

PHONES, VIDEO GAMES, TECH, AND HOW THEY AFFECT YOUR MARRIAGE (W/ GUESTS NATHAN AND ANNA SUTHERLAND, PART 1 OF 2)

<https://fiercemarriage.com/phones-video-games-tech-and-how-they-affect-your-marriage-w-guests-nathan-and-anna-sutherland-part-1-of-2>

[00:00:00]

Ryan: All right, Selena, technology is an elephant in the marital room, is it not?

Selena: It is.

Ryan: It is.

Selena: It is. Big, fat one.

Ryan: It's a big fat one. Thank you for that. We actually have our friends on the podcast today, Nathan and Anna Sutherland. Hello, you guys.

Anna: Hello.

Nathan: Hi.

Ryan: And you are going to be talking to... I was very enthusiastic. [all laughs]

Selena: Give him a minute.

Ryan: No, we're not stopping.

Selena: Okay.

Ryan: So Nathan and Anna and us go way back.

Selena: We talk about them all the time on the podcast. I'm so glad they're finally here.

Ryan: And we're here to talk about technology as the elephant that it is, the big fat elephant in the marital room. And we'll do that on the other side.

[00:00:36] <music>

Ryan: All right, I can already tell this is going to be a fun interview. We've been trying to get you guys on the podcast for like 17 years.

Anna: Oh, it's a long time.

Nathan: And we keep saying no. We're like, No, Ryan. We can't.

Selena: They're so in high demand.

Ryan: Well, we had a tiny table in a little office. And now if you're watching on YouTube, we have this big table in a big space. We have to name the studio space. This is in the shop.

Selena: It's in the shop right now.

Ryan: Yeah. In the shop.

Selena: No longer the office, but the shop.

Nathan: This is the forge. This is where the great content is created.

Ryan: It's the forge.

Selena: I like that.

Ryan: The fellowship forge. The Fierce Fellowship is...

Nathan: Whoa.

Ryan: [Patreon.com/FierceMarriage](https://patreon.com/FierceMarriage).

Anna: Just real quick.

Nathan: Patent vetted. Trademark. It's an F3. The Forge.

Ryan: So if you're watching, this is the very first podcast episode in The Forge... That's going to stick. I can tell.

Nathan: Here we go.

Ryan: I think Selena and I, we're going to start recording in here as well. What do you think?

Selena: Yeah. This is our very first.

Ryan: Okay. So we should probably keep this going. All right. So Nathan and Anna, thank you for joining us. We're talking about technology in marriage. Now,

why in the world are you here to talk about technology? Do you know something about this topic? Tell us about yourselves. How'd you meet? All that good stuff.

Anna: Oh, really?

Ryan: Yeah. So how'd you guys meet? And why are you here talking about technology? [inaudible 00:02:05] get us there.

Nathan: Take it away.

Anna: Do you want the...

Selena: In two minutes. [all laughs]

Anna: Do you want a quick story of how met? We met 23 years ago at NBC camps.

Ryan: What is that?

Anna: It's a Christian basketball camp in Auburn.

Nathan: Washington state.

Anna: Yes. So we met there, but then it was a few years of...

Nathan: Courting.

Anna: Courting. And then we officially met again in college.

Nathan: Yes. I was part of the move-in team. And so...

Anna: When I moved in my freshman year.

Nathan: When Anna moved in, I was a junior, she was a freshman. And I was the one to meet her at the door. And I was like...

Ryan: You were strategically placing yourself.

Nathan: Strategically placed. I was dumb as a rock. The context was relationally that I had... I was going through a bit of a drought relationally. So the last person I dated was seventh grade. So by junior year in college, I was like, This seems to be my call: singleness. And clearly...

Anna: And I chose SPU because he was there.

- Ryan:** That's important context.
- Selena:** Didn't know that.
- Anna:** The elevator's open-
- Ryan:** Wow.
- Selena:** Didn't know that. And he was my IT guy. It was a sign to the Lord.
- Nathan:** For her, because I was still dumb as a rock. I don't know if you remember this though, that our relationship... the reason we ended up dating was because you and I met over spring break. And I was like, I don't think... Yada, yada, you know, small Christian school angst about relationships.
- Anna:** He'd been loitering after my games and around my dorm room longer than somebody who's not interested hangs around.
- Nathan:** If you're a junior, there's no like... You don't cross paths with freshmen. Like that's not just like, oh, look at us. We're in the same classes again. So you kind of have to like accidentally end up in the same spaces. I was all conflicted about this. And you very lovingly were like, "What if you just asked her out? And if it doesn't work out, you break up anyway. And if it does work out, then that's a good thing." And that's why you were the best man at the wedding. Because I was like, "That's good life advice."
- Selena:** That seems like good advice.
- Ryan:** I don't remember using that advice.
- Nathan:** Well, it worked. It worked really well. So yes, we just passed 18 years of matrimony.
- Ryan:** Oh wow.
- Nathan:** Yeah, for real.
- Ryan:** Oh my goodness.
- Nathan:** A lot of time has passed, 18 years, three kids.

Ryan: And how did you get into technology? So we're fast-forwarding through everything. You were teachers. Tell us about that. So you were teachers and then why did you stop teaching?

Anna: Well, I stopped teaching when we had our oldest son because I didn't want to grade papers anymore and be a mom.

Nathan: You were really committed to like, you wanted to focus your efforts on Owen. That was great.

Anna: Yeah. So I've been out of the classroom for 10 years.

Ryan: Okay. Awesome.

Nathan: She taught high school AP English and I taught middle school language arts. The difference being she's teaching people how to create new content and I'm teaching people how to just understand the content other people have read or created.

Anna: It's in there.

Nathan: It's in there. It's good. It's still important. But a lot of similes and metaphors in my world. And I quit teaching to start a ministry called Flint and Iron, which was about sparking positive purpose in young people. So a lot of talks about hope and using technology well and really being deliberate with our choices.

And then from that spawned Gospel Tech, which is how do we love God and use tech, specifically in a Christian conversational environment of like, how do we take the hope of the gospel? This idea that I'm a sinner saved by grace, so I'm now a saint and that should show up in the way we use our tech and the games I play and the platforms I use and the things I celebrate with my time and my focus, my money. So that became a full-time thing now.

Ryan: So you guys have now the... one of the main drivers for this interview, getting the forge done [laughs] and having you here is because you have books coming out. Just very briefly. We're going to talk about those more toward the middle for the end. These books, what are they called? What are you hoping to accomplish two books that you've both written. Well, you each wrote one book. There you go.

Nathan: And it gets credit for at least a quarter.

Ryan: Tell us briefly about those. Then we'll get into kind of what we mean by the marital elephant in the room. So what are these books about?

Anna: Mine's called *The Graceful Disconnect* and it's written for moms and it's a 25-day devotional tech journey to reevaluate kind of where our hearts are and what we're spending time doing. I think I just see that a lot in moms and my own life of just it's easy to get stuck in bad habits and bad rhythms or just not even intentional ones. Even if they're not necessarily bad, just to not use our time intentionally.

So it's some encouraging devotionals to reorient our hearts back on the Lord. And then a few tech challenges in there too, to just put pushback on some of those habits.

Ryan: That's good. Nathan, what's your book about?

Nathan: It's called *Gospel-Centered Tech* and it's about how we can equip and empower families to talk about healthy tech, communicate the gospel, and then connect the hope of the gospel to our daily tech lives. It's basically the big picture conversation and then some practical application pieces for how do you make tech safe at home?

Ryan: Good, good. Nathan, you have a history with tech.

Nathan: I have multiple histories with tech. Yeah. How much time do you got?

Ryan: And you have a-

Selena: Didn't you have some histories with Nathan? Those history techs.

Ryan: Yeah. We were just reminiscing. We used to play *Goldeneye* together. It was so good. NFL Blitz, video games. When I say you have history, I mean video games.

Nathan: Yeah, that's part of it. You came to a conviction. Tell us about that journey from not having the conviction to having the conviction to now you guys literally wrote the book on it. So tell us about that journey from no conviction to conviction.

Nathan: Okay, I'm going to go big picture on this. It's a big question and it is covered in the book. So it'll be more details. But I actually found a journal entry. We just moved. And in going through old pictures and journals, found a 2008 entry. And it literally starts with, "I know video games are bad for me. I can see what they do in my relationships. I can see what they do with my attention. I can see what they do with like my heart and my interests." But that was 2008 and I didn't quit playing video games until May 15th, 2011.

Ryan: Wow.

Nathan: So it took me three more years, even after I was able to articulate very clearly for a page that this is not good. Like three more years for the Lord to finally get ahold of me. I mean, we were married. I had a master's degree in education, like a house of career as a teacher. I looked like a functional adult, but after gaming until 2 a.m. yet one, another morning, because Anna-

Anna: I would go to bed...

Nathan: She's part cat.

Anna: It wasn't a thing in our marriage game until I went to bed. And it didn't bother me. I think now that would bother me if I went to bed and you weren't coming to bed. But I feel like we were just up so late anyway because you're 20 and working late hours and then you would stay up. I don't think I even really knew you were doing that.

Nathan: No, which is that's bonus material.

Anna: Right. That's maybe a different conversation in that.

Nathan: If you have a behavior you're hiding from your spouse, then it's probably not good for you. But that's extra.

Anna: But it wasn't causing conflict.

Nathan: No, you didn't even really know I was gaming because I wanted to stay married and still play video games. So May 14th into 15th, I had stayed up for a number of reasons, had failed at this game goal I had, and went to church that next morning on four hours of sleep. And the pastor was like, "Hey, today, instead of going through the book of the Bible we've been going through, we're gonna take a pause and we're gonna do two weeks on addiction." My reaction was literally like, "That's really good. Someone here needs to hear that. I'm really excited that he's gonna do this."

And I don't remember the first half because I was so tired. But partway through, he said, if you're asking the Lord to help you manage your sin, you're praying the wrong prayer. God doesn't manage sin, he kills it. And I had this very lucid realization that four and a half hours before I had prayed, "Dear Lord, help video games not be a problem for me. Help me be a good husband and a good teacher and a good son of yours, amen." That was the last thing I'd prayed before I went to bed that night. And the Lord gently brought that

back to me and I was like, "Did you mean it? Because otherwise you're lying and you get to run your own kingdom. But if you're in my kingdom, like I get to call the shots." I'm like, "This is distracting."

And I had all sorts of arguments after that with God of like, "Why? Like, it's not that bad. I'm not playing bad games." And I was like very, very deliberate in the games I played. And I was gaming maybe 10 hours a week, which if there are gamers listening, they're like, he's not a gamer. Whereas other people are like, "That's sad. He's an adult who game 10 hours a week." But yeah, that gave me 10 hours a week.

I started volunteering with Young Life and that led me to really having a passion for seeing young people realize their purpose in Christ. And that led me to start a nonprofit, Half Time while teaching, which I was very graciously led to a spot of full-time ministry where now I get to talk to families about what does it look like to use your tech on purpose rather than letting it use you. And very much spawned from the Lord, just asking, "Do you trust me? Do you trust me to be better even than your favorite pastime that you did with all your friends?"

All my closest friends at the time were really core gamers gaming 20 to 30 hours a week. And when I approached them with like, "Hey, I think I might be unhealthy with my gaming," they're like, "Yeah, we all are. This is what gamers do. Like we give up important things in our life to be awesome at video games." And I was like, "That doesn't feel quite right," but like couldn't get anyone to see it with me.

So it's been a cool journey to still be able to appreciate games, but "Oh, they are awesome. Like they're incredible. They're made by the most creative brains on the planet, but with trillion-dollar companies pumping money into them. They have amazing stories to tell and great experiences and they're not better than the goodness of God." And they don't bring freedom. Many times they bring distraction and fetters that come along with easy gratification.

So it's been a journey and that's very much something I'm passionate about is, specifically video games, seeing young people. Often I hear husbands seem to be the more core gaming crew. There's lots of gamers, lots of wives play video games. But if there's a group who seems to be struggling as a whole, it tends to be husbands.

So that's not my specific focus. The bigger picture is how do we get young people to use their tech well. But that's my journey with gaming.

Ryan: So what I hear you kind of articulating is there's two parts to this, right? There's technology, which we can talk about how it's developed at a breakneck pace over the last 20 years. I remember 20 years ago having a brick... not a brick. Like one of the big Motorola. But like having a dumb phone and a pager. I had a pager in high school. And that's how Selena got on.

Nathan: Like a 90s dealer. I mean, the iPhone came out, that revolutionized the world. And then now it's AI and we've seen some of the robot stuff that's coming out and how creepy that is.

Nathan: It's amazing/terrifying.

Ryan: And then what's pertinent to the marriage conversation is how pornography is being influenced and AI is being used.

Nathan: In VR and... yes.

Ryan: And then you go down even the darker path of the sex robots, which we won't go there today. Technology is developing at a breakneck pace. I think some technology is inherently bad. The latter of what I just mentioned. But not all technology is bad. So that's one side of it, technology itself.

And then there's the attitudes toward it and the behavior around it. So I guess that's what I want to maybe dissect a little bit. Help us... So I'm picturing... like you brought up the gaming, right? We can pick on husbands a lot in terms of gaming because it is primarily husbands who game. But you can also pick on wives, Instagram, social media, you know, because that's more of the Achilles heel of most women, I'll say. How can a couple approach this?

Let's talk about if technology is inherently bad or when is it inherently bad? Can you help us kind of draw some lines between when tech is good, when tech is bad, and how can we see this clearly when we're kind of always muddled by our own desires, habits, routines, and so on?

Nathan: You want to jump in that one first?

Anna: That's a big question. When you were talking about the good or bad, I think one of our verses that we go to a lot for our tech standards is Philippians 4:8. So looking at that for anything we're consuming or using, that is it. I'm going to forget the whole list right now.

Selena: So good.

Anna: But is it honorable? Whatever is true and honorable and worthy of praise.

- Nathan:** Pure and noble.
- Anna:** Yes. That is our standard for life.
- Ryan:** What we set our minds on.
- Selena:** It's good.
- Anna:** Right. So if our technology isn't lining up with that list, then I think there's a question.
- Nathan:** Right. That'd be on the terms of like what is acceptable. So I'm playing video games, but which games should I play? Like, this is your list to go to, but does this fit the standard? I almost went on a big rabbit trail there, but there is it. Thank you.
- Anna:** Well, because there is some tech that is not a fair fight and is designed.
- Nathan:** But it's not immoral on its face. We're saying if you're going to use the tech, you're going to listen to music, going to play a game, going to watch a show, Philippians 4:8, then it applies. And then there's tech that's unfair, even though it's not immoral. And that's like the nuance. That's where we call it toll and drool tech.
- Ryan:** Let's talk about that. Because phones, right? Phones. And you have a chapter in your book, Nathan. It's called Designed to Distract. Right. That feels like you're fighting an uphill battle, right? Because you have a phone in your hand. It's designed to keep as much of you glued to it as possible.
- Nathan:** Yeah. And if I can just jump in on that, that I think is a really important point when we're talking about technology, when we're talking about parents trying to think about technology, your kids asking for technology that it's not all the same. You have tech that helps you create, I like to call this tool tech, and then tech that's designed to help you consume. And that's drool tech.
- And the idea being tool tech is only doing your goals. You want to write a letter. You want to create a book. You want to draw art. You want to make a game, like Tool Tech is going to help you do that. It's impossible to get overstimulated. There's no hooks or behavioral loops built in. It's only incentive is to help you. Think Microsoft Word. It never sends you notifications at 11 p.m., going, "Hey, I haven't seen you in a while."
- Ryan:** I don't know if Cleepy's been in my DMs.

- Nathan:** Cleepy dropping in the DMs. Whereas drool tech absolutely will do that. And it sends you notifications about people you haven't thought about in 20 years and "Did you know they have a birthday? Maybe you should stop the important stuff you're doing now and go do this distraction." That's because the revenue is tied in with that. Things like social media, so TikTok, Snapchat, Instagram would be kind of the ultimate examples of that. But that-
- Ryan:** What's YouTube?
- Nathan:** What is the YouTube? It's drool tech. It's designed as drool tech. And the reason we know that is because, well, last time they quoted the stat, it was 2016, but 70 percent of their views come from the suggested bar.
- Anna:** Well, that's really changed, right? Because YouTube didn't used to-
- Nathan:** No, it used to just be a peer-to-peer search.
- Anna:** A search.
- Nathan:** That's true with Facebook and that's true with Instagram. Like the like button.
- Anna:** Yes. The last 10 years, they've changed that, that it auto plays to the next thing and gives you the suggested content and-
- Nathan:** Endless feeds, swipe to refresh. It has followers and deep, deep algorithms. They're very good at their job. But if you took... So they have over two billion monthly users. And if you took 10% of their daily users, let's say, and got them to engage for one extra minute, just 10%, one out of 10, say for one minute, you're going to end up with something like 18,000 extra days of viewing-
- Ryan:** Which translates into ad dollars.
- Nathan:** Which translates into ad dollars. So it's deeply incentivizing for them. Again, the 2016 stat, they were at seven out of 10 viewers were staying for that extra click. So you came on, figure out, how do I fix my air conditioning? And you stayed for how that squirrel get through that maze. And-
- Anna:** That is a good video.
- Nathan:** All three of them, top-notch. Strongly recommend. But that's not why you went on there. And it's not that the video you watched was bad. It's that it wasn't intentional. And that's when Anna's talking like, yes, you have Philippians 4:8, for like, how do I know if this game is acceptable? We have a

conversation for that, but that's not usually the conversation you have to have. You're doing something that isn't bad, but isn't the best. That all things are now acceptable, but not everything's beneficial. And there's going to be technology you choose not to add to your family, not because it's immoral, but because it's not a net gain.

I actually really love going to Galatians 5:19-22. Read 19 through 21 and you will realize there are games, music, websites, social media platforms built entirely around things like envy and jealousy and lust and dissension, and anger. Like there's entire platforms built to serve these niches. Whereas the other side, you have love and joy and peace and patience.

Like you want to add tech to your family. You want to know if your kids should use it. Like I just pick three, go love, joy, and self-control. You find any tech that does those three things and like buy one for your kid and one for a friend. But most of the stuff we do doesn't.

Anna and I compared screen time last week, maybe a week and a half ago and I was like, oh, feeling all prideful because I had like a third of the screen time she had. She had like three and a half hours and I was sitting in like one.

Anna: I would like to clarify that. Children... In defense of my screen time-

Nathan: I give my children my phone.

Anna: No. But we're in the car. I'm driving. And so the music and the podcast, yes, that is all playing off my phone.

Nathan: Okay, yeah, whatever. I just need to defend myself a little.

Ryan: This is not fierce parenting. [all laughs]

Anna: Thank you. She said no one cares about your kids.

Nathan: The point I was headed to was the number of checks though.

Anna: Oh, right.

Nathan: Anna was at like 50 checks for the day and I was over 200.

Anna: Which is still a lot.

Ryan: What are you checking?

Anna: You pick up every time-

Nathan: Every time you log into your phone.

Ryan: What are you checking? Email?

Nathan: Compulsion.

Anna: No, he doesn't have email on his phone.

Nathan: I don't have email. I don't have social media.

Anna: There's nothing.

Ryan: [inaudible]

Nathan: That my friends is an unsatisfied heart. That's it. Like, I need to take this to Jesus. Like I don't even want to know what mine is. She's delightful.

Selena: You should check right now. Check your check.

Nathan: Check yourself.

Ryan: I don't have my phone.

Nathan: So the idea though being that those two, Philippians 4:8, Galatians 5:19-22 are two great ways to check the tech that we're using on, whether it's tool or drill, the amount we're using and if we're actually aware of how much we are as I knew I was doing pretty good on total time. I didn't realize how compulsive it had become. And this is literally my day job.

Ryan: Where are my pickups? How do I know when I check?

Anna: In your screen time.

Nathan: It's under screen time.

Ryan: Oh. 83.

Nathan: 83 pickups?

Ryan: Yeah.

Nathan: All right. Okay.

Anna: But it's only two o'clock.

Ryan: That's the average. Yes. I did better than the tech guy.

Nathan: Dude, the tech guy is here because he has issues. So yeah-

Selena: No, I-

Ryan: Go ahead. Help us. My wife is-

Selena: No. I think the thing that I so appreciate about these guys and whenever we mentioned them on the podcast is that you guys really bring organization and order and vocabulary and words to the issue. Because tech is just like this big nebulous, ambiguous idea that we all have it. It's the water we swim in. It's the culture we live in. It's all around us.

But to say, well, I feel like this might be bad for me, but nobody really cares or says anything. I mean, we've worked everything out. Like, yeah, I'm on IG for a couple hours a night, but he's on his phone and it's totally fine. And it's like, is it though?

If we don't have the vocabulary or know what to call drool tech and tool tech and how to really bring in scripture to evaluate what is good, what is pure, what is holy, how can we even begin to question the foundation if we're not even given the words to help understand it? So they do that really, really well in both of their books.

Ryan: Well, I think that's what you're describing is you're calling out the elephant in the room and saying you're putting words to this nebulous, big reality.

Selena: Yeah, you're finding the sin. You're knowing what sin is and you're able to slay it. I mean, we are called as Christians to walk in dominion, to be in charge of what God's given us. It's not to take charge of us. Like we are here to serve the Lord and to use it for His glory.

Ryan: Amen.

Selena: It's not for us to be subservient to.

Ryan: So today we're talking about the elephant in the room. How can a couple, a wife listening to this, a husband listening to this, how can they diagnose?

Selena: Yeah, what are some questions or things that...?

- Ryan:** Because they may not even realize that they're in an unhealthy spot with this. Or they may not even realize-
- Selena:** We're asking.
- Ryan:** Please.
- Selena:** Please. If there's-
- Ryan:** How could a husband approach his wife about Instagram?
- Nathan:** Yeah, that's really the question.
- Ryan:** I'm getting too much news.
- Selena:** How dare you?
- Ryan:** Should I keep it real?
- Anna:** Real things on there.
- Selena:** It's all real.
- Ryan:** Yeah, it's all... no it's not. So how can we diagnose if... you know, if we're swimming in the water, how do we identify the water we're swimming in? What tangible things can a couple be asking and reviewing in their own lives? And then this will be the lead into next week's conversation, which we'll talk about really creating healthy boundaries very practically around the various areas of tech. So to that end, how can a couple diagnose if they have a problem or not?
- Anna:** Well, I feel like I have some Frederick tips in my head when I heard you ask that question of just like prioritizing your time. First of all, just having an inventory together. I feel like you guys talk about that a lot of putting first things first. And I think that's a big part of both of our books is saying these are the things we want our marriage to look like. We want to have time for community group and for time for date night. And we want time to be intentional, maybe at the end of every night. And to set those parameters and then fill in the gaps with extra stuff. Because I think when we don't do that, it's really easy for our tech to take over and become the default.
- Nathan:** Because it makes it have more of a cost then like, oh, this isn't just 30 minutes or an hour of TV. This is replacing this other thing. We actually saw this with

our kids. So we don't currently have any gaming systems in our house, but I bought an old... it's not an old. It's a new version of an old system. So a Nintendo sold by a Seattle company called Analog. And I was like, "Oh, I want my kids to like play my favorite games from growing up, right? Like that's something I want for them just for pure nostalgia and loving parenting, raising them up in the way they should go.

Ryan: Golden X.

Nathan: And Anna and I were like, "Oh, when do we give it to them though?" And we're like... Did you say Golden X?

Ryan: Yeah. Yeah.

Nathan: The one I have is Zelda. So I want link to the past to be part of their narrative experience.

Ryan: Acovenantoftime.

Nathan: Oh, that's 64. Come on, Ryan. But that like, oh, what would we like... out of their days and what we've prioritized for them, at no point in their day do I like, "Oh, I wish they didn't do A and they had played this video game instead." And that's true with us too. Like, oh, it's not that the show is bad or that we're wasting time. Like it's discretionary time. You can choose it as you get the opportunity AND we have other priorities. Like I don't make it... If I had a 25th hour in a day, I still wouldn't make it to video games because it's so low on my priority list now because I know what it does to my heart, my brain, and like how quickly that sets me adrift. So like it's, you know, 150th on my list of things I should do. That's my priority list. And that's really helpful. So families to do that is huge.

Ryan: So let's maybe shift just a tad because I don't struggle with video games at all.

Nathan: Most people would say this.

Ryan: Okay. But email. I could obsess over it. Actually, I'm really good at not answering text messages, but Selena-

Nathan: It's true.

Ryan: Selena, you really feel like you need to answer the text message right away.

Selena: I'm learning boundaries, but yes, I do. Unless I put no notifications.

- Nathan:** It's like someone just talked to you and you turned and walked away, Ryan.
- Ryan:** You know, it's like they interrupted me and they're going to wait-
- Selena:** It's true. It's true. The people pleaser in me wants to say, oh gosh, we're having a problem.
- Ryan:** We've had this conversation, to keep it real. We're doing valuable things. You'll order groceries to go pick them up. And like, it's gotta be done, right? And you've got it on top of mind. So you're gonna finish that real quick. Just another quick three, four minutes doing that while the kids are running around, while dinner's... you know, and it just kind of chips away. Are there boundaries to be had or is there a way to diagnose whether those things are bad, good, or neutral?
- Anna:** I feel like I've seen that in our lives this summer because we've been out of our normal rhythms. It's summer and that disrupts everything anyway, and then the move, I feel like I've been doing that too. Where it's like, "Oh, I just have to respond or I have to order. We're out of everything and ordering stuff."
- Nathan:** We're out of all the things.
- Anna:** We have no food. We have no cleaning supplies. And then trying to order it. And I've been feeling myself like, "I need to set some times," which I think is an Andy Crouch principle from The Tech-Wise Family for me and maybe some John Mark Comer. A couple of people. It's not our idea. But of setting times aside, which I'm not practicing well. But I think is a solid.
- Nathan:** We give mental ascent to it.
- Anna:** I would aspire to this and I would like to be better. And I think we've gone through seasons where we've been better, where I would check my phone like, Okay, do my devos, read my Bible, and then check texts in the morning and then didn't check again until lunch. Or like whatever I had to do on my phone, like make a list, like write it on a piece of paper and I can come back to that and remember to do it.
- Ryan:** That's a Cal Newport.
- Anna:** Oh, that's who it is. It's Cal Newport.
- Nathan:** It's in *Ruthless Elimination of Hurry*, but Cal Newport's the guy.

- Anna:** Digital minimalism.
- Nathan:** Digital minimalism.
- Ryan:** And knock it all out at once. That way you're not getting...
- Anna:** Chunk your day with your text, which is so good.
- Ryan:** Then you're spending maybe three minutes on whatever the distraction.
- Selena:** So good.
- Nathan:** Yeah, don't do that. You don't get that-
- Ryan:** Ends up soaking up so much more time.
- Anna:** Right. And your mental... what is that Linda Stone article that she talks about? The continuous partial attention. Like it's just always... like you open that text and it's like, oh, I got to do something about that. And your brain can't transition quickly to the next thing. So you're trying to engage with that kid or your husband or wife who comes in, you're like, well, I'm still trying to solve how I'm going to respond to that person. And your brain is trying to figure that out. And you can't.
- Selena:** You can't. You cannot.
- Anna:** We all know that feeling of...
- Nathan:** Andy Crouch's phrase is putting it in its proper place. Like there's a proper place for email and there's a proper place for social media and communication and connecting with friends. And it's not all the time.
- Selena:** It's so good.
- Nathan:** It's not "I'm going to check this every third... Oh, I didn't check it very long, but it's on my wrist. So I check it 10 seconds out of every five minutes because I get some notification. I'm talking to you until this thing buzzes. And now it gets my attention because-
- Selena:** How dare you?
- Nathan:** It's higher priority.
- Selena:** It was a gift. I didn't do it.

- Nathan:** It wasn't really... I didn't mean it. But it is like...
- Selena:** It is though. I never wear it. I only wear it when we're out because it's like you can have stuff. But it's true. If this is buzzing...
- Nathan:** Those can be lovely.
- Selena:** ...and you're talking. I'm like, my wrist is buzzing-
- Nathan:** I have to check this.
- Selena:** What are you saying?
- Anna:** Yes. Or the Google Alerts that come through.
- Selena:** Yes. Obnoxious.
- Ryan:** I have all my notifications completely off.
- Anna:** Yeah. Most of mine are off too. A friend gave me this.
- Nathan:** I feel like... Do we need to talk about this, Selena? I feel like this is-
- Selena:** This is sensitive for you now.
- Anna:** You're doing perfect.
- Selena:** No. See, this is why we're friends. No, I think it's... I mean, it can be like anything. I'm like, I could clean the house all day. Like I could do things all day and not. But if you don't set boundaries and say, okay, yeah. And chunkiness, especially with technology though, take those chunks. It definitely eliminates the constant distraction and the constant movement of everything, your head, your brain. And you aren't actually anywhere. You're just kind of in the middle of all 10 million things.
- Nathan:** I feel like we kind of got around what you'd asked. Of like, how does a husband or a wife know if there's an issue? And we do actually have something like... The *Gospel-Centered Tech* book directly addresses this. But it's called a reset.
- This is just an awesome tool for parents to use amongst themselves but also with their young people, because it really equips you to have the conversation that isn't "I don't like your tech," right? Like a spouse who sees another spouse gaming might go, Well, I hate video games. Like, "Okay, but that doesn't mean

I have a problem. That just means you don't like them." Like that's different. Like, a parent looking at a kid and being like, "Kids these days, back in my day..." Like you might just be saying, get off my lawn, and your kid's fine.

Anna: Well, we've had that even... I think I write about it in mine. But it's not even with video games. Just you were listening to your cycling podcast on repeat and it was just making me bonkers. Because every time I'd walk into a room, he had an ear... whatever-

Nathan: An AirPods.

Anna: An AirPods. You don't even have AirPods. Whatever they were. You had something in and you were just every down moment, you'd turn it on. And then I'd be like, well, now I'm interrupting you. Every time I come into the room. So it's not that even what you're doing, like that's the best pod... besides your podcast. The second best podcast you could be listening to is like this health and fitness. Like it's a fun hobby for you. Great. Just a good information. But it was like, that feels like it's infringing.

Selena: It is. It totally is. I'm sorry. But if you're wearing AirPods around me, you're already annoying to me. Like, I hate it. I hate it.

Nathan: Seconded.

Selena: I hate it.

Nathan: Fully seconded.

Selena: Fully hate it. So just everybody knows. No, because they will start talking and you're like, were you talking to me? And they're like, no. And you're just-

Anna: Yes. What's happening right now?

Selena: So let it be known.

Nathan: We're not ready for the cyborgs.

Ryan: What about the Apple...? What's the guy?

Anna: Oh, the VR.

Selena: No.

Nathan: Vision?

- Selena:** Yeah.
- Ryan:** Apple Vision. Those things. I don't know.
- Selena:** Like listen to your music when you're running and you're not talking to me and we're not supposed to be hanging out. So not on my time.
- Ryan:** We have to close this episode.
- Nathan:** No, no. We still got momentum.
- Ryan:** I'd like to get into the reset assessment.
- Selena:** Yes.
- Ryan:** Kind of really practically.
- Nathan:** We just really tease that hard then because people are like, I don't know what that means.
- Ryan:** It's an acronym. And acronyms mean things. We're going to get to that meaning next time. Really quickly I want to hear your fast answer to this. What trends in technology do you foresee kind of coming down the pike, so to speak, that will have a significant impact on marital health?
- Selena:** Real fast.
- Ryan:** Real fast. Is this going to continue to be...
- Selena:** You can cut.
- Ryan:** I mean, the AI stuff? I don't know. Do you have any prophetic thoughts?
- Nathan:** Okay. All right. Quickly. I mean, what you asked was how it's going to affect marriage specifically. I mean, cybernetics are going to be your... This is going to sound nuts.
- Anna:** What is cybernetics?
- Nathan:** Embedded technology. Technology that you don't just wear externally, but it's very internal.
- Selena:** This is what we were just talking about.

Nathan: Yeah. So internally worn tech is going to be a thing. So that's where's the future going. That's the future.

Selena: That's already started. People are like paying for their groceries.

Nathan: And it's been around for 10 years. It's been around for 30, that they've been able to really do it. But 10 years, it's been practically out there in South America and, you know, people doing their credit cards that way and things like that.

How is it going to affect marriage? I really do think that you mentioned the sex robot thing. And this isn't to be fringe or make people, you know, flinch when they hear it. But the concept of it's not a person. I'm not sinning. My spouse might be offline with some kind of sickness and I have needs so this is how I meet them. It's going to invade the church. And we are not ready to have that conversation of like, no, like we get it. That's not another person. So it's not a marital relationship. You're not with a prostitute. And yet you're seeking spiritual and physical needs in an inanimate object that doesn't have the whole premise of sex and marriage is two people serving each other. That's an echo of a greater metaphor when we're described as the bride of Christ, that's supposed to be there to becoming one. You're not becoming one with a robot. You're just serving you. And you have this image that you might be in intimacy, but it's not intimate. It's just selfish.

For us to be able as a church to wrap our brains around, like that's going to invade, like we are not ready. And we don't have the arguments. We don't have the clarity. We don't have the comfort level to say those things out loud. And these babies are like a couple years out because they've been in Japan for 20 years and the VR sets have already got here. And all we need now is the hardware. Yeah, it's coming.

So I think that on a marital side, it's, hey, we're having a rough season. My wife has cancer and she can't have sex with me right now. So this is just a temporary fix.

Ryan: Or I'll even throw this wrench in the gears. You have a deep fake of your wife made up.

Nathan: Yeah.

Anna: Sure.

Nathan: Yeah. I'm not cheating with another woman.

- Ryan:** You're imagining your own wife doing things that she didn't do.
- Anna:** Consenting to do.
- Ryan:** That's a big problem.
- Nathan:** It's a huge problem.
- Ryan:** And it's not okay. And so, yeah, I think you're right. As a church, as men and women, we need to have a strong sexual ethic, sexual theology for such a thing. Like what is it?
- Nathan:** Absolutely. This is the thing because sex is part of how we...
- Ryan:** Right. What is the theology behind it?
- Nathan:** ...understand God.
- Ryan:** Yeah. And you nailed it in terms of it's a small picture, image of a bigger thing, right?
- Nathan:** But that would be my two cents on it. Specifically how it's going to affect marriage, I think it's pornography, but not in the way we currently experience. It's going to be way more interactive. It's way more iterative. It's going to be actively created by AI. It's going to be interactive and it's going to be... what would you call it when you're in the experience?
- Ryan:** Immersive.
- Nathan:** Thank you. Wow. That word was escaping me. Immersive. And I think it's going to be very difficult to break, especially if young minds get onto it. And it's going to be very difficult to put the finger on, like something's wrong here, but why? Like average person on the street is going to struggle to really go, you know what, that's wrong because of A, B, and C. Like we have to get ahead of that.
- Ryan:** Yeah. All right. To the married couples watching and listening, bolster up your sex lives.
- Nathan:** Yeah.
- Ryan:** Okay. Well, this has been a joy. Nathan, one of the things that I love about your ministry is that you've pivoted consciously so that you could not be without the gospel in the message that you share with kids, with parents, with

churches. One thing we like to do with every episode of the Fierce Marriage podcast is to share the gospel.

Nathan: Oh.

Ryan: Just because if someone's given us their attention, their ears for 40 minutes, we don't want to waste that. So I'm actually going to ask you because you speak publicly all the time. So I'm putting you on the spot, but you don't care. How do you connect?

Nathan: Command form. Don't care.

Ryan: Give us the gospel and maybe even say, like, how does tech need to be submitted to the gospel and how does that actually save the human soul?

Nathan: I love it. Thank you for the opportunity. I mean, the gospel is the good news that God's safe centers. I love Ephesians 2:1-10 as kind of the text to cover that, that Ephesians 2:1 sets out that we are sinners deserving judgment and that we were running in our rebellion against God, making our own kingdom and telling God what to do.

So we might've been praying, but it was God do things on my term. And if God told us to do something like, that's not really convenient. I don't really want to do your stuff. I want to do my stuff. And then 2:4 tells us, but God being rich in mercy because of the great love with which He loved us, while we were yet sinning, sent a Son to die for us. And that tells us that Christ died the deaths that we deserve to be raised to new life and then invite us in. That He's going to be the firstborn among many brothers.

And so we are now saved, not because we're good enough, but because Christ was. And we're not just saved from the world. Ephesians 2:10 says that we're saved for good works that God prepared beforehand that we should do. So we're not saved from the world to go to a little cloister and hide away from that bad, icky stuff we used to be a part of, but now be with the good people.

Instead we're saved for the world and that we are sent back in. We're cast like a seed into a garden and the kingdom of God grows wherever God puts us. That when Jesus says, we need to pray to our Father in heaven that His kingdom come and His will be done, that's what He says when he goes among the towns and says. And He preached the gospel saying that the kingdom of God has come near. And when He sends out the 12 and then He sends out the 72, 72, right? 60? Anyway, sends out the bigger group, whatever number it is. He says, go and proclaim the gospel that the kingdom of God has come near. That that's what we're doing, that we are going out into the world with the

kingdom of God inside of us, that we are tabernacled and the Holy Spirit of God dwells in us. And that that is the good news. That we're not alone. We're equipped for the darkness of this world. We're empowered to communicate that to others and we're living in freedom, not apart from the world, but amongst it so that God can be glorified and people can be set free and souls can be saved. And in that, technologically, then that affects, what am I watching? What does my search history look like? And not saying that I'll never make a mistake, but when I make a mistake, it now demands a different reaction.

Our 10-year-old just asked me this about the difference between confession and repentance. Confession is, I did something wrong. Like Judas did that, right? What was the difference between Judas and Peter? Peter had repentance, Judas didn't. Judas is like, "I took an innocent man's life." Confession. Didn't repent though.

And with us, when we talk about the gospel, with our technology, when we make a mistake, we have to repent. We have to take that to the Lord and then take it to whoever we hurt, say you did it wrong, repent of it, and do what it takes to make that right in a humble, not a self-righteous fashion, but in a humble way of saying, Lord, I'm doing this at cost. Zacchaeus. But I'm gonna pay back those that I defrauded multiple times over what I took from them, because I understand the cost of that and it's gonna cost me something to make it right.

So that's the way the gospel applies to technology. And there's a lot of freedom to be had in the world of tech, in terms of not license, but in terms of true joy, fruit, and life in Christ.

Ryan: Amen. Which I actually need to mention because... thank you for sharing the gospel today. You have a podcast, The Gospel Tech Podcast.

Nathan: Yes.

Ryan: And so certainly, we've mentioned it many times on the Fierce Marriage podcast before, so here it is again. Go check out. Now you actually can see and hear Nathan and Anna. Anna's on a number of those episodes. They're the most highly rated episodes.

Nathan: They are every time. I'm like, Oh, I wonder what topics were the best. And it's just a list of all the ones Anna was on. I'm like, that makes sense. That seems right. Unfortunately, they're not consistent enough, but.--

Ryan: That's all right.

Nathan: Yeah, Gospel Tech Podcast.

Ryan: All right, well, thank you guys. Let me pray this out. Lord God, thank You for this time with the Sutherlands. Thank you that you are the King and your kingdom has come near. You have saved us and your kingdom also should saturate our tech lives the way we think about tech, our behavior around it, how we respond to your Holy Spirit convicting us.

I pray that you'd help the husbands, the wives hearing this, that you would convict them as you would need to convict them, and that they would act accordingly, Lord, in obedience to you and find freedom on the other side of that repentance. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.

Selena: Amen.

Ryan: All right, if you are still listening and watching, we want to mention, because we have The Forge now, we still need the fellowship, the Fierce Fellowship. So go to fiercemarriage.com/partner if you want to partner with us. It's one of the ways that God has seen fit to provide for this ministry. That being said, this episode of the Fierce Marriage Podcast is—

Selena: In the can.

Ryan: Nailed it. See you again in about seven days. Until next time—

Selena: Stay fierce.

PODCAST NOTES

- **Referenced scripture**
 - Philippians 4:8
 - Galatians 5:19-22
 - Ephesians 2:1

- **Recommended resource**
 - thenewsisgood.com

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