

Happy New Year!

January invites us to reflect on time. You might say that the New Year isn't a Christian holiday, but who created the earth to go around the sun? Who created time? The Old Covenant was dominated and directed by the moon, the lesser of the lights in the sky. (The reason Easter changes dates every year is because it's determined by when Passover is, which is governed by the lunar cycle. The church has been arguing for 2000 years if we should have a set date for Easter, like the 1st Sunday in April. I think it won't ever change at this point.)

The New Covenant is dominated by the sun. This is how the Old Testament ends - **“But for you who fear my name, the sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings” (Mal 4:2).** Jesus, the sun of righteousness, the eternal light of the world, has come. We are now people of the sun, so celebrating the New Year is a good idea for Christians.

As we begin a New Year, I'd like you to consider how you use your time. Time is a gift from God. That should cause you to use your time wisely.

Here's what I'd like you to re-evaluate as we start a new year - how much time you spend using technology. I recently read *Digital Minimalism* by Cal Newport (2019, Penguin). It's not a Christian book (Newport assumes evolutionary biology throughout the work), but since it argues for using your time in accordance with your values, it's extremely practical and helpful for Christians living in 2024.

I'm not saying you have to read the book (I'm going to try to give you the takeaways in this article). But I have been thinking about this more and more - reading isn't *just* another hobby. Since God communicates to us *via* words (both verbal and written), we should want to get better at reading and listening *for the purpose* of listening to sermons and reading the Bible better.

Newport doesn't tell us to throw our smartphones in the toilet (although practically that could work). He urges us to adopt a philosophy of technology. We need to know what our values are, and then use technology to support those values. For instance - you might value connection with friends. The question becomes - what's the best way to connect with friends? Facebook or a phone call or a face to face meeting? I value communicating with my members so I'm writing this newsletter on an iPad. If one of your values is family time, then whipping out your phone at the dinner table is destructive of your values. (One practical tip Newport offers - delete social media apps off your phone; rather, use social media on a computer during a scheduled time.)

What do you value? Our hymnody puts it best - *Jesus, Priceless Treasure* (LSB 743). The gifts I have from Jesus alone have priceless worth (LSB 724). We value the fruit of the Spirit - love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Rather than

letting Big Tech tell us what's important, let's use tech to support what we value. We don't want to be technophobes (irrationally afraid of tech) or technophiles (people who love everything new and dive into new tech without thinking about their values). We want to be Christians who use time and technology wisely for the glory of God.

God bless you during 2024!

Pastor