

Technology and discipleship: using innovation as followers of Christ

Brothers and sisters, friends and neighbors of the Salem Utah Woodland Hills Stake, we invite you to review this document as helpful information for all of us wrestling with the challenges of technology and how we can personally use the amazing resources and inventions coming to us in this modern age. We testify the Lord is intending it be used for good and that He inspired the following document.

We are on earth to develop a relationship with our Heavenly Father and Jesus

In Doctrine and Covenants 6:36 we are taught:

“Look unto me in every thought;” (1)

This theme runs throughout scripture. In Mosiah 7:33 we read:

“If ye will turn to the Lord with full purpose of heart, and put your trust in him, and serve him with all diligence of mind... he will... deliver you out of bondage.”

God promises that when we put Him first, “it may be well with you” and your days will be prolonged in the land (Deut. 5:33).

The very purpose of this life is to prove whether we will choose God. “And we will prove them now herewith to see if they will do all things...their God shall command them.” Abraham 3:22–25). Recall that God has requested us to “Choose” Him many times (D&C 95:56, 105:35-36, and 121:34-36, Joshua 24:14-15).

But it’s not just about prioritizing Him in theory, for there is no power in that—it’s about truly knowing Him and growing in a relationship with Him.

John 17:3 Jesus Himself invited the relationship:

“This is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.”

Jesus summarized the importance of relationships in Matthew 22:37–40:
Love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, soul, and mind and “love thy neighbour as thyself.”

Indeed, the test of this life has much to do with developing these relationships, first with God and then our neighbor.

Technology in God's Plan

Technology can greatly assist us in fulfilling God's Plan. Elder David A. Bednar said:

"From trains to telegraphs... to the internet... all of these advancements are part of the Lord hastening His work in the latter days."

Brigham Young declared in 1862:

"Every discovery in science and art... has been given by direct revelation from God... to prepare the way for the ultimate triumph of truth."

Technology can bless us in many ways. Think of it, what would you do without the efficiencies and connections that a cell phone enables. It is one of the greatest inventions ever! (2) But—"with great power comes great responsibility." (yes, that comes from uncle Ben in the Spider-Man series. 😊) or, its scriptural equivalent, Luke 12:4 where "... much is given, of him shall much be required."

Consider this quote from Elder Bednar, quoting David O. McKay, regarding the wonderful discoveries that would come and how their potential is for good or bad and it's up to us to control them for good; it's literally in our "human hands."

"In 1966, President David O. McKay prophesied scientific discoveries that "stagger the imagination" would make possible the preaching of the gospel to every kindred, tongue, and people. And further: "Discoveries latent with such potent power, either for the blessing or the destruction of human beings as to make men's responsibility in controlling them the most gigantic ever placed in human hands. ... This age is fraught with limitless perils, as well as untold possibilities. ([CR Oct 1966,4](#))"

The cell phone could be the most amazing device for good ever invented! It's in our hands, literally and figuratively, to control.

We've mentioned and you personally know of the "untold possibilities" for good, but what about the "limitless perils?" "

Limitless Perils: Opposition in All Things

Distraction:

At the very least, many of us find ourselves distracted from God, and also other meaningful relationships. Somehow, we cannot find time to study God's word in the scriptures, yet if we check our phone usage (3), it will tell us we have been using it for other less important or less prioritized things for many hours every day! I recently watched a family enjoying dinner at a restaurant. What a golden opportunity to build family relationships, but the dad had his nose in his phone most of the meal. While in Dallas for a vacation we were playing football in the hotel pool. Two young boys kept pestering us. Finally I looked around for their parents. On the deck of

the pool sat their mom, completely distracted as she scrolled on her phone. At the very least, we need to be present. We are trading our relationships for “pottage,” suggests Elder Bednar ([Things as They Really Are 2.0](#)).

What Are Some of the Lord’s Warnings?

- The Savior warned in Matthew 6:24: “No man can serve two masters.” (4)
- Paul cautioned in Ephesians 4:14, 17-24 not to be tossed by false doctrines or walk in the vanity of the mind, but to “be renewed in the spirit” and put on the “new man.” (5)
- President Russell M. Nelson said,
“If most of the information you get comes from social or other media, your ability to hear the whisperings of the Spirit will be diminished” and “you leave yourself vulnerable to philosophies... that are not true.” (6)
- Elder Bednar warned that artificial intelligence, though powerful, “cannot simulate... the influence of the Holy Ghost” and can suffocate moral agency if misused. ([Things as they really are 2.0](#).)
“Now, you may be thinking this sounds more like hard spiritual work than rest. But here is the grand truth: while the world insists that power, possessions, popularity, and pleasures of the flesh bring happiness, they do not! They cannot! What they do produce is nothing but a hollow substitute for “the blessed and happy state of those [who] keep the commandments of God. The truth is that it is much more exhausting to seek happiness where you can never find it!”
- Elder Gong said in August 2025, “Artificial intelligence is not God and cannot be God. AI cannot provide inspired divine truth or independent moral guidance” ([An Ear to Wisdom, a Heart to Understanding](#)).

What is scholarly research telling us?

Since around 2010 (the introduction of handheld internet and social media (7)):

- ER visits for self harm in teenage girls increased 188%.
- Suicide rates increased 167% in girls and 91% in boys.
- Anxiety and depression in college students doubled.
- Major depressive episodes rose 145% for girls and 161% for boys.
- Lots more negative effects. This is just a taste of the research out there.
- There’s a failure to launch into jobs, college, trades, etc., especially in young men.

What is behind this data? How does phone use do this? Here are a few reasons:

- Algorithms (the app designer’s way of customizing your feed such as sending lots of shoe ads when you search for new shoes on Google) are designed to keep users hooked, using the same brain chemistry manipulation as addictive substances (8).
- Fuels unhealthy comparison, especially in girls (girls are more susceptible to worry in regards to community judgement).

- Distorts self image. Apps that manipulate our selfies, becoming “instagram pretty.” It’s fake and promotes anxious feelings inside related to imposter syndrome and other poor feelings about ourselves and our worth.
- Promotes pornography with very strong algorithms as described above. Young men are more susceptible, but it can affect any of us.
- Promotes objectification of (particularly) women (defined as viewing another person as an object or as parts and not for their true value).

And these are not just youth problems—adults are equally at risk through distraction, comparison, and weakened family connections.

Promised Blessings of Discipleship

John 14:27:

“Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth...”

Christ’s peace is not the shallow distraction of endless scrolling—it is deep, abiding, and soul-healing.

Elder Bednar promised that if we “look unto [the Savior] in every thought” we will walk in the meekness of His Spirit, “doubt not, fear not,” and discern “things as they really are.”

President Nelson taught that covenant-keeping disciples have access to the Savior’s power, which can make “everything about life easier” even in the face of opposition.

Agency

In the end, you are agents unto yourselves, and we have felt impressed to warn you. The impression to speak to our stake candidly about cell phones has been pouring in for months. God knows our stake and wants to warn us specifically. We pray you will deeply introspect on the topic and let the Holy Spirit guide you in your choices. As the country is waking up to this problem, as the school system is legislating changes, we feel great momentum and further see the reason God is calling on us to change. There is great momentum right now and we must take advantage of it.

So, it is one thing to warn about a danger we sense around us, but we desire to help move us from danger. In that spirit, here are some suggestions. Remember fence laws (laws that give clear boundaries) are not commandments, but are intended to be helpful guidelines.

Practical and Parental Guidance (9)

Research-based “fence law” recommendations:

- Under 13: Communication and location device only (no internet or social media).
- 13–16: Parent-approved educational apps only. No social media.
- 16+: Social media only when spiritually and emotionally mature and desired.

- No cell phones in school.

Conclusion and Inspired Direction

The Lord is powerfully directing our stake. For months we have been shown the dangers of misused technology and the naivete many of us experience with technology use. We treat it lightly, and even those who know better get drawn in by the enticement of the invention. As your stake presidency we feel His clear direction (10) to warn and to invite:

- Elder Soares said, “Taking ownership for choices deepens personal conviction.” (11) He notes we must each personally own our decisions, including phone use.
- Eat at least one phone free family meal together each day.
- Put away your phones at church, only referencing them for scriptures or spiritual inspiration. Elder Ulisses Soares reminded us to set aside distractions—especially our cell phones—during sacred worship so we can fully partake of the sacrament.
- Keep electronics out of bedrooms and bathrooms. (12)
- The Holy Ghost will be your guide. As reminded by our prophet, “in coming days, we will not be able to survive spiritually without the guiding, directing, comforting, and constant guidance of the Holy Ghost. “ (13)
- Develop a family phone plan. Teach discernment between “influencers” (14), algorithms that direct content, and truth.
- Spread the information to friends, family and others to help develop a critical mass. As more and more families implement change it will be easier for others to do the same. Connect with your children's friends' parents and get on the same plan for cell phone use. Your kids will thank you!
- Fast for 10 days from social media, ask yourself if you feel differently, then make changes to use social media as the Spirit directs you going forward.
- Parents model powerful phone use in both content and duration (15).
- Choose to lift, inspire, and build others in our phone use. Resist “instabragging,” selfish and showy and self-serving content. Check your motives and help all of us popularize good content.
- Discover or rediscover meaningful activities once adjustments to phone use have been made and more time is available. Engage again at meals, in the living room, at parties, etc.

We testify that as you learn to use technology as a disciple of Jesus Christ would, your life will change! Literally, you will find that in various ways your peace will return and you will open yourself to living life with joy and gladness again! 16).

Notes:

1. We invite each of us to wrestle with this invitation. Think of Jesus in every thought? Is that possible? Giving God our “mind” (Mosiah 7:33) and the countless requests for our “heart, might, mind, and strength,” sounds impossible or at least far away for most of us mortals. Yet, we don’t think God was overstating our capability. And, please don’t overthink this; it’s nothing more than considering Jesus in all that we do. Many of us are already doing that. Don’t give up on this. A life focused on Christ is joyful. Recall President Nelson’s “...the joy we feel has little to do with the circumstances of our lives and everything to do with the focus of our lives.” ([Joy and Spiritual Survival](#)). Believe it brothers and sisters, live it, and you will see.
2. If there has been a downfall to this amazing device, it is when it has been held either naïvely to its power or simply irresponsibly. Because this device is a relatively new invention, many use it naïvely. Research is now rolling in as to the problems it can cause. Most of us did not realize the deleterious effects it can have on individuals. We are now coming to understand this and, as disciples of Jesus Christ, it is our prerogative to learn to use it with its God-intended power (recall what Elder Bednar and President Young said about all inventions coming from God). Think of it, the phone literally saves us precious time for an increased capacity to develop our relationships. Our test is how we will develop these relationships with our God and our neighbor.
3. Look up your screen time by going to “settings” on your iphone (other?) and scrolling down to “screen time.” Explore screen time and you’ll see the categories where you are spending your time (i.e. social media, music, gospel library, texting, etc.).
4. Matt 6:24 No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon. (Read on to v. 34 as Matthew further encourages us to live a Christ centered life and the blessings that will come). No one picks up their cell phone and makes a conscious decision that they are choosing this instead of God, but the evidence suggests otherwise. Soon we are missing the spiritual connections in our lives (prayer, scriptures, temple) but are very advanced in our latest hobby or personal interest generated on the phone. The reality is, we feel most of us fell into this due to the craftiness of the phone’s influence. It pulls all of us in, through algorithms and dopamine responses. It’s now time to “wake up”. The research and our own internal compass, the Holy Ghost, is telling us we need to change. It’s time to listen and act. Think deeply here, it’s one or the other, God or Mammon (the world) and the key goes back to “look unto me in every thought (D&C 6:36)” We testify that choosing God is so much better!
5. This entire verse has application to the way our cell phones have affected us, read closely, Ephesians 4:14, “That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; ... 17 This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind. 18 Having the understanding darkened, being alienated (distracted, separated) from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart.” Paul then adds this word of optimism, “23 And be renewed in the spirit of your mind; 24 And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.” The new man in this case is using the phone with power, as a disciple of Jesus Christ.
6. The words of our prophets come with such clarity. We must apply them in our lives. When they speak it from the pulpit, it resonates with us, then we turn around and pick up our phone and start down the path of the same old habits. Most of us have done this. It’s a “slippery slope.” Read these and see if they don’t resonate as clear guidance for how to use technology. Then, let’s never go back to those old habits and tendencies.
 - “If most of the information you get comes from social or other media, your ability to hear the whisperings of the Spirit will be diminished. If you are not also seeking the Lord through daily prayer and gospel study, you leave yourself vulnerable to philosophies that may be intriguing but are not true. Even Saints who are otherwise faithful can be derailed by the steady beat of Babylon’s band.” ([Make Time for the Lord](#), President Russell M. Nelson, October 2021)
 - Now, you may be thinking this sounds more like hard spiritual work than rest. But here is the grand truth: while the world insists that power, possessions, popularity, and pleasures of the flesh bring happiness, they do not! They cannot! What they do produce is nothing but a hollow substitute for “the blessed and happy

state of those [who] keep the commandments of God (this is so true, isn't it interesting that engaging in social media encourages us almost directly against many of the virtues taught surrounding a Christian life, including, devaluing and objectifying others, being trivial or trite, being argumentative, elevating oneself (bragging), embracing vanity, promoting lust) and the truth is that it is much more exhausting to seek happiness where you can never find it! However, when you yoke yourself to Jesus Christ and do the spiritual work required to overcome the world, He, and He alone, does have the power to lift you above the pull of this world....With the power of the holy apostleship vested in me, I bless you in your quest to overcome this world. I bless you to increase your faith in Jesus Christ and learn better how to draw upon His power. I bless you to be able to discern truth from error. I bless you to care more about the things of God than the things of this world. I bless you to see the needs of those around you and strengthen those you love. Because Jesus Christ overcame this world, you can too." (Nelson, [Make Time for the Lord](#))

- "Now beware. The ease of use, perceived accuracy, and rapid response time that characterize artificial intelligence can create a potentially beguiling, addictive, and suffocating influence on the exercise of our moral agency. Because AI is cloaked in the credibility and promises of scientific progress, we might naively be seduced into surrendering our precious moral agency to a technology that can only think telestial. By doing so, we may gradually be transformed from agents who can act into objects that are only acted upon. And we may unwittingly help Lucifer to achieve in mortality what he was unable to accomplish in premortality. Truth is knowledge of things as they really are. Artificial intelligence cannot simulate, imitate, or replace the influence of the Holy Ghost in our lives. No matter how sophisticated and elegant AI technology ultimately may become, it simply can never bear witness of the Father and the Son, reveal the truth of all things, or sanctify those who have repented and been baptized." (Bednar, *Things as They Really Are 2.0*)
 - "As you strive to learn the gospel of Jesus Christ and perform the work you have to do, I specifically exhort you to be wise in your use of contemporary technological tools. Innovations such as artificial intelligence [can] both (1) assist you in receiving magnificent blessings and (2) diminish and suffocate your moral agency. Please do not allow the supposed accuracy, speed, and ease of modern technologies to entice you to avoid or circumvent the righteous work that invites into your life the blessings you will need. My beloved brothers and sisters there are no spiritual shortcuts or quick fixes." (this point is critical. We are on earth to BECOME SOMETHING, having AI do our thinking does not develop us. We must put in the work and oh how sweet is the reward!) (Bednar, [Things as They Really Are 2.0](#))
7. This is the research that is coming in. The emotional and mental health of the United States has been studied for decades. There are spikes that surround conflict and nationwide social challenges, including wars, economic factors, and even COVID. Researchers have concluded that there is literally nothing that could have caused the spikes in the emotional health of our children and adults beginning around 2010 except the introduction of the portable electronic device, and, specifically social media. It is disturbing to see that as different innovations that affect our biology, such as "likes," and camera placement on the screen to allow ease with "selfies," were introduced, the research would show additional spikes in anxiety and depression. The U.S. Surgeon General (2023) reported that teens spending more than three hours daily on social media double their risk for depression and anxiety.
 8. Free time: as a Stake Presidency, one of our biggest worries is that people will find themselves with a lot of free time and feel bored. Right now our youth struggle on their missions because they have no game to play or feed to follow when they have a few minute break. That feels boring. But research shows that bouts of boredom (that is time when the mind can relax and wander) are important for humans, and are essentially for developing and expressing creativity. It is also in these moments when we are often sensitive to the promptings of the Holy Ghost. Let's get comfortable being a little "bored."
 9. Believe us, we were very cautious about adding these "fence rules." Our stake has wonderful parents and we don't wish to create discord or improper judgement regarding your own parenting choices. In the end, however, these recommendations are based on the best research currently available and we felt there may be some parents who really would benefit from knowing this information.

10. As the Stake presidency, you know one of the things we have spoken about often is social media and cell phone use. However, we would be amiss if we suggested we are feeling the same thing we felt one to three or even four years ago. There is something going on right now. The Lord has awakened us. This entire summer has been filled with inspiration and thoughts about truly making change. We don't mean to be overdramatic. But we are not sure there is anything with more potential to bring down our people, to bring about sadness and unnecessary trials, to captivate us away gradually into the grasp of the adversary, than the cell phone. And yet, it's not going away, nor would any of us want it to! We love our phones! We really do. Nothing makes us more productive, enlightened, and capable than this amazing device. But we must follow the spirit and take ownership in how we use it. This message has been loud from the Lord. And we have momentum right now, with legislation helping us by taking phones out of the schools and by researchers bringing us insight into its effects. And truthfully, we could not be more excited to share what the Lord is bringing. We have felt handcuffed, not knowing how to address this critical topic until now. We plead with the stake to receive this message as the mind and will of God to our stake.

11. This concept of ownership discussed by Elder Suarez is very enlightening. Most of us, as we read this, think to ourselves, "This message would be perfect for so and so. They are always on their phone.. They really need it!" But the truth is, how we use innovation in our lives is a very personal matter. Of course, there are guidelines. But it behooves each of us to introspect and ask ourselves where do I (and my family) need to improve? Other helpful questions might include, "Am I prioritizing my scripture study and prayer or am I prioritizing my social media feed?"

We are not joking here, many of us are prioritizing our social media feed, which on a daily basis we do not miss, yet commonly miss daily scripture study. We should ask ourselves, "Is this a faith problem?" Do we not believe the scriptures and the prophets who guarantee us a better, easier, more joyful life, as we connect to God through prayer and scriptures. Or, are we truly victims of cell phone and app engineers who have created a machine that keeps us engaged long past the time we intended. Either way, we invite you to live a different life. Live life where you prioritize God, and you'll discover the happiness promised, the peace assured. You will not find that in social media, and the research says what you will find is quite the opposite, possibly even emptiness, loneliness, depression, and anxiety.

12. We find this so curious. Parents complain that their children do not interact with them as preteens and young adults. However, we put electronics in their bedrooms. This includes televisions, computers, and all portable devices. We get so little time together with our families, we cannot afford to sequester them in their rooms by providing technology for entertainment. We suggest keeping them in the common areas of the home visible to everyone present at all times. Countless missionaries have been grateful for the missionary standards which require all missionaries, when using technology, to be where others can see their screen. This is not just good practice for missionaries, it is also a good idea for each of us

13. At the heart of this encouragement is that each of us must learn to feel and recognize the Holy Ghost in our lives. He is our constant companion. How to master the cell phone becomes almost an experiment on the word (Alma 32). It is here that we can practice being very in tune with the Spirit. The Spirit will put thoughts in our mind as to when we should quit, change, pause, etc. You'll also feel a removal of the spirit, a feeling of discomfort that God is not supporting your choice in whatever you're doing even if it's just being distracted. Recall the beloved hymn, "Let the Holy Spirit Guide." We find it so exciting to have this little microcosm in our lives, our engagement with our phones, be a source of growth to spiritually feel and recognize the Holy Ghost guide us. We can do this! You can do this!

14. Influencers are not necessarily bad or ill intentioned, but they are also, by no means, our source for truth. Many of us know people who are actually influencers. Those that I know have no ill intention. They are good people. They are seeing an opportunity and with very, very few exceptions, are driven by money and secondarily by prestige or prominence. Don't be fooled by their charisma or their appearance. In our experience, their lives are just as complicated and messy as yours is. We all have challenges and influencers have not figured everything out.

15. Are we parents really the problem? We talk like it's a kid problem when in actuality adults struggle just as much with use, content, and distraction. It is interesting that the users of phones have expanded. It seems the engineers have discovered that there is something for every age. From gaming to social media to the news. Literally everyone in our society is captivated by the power of the phone. Is there any better example of the

scriptural reference to being, “lulled away?” These devices control many of us much of the day. Research states that many of us are using the phone in various ways up to eight hours a day and with notifications are engaged another eight hours! (Haidt, The Anxious Generation). Again, there is great power in the phone and it behooves us to discover that and use it for its powerful applications, which will likely include moderation, possibly in each of these categories. Again, it comes down to ownership. Each of us must learn to use our device powerfully as a disciple of Jesus Christ.

16. In the end, this is another faith principle. When we make the effort to put God first in our lives, to truly let him prevail, we must also have faith that this is the best way to live. We, as your stake presidency, wish to testify that using your phone with power as a disciple of Jesus Christ will change you. We testify your life will be happier and and have more peace. Creative marketing and design have used our literal biology to sneak through the back door and negatively influence us and our families. We caution you not to be hard on yourself. We are all just normal. Christ's atonement will fix the mistakes of the past and enable our future. We invite you to keep your chin up and stay on this effort. It will take time, but in time we can each, as individuals, unleash the full potential power of this inspired invention, the cell phone.