

# Free Software!



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**L**ast month I started a new series discussing the impact that tablet computing is likely to have on our lives as Christians. I started by talking about the disruption the iPad is causing in the computer industry and the positive impact it is having on my daily activities. This month we'll talk about the most important aspect of any computing platform – software.

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## Software and “Openness”

Christian Computing readers know that computers are nothing without software. Sure, some of us remember the early hobbyist days when the joy of owning a computer was the ability to program it to do amazing things (like play a game of Mastermind – wow!). But these days, computers are mass market products whose success is almost entirely determined by what everyday consumers can do with them.

The most obvious example of the importance of available software in determining platform success is the comparison of the Macintosh and Windows operating systems. It's easy to argue that the Mac is a much more elegant, user-friendly, stable, and secure platform than Windows. But it's impossible to argue that the Macintosh ecosystem has been more commercially successful than Windows.

What's the difference? Sure, many buyers have been turned away by Apple's premium pricing, but I believe the greatest difference has been available software – people bought a Windows PC because the

software they wanted or needed to use was available for Windows and not the Mac.

And why did more developers write software for Windows? – Because, Microsoft made it easy for developers to make money. Microsoft took a relatively hands-off (or “open”) approach, giving developers the freedom to do as they please while enabling them with powerful development tools and support forums. Microsoft also encouraged a growing market for developers to sell into by working with Intel to enable many hardware manufacturers to come to market with competitive computer systems.

In contrast, Apple hasn't made it as easy for developers. They are more [protective](http://www.zdnetasia.com/mac-app-store-limits-developer-options-62205309.htm) (<http://www.zdnetasia.com/mac-app-store-limits-developer-options-62205309.htm>) of their environment, limiting what developers can do, [and they haven't provided as strong of development tools](http://blog.phanfare.com/2005/10/mac-vs-pc-development/) (<http://blog.phanfare.com/2005/10/mac-vs-pc-development/>) as Microsoft. By not licensing the Mac OS, they have also limited the market that software developers can sell into. Bottom line, developers

chose the easier path to business success and chose the Windows platform over the Mac. The result for consumers is more software titles available for Windows than for the Mac.

So what does that have to do with the iPad? After launching the iPhone, Apple took the right steps to help application developers make money by developing apps for the iPhone. Although not as “open” as it could be, the iOS platform was the first mass market mobile platform that was relatively easy for software development and that had an effective go-to-market path that enabled some developers to make lots of money. The result has been hundreds of thousands of software titles available for iOS devices – the iPhone first, but also the iPad at launch.

Advocates of “open” approaches to software development talk about developer freedom. They talk about “free software” and use the phrase “free as in free speech, not free beer” to explain that they are talking about developer flexibility rather than a specific price point. However, given the competitive environment where iOS developers are fighting for attention, Apple’s support of the development ecosystem has also resulted in lots of free software that’s free “as in free beer.”

### Bible Software

Unlike many here at Christian Computing, I’ve never been a heavy user of Bible Software on the PC. A decade or so ago I splurged and bought Logos Library System 2.0 and was amazed by all the functionality and available content. I used it for preparing to teach children’s Sunday School, but honestly, it was overkill for my needs. For the most part, I just spend time in the Word, either by myself or gathered together in small Bible studies.

I have, however, been an early adopter of Bible software for mobile




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computing. The convenience of having the Bible with me wherever I go has been a wonderful blessing. At times, my mobile Bible has even been my primary Bible. Being able to type notes directly into my mobile device during sermons and Bible studies may appear geeky to those around me, but has meant that I could always access that shared wisdom in future settings (at least until I switch Bible apps).

So, my needs for Bible software are relatively simple. I need to be able to read the Word of God. I need to be able to navigate fairly easily to different books and chapters. I need to be able to take notes. And it's nice to be able to pull up simple footnotes and commentaries. If you're looking for more, I'd point you to Kevin Purcell's excellent overviews in the [May](#) and [June](#) and this month's issues of Christian Computing.

I currently have five free Bible software packages installed on my iPad. My first download was the Logos app, because of the strength of the brand. My second was YouVersion, as much out of curiosity over how it had become one of the most popular downloads in Apple's app store. I also sought out the software that I loved on my old PocketPC – Olive Tree Bible Reader and Laridian PocketBible. Finally, since my everyday translation is the English Standard Version, I downloaded Crossway's ESV app.

Of these, my favorite is Logos. As long as I'm in a WiFi hotspot, it works beautifully. The formatting automatically adapts to single column or dual column depending on whether I hold the iPad in portrait or landscape mode. Navigation isn't as strong as other packages, but I love the way cross-references are handled. Tapping on the superscript letter in a verse brings up a small bubble identifying the cross-reference verses. Tapping on a verse reference brings up the verse in the small bubble without taking me away from the text I'm reading (although I am given the option to Jump to the reference text). This feature is incredible in daily reading, group Bible studies, and listening to sermons.

YouVersion's strength is in the number of translations that are freely available and that can easily be downloaded to your iPad for reference even when not network connected. YouVersion is also very much

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about social connectivity for your Bible reading.

Olive Tree's software has the best navigation and makes it easy to add personal notes. The ESV is a beautiful app that's not quite the best at any one feature, but does a decent job at navigation, cross-references and footnotes, adding personal notes, and works well whether network connected or not.

Having just started using many of these features, I'm just getting a glimpse for how a network-connected Bible I have with me all the time will change how I interact with the Word. Of course, that network connectivity piece isn't always easy – but more about that next time!

*Russ McGuire is an executive for a Fortune 100 company and the founder/co-founder of three technology start-ups. His latest entrepreneurial venture is Hschooler.net (<http://hschooler.net>), a social network for Christian families (especially homeschoolers) which is being built and run by four homeschooled students under Russ' direction.*