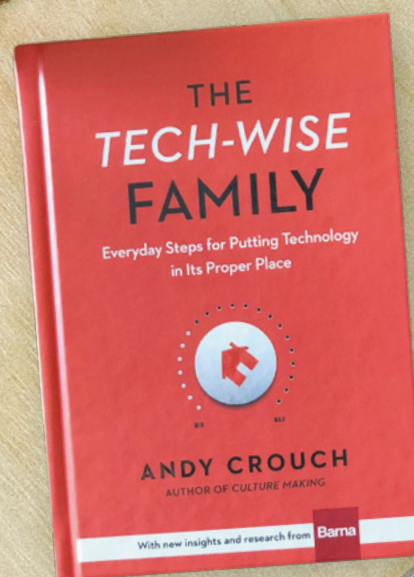# The Tech-wise family

parenting in a digital age VI

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If you were to browse Andy Crouch's recent book, *The Tech-Wise Family*, you might be forgiven for dismissing it as just a tad too hippy and unrealistic. It might be from the suggestion that his family didn't allow their children to access any screens until "double digits" (age 10). Or that they endeavoured to sing together as a family more than they listened to downloaded music. Or maybe from the statements that car travel should always be tech-free and dedicated to conversation! You might be forgiven, but it would be a terrible mistake—this is a must-read book for all Christian families.

Crouch begins by exploring some of the big picture notions about technology and its place in faithful family life. For those of you who prefer more practical parenting advice, this is also delivered in spades.

Big Picture

A foundational idea that Crouch builds from is that we parent in a world created in such a way that our choices matter, and that God calls us to courageously make them. We are called to not passively accept the cultural forces that weave their way into our family life. God has blessed us with the task of parenting, and this is an honourable task involving active commitment to the formation of our children's faith and flourishing. This task becomes particularly difficult as we consider what Crouch refers to as technology's "easy everywhere" and due to a barrage of technological "nudges".

"Easy everywhere" is used to describe how we have woven the efficiencies and benefits of technology into the very fabric of our everyday lives. Our technologies make life significantly easier and they are literally everywhere—we even carry the crowning jewel of these technologies around in our pockets constantly, and we place it next to our pillows at night. Crouch doesn't suggest that technological ease is wrong, but he convincingly argues that it's not the ideal thing for faithful families to flourish.

Families are largely about the formation of persons—the formation of faith, wisdom, and courage. Wisdom is more than understanding; it is understanding that leads to faithful, courageous action, and to engagement with God's world and with other people. 'Easy' is not conducive to this sort of formation and can at times be the enemy of a family's goals and desires—often without us being aware.

However, Crouch helpfully suggests a suite of reverse "nudges" that can be implemented to help with a commitment to faith and flourishing. In speaking of his own captivation with TV screens, he suggests that one solution could be that he work on his own willpower and self-discipline. Although this is always a worthwhile pursuit, he mentions a simple commitment to sit with his back to screens whenever he can. He explains:

> But to achieve that level of inner transformation [will power and self-discipline] would require time and effort. For now I can almost always settle for sitting where no screens are in sight. It's a simple, low-friction decision that has made countless hours at friends' homes and at restaurants much

more meaningful and memorable than they would have otherwise. You might call it a nudge. (p. 33)

In the same way our "technological devices have become absolute masters of the nudge" (p. 34). Whether it's the plethora of notifications, distracting vibrations, constant presence, or even simple things like the next show in a Netflix series starting automatically in 10 seconds, the easy everywhere is constantly nudging us and our families little bit by little bit away from rich formational faith and flourishing.

Practical

Practical reflections are given through ten "tech-wise commitments" that were embraced by the author and his wife—though there is a recognition that for each family the wise response to the technological nudges might look a little different.

The ten tech-wise commitments that Crouch testifies to:

1. We develop wisdom and courage together as a family.

2. We want to create more than we consume. So we fill the centre of our home with things that reward skill and active engagement.

3. We are designed for a rhythm of work and rest. So one hour a day, one day a week and one week a year, we turn off our devices and worship, feast, play, and rest together.

4. We wake up before our devices do, and they 'go to bed' before we do.

5. We aim for "no screens before double digits" at school and at home.

6. We use screens for a purpose, and we use them together, rather than using them aimlessly and alone.

7. Car time is conversation time.

8. Spouses have one another's passwords, and parents have total access to children's devices.

9. We learn to sing together, rather than letting recorded and amplified music take over our lives and worship.

10. We show up in person for the big events in life. We learn how to be human by being fully present at our moments of greatest vulnerability.

If you desire your family to be forming faithful young disciples of the Lord Jesus, and you seek to parent with wisdom, and if you want to be equipped to create family life that resists the cultural forces that nudge us away from this discipleship, then *The Tech-Wise Family: Everyday Steps for Putting Technology in Its Proper Place* should be high on the list of books to engage with.

Chris is the author of The Frog and The Fish: Reflections on Work, Technology, Sex, Stuff, Truth, and Happiness. He is also the editor of The Christian Teachers Journal and CEN professional learning coordinator. Chris and his wife Coco live in the Blue Mountains. They have two children (16 and 14) and a growing collection of ukuleles.