

## Following Christ in a Social Media World Matthew 10:16

For better or worse we'll be on the internet and social media till death do us part. So we must learn how to live online as followers of Christ, and as parents, how to train our kids to do the same. Discover biblical principles and research-based practices to guide your online life.

### **I can't come close to covering every issue with social media and the internet in one sermon**

- all I can do today is get the conversation started
- give you a few PRINCIPLES and PRACTICES to guide your use of social media & the internet
- and to help you guide your kids

### **The challenge with preaching on social media... it didn't exist in biblical times!**

- No scripture on internet or Instagram... so we can't be dogmatic
- I may say some things this morning you disagree with – that's ok!
- All I ask: listen to the conclusions I've drawn and then prayerfully decide what to apply
- Begin to think deeply, critically, and biblically about how you use social media and internet

### **My own story: My first computer = a Macintosh SE in 1988**

- 20 MB hard-drive and 1MB of Ram... MB, not GB!... cost us around \$2500!!
- **Compare that to my 3-year-old iPhone**
  - o 1000x RAM, 800x storage, 350x processing power, infinitely better screen
  - o and it cost me a fraction of what the Mac cost!

### **Computers have come such a LONG way in 30 years**

#### **Yet NOTHING compared to how far the internet has come since its birth just over 30 years ago**

- **Who here can remember life before the internet?**
  - o I can – home phones with coiled cords, hand written letters you put in this metal receptacle they call a "mail box," and 3 network TV stations plus Fox and PBS. You had Readers Digest in the bathroom.
  - o That's all we had. Life was a LOT simpler.
- **But then I came to A&M in '98 – Dunn hall – just wired with Ethernet – everything changed**
  - o we began communicating more by email than phone
  - o we started doing research online instead of going to the library
  - o we played with friends online – in networked games and chat rooms
- **The internet was no longer a NOVELTY... it began to feel like an ACTUAL PART OF YOUR LIFE**
- **And that was just the beginning... before the invention of social media or smartphones**
  - o now we're online all the time – don't surf the internet; we live on the internet!
- **If you are 40 or older: think about how much your life has changed because of the internet**
  - o How you do your job... get an education... find and build relationships... pay bills...

### **Internet changed human life faster and more profoundly than any other technological innovation**

#### **And that change has brought us MANY GOOD things:**

- access to practically all human knowledge
- freedom for persecuted groups to speak out
- phenomenal growth in economic efficiencies – driven down prices & increased options
- connected us to more people than ever before

**But it has also brought incredible EVIL and SUFFERING:**

- Tool for terrorists, criminals, racists, pedophiles
- A Petri dish for spreading fake news, gossip, and hate
- And don't even get me started on pornography!
  - o As Nancy Jo Sales tells us in her groundbreaking book, "American Girls: Social Media and the Secret Lives of Teenagers", "The adoption of the Internet in American life is inextricably tied to porn... In 2015, porn sites were among the most popular in cyberspace, accounting for up to 35 percent of Internet traffic. Porn is more available now than it has ever been, and for the first time it is readily available to everyone, including kids. Studies have reported that American children start seeing online porn as young as age six." And now, thanks to social media, "Our kids are not only consuming porn, they're producing porn" — by taking and sharing nudes" There are, she says, "Slut pages at *every* high school in America" where non-consensual nude pictures of girls at the school are shared, followed by anonymous, horrible comments.
  - o EVERY large social media platform – Facebook, Twitter, Instagram – all are used to distribute porn
- **Beyond the blatantly evil stuff, research is proving the internet and social media are...**
- **...changing the structure of our brains**
  - o our neural pathways are literally being rewired by our constant use of internet
  - o good: we're getting better at processing a wide ocean of interconnected data
  - o **bad: we're losing our ability to think deeply and critically about one thing at a time**
  - o I see that in my own life – harder to stay focused for long periods of time
  - o Part of reason for **collapse of mature political discourse** in this country
    - Abe Lincoln's day – listened quietly for *HOURS* as positions explained, debated
    - Today – lucky to get 30 seconds!
    - Everything boiled down to sound-bites – 140 characters max – Twitter
  - o The internet has trained our brains to jump endlessly from 1 soundbite, link, gif to next
  - o Not good for us individually or as a species
- **...fueling comparison and starving contentment**
  - o author Michael Harris, "Online life is a toxic enabler of the desire to compare."
  - o Jean Kilbourne, "Social media creates a heightened sense of competition and inferiority,"
  - o Humans have always struggled with comparison
  - o But now we have never-ending string of updates & pics to feed need to compare
  - o **And the problem: On social media what do we all share? Idealized version of self!**
    - All the good, beautiful, funny, sweet... none of the mess
    - Few weeks ago I shared video of my son reading Bible... not fight 5 mins later
  - o **Result: social media gives us a skewed version of reality that fuels discontent**
    - Fuels our fear of missing out
    - see every perfect party, vacation, date, parenting moment... we didn't get
- **...destroying civility and kindness**
  - o 2 things about the internet that have enabled cruelty to flourish in our society:
    - 1) anonymity – you can say things online without people knowing it's you
    - 2) distance – never have to see the pain on someone's face when humiliated
  - o Add those together and you get a culture of cruelty
  - o We see it with kids – bullying other kids online so mercilessly they commit suicide
  - o We see it among adults – targeting people they don't like, humiliating, shaming

**We created the internet without ever asking, "Should we?" We just did... because we could.  
Now it's here and it's not going away – can't put that genie back in the bottle**

**So what do we do?**

### **Some Christians will choose the Ron Swanson option... throw the computer in the dumpster**

- = get off the grid – take yourself and your family off-line to avoid dangers of the internet

### **But not an option for most of us**

- Who here could do all of their job without ever accessing the internet?
- Students, who could do all that's required for classes without ever getting online?

### **For better or worse we're on the grid till death do us part...**

### **So we better learn how to live online as followers of Christ... and train our kids to do the same**

### **Start with my 2 fundamental guiding principles from Matthew 10:16**

- Jesus is sending His disciples into the world to share His love and His salvation with others
- But He wants them to understand: this world is a dangerous place full of wolves
  - o perfect way to describe the internet! porn, violence, cruelty, addiction
- **Therefore principle #1: Be Vigilant to Remain Innocent**
  - o Internet and social media have stolen the innocence of so many children and adults
  - o Don't let that happen – we must be on our guard – watch ourselves & our kids
- **So why not just run from the internet?**
  - o Why didn't Jesus just take His disciples out of this world of wolves?
  - o Because then they couldn't reach the world for Jesus... that's the whole reason we're here!
  - o **The purpose of your life: Tell the world about Jesus - GOSPEL!**
  - o Our world lives online... therefore to reach our world we must be online
  - o But be SHREWD = wise, thoughtful, prudent
  - o really understand the online world so we can reach it for Jesus
- **So principle #2: Wisely Use the Internet for Good**
  - o For all its dangers... the internet and social media can be tools for incredible good
  - o You can connect with people who don't know Jesus but share a hobby with you
  - o Can be a great evangelistic tool – Cru and Breakaway reaching thousands online
  - o Seminaries training new pastors and missionaries
  - o Charities caring for people in need
  - o There's so much potential for good online
- So be vigilant and be wise... that's the big idea

### **Now let's get into the details... get very practical**

### **Here are best practices I've discovered from the Bible, research, and other staff at Grace**

### **I've divided these practices into 2 parts:**

- How should we use Social Media & the internet?
- How should we train our kids?

### **How should I use social media & the internet?**

#### **1) LIMIT THE AMOUNT**

- **We must understand: Social media is addictive by design!**
  - o Why does FB or Twitter exist? TO MAKE MONEY! They're businesses!
  - o How do they make money? By getting more of your time and attention!
  - o Research departments studying how to keep your eyeballs on their app longer
  - o They're very good at it!
  - o Every part of social media – likes, comments, feeds, filters – designed to hold you
- **Social media NOT inherently sinful BUT it becomes sin if we allow it to become an addiction**
  - o 1 Corinthians 6:12 – becomes evil for you if you let it control you

- **How do you know if you're addicted? Here's some of the signs of online addiction:**
  - Online relationships are deeper & more significant than face-to-face relationships
  - You let social media interrupt actual conversations – check your phone while talking
  - When start to get anxious if you haven't checked your phone in 10 minutes!
- **Practical ways to fight addiction – just pick 1 to try this week:**
  - **Practice Sabbath without electronics**
    - Similar to Jewish or Christian Sabbath practice
    - 1 day/week go off social media to spend time with God and other's in the flesh
  - **Ban devices from meals**
    - At restaurant – all devices face down on table – first to pick up pays whole bill
    - At home – first one does the dishes
  - **Schedule off-hours**
    - e.g. no internet or social media at all between 9pm and 7am
  - **Set up restricted spaces**
    - E.g. no devices allowed in the bedroom or in the car
    - we actually have to talk to each other – what a novel idea!!
- **You must proactively set the boundaries or you will be mastered**

## 2) ASSUME EVERYONE WILL SEE EVERYTHING

- **It absolutely stuns me that anyone still believes in online privacy!**
  - Celebrity nude photos stolen, posted online; Target hacked; Democratic emails leaked
  - The CIA got hacked... and you think you can keep your pictures and posts secret?!!!
- We must assume that everything we share over the internet could be seen by anyone
  - whether or not we share it anonymously, privately, or through a snap chat
  - if you send it electronically or post it in any way, someone can hack it
- **NEVER share, post, send, or text anything you're not ok with everyone seeing...**
  - Including your spouse... or future spouse, parents, pastor, your boss
- **Students: think about this from a career perspective**
  - what you post today could be seen by a potential employer 10 years from now!
  - even if you post anonymously or privately someone can put the pieces together
  - assume that pic of you drinking too much or wearing too little or breaking the law will follow you forever – so don't post it!
- Never assume private means private online. Period.

## 3) Consider the CONTENT

- Ephesians 4:29
- **That verse applies to our online speech as much as our literal speech**
  - Everything we write online must be wholesome, gracious, and edifying
  - It can be funny, challenging – but it can't tear people down or humiliate or shame
- **My rule: If I wouldn't say it face-to-face, I won't say it online. Period.**
  - Includes anonymous speech online... because you're never anonymous to God!
  - I may not know who @hiphopAugustine is, but God knows!

## 4) Consider your MOTIVES

- Honestly think about your motives before posting anything online
  - Why are you about to post this picture or comment?
  - Are you really trying to give thanks, connect with someone, start a good discussion?
  - Or are you trying to feed your ego, get more likes, more followers, prove your worth?
- If you detect an unrighteous motive... then stop. Don't post it
  - Remember: God cares about motives as much as He cares about actions

- If it comes from a sinful, selfish motive, then it's not ok... that's sin

## 5) Consider the CONSEQUENCES

- Everything you post online affects someone... or maybe many someone-s
- **It's YOUR RESPONSIBILITY to think how your post, picture, comment will affect others**
  - **Will it hurt, embarrass, offend someone?**
  - **How will it affect your witness for Jesus?**
  - You can't predict every response... and sometimes you should offend for sake of truth!
  - Goal is NOT to so overanalyze and stress out that you never do anything online
  - Goal is to pause and think about whether this post will be loving/good to others
- **Let me give you an example that you may or may not agree with...**
  - Go to dinner, movie, concert with a small group of your friends – not all invited
  - You post a pic online... How will that make those not invited feel?
    - Left-out? Insecure?
  - So why post that picture?
    - **If a party happens and no one shares it on FB, did it really happen? YES, it did!**
    - You don't have to share it online with everyone who wasn't invited
  - Again – you may or may not agree with me on this – that's ok
  - I just encourage you to think carefully about whether the pictures you post bless others or feed their insecurity and loneliness
- **2<sup>nd</sup> example: pictures and jokes about our kids**
  - A 2010 study found that 92 percent of American children have an online presence before the age of two. Parents post nearly 1,000 images of their children online before their fifth birthday... Parents wrap their children's online identities into their own online selves. And so many children growing up today experience the world as a never-ending series of photo shoots, for public consumption. "We're raising our kids to be performers"
  - Before posting about your child ALWAYS think: Is this good for your kid?
    - Not just today... but when they see it 10 yrs from now – online forever
    - Will they be encouraged or embarrassed?
  - Never ok to build our social media popularity on the backs of our kids
- **3<sup>rd</sup> example: before posting or linking to something political or strongly opinionated...**
  - **...think about how this could affect your witness for Jesus**
  - Do you have a right to share your opinions online? YES!
  - But is that the best course of action as a follower of Christ?... Maybe, or maybe not!
    - Not if it makes it tougher to serve people or tell them about Jesus
  - Think carefully whether a political post or comment helps draw people to Jesus or pushes them away

## Here's the deal: it takes TIME to consider content, motives, consequences... so SLOW DOWN

- Write a post or comment or get a pic ready to share... and then let it sit for 5 minutes
- Give yourself time to pray and think
- I THANK GOD for all the posts and comments I HAVE NOT SENT – would haunt me now!

## How should I help my kids use social media & the internet?

- Reminds me of what my son and I were up to yesterday... cleaning garage
  - he hopped in Miata – could actually reach pedals with pillow behind back – big day!
  - so of course he starts begging to drive it!
  - he's a bit young for that, 7... but he just keeps begging and I had work to do
  - so I started car, helped him get strapped in, and said, "Alright buddy. Have fun!"
  - off he went... which allowed me to get back to work in the garage
- **Now... how many of you have figured out I'm lying? Hopefully all of you!**

- No descent parent would hand a car to a 7-year-old and tell him, “Have fun!”
- Not just illegal... incredibly dangerous – he’s going to die!
- **And yet... isn’t that exactly what we’re doing when we hand our young children internet connected devices and tell ‘em “Have fun, see you later”!?**
  - an unrestricted internet connected smartphone or tablet without supervision...
  - in the hands of an untrained child every bit as dangerous as a car
  - your child is one click away from violence, pornography, hatred, addiction.
  - won’t give ‘em cars till they’re 16, taken driver’s ed, passed a driving test...
  - so why give smartphones to even younger kids without any training or oversight?! Crazy!
- I’m NOT saying that you need to wait till your kid is 16...
- I’m saying you need to recognize POWER and DANGER inherent in internet connected devices
- **Therefore BEFORE you give your child internet connected device you must provide 3 things:**
- **TRAINING, BOUNDARIES, and OVERSIGHT**

## 1. TRAIN THEM

- This comes first because it’s most important!
  - your boundaries and oversight will fail at some point
  - your tween/teen probably already understands the internet better than you!
  - they can always find a way to get online no matter what you do
  - so protect them as best you can... but focus on training
  - get them ready ahead of time for the evil stuff they’ll see online
- **Here’s the “talks” you need to have BEFORE you give an internet connected device:**
  - **all the principles we’ve already covered**
  - **internet safety** – how to steer clear of people who want to lure your child into danger
  - **pornography** – your child will be inundated by it – violent, abusive porn everywhere
    - talk about what they should do when, not if, they see porn
  - **bullying** – what to do when they see online cruelty – Who should they tell?
- One practical idea I got from another pastor: wife teaching kids how to use Instagram
  - 1<sup>st</sup> step: created account for each child that *only she* can log onto or post to
  - 2<sup>nd</sup> step: shared control over all posting and commenting
  - 3<sup>rd</sup> step: when they’re ready, it’ll finally be given to them
  - Great idea – like giving a teen a learner’s permit before they can drive

## 2. SET BOUNDARIES

- Big idea: **Smartphones are not a RIGHT, they are a RESPONSIBILITY**
  - Failure to use responsibly should result in temporary loss or restriction of device
- **Formalize that responsibility in a FAMILY SMARTPHONE CONTRACT your kids sign**
  - Should spell out rules, expectations, and consequences
  - If they break the terms of the contract – enforce the consequences
    - take away phone or delete app for a time
    - I wouldn’t take it away forever – that’s probably too much
    - but don’t hesitate to take it for a day or a week
  - Lots of great templates online – just search for “Family Media Contract”
  - As you set boundaries remember: every child is unique
    - doesn’t matter what his or her friend’s get to do online – “fair” doesn’t matter
    - do what’s best for *your child at this time*
- **A couple examples of boundaries:**
  - **All devices in lock-up at night**
    - I don’t think devices should ever “sleep” in a kid’s room – asking for trouble!
    - Have all devices off and charging in the living room or kitchen over night

- Get your kids old-fashioned alarm clocks – be retro!
- **Consider banning dangerous apps:** Yik Yak, Snapchat, Tinder, Tumbler, Kik, AskFM
  - these often used for pornography and bullying

### 3. PROVIDE OVERSIGHT

- **Till your child moves out, under your oversight... including when they're online**
  - They need to know: you have RIGHT to see everything on their device at any time
- Nothing allowed to be hidden from you – no secret accounts – you have all their passwords
- **Some parents will object – “We need to trust our children”**
  - But you wouldn't trust your 13-year-old with a loaded gun
  - Smartphones are just as dangerous
  - This is not an issue of TRUST, it's an issue of RESPONSIBILITY – what good parents do
- **You have RIGHT & RESPONSIBILITY to watch over child's use of internet and social media**
  - until they've grown up – could be 15, 17, or when they go off to college
  - age will vary for each child, each family
- **In particular, let me encourage you to watch carefully for signs of:**
  - addiction – their device is beginning to control them
  - narcissism – they're consumed with vanity and online fame
  - body-image issues – anorexia, bulimia, self-harm
  - possessiveness – tries to guard or hide the device from you... that's a bad sign

#### Now here's the good news: Your child actually wants your help

- **They can't imagine living without social media**
  - For tweens and teens... it's the air they breathe!
- **BUT they've spent enough time online to know, it can be very bad for them!**
  - Nancy Jo Sales tells us of a conversation she had with a couple teenage girls, “Social media is destroying our lives,” said the girl at the Grove. “So why don't you go off it?” I asked. “Because then we would have no life,” said her friend.”
  - They've seen how it can hurt and destroy people... but they can't get off – catch-22
  - They want your help and protection even if they won't admit it!
- **They are sheep among wolves – don't abandon your children in this fight!**
  - you are not being mean or untrusting to stick your nose in their online business
  - that is where your nose belongs!!
  - train them, set boundaries, and then provide oversight – that's what good parents do

#### My FINAL PIECE OF Parenting ADVICE: Keep this conversation going!

- Talk frequently about social media and internet with your kids, your spouse, your friends
- Since online world changes constantly, we must keep conversation going for rest of our lives
- **To help you keep the conversation going:**
  - This talk and my notes will be online by Tuesday afternoon
  - Two primary books I've referenced today:
    - Nancy Jo Sales “American Girls: Social Media and the Secret Lives of Teenagers”
      - brutal – definitely rated-R – but if you have a teen, it's worth your time
    - Nicholas Carr “The Shallows: What the Internet Is Doing to Our Brains”
      - surfaces the problem without providing a lot of solutions
  - And one more that's just come out:
    - Andy Crouch, “The Tech-Wise Family”
      - An example of one family's attempts to keep Social Media & the Internet in its place