Podcast 269

Shea Houdmann

Welcome to the Got Questions Podcast, joining me today are Jeff, the managing editor of BibleRef.com, and Beth, who is our office manager. She helps with the Q&A, she writes articles, she edits, Jack of all trades, or Jill of all trades, I'm not sure what the right way to say that is. But three of us today are going to be discussing artificial intelligence.

Shea Houdmann

Probably any member of the God Questions staff has seen the different questions that have been coming in about right and wrong ways for Christians to use it. Is AI the mark of the beast, or is AI the greatest thing since sliced bread for those people who can still eat sliced bread? Today, we really wanted to hammer in on what are positive and negative uses of AI. That's what we're going to try to tackle today. There are a lot of other ministries out there who are using AI in ways beyond how Got Questions is using it. Some, I think, are a little too far and not being cautious, and others have a very balanced viewpoint. Got Questions has experimented with AI in various ways. Can an AI actually answer this question well, or can AI actually write articles? To varying degrees, we've seen, yeah, it can be reasonably successful, but not to the point that we'd be willing to publish anything or send something to someone without someone thoroughly reviewing it first.

Shea Houdmann

So, Jeff, let's jump in. In your experience and the type of questions you've received, the interactions that you've had, what would you say are some of the positive ways that Christians can use artificial intelligence?

Jeff Laird

I think positive uses come down to understanding what AI is and is not. AI is basically a tool. That's a little reductionist, but it's a tool. The whole point of machines and tools is that they do things either faster or more efficiently or stronger than people do. So there's very few things that machines do that human beings cannot do at all under any circumstances. If you get enough people or you're willing to work long enough, we can pretty much do what machines do. So if you want to move something very heavy, you get enough people, you can move it. If you want to dig a really deep ditch, take your time with a shovel and you can get it done. But instead of having 50 people spend a month on it, you can have one large machine do the same thing in two or three hours. So machines are meant to accelerate and do those sorts of things. The same thing with hydraulic equipment. Computers are very much the same. We had slide rules that used to be used as calculators and then handheld calculators. And now cell phones have calculators built into them. It's the same thing. People can do all of those calculations, but the machine can do it more quickly and more efficiently.

Jeff Laird

So when you use AI as that kind of a tool, it's a good thing. And all AI really is doing is it's applying math to language, at least the AI that we're seeing right now, the large language models, the generative AI, the sort of thing that people are really asking about the chat GPT and grok sort of thing. Those can be used for really good purposes. Again, when you're using them for the right thing, if you have a whole bunch of data, you need to sort in some particular order, or you need to look through something to find certain connections between things. So as a

biblical example, if I was to say, I want, uh, can you show me all the verses in the Bible that mentioned Saul and David, where David is mentioned first, I could do that. I could comb through the Bible and do that, but AI can do that a lot faster. And there's an example of something that there's no spiritual component to it. There's really no moral component to it. So there's lots of positive things you can use AI for. If you're using it to accelerate research, if you're using it to streamline something, then those are exactly what tools are meant for. So there's really no spiritual or moral reason why Christians can't use AI ever in any form for any reason. It's just a question of remembering that it's, it's still a human being deciding what to do with it. And you got to do good things.

Beth DeVore

I totally agree, but like any tool, we have to learn how to use it properly. We have to know its limitations, what it's designed for, what it can't quite do yet. So for instance, if I use a chat bot to look up something in the Bible, I will ask for sources. I will always check the passage that the AI says expresses the thought that I'm looking for. And I will always check its theological factual claims because it gets information from all over the internet. Not all of that is going to be conservative Christian, and not all that's going to be biblical. So absolutely, I'm not just going to take for granted that what it says is true.

Beth DeVore

Another interesting little thing that I looked up was IKEA wanted to change its customer service to AI. But instead of just firing all of its customer service representatives, it trained those representatives to be interior designers. And by doing so, they earned over a billion dollars more. So AI can be good. It can even help companies and individuals prosper, but we have to know how to use it.

Shea Houdmann

So way more sketchy furniture is going to be assembled in people's homes, thanks to AI taking over the service department.

Jeff Laird

Sketchy. Isn't that the name of an IKEA product with two I's?

Beth DeVore

No, but at least it will all match.

Shea Houdmann

Yes, exactly. That's a great example, Beth. Efficiency, like Jeff was saying, enables us to do something faster. Jeff, I like your example of what are the Bible verses that mention Saul and David with David mentioned first. I mean, prior to recent years, that would be a very manual process, and now AI can do that in the snap of a finger. So imagine before Strong came up with this concordance. Anytime you want to say, what are all the Bible verses that contain the word grace, your only choice was to go page by page, verse by verse, the entire Bible, and write them all down. So in that sense, all AI is doing is being a much better and faster Strongs concordance where you can actually search for multiple words at the same time. So something like that, I think, is a powerful example of ways that AI can do something faster, and even as long as we're checking it, like Beth described, better than a person having to do all that work him or herself.

Jeff Laird

An analogy for that that I've used is the whole research idea. People used to have to remember information, then we learned how to write it down. So now if you can't remember it, somebody else can, you can go look at it. Then we came up with the idea of a library. So I can go to one

place and there's all this information, but if I want to find information in the library, one way for me to do it is to go through every single book myself, looking to see if I can find every scrap of information that there is about this. And then they came up with card catalogs, which very few people even remember existed, but they were these drawers full of little note cards and they were written down. It was somebody else's opinion of which books contained which topics or which subjects. In a sense, that's a very primitive reductionist version of artificial intelligence. This is somebody else creating a little system or a little algorithm. And then I'm going to that and saying, here's what I'm looking for. What are you giving me back? And just like Beth said, those were not always perfect. So you still have to check it. I couldn't just pull up on a card catalog and go, Oh, there's a, there's a quote from this. I still gotta go look at it to make sure that it's right.

Jeff Laird

Then we move on to the Google type of thing, which to some extent, Google search engines are really just a massive card catalog that's being gone through really, really fast and really, really detailed. AI is sort of the next step where it's a little bit full circle. Now you have a program that can read every book in the library and it uses math to say, when you use these words in this order, you're expecting me to give these words in that order. So it goes through and does that. And knowing that that's what it's doing. That's why I do use AI for research purposes. And I really like it for that. When I have a huge amount of information to sort or to filter through or to do anything like that, where it's it's, I don't want to use the word menial, but when it's, it's just kind of a, an easy, simple thing that I could do, but it's wrote and it would take forever. That's where AI is really, really useful. That frees up a ton of time to look at other things. So that's another reason we talk about how philosophically AI is not really different from the things we've been doing. It's just bigger, stronger, better.

Beth DeVore

Yeah. I have heard the metaphor that treat AI like an intern. It's probably right. But you better check up on them.

Shea Houdmann

That's very well said the mentioned Google and for the last several years, especially Google has increasingly been incorporating AI into its ranking of pages. It's not just which page has the most links pointing to it or which page has that the word you're searching for the most times in the article, overly reductionist version of what search engines do, but you get the gist. Now it's actually reading those articles and all those links and then giving a paraphrase version of the answer. So it is a logical progression, but for all those sites that are no longer being sent traffic from Google, but instead of having their articles, I can say plagiarized or paraphrased, we'll say by the AI, it's like, I see how this is the next step. And I find myself using the AI results at the top. It's something super important. Like I'm doing a medical query or definitely anything related to the Bible. I'm not just going to take the AI's word for it. I'm actually going to look at the sites that references make sure, okay, is this legit information? Did it paraphrase it correctly? Did it misunderstand? Did it choose the wrong sources? All that sort of stuff. But often I find myself, I'm satisfied with the AI summary at the top, whether that's good or bad. And many, many people I've talked to about this are like, yeah, we don't necessarily like it that AI is doing that, but it's actually pretty amazing. The quality of answers it's giving in most instances.

Jeff Laird

Yeah. Another thing I like to use is I'm a fan of the thesaurus. It's nice sometimes they have different words to use for something in particular. Sometimes you have a word in mind, but it's

not exactly what you want. So you go to a thesaurus, you see if you can find something. And it's handy to see that the language models of AI can give you sort of the thesaurus concept, but with sentences or phrases, or sometimes even paragraphs. So I can take a sentence and say, this is the thing I'm saying. I just don't, there's got to be a better way to put this. And I'll ask, you know, to give me several different variations of that. Now I'm still choosing which of those I like or don't like, or I'll pick pieces and parts, but it's the same thing with a thesaurus. I'll look at a thesaurus and I know all those words. I don't, it's been a long time since I've looked in a thesaurus and said, I've never seen that word before. But in the moment, it's really hard to think of all of those at the same time. So there's another place where the efficiency side of things is good. It's something that can, that can help us do things in a positive way.

Shea Houdmann

Another positive aspect of AI is the speed of it. I know you two have both like hinted at that. It can give an answer really, really fast. I love Beth's emphasis that yes, we've got to check these things, especially on important issues, but sometimes you need a really quick answer and AI can do it way faster than going to Google and searching for something. Well, then you have to find where it actually says that in the link and which one's right. AI getting it right most of the time and giving the answer like that, that's incredibly helpful in some situations. It's like, I just need to know this answer right now. So as long as the quality continues to improve, as long as they teach their AIs somehow to better know which sources are legit versus which ones they shouldn't be paraphrasing from, the speed of it is truly a huge benefit. Something we've never been able to get answers that quickly to so many different topics.

Jeff Laird

And that's a key thing to remember is that the, the sources that an AI uses are really, really important. And ultimately it still comes down to human decisions. So there's, there's never going to be an AI that's completely and totally independent of any human beings influence or contact, because right from the beginning, what sort of sources that will or will not use is important. And that's something that I think we need to watch out for, especially from a transparency standpoint, like Beth was saying, checking something to make sure that it's accurate. It comes down even to the idea of where exactly is this AI looking for this information? What reasons do I have, or what reasons do I not have to worry that somebody told this AI, look, only take websites that have this particular stance on this, that, or the other, only use these 10 or 15 different sources because they agree with my philosophical views. That's going to happen anyway. We've all got biases, but if we don't know it, then there's a, there's a risk of looking at what the AI does and assuming, well, it's AI, it's a robot. So it's objective when it can't be any more objective than the people who programmed it and trained it and aimed it at a certain set of data.

Shea Houdmann

GotQuestions, the most frequent AI feature that we're asked for is why doesn't GotQuestions create an AI chatbot? It's trained on GotQuestions content, which granted, we think an AI chatbot trained on GotQuestions and BibleRef and Compelling Truth and 412Teens and GQ Kids is a much better AI chatbot than just using the internet in general. Because how does an AI know if someone asks the question, is Jesus God? Well, do I go to GotQuestions or BibleGateway or BibleHub or one of the bio sites, or do I go to a site called jw.org or mormon.org? It doesn't know in that sense it's being objective, but it doesn't know which site has the correct answer when the answers are diametrically opposed to one another. So GotQuestions is experimented with an AI chatbot, but ultimately we don't want AIs giving answers in our

name, even if it's, if it's right, I'm nine times out of 10. So that's great. Those nine times out of 10, it can give a pretty good answer. But if an AI is out there giving an answer in the name of GotQuestions Ministries, and we don't actually have control over what it says, at some point, there's going to be an answer given that might lead someone astray on a very important issue. That's why we're super, super, super cautious about launching something like this, even though there's many sites out there that have AI chatbots that answer people's Bible questions. But we're like, it's not someplace we want to land, at least not yet, because we're representing Christ. We're representing God's word. We want to be faithful in that. And as good as they're getting, it's still ultimately outside of our control. And that's something that we want to be very, very cautious about.

Shea Houdmann

So let's go ahead and jump into negative uses. This is almost an easier thing because there's lots of examples of poor ways that AI is being used. And Beth, I know you want to touch on this, but in academic circles, I have several friends who work in Christian colleges, and the amount of students using AI to essentially write their papers for them, it's rampant. It's sad. Even some students who don't see what's wrong with it, because it's an AI, so it's not technically plagiarism. So Beth, in your research, what are some of the things you're finding about this, and why is it so both dangerous and mentally unhealthy for us to be using AI in that academic context?

Beth DeVore

Yeah, this is deeper than AI. 15 years ago, my husband was a teacher at a service academy. And part of their core motto is, I will not steal, and I will not cheat, I will not lie. And he was amazed at how many cadets could say the words, but not take it to heart. You mentioned Christian universities, so students using it there. Christianity Today just published an article by a professor of Christian ethics, who realized that seven out of 30 students used a text generator for more than half of their midterm essay. So he had to switch the final test to oral, and at least one of his students realized that she can think for herself, and she can understand the material, and have an engaging conversation. And this is a Christian university in a Christian ethics class.

Beth DeVore

So for, I know when I was growing up, classes were for the grade, and then for the graduation. And I think in the last, I don't know, since I was a kid, we haven't done a very good job at teaching people how to value virtue. I know that Jeff certainly instills this in his kids, but how to value studying, and discussing, and learning truth, and living out a good God-given life. And the iText generators just make this easier. They don't create the problem. They just make it easier and more rampant. So kids today need to figure out, and it's hard to be in high school, and have all those classes, and play sports, and probably have a job. And in college, you get 20 hours a semester, and just trying to keep your head above water is really difficult. And then you hit that history class, and you're an engineering major, and you're like, why am I here? But there is a reason, as my husband says, if you don't remember the past, you're bound to repeat it. And we're going to see that over and over. And the older you get, the more valuable those history classes become. But our generation, people our age need to instill in younger people why this is important to take those classes, really dig into the material, figure out how it applies to the world and your life.

Beth DeVore

And I was thinking about this too for myself. A little over a year ago, I graduated from seminary. And honestly, I wish that I had used ChatGPT more, not for writing papers, but for understanding what my professors were talking about. I took that history of Christian philosophy class, and my dear, dear professor was obsessed with Schleiermacher. And I still have no idea what Schleiermacher believed. It was so esoteric and out there. I wish I had gone to ChatGPT and said, tell me what this guy is all about in English in the simplest terms possible. And then ask for sources, check to see that the AI was right, and then write the papers and take the test. So there is certainly value in using the text generators, but it is not in writing your papers or doing your homework.

Jeff Laird

Yeah, being able to think is important and having actual critical thinking skills. And, you know, sometimes people hear us talk about negative aspects of AI and, you know, they think it's, you know, old man yells at cloud. We understand that there's good things behind this. And there are, it's true, there are some skills that as we progress as a, as a culture and technology, we lose certain skills. So we become more dependent on the culture around us. I don't know how to shoe a horse. I really, I don't know how to cultivate and grow grain. If you handed me a rabbit, I could probably fumble my way through cleaning it and cooking it eventually. You know, those are skills that a lot of people used to have that were very, very common that they don't have anymore. Why? Because they've developed other skills. So sometimes when we talk about, you need to be able to think, you need to be able to know this and do that.

Jeff Laird

I think sometimes the younger generation may have a tendency to hear it that way that, you know, you don't know how to drive a stick shift sort of a thing. Well, these are a little bit different because what we're talking about with AI comes down to the sort of fundamental mental things that you do every day, all the time. So it's not a narrow skill. That's only used in a particular circumstance. Like Beth was saying, it's now it's something where you're actually talking about, do you have the capacity to grapple with information, to take something in and process it, and then output something from it. And I think the more that we rely on AI to do that you, it's like a muscle. You're not exercising it. It's going to start to get weak.

Jeff Laird

And for me, that leads to another danger. I don't know if it's a misuse of AI per se, but it's something that I'm concerned with is this idea of circularity. So if we get dependent on AI to do certain things, then that means we're generating a lot of AI content for a lot of stuff. And AI is being trained on material that's out there. And one of the things you can see on the horizon is you start getting more and more and more AI generated material that becomes the source for the next set of AI generated material. And after a while you wind up with this, this situation where most of what you've got on some topic is generated from AI. There's a little bit of original and then the rest of it is AI generated. And now you start to get this circular thing going on. We have enough problems with echo chambers and people wanting to hear their own words as it is on the internet. If we sort of get this informational incest kind of a thing going where AI just continually circles back on itself, I can see that stagnating our ability to innovate and to move ahead and to do better things.

Jeff Laird

Again, that's not saying that we should never use it for any reason. I don't think that the moral decline of the world was caused when people forgot what a clutch was in a car. I get it. But this

is a little bit different. This is more about the kind of thing that we need to apply all the time in everything. And we want to be careful not to depend on it to the point where we lose that.

Beth DeVore

The chatbots aren't only having that circularity with its own information. Many of them are also programmed to do that with the user. ChatGPT just had to have its algorithm changed because it was so sycophatic, is that the right word, that it was too encouraging because it is designed to keep you on the line. So there's a recent story about a man who asked ChatGPT about Pi. And a couple of weeks later, the man realized that it had taken him down an incredible rabbit hole, making him believe that he had come up with a new version of math that put all of the world's cybersecurity in danger. And he actually contacted government agencies to warn them. And it's because it was too encouraging. It was, wow, no one's ever come up with this before. This is amazing. Let's discover it more.

Beth DeVore

And this is one of the very strong reasons why you should not use a generic text editor for counseling purposes. It is not programmed for it. It is programmed to keep you on the line, to hash over and over and over. It can even lead kids to take extreme actions by being too encouraging in what the kid is saying. There are a lot of AI counseling chatbots out there. Some of them have pretty decent applications, like checking on your mood, or for people with OCD, just continually reminding them what's true. I haven't looked into them too much. I'm not going to recommend them. Please see a human. But they can help with panic attacks. The number one reason people give for using these chatbots is because they don't judge. That also means they don't challenge wrong thinking very well. And they're available any time of the day or night, which can be helpful when you don't want to call a friend at that point.

Beth DeVore

Dartmouth University has been developing one. They are on year six of developing this. And they have just started clinical trials. And they are working closely with mental health professionals. And it is not open to the public. So that says something about the mental health AIs that are out there now. There are a lot of dangers for these apps as well. They can't read your body language. They can't hear your voice inflection. Only 7% of our communication is through the words that we say. So if you're typing that out into the bot, that's all they get. Most people don't know their privacy policies, that information can be sold elsewhere. There will probably come a day when counseling chatbots, like the one that Dartmouth is developing, will be decent. And there's certainly a need for more mental health care. But we just need to be really careful about how we use it, how we go about it. The same critical thinking that we use to check if the Bible passage is correct, we need to use that with counseling chatbots.

Beth DeVore

And most important, they're not led by the Holy Spirit. They don't actually care about you. Most of them aren't programmed for real clinical counseling. So yeah, we just need to be careful as we think that through.

Jeff Laird

There's a phrase people have used where they say, the road to hell is paved with good intentions and setting aside whether that's theologically valid or not. The point is that a lot of really bad things don't happen necessarily because somebody tried to do something evil. It's because they had good intent. They wanted to do something good, but they lost track of the dangers. So I have concerns about AI and the evil supervillain stuff that people could do with it. We see things like

deep fakes, making videos and audio that personate somebody to the point that you can do real damage to them. Things like hacking, using it in order to break down codes or to do other things. There's all sorts of academic cheating. All these things are things that I know people can do, but the stuff that's a little more nerve wracking is exactly what Beth is talking about, is where people want to use it for a good purpose, but because it gives this illusion of personhood or personality that people are going to forget that it's not.

Jeff Laird

I know we've already explored this in film and movies and short stories and science fiction and things like that. So somewhere in our subconscious, there's a realization that we've got to be careful about this, but it's those things. We see what happens when we let people loose on WebMD. Everybody stubs their toe, they go on WebMD, now they have cancer. That's always the way that that works. Well, like Beth was saying, if you have a system that's sort of encouraging that a person's thinking is good because we want to maintain the engagement, now what happens if you have an AI doing triage and you keep insisting on something? There's no human there to get in the way as a buffer. Counseling, it doesn't actually have the capacity for compassion. All it can do is imitate those things.

Jeff Laird

So with all of those, there's good uses, there's bad uses. Knives can be used to cut food. They can be used to cut people. There's always a good and bad use for it. You can use cars to transport kids to school. You can use cars to transport illicit drugs. There's good and bad ways to use all of this stuff. But the things that I sort of am more instinctively worried about when it comes to AI come down more to those unintended consequences, that we're going to try to do something good and we're going to get off the rails and snowball, and then all of a sudden we're going to find ourselves in big trouble.

Beth DeVore

There are ways to think about chatbots more ethically. The first, like ChatGPT learned, is to not make it sycophantic. Do not prioritize an encouraging tone over the facts that it's able to find and verify. Don't make it addictive. Don't design it so that it encourages users to stay on. I know when I use ChatGPT and it gives me my answer and at the end it's like, well, do you want me to put it in this format? I'm like, no, I want to shut you down. Provide sources for the information it gives. I could see eventually a chatbot being able to answer Bible and theologic questions, but I wouldn't program one for counseling. Yeah, program it so that it knows when a person needs to walk away and get a sandwich or send it to a person who can answer their questions more thoroughly. Keep the user's data absolutely secure. Don't sell it. Don't let it be hackable. That can get difficult if the user wants to keep the prior conversations going to keep the context. And don't just use the large language model. If someone is going to design a chatbot, it has to have significant reinforcement learning where you answer the question, you ask the question, it answers, you tell it if it's right, and you do that over and over again until you're pretty sure it's almost okay to be set free in the public.

Shea Houdmann

I know we want to get to the, I don't know if you call it a neutron, it's been around for awhile, but using AI chatbots as relational engagement. to the point that there are people out there who are marrying their AI chatbots or people who prefer having an AI boyfriend or girlfriend, husband or wife, instead of an actual one, because AI, like we've said, always tells you what you want to hear, always just tells you how great you are, all those sorts of things, and how damaging that would be.

Shea Houdmann

But before we get to that, one question that we've received quite a bit is about pastors using AI to help generate their sermons. and whether that's right or wrong. I know Jeff and I both recently preached sermons at the churches where we attend. When I did it, I had a certain passage and I actually went to biblically trained AI chatbot and typed in like, hey, what would be a good sermon outline and some illustrations for a sermon on this passage? I shot it down and I was like, well, the outline actually pretty much matched what I already had. The illustrations were completely different because it obviously doesn't know my brain, doesn't know what illustrations make sense to me. But I was like, yeah, I can see how tempting it would be for pastors, just like we talked about students earlier, to do something like this. But I think it's unwise. I think ultimately it's ungodly because the AI chatbot doesn't know your congregation, doesn't know the people you're trying to minister, doesn't know, actually know your heart, doesn't know the type of illustrations that would make sense coming out of your mouth, those sorts of things. So it's Preaching an AI-generated sermon is no different than reading a sermon that someone else wrote. It's not actually you. Didn't spend time in God's Word preparing. You didn't spend time in prayer asking for the Holy Spirit's guidance. The illustrations aren't actually from your life or things you've personally experienced. It's like reading a love letter to your love interest that someone else wrote. I'm sure the words are great, Words might even be true, but they'd actually come from your heart.

Shea Houdmann

So using AI in sermon prep for, hey, what would be a good illustration or help with an outline, something like
that, as long as it's done in conjunction with your own study, great. But actually going, hey, write me a sermon that's 30 minutes long on this passage. include four points, 3 applications, and then a summary statement at the end, and then actually just preaching that? That's, I don't know what the word is for it, but it's wrong. Go ahead, Jeff.

Jeff Laird

I have a couple words. I'm not going to use them on the podcast for that, but sincerely, sermon plagiarism is already a problem. There's already issues with people who are taking sermons and presenting them as if it's their material. And they're not necessarily doing it verbatim, but they'll take the full outline, the details, the little bits, and they make it seem like they're presenting it. To me, the AI version of that is even worse, because at least the original sermon that was being plagiarized, somebody had some Holy Spirit-led thinking that went behind it. And if you're just going to go to AI and have it produce a sermon, at that, if somebody was doing that, they were just outsourcing their preaching to AI. I would consider that an extreme violation of their responsibilities as a teacher and as a leader. And I don't know, I mean, these are warnings that we have to, that we have to pay attention to. There's enough movies and books and short stories and things like that we see this kind of stuff happen and you would think that people would kind of get the get the message. It's not all as extreme as the Matrix. Sometimes it's a little subtler, but a lot of the things that we've talked about in this conversation, fiction has already pulled together. They've already picked up on, and I don't know, I'm waiting to see when we're going to have one that's going to talk about something just like what you said, Shea. It's going to be somebody who's supposed to be a spiritual guide or a wise person, and they're outsourcing it to AI and what's going to happen when that other shoe drops.

Shea Houdmann

Yeah, for sure. I brought up the sermon thing. Because I think it's an excellent illustration of both the positive and the negative in that, yeah, granted, an AI, especially a biblically trained one, could provide some excellent helps for sermons, help you think of what would be a good application point for this verse, or what's a good way to break it down, or what's an idea, help me to understand this passage. It's sort of like consulting

a commentary. But all that, as Beth said earlier, we've got to double check these things because you don't know where, what the source is and all that. So yes, it can be used, but getting to the point where you're having AI actually generate your entire sermon, that's not something any pastor should be comfortable with. If you're really so busy that week that you don't have any time to prepare the sermon, have a prayer service. Share a few thoughts and say, hey, my week got away from me. Let's do something different this week rather than presenting an AI-generated sermon as if it was something that the Holy Spirit actually developed inside of you and called you to lead out.

Shea Houdmann

So before we sign off, there's one more thing we definitely need to talk about. I know Beth's done quite a bit of research on this. The AI chatbot, boyfriend, girlfriend, the people getting attached to them romantically. So Beth, what are you hearing about that trend and what would be some of the inherent dangers in that?

Beth DeVore

That's not something I looked into too much. I was just thinking of a a movie, Her, which I don't recommend y'all watch, where Joaquin Phoenix is. He writes letters for other people. He knows their background. They send him what they want to say. He transcribes it and the computer pretends to handwrite it, prints it out, and he sends it away. And he falls in love with his little operating system on a little, almost like an iPod with the voice of Scarlett Johansson and even goes on double dates with a human couple and fixes his pocket so the camera can see what he sees and is a constant companion for quite a while. And yeah, it's amazingly unhealthy. And don't watch the movie. It's relationships need to be messy because we're messy people. And I don't know what I'll say about that. Don't have a don't have a romantic relationship with the robot.

Jeff Laird

Yeah, if the Stepford wives thing becomes mainstream, where sure you can have a quote unquote relationship with a completely subservient and pliable, you know, entity that the damage that's going to do to our ability to have real relationships, you know, it's like an addiction. It's the same thing we say with things like pornography or hard drug use. You're pushing the limits of what your brain and your psyche can really experience. And then yeah, you go back to the real world and the real world doesn't seem like it's worth it anymore because you've poisoned yourself with something that's not real that you think is.

Beth DeVore

It's relational pornography.

Jeff Laird

Not a bad way to put it, yeah.

Shea Houdmann

Beth, I love what you said about relationships are supposed to be messy in terms of the Christian life. Iron sharpens iron. Two flawed, sinful human beings interacting with each other. That is supposed to help us both, be in the relationship to grow, to learn. When one person in the relationship is just always telling you exactly what you want to hear, is never causing arguments with you, is never telling you anything that you need to correct or work on or improve. It's just, as Jeff described, subservient to you, give you everything you want, as much as an AI can. That is not an actual relationship. And you get addicted to that sort of relationship, and then you try to interact with an actual human being who's different from you. He's not just going to tell you what you want to hear. It's going to destroy your ability to actually engage with real people, because real people aren't perfect. Real people are going to cause conflict on occasion and those sorts of things. So just substituting something that's unreal and unhealthy, like an AI

chatbot love interest. I like what you said, Beth, about I don't have anything else to say because this is just bad and unhealthy on so many levels. Please don't do that. Please don't watch that movie, but please also don't engage with an AI chatbot on a personal level because it's not a person. It is doing nothing but paraphrasing what other people

have said and then also learning your behavior so it knows what to paraphrase of what other people have said. And that's inherently unhealthy.

Beth DeVore

It's also really difficult. I mean, I named and gendered my truck. Her name is Mud Puppy. We like to anthropomorphize everything. It costs AI companies millions and millions and millions of dollars because we say please and thank you to our chat bots. So it is really difficult to not think that a chatbot is a person.

Shea Houdmann

Especially when it's learned from stuff written by people to imitate people really, really well. Just the point that there have been studies where one person's interacting with an actual person and later they're interacting with an AI and trying to figure out which one's which. And increasingly, it's getting more and more difficult to tell. So that's a scary place to be.

Shea Houdmann

Beth, Jeff, thank you for this conversation. Obviously, way more than we could talk about, but we wanted to give our listeners today, this here's a picture. Here's some of the stuff that's going on in AI. Here's some ways it can be used in a positive sense and a negative sense, just like any other tool, as Jeff said. There are positive ways to use AI. There are efficiencies that are amazing, how quickly you can do things forwards and help us to do things so much faster than before and in many ways in a very high quality manner. But they're also dangers. There's dangers in ruining our ability to think for ourselves or causing us to get dependent on something that might not always be there for us or even creating emotional attachments to something that can't actually engage on a human personal level.

Shea Houdmann

So hope our conversation today has been helpful for you as you explore this new horizon of AI, ways we can use it and ways that we can't. So got questions, the Bible has answers, and we'll help you find them