

Houston Q&A Session

Sunday April 27 2025 4PM

Question 1:

What about "sextortion?" I've read recently about a number of teens who have experienced this and in a very short period of time (hours) have taken their lives because of it. How can we talk to our kids about preventing it, or even how to handle it if they get caught up in it?

Sextortion is a form of blackmail where someone threatens to share your private, often sexual, images, videos, or information unless you give them something — usually more images, money, or other favors.

It usually happens like this:

- Someone tricks or pressures a person into sending explicit photos or videos.
- Then, they threaten to post them online, send them to friends/family, or ruin their reputation unless the victim meets their demands.

Important:

- The blackmailer can be a stranger, an online "friend," or even someone the victim knows.
- It often starts on social media, messaging apps, or online gaming platforms.

Quick Facts:

- **It's illegal.** Law enforcement treats sextortion seriously.
- **Victims are not at fault.** The blame always lies with the person making the threats.
- **It can happen to anyone,** but young people are often targeted.
- **Getting help quickly** can stop the situation from getting worse.

If you or someone you know is facing sextortion:

- **Don't pay or send more images.** It often makes things worse.
- **Save the evidence.** (Messages, usernames, threats.)
- **Report it.** (To police, the FBI, or the platform where it happened.)

- **Tell a trusted adult** or contact help organizations.

If you are a teen or anyone who has gotten caught up in something like this, then the best thing you can do is tell a parent or authority figure. This is something you **MUST** talk about with your teens if you allow them to be on any form of social network. Emphasize that you will not react in a rash way when they tell you. Encourage them that they can come to you with this.

Question 2:

*What are things we need to be aware of in regards to **AI, ChatGPT**, etc.... these new features that make so many things so easy? Are there implications for us as Christians to be aware of?*

First of all, "A.I." (artificial intelligence) is a misnomer - it's a marketing term, not a technical term. AI is really just a learning algorithm, more complex and capable of learning in basic ways better than your average search engine. I don't call things like ChatGPT "A.I." - and neither does OpenAI, the company behind ChatGPT. I call it "super Google." It's the next step in getting information, but it is not true artificial intelligence.

When the breakthrough is made with general artificial intelligence, it will be one of the single most impactful discoveries in all of human history. Everyone will know about it, and it will definitely be more impactful than super Google.

That caveat aside, tools like ChatGPT are something I have come to use every day. It has replaced Google completely for me. But it's a little more powerful than just being a supered-up search engine, let me give you an example -

Who just loves reading all the messages from their kids' schools? Not me. I feel like I need to just quit my job to focus on reading my boys' school emails. And they're not even in high school yet!

Because I'm a nerd, I wrote a script with the help of ChatGPT that will take all those messages, from emails and school apps, every single day, cobble them together in one email, and summarize them in a 3-5 sentence paragraph for me to read in 30 seconds or less. I even put a hard limit 100-word count on it so it couldn't be too wordy. It's saved me a LOT of time.

Another example - one of the things I struggle with every year is to find 22 suitable Bible topics along the same theme for our Wednesday Morning Men's class. We have

the class for 22 weeks and I always like to have all the lessons so the men can sign up for one week to teach. This year in planning that, I asked ChatGPT to make me a list of 22 Bible topics, specifically the "I AM" statements in scripture, along with scripture references, and generate me a list. It did what would take me a day and a half in about 20 seconds. Now, obviously I went over that list and checked all the scripture references - but it was correct on all of them.

I give you that example specifically because that's where, as Christians, we could get into trouble with some of this.

When ChatGPT was released to the world in 2022, there was a big asterisk on it. It was revolutionary, but sometimes wrong. OpenAI said that the failure rate at ChatGPT's launch could be up to 10%, meaning that 1 out of every 10 answers could be and would likely be wrong. However, just a year later, that failure rate had fallen to just 2%. Now it stands at less than one half of one percent. So 99.5% of the time, you will get the correct answer from ChatGPT.

But as with any of these AI assistants, they are trained only by what information they are given, the majority of that being large language models (LLMs) and the internet as a whole. And I don't know if you've read the internet lately, but there can be some wrong things on there.

It's one thing to ask ChatGPT a recipe for banana nut bread. It's another to ask it about the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and how that works.

My advice on this question: we do not need to treat ChatGPT and other "AI" services like it like it is always correct. It's not. Google, a learning algorithm search engine that all of us have been using for 20 years hasn't always been correct. So we need to treat this "new" technology just like we did Google - always give it a scrutinizing eye, always check the sources, and never take it as is.

Question 3:

I've heard that reading on a screen does not stimulate your brain the same way reading on a page does. Can you address this? What might we need to be aware of regarding e-readers, etc? For adults and children.

1. Cognitive Engagement:

- **Paper reading** tends to promote *deep reading*, where your brain slows down, reflects, and builds strong connections with the material. It's a more "immersive"

experience.

- **Screen reading**, especially when scrolling or clicking between tabs, often encourages *skimming*. Your brain stays in a lighter, more distracted mode — *surface reading* instead of deep comprehension.

Paper reading digs in. Screen reading tends to skate across.

2. Memory and Retention:

- Studies (especially in educational psychology) show **better recall** when people read from paper. Physical books give spatial markers — you remember where something was on a page ("bottom left corner") which helps your brain store and retrieve info.
- Screens, especially endless scrolling or clicking, erase those physical "landmarks." Every page looks the same, so your memory gets fuzzier.

Paper anchors your memory. Screens tend to float it away.

3. Brain Fatigue:

- Screens emit **blue light**, which not only strains your eyes but can cause subtle cognitive fatigue over time.
- Reading from paper doesn't have this problem, meaning you can often focus longer without your brain feeling "buzzed" or "tired."

➡ *Screens = mental caffeine crash. Paper = mental endurance.*

4. Multitasking Temptation:

- When you're reading on a screen, you're *one notification away* from distraction: a text, a social media ping, a news alert.
- With a paper book, there are no popups or dings — just you and the page.

Screens invite interruption. Paper invites immersion.

Personal Takeaway:

When I really want to understand something (like deep theological study or meaningful journaling), I *almost always* reach for paper. But if I'm casually skimming articles or catching up on news, a screen works just fine.

Question 4:

What are some good books or resources pertaining to technology?

- *Screens and Teens* by Kathy Koch
- *God, Technology, and the Christian Life* by Tony Reinke
- *12 Ways Your Phone is Changing You* by Tony Reinke
- *Dangerous Playground* by Drew Kizer
- *Disconnect* by Jeremy Roberts
- *Wired Child* by Richard Freed
- *Raising Self-Reliant Children in a Self-Indulgent World* by Glenn & Nelson

And you MUST read...

The Anxious Generation by Jonathan Haidt

Question 5:

*Can you describe or talk about how technology can **desensitize** us? Does the use of technology lead to a lack of compassion to our world and others?*

Seeing so much all the time can certainly lead us to be desensitized to the world around us, but it can also have the opposite effect of us becoming too angered or emotional about the world around us as well.

Mass media is a relatively new invention in the span of human history. I would argue that we are in the middle of the biggest technological and mass media shift in our history since the printing press was developed over 500 years ago. The advent of radio in the early 20th century and of television in the 1950's was certainly huge, but we have seen an explosion of mass media we didn't even know existed 20 years ago just with the invention of the modern smartphone.

Technology can desensitize us by overwhelming our senses with a constant stream of information, entertainment, and distressing news, making it harder for us to feel genuine emotional responses. For example, repeated exposure to violent images or tragic events on social media can numb our empathy, causing real-world suffering to feel distant or less urgent. Over time, this constant flood can make serious issues seem ordinary, training our brains to scroll past human pain without a second thought. It's a subtle but powerful shift that can erode our compassion if we're not careful.

On the other side of the coin, technology can unevenly enrage and anger us. Facebook's number one engagement tool is anger. They won't admit it, but it is. Controversy gets clicks. We can also fall onto the other side of this by getting too caught up in it as well, which could also lead to desensitization.

Question 6:

Here's my question- I use my iPhone for so much! It's my phone, my camera. I use it for grocery shopping, work related texts and all manner of communication. It's my book, via kindle app, my map/gps and my Bible. It's social media and business and everything in between. Is it possible to live without a smart phone in this culture, when jobs and kids' school and everyone else expects you to have one? And are there tips/ suggestions or a game plan for ditching the smart phone?

Short answer is: it's possible, but much more difficult.

Have you ever seen this picture? "Everything in this photo is now in your pocket." There's even some stuff that's not included - your phone is also your rolodex. Have you ever asked a group of high schoolers what a rolodex is? Also not in his spread there is a paper map - as mentioned in the question, it's also our map around unfamiliar places now.

The bottom line question is this: how do we control our technology so it doesn't end up controlling us?

My advice would not be to live without a smartphone, but own a smartphone and operate it in a minimal way. Control it so it doesn't control you. Minimal, if any, social media. No games on your phone. Use other devices for specific, singular purposes - i.e. a Kindle device instead of an app to read a book. (I know that's just exchanging one screen for another, but I'm not watching Instagram reels on a Kindle.)

Start viewing the phone as a tool instead of an entertainment device and you will start to see these things differently.

Question 7:

Is there a "safe" age to give a kid a phone? And what kind of parental controls are out there to help protect out children?

I'm glad you asked! We are covering this in-depth in our next and last session, *Device Control in Your Home (and Beyond)*.