Technology
By Pastor Alan Utting

'Technology is a useful servant but a dangerous master.' Christian Lous Lange

The use of social media is often a hot topic for debate. While much of it can be helpful, I've found from personal experience that spending too much time on platforms like Facebook, endlessly watching the news, or getting caught up in trivial content can easily draw us away from God.

Bible Perspective
'Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things' (Colossians 3:1).
'Blessed are those whose hearts are pure. They will see God' (Matthew 5:8).
'Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me' (Psalm 58:10).

Observation
1. The use of social media can be an exciting and powerful aid in ministry. For aiding evangelism, emails for communication, encouragement to others and in saving years of hard work as in Bible Translation.
2. Technology like money, is neutral and can serve both good and bad purposes.
3. Advancing technology may displace millions of jobs, as seen with Uber and Airbnb. However, meaningful work remains a source of hope and purpose. Use media tools to support this.
4. Digital tools like PowerPoint can support your talk, but they should not replace genuine inspiration. Keep presentations simple and avoid distracting movements.
5. The average person checks their phone 150 times a day, according to the Huffington Post. Some apps now track your daily phone use the results of which can be surprising. Be mindful of short-term pleasure turning into long-term addiction.
6. If you are working underground as a believer or writing to these people, keep in mind that anything you write online has the possibility of being read by government officials. Substitute (*) in key words to disguise the message may help in keeping you safe. In another example instead of using the word 'God' refer to God as 'Father'.
7. Several years ago, while experiencing computer issues in New Zealand, I received a call from an individual claiming to have detected my computer problem and offering assistance on behalf of a specific company. When I inquired about whether I could trust him or not, he promptly ended the call. Upon discussing this incident with a technology-savvy friend, I was advised to remove as much personal information as possible from Facebook and various applications. I found this recommendation valuable.
8. During interviews or visits, set your phone to silent mode and avoid answering calls unless you are expecting a very important call. In such cases, it is appropriate to inform the person beforehand and ask if they are comfortable with you taking the call during the meeting.

9. Take a firm and uncompromising stand against pornography. If it becomes a struggle, consider using accountability software that allows a trusted friend to see the sites you visit and help keep you on track.

AI (Artificial Intelligence).
AI is still in its infancy stage of development and again like money it is useful but has its positive and negative uses.

Positive
1. I have a good friend who has English as his second language and struggles over writing emails and sermons along with other articles. It often takes him an exorbitant amount of time to do that. He found however that by using AI to help him write emails and other documents it has saved him about a third of his working day. That is 'redeeming the time'.

2. AI can help you create prayers or research background for sermons but remember that true inspiration comes from the Spirit of God, not just polished wording. Use AI cautiously and sparingly in these contexts.

3. AI helps locate specific Scriptural references by inserting search hints and can assist with other biblical resources like background material.

Negatives
1. When calculators were first introduced in schools and workplaces, they were seen as a great innovation. However, over time, reliance on them led to weaker memorisation of basic maths, as I noticed when a student needed a calculator to give me 50 cents change from $2 for a $1.50 purchase. Similarly, overdependence on AI could undermine language skills, and some countries are seeing educational standards decline. In response, one European country is banning digital tools in classrooms and bringing back textbooks to strengthen students' written language abilities.

2. AI generated articles can sometimes be identified due to their high degree of polish, which may raise questions about authorship and affect the perceived value of the work. Some universities use tools to analyse submitted articles for AI involvement and assess the work based on those findings. However, even these software packages can make mistakes and give false marks.

3. AI can make mistakes so do check your work thoroughly.

4. Scammers and other criminals are using AI to commit crimes so stay very alert. In worst case scenarios people are warning that the outcome of using AI can be frightening.

'Artificial intelligence may be powerful, but it cannot replace the human heart, the human conscience, or the image of God in a person.' N. T. Wright

*'Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things' (*Colossians 3:2).