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Steve Jobs, 1955-2011

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The death of Steve Jobs, founder and iconic leader of Apple, is a signal moment in the lives of the “Digital Generation,” which Jobs, along with a very few other creative geniuses, made possible. Few individuals of any historical epoch can claim to have changed the way so many people live their lives, do their work, and engage the products of the culture.



Jobs was one of the most influential cultural creatives of all time. If that seems like an exaggeration, it is only because the products that Jobs and Apple brought into being have become so familiar that they appear as the furnishings of contemporary lives. The personal computer was not invented by Steve Jobs, but he saw the possibility of integrated systems that would allow personal creativity to blossom. He saw products that customers did not even know they needed — and then released the products to the public, creating entire new markets and unleashing an explosion of worldwide technological creativity.

The Apple products that Jobs personally introduced, including the iPod, the iPhone, and the iPad, defined a new era. There is now no going back. We are in the digital age to stay. But, that world will now have to reckon with the absence of Steve Jobs.

Born to unwed parents in 1955, Jobs was adopted by a couple in Northern California — the region later to be known as Silicon Valley. In one sense, Jobs was first defined by Silicon Valley. Later, he would return the favor by defining the region on his own terms.

He, along with Stephen Wozniak, developed Apple as an idea and as a company. After dropping out of Reed College, Jobs joined Stephen Wozniak in attending the meetings of the Homebrew Computer Club, which met at the Stanford Linear Accelerator Center in Menlo Park, California. They began attending the meetings in 1975. In 1976, they began Apple with just over \$1,000 of their own money. By 1981, the company was worth \$600 million. In 1983, Apple joined the Fortune 500.

Jobs had his share of technological failures, or disappointments. Nevertheless, even in his years away from Apple (after losing control of the company), Jobs redefined entire industries. He developed Pixar into a digital movie powerhouse, among other things, returning to lead Apple in 1997 and later to become CEO again in 2000. The rest is history.

Christians considering the life and death of Steve Jobs will do well to remember once again the power of an individual life. God has invested massive creative abilities in his human creatures. These are often used for good, and sometimes deployed to evil ends. Steve Jobs devoted his life to a technological dream that he thought would empower humanity. He led creative teams that developed technological wonders, and then he made them seemingly necessary for life in the digital age.

Jobs' massive creative genius was matched to an almost unerring intuition of taste. His design specifications and attention to aesthetic detail are legendary. He reportedly held product designs, such as the iPhone, in his hand, closing his eyes as he ran his fingers over each surface, mandating changes to make to the product that were, to his mind, aesthetically perfect. He once defined taste as "trying to expose yourself to the best things humans have done and then trying to bring those things into what you are doing."

His sense of taste — almost an intuition to know in advance what would be considered tasteful — was remarkable. Nevertheless, taste is not a very substantial basis for a worldview, nor can technology save us.

Steve Jobs lived a life that, by secular standards, will be considered legendary. Generations to come will be directly influenced by forces and products that he and his company brought to reality. He died a legend and one of the world's richest men.

His personal life was far more complicated than his cool and reserved public image suggested. And his worldview, seemingly and vaguely Eastern in orientation (there was speculation that Jobs was Buddhist), was very much a part of the hidden Steve Jobs. In his 2005 commencement address at Stanford University, Jobs said:

"Again, you can't connect the dots looking forward; you can only connect them looking backwards. So you have to trust that the dots will somehow connect in your future. You have to trust in something — your gut, destiny, life, karma, whatever. This approach has

never let me down, and it has made all the difference in my life.”

He told the graduating students to pursue their dreams and cited *The Whole Earth Catalog*, a work that symbolized the quirky culture of Jobs’ youth in northern California: “Stay Hungry. Stay Foolish.”

In diet, he was a pescetarian, eating fish as the only meat. In public, he was the essence of cool — redefining the role of the CEO as the narrator and public revealer of new technologies and products. In private, beginning in 2004, he was fighting against pancreatic cancer.

In his Stanford address, Jobs told of a saying he first heard as a 17-year-old: “If you live each day as if it was your last, someday you’ll most certainly be right.”

He stepped down as Apple CEO in August, telling his company’s employees, “I have always said that if there ever came a day when I could no longer meet my duties and expectations as Apple’s CEO, I would be the first to let you know. Unfortunately, that day has come.”

He exited the scene with grace, ensuring that the company he founded would endure when he was off the scene. There is much to learn from his life and his legacy.

At the same time, Christians cannot leave the matter where the secular world will settle on Steve Jobs’ legacy. The secular conversation will evade questions of eternal significance, but Christians cannot. As is the case with so many kings, rulers, inventors, leaders, and shapers of history, Christians can learn from Steve Jobs and even admire many of his gifts and contributions. Yet, we must also observe what is missing here.

I am writing this essay on an Apple laptop computer. I am listening to the strains of Bach playing from my iPad via an AirPort Express. My iPhone sits on my desk, downloading a new App from iTunes. Steve Jobs has invaded my life, my house, my office, my car, and my desktop — and I am thankful for all of these technologies.

But unerring taste, aesthetic achievement, and technological genius will not save the world. Christians know what the world does not — that the mother tending her child, the farmer planting his crops, the father protecting his family, the couple faithfully living out their marital vows, the factory worker laboring to support his family, and the preacher preparing to preach the Word of God are all doing far more important work.

We have to measure life by its eternal impact, even as we are thankful for every individual who makes this world a better place. But, don’t expect eternal impact to be the main concern of the business pages.

My son Christopher, age 19, is very much part of the digital generation — a “digital native” who never knew a time when the digital world was not. To him, and to his generation, Steve Jobs was the worker of wonders. Jobs, said Christopher, “made computing cool” and “brought in the iGeneration.” Texting me after the announcement of Steve Jobs’s death, Christopher wanted to make sure I knew “this is a big deal.” Got it, Christopher. Thanks.

Photo source: www.apple.com

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