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## Thriving Against the Technological Tide (Part II): A Review Conversation of The Life We're Looking For

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## Thriving Against the Technological Tide (Part II): A Review Conversation of The Life We're Looking For

### Abstract

"We need to ask what it would look like to design more instruments and less devices. And we need to build our lives more around instruments and less around devices."

Posting about the book *The Life We're Looking For* from *In All Things* - an online journal for critical reflection on faith, culture, art, and every ordinary-yet-graced square inch of God's creation.

<https://inallthings.org/thriving-against-the-technological-tide-part-2-a-review-conversation-of-the-life-were-looking-for/>

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### Disciplines

Christianity

### Comments

*In All Things* is a publication of the [Andreas Center for Reformed Scholarship and Service](#) at Dordt University.

# Thriving Against the Technological Tide (Part 2): A Review Conversation of *The Life We're Looking For*

Justin Ariel Bailey

Matthew Beimers

**August 11, 2022**

**Title:** The Life We're Looking For: Reclaiming Relationship in a Technological World

**Author:** Andy Crouch

**Publisher:** Convergent Books

**Publishing Date:** April 19, 2022

**Pages:** 240 (Hardcover)

**ISBN:** 978-0593237342

Note from Justin Ariel Bailey (JAB): Andy Crouch's elegant new book *The Life We're Looking For: Reclaiming Relationship in a Technological World* is one of the best books I've read in the last five years. Given the nature of Crouch's argument, I thought it would be appropriate to invite a friend and colleague, Matt Beimers (MB), to join me in what we are calling a "review conversation." We both found the book to be incisive in its diagnosis and challenging in its prescriptions. This is part 2 of this conversation.

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JAB: One of the things I enjoy most about Crouch's writing are these elegant distinctions he makes. He proposes three redemptive moves to help us thrive as persons: a shift "from devices to instruments," "from family to households," and "from being charmed to being blessed." Take the first shift: from devices to instruments. Devices promise convenience and efficiency while also enforcing new patterns of life, like the way we can't put our phones down! Instruments also promise new powers, but they require our full humanity, effort, and engagement.

MB: Say more about that.

JAB: Today I spent time with tapping at my phone and my piano. Both are pieces of technology, but they offer two different sorts of power. One expands my experience; the other narrows it. One requires the fullness of my humanity; the other treats me like I've been built for entertainment. We need to ask what it would look like to design more instruments and less

devices. And we need to build our lives more around instruments and less around devices. It's not that devices are bad in their proper place: I'm really happy to have one while I travel, for example! But for being human, instruments are better because they fit who we really are meant to be. What about the second shift?

MB: When I encountered Crouch's second shift, "family to household," I found myself taking a defensive posture. Initially, that move didn't feel redemptive at all! I come from a large family, and on many Sunday afternoons, four generations of us would gather in a backyard or on a patio and we would eat, drink, laugh and cry together. We knew each other deeply, and we were deeply known. Recently, we made the difficult decision to move away from the people and place we loved. I miss them dearly, so when I encountered Crouch's idea that we need to shift from family to household, I wanted to protest. It's hard living in a place where so many others have the very thing we left behind. And yet, as I read Crouch, I also had an inkling that moving away from family and all that we knew has forced us in a beautiful way to discover household in ways I could not have imagined. We have had to be patient, and the work has often been slow, but we have learned to trust and love people with whom we had no connection just two years ago. We are learning to be vulnerable and share hard parts of our story, and we also have a community of recognition that sees us, knows us, celebrates with us, and grieves with us. Today, I am confident that my kids could show up unannounced at the front door of a number of people in our household and they would be welcomed and cared for under their canopy as if they were their own children—this, to me, is household. To me, this is a gift.

JAB: Yes, it seems to me that the shift to household means to extend our care and commitment beyond the ordinary boundaries of family.

MB: Right. While I love my family dearly, I have to be honest with myself and say that I now wonder if I have made an idol of my family and sacrificed household in the process. To be clear, I don't want to suggest that family is not and should not be important; rather, I need to consider how we might connect our family to a larger household for the flourishing of all. The irony is that in placing so much emphasis and focus on family and family alone, we potentially inhibit their flourishing. Crouch writes: "Without participation in a broader network of kin and friendship, and especially under the pressures of consumer culture, few marriages and families thrive."<sup>1</sup>

JAB: I think I experienced something like household in the two immigrant churches where I served. Household is more natural, and to some extent necessary. But in the dominant culture it sometimes seems that the ideal is very isolating. Affluence enables greater security and control. Gates and walls. Lots of undisturbed space for me that I may or may not invite you into. In *The Great Divorce*, C.S. Lewis describes Hell as a grey town where people are moving further and further away from each other. That's how modern life seems sometimes.

MB: This connects to Crouch's third shift, doesn't it? He calls it a shift "from being charmed to being blessed." What's the difference?

JAB: Crouch argues that much of what we call "being blessed," more nearly reflects "being charmed... magically held apart from harm, endowed for a time with a bubble of prosperity and power."<sup>2</sup> The idea is that we try to create these bubbles of security, immune from the pain of those outside our circles. It's very human to protect ourselves, of course. But we do not realize that blessing actually depends on our sharing vulnerability with the "uncharmed," so to speak. He writes: "Imagine a community that incorporated into its very center those at the extremities of life, the very young and the very old. Such persons who have not yet demonstrated their usefulness, or have lived beyond their ability to be productive in Mammon's terms, would remind the whole community that our identity is not bound up in our accomplishments."<sup>3</sup> That sounds like a church at its best, doesn't it? But the way many of us experience church is more like a gathering of families—each with their own private vision of flourishing—rather than a real household.

MB: I am thankful you mentioned Crouch's discussion about those who are "uncharmed." I came to a full-stop in my reading when he said, quite simply, "For the flourishing of persons, everything depends on the ones who are unuseful." It can be easy to want to surround ourselves with people and things that have some utility to us. Crouch mentions that being part of a household means we "give ourselves away in mutual service and sacrifice in ways that secure our own identities instead of erasing them."<sup>4</sup> Yet, I wonder if we consciously or subconsciously choose our friendships the same way we choose our devices: how might this person serve my needs and help me lead a more charmed life? It's not about what I can give away for the good of others and self, but simply what can I acquire. Surely such relationships cannot survive, and if we take such an approach and model it to those around us, how might we be viewed once we have outlived our perceived usefulness? Crouch writes: "If we can recognize those who cannot ever see us—if we can see them as persons—then we ourselves, so often unsure of whether someone truly sees and knows us, can know that from the beginning to the end of our days, we will also be seen."<sup>5</sup> May it be so.

JAB: Amen. I think this book has helped me notice the way that the world around me seems designed for disconnection. And I've been thinking of small ways that I can lean in the opposite direction: slowing down, leaving my phone plugged in another room, and making space for unplanned conversations. In any case, I'm thankful for this book and for the chance to discuss it with you.

2. p. 173

3. p. 190

4. p. 151

5. p. 182