



From the Principal:

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Compute This!

Over the last two weeks I have been reflecting on the impact of three technological advances on individuals, families, schools and our society in general. Last week I looked at the impact of television. This week I want to make some comments about the computer, and digital technology.

This is an aspect of technology that is advancing so rapidly that new gadgets are obsolete almost as soon as they are released. By gadgets I refer to PC's, notebooks, laptops, tablets, USB data sticks, external hard drives, PDA's, ipods and mobile phones. Just to name a few. Part of the phenomena of ICT is that the gadgets get smaller and more powerful every week. One little data stick can now hold a similar amount of information to several library shelves of printed material, stacks of the old floppy disks, a small pile of CD's. A tiny notebook computer that a student can fit into their pencil case can store more data than 10 PC's could in the 90's, get onto the internet wirelessly, and process material in seconds that would take a PC running on an early Windows platform half an hour to cope with.

So what? Who cares? Well, we all have various kinds of computers in our home, in our cars and they run all our financial, record-keeping, legal and educational systems. We are all constantly upgrading our gadgets and having to spend more and more time learning how to use them, communicating with someone or playing games/listening to music on them. But have they improved the quality of our lives? If being busier and more contactable at all times is an improvement, then yes, they have made a difference. If spending hours staring at a screen and trying to absorb vast amounts of information is an improvement, then we can thank the computer. However, there is increasing concern that they are huge distractions for many of us and that we waste enormous amounts of time fiddling with the computerised gadgets we own to the neglect of important relationships and focussed application to meaningful tasks. You could say that computers are causing most of us to suffer from Attention Deficit Disorder.

Like many technologies, a computers makes a good servant but a poor master. We can use them to enhance our lives, to increase our productivity, or we can let them waste our time and complicate simple tasks. Here are three traps of computers – particularly for BOYS (of all ages!):

1. **Games.** Computer games can be great fun, but also great time-wasters. I notice that when I am very tired from typing away on the computer I will start playing a game instead of closing it down and taking a break. This habit doesn't allow you to actually find space and time for reflection.
2. **Toggling.** Computers encourage us to do multiple tasks simultaneously and to 'toggle' from one to the other. We can have several applications open at once; we can check our emails every time we hear a ping; we can have a game open ready to play when no-one is looking! Toggling is an exhausting habit, and a very inefficient practice, as it prevents us from completing one task before moving on to the next, and requires us to keep a lot of information in our conscious mind (RAM, to use a computing concept) for long periods of time.
3. **Hardware and software glitches.** Computers break down! When they do, they can lose work that has taken hours, or change formats, or refuse to print. We then muck around for hours trying to work out the problem, or unfreeze the application or beat ourselves up because we didn't save or back-up our info. I have had teachers in tears because they worked into the wee hours of the night to complete reports and then accidently wiped the lot. They have gone into melt-down at the thought of repeating 20-30 hours of work.

In summary, I have to say that computers have added quality to many areas of life and can be a wonderful servant. However, the negative impact of computer technology is the **rise in busyness** for thousands of people. We are often running through life instead of walking, rushing instead of enjoying, trying to meet the next deadline when we are dead beat. In my experience, the first thing that suffers is my relationship with God. Secondly, our family relationships suffer. Computers are the great promoters of the Tyranny of the Urgent. Urgent does not equal important. We need to exercise discipline with our time to make the truly important our priority! *"In repentance and rest is your salvation; in quietness and trust is your strength – but you would have none of it!" (Isaiah 30.15)*

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