

# Social Media & the Christian Life

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Good morning! Please open your Bibles to 1 Corinthians 6.

This morning, we're continuing a mini-series called 'redeem the screen.' Last week, we talked about God and Technology more generally. We considered the temptations that technology brings to misuse time, attention, and people. But we also thought about how we can use technology to have dominion, bring order out of chaos, and even make disciples of Christ. And we affirmed that God is sovereign over technology and it is possible, by His mercies, to live wisely with technology in our daily lives.

Today, we are going to be thinking about social media and the Christian life. Things like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok, Pinterest, Tinder, Reddit, Discord, Goodreads, Youtube, Whatsapp, Twitch, WeChat, and the list goes on and on. Pew Research released a study this week that found that 95% of teens use YouTube, and 19% use it 'almost constantly.' Most teens have cell phones now, and the majority of teens are using TikTok, Instagram, or SnapChat while Facebook has fallen away among younger users. Interestingly, a third of teens self-report to spending 'too much' time on social media apps.<sup>1</sup> That to say, social media is worth our time thinking about this morning.

I'm going to read a verse for us now, but we'll come back to it later in the message.

## ***Read 1 Corinthians 6:19-20***

Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, 20 for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.

## ***Intro***

What kind of world are people meant to live in? If you could design a world for humans, a habitat that would allow us to flourish, what would it look like? What kind of house and daily habits would you encourage?

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2022/08/10/teens-social-media-and-technology-2022/>

Some animal scientists think about these kinds of questions when they consider how we treat animals. What kind of environment is best for this animal? We haven't always done a great job at considering what is really best for the animal. But one scientist who helped change the cattle industry, did so by thinking about this kind of question. Her name is Temple Grandin. There was a movie about her several years ago. You can still find information about her as she still travels around to speak and give lectures.

Temple Grandin has autism, and according to her, it is her neuro-divergent brain that has allowed her to think differently. She created designs for holding pens and processes for moving cattle that better fit how cattle like to live and move. They had curved walls, gentle slopes, and were free from noise and visual distractions. Her designs lowered the stress level of the cattle and helped make the killing of cattle more humane. Now, we could talk about the ethics of factory farming in general, but that's not my point here. What I want to point out is that by changing the world in which the cattle live, they were able to raise healthier cattle who were less stressed by their environment.

I want to ask us, could that be true for us as people? Alan Noble has made this point in his book, *You are Not Your Own*. People are affected by our environments.

So what kind of world have we built for ourselves? I want to suggest that the online world of social media, as it is currently used, is not fit for humans. All kinds of studies show that using social media is making us anxious, depressed, and generally exhausted. In other words, it's stressing us out.

The popularity of social media has brought with it some of the very things it seems to want to eliminate. It promises better connection, but people are more lonely than ever. It promises to give us the ability to create our own identity that will lead to happiness and freedom, but people are increasingly anxious and depressed and enslaved to the ever-changing demands of social media.

But it's not all bad, of course. We are able to have relationships with family and friends who are far away. We're able to learn from others, find like-minded communities, and feel seen and heard. Like other technologies, social media has been used by the church to advance the gospel. So social media does provide some benefits.

The questions for us, then, is how can we use social media wisely? Let me give you four suggestions. And let's start simple:

### **Guard your information**

There are obvious dangers here. Don't share your banking information with questionable websites or respond to email or message requests that seem suspicious. There's also an inherent danger in posting pictures or videos of yourself online. When something goes online, it is extremely difficult for it to be removed, if it's possible at all. Now, I'm not an expert on cyber-security, but there are people out there who would love to get your information and use it against you. There are scammers who are trying to rip you off, or even legitimate businesses who nonetheless want to sell your information to others who may or may not secure your information well.

But even more than that, social media offers us the ability to share anything and everything that is going on in our lives, from what we ate for breakfast to the struggles we're having with work or relationships. We need to consider, do I need to share what I am sharing?

Let me give you a proverb to chew on. We'll look at several proverbs this morning.

### **Proverbs 12:23**

A prudent man conceals knowledge,  
but the heart of fools proclaims folly

This doesn't mean that wise people never share what they know. But it does mean that wise people are careful about not proclaiming things in each and every context. Fools just gush out folly, but the wise consider when something should be shared with others and when it should not.

And we instinctively know this, right? We would want our friends to keep some things confidential.

### **Proverbs 11:13**

Whoever goes about slandering reveals secrets,  
but he who is trustworthy in spirit keeps a thing covered.

It is possible to over-share. Why would a person do that? Probably there's some insecurity there. Maybe some pride in that I don't feel like the main character, so I have to make sure I'm always putting something out there. It can be a good thing to be honest and authentic and vulnerable with other people. But it is also possible to naively entrust yourself to everyone you meet.

There's a fascinating statement in John 2 that I think can be helpful.

### **John 2:23-25**

Now when he [Jesus] was in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, many believed in his name when they saw the signs that he was doing. **24** But Jesus on his part did not entrust himself to them, because he knew all people **25** and needed no one to bear witness about man, for he himself knew what was in man.

Jesus had apparent popularity with the crowds. They loved to see him do signs and miracles. But Jesus knew all people. He knew what was in man (the GK has a play on the word 'man' here). He didn't entrust Himself to them. He didn't get carried away with being popular. He knew that the approval of man was fleeting. So he didn't entrust himself to them.

Friends, not everyone needs or deserves your full trust. Not everyone needs to know everything about you. Now, some of you never share with anyone – that's a different problem. But some of you are tempted to overshare, especially with social media. And I'm suggesting that you need to be careful about what information you put online. Guard your information.

### **Guard your Words**

Social media offers us the ability to instantly communicate with hundreds, thousands, or even millions of people at the same time. And because it's a new form of sharing our thoughts, we can forget that the biblical principles of communication still apply.

Obviously, we ought not to use social media to lie, to bear false witness, or to deceive others. Before we share or pass along that post or meme, we need to ask ourselves, does it pass the basic test of truth? Do I know this to be true?

We ought not use social media to gossip and speak about people behind their backs. What would happen to Twitter or Facebook or Instagram or TikTok or whatever platform if gossip stopped for a week? I think a lot of social media would stop as well.

The book of Proverbs has much to say about social media if we have the ears to hear it.

- *We find warnings against speaking too much and too quickly:*

#### **Proverbs 10:19**

When words are many, transgression is not lacking, but whoever restrains his lips is prudent.

#### **Proverbs 18:2**

A fool takes no pleasure in understanding, but only in expressing his opinion

- *We find warnings against interacting with foolish people.*

#### **Proverbs 14:7**

Leave the presence of a fool, for there you do not meet words of knowledge

#### **Proverbs 23:9**

Do not speak in the hearing of a fool, for he will despise the good sense of your words

#### **Proverbs 29:9**

If a wise man has an argument with a fool, the fool only rages and laughs, and there is no quiet

- *We are warned against witnessing and joining in on matters that are none of our business.*

#### **Proverbs 26:17**

Whoever meddles in a quarrel not his own is like one who takes a passing dog by the ears.

- *We are warned against boasting and humble bragging.*

#### **Proverbs 27:2**

Let another praise you, and not your own mouth; a stranger, and not your own lips

- *And finally Proverbs warns us against acting foolishly on social media, and then going right back to it.*

#### **Proverbs 26:11**

Like a dog that returns to his vomit is a fool who repeats his folly

So how are you doing with your words on social media? Do your posts reflect these principles? Maybe you just lurk and don't post – do these things reflect the people you follow? It can be easy to justify ourselves by saying, "I didn't do or say that personally; I just follow that person." Maybe, but are you amplifying their voice?

You see, another problem with social media is how vague it is, how easy it is to misunderstand other people. Years ago, Facebook wanted to declutter the comments under people's pictures and posts. Many of the comments were things like "Great!" "Good for you!" "Awesome!" So Facebook created the 'like' button in order to allow people to simply click that and comment when they had something to say.

Now, of course, we are faced with the ambiguity of 'liking' something that may not be entirely good. Are we liking things that God would approve of? Are we trying to show love to someone, and that's all we mean? Social media communication is vague by design, so give thought not only to what you say but to how other people might hear it.

We will give an account for our words, even on social media. So let's guard our tongues.

### **Guard your heart**

The heart is the center of the immaterial part of man. It is that part of each one of us that lies underneath our decisions and beliefs and emotions. Listen to what Solomon says about our hearts...

#### **Proverbs 4:23**

Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life.

What does this verse mean for social media?

Well, I think it challenges us to consider what we are taking in through social media apps. Who are we following? Are they positive voices in our lives, leading us to be more like Christ, more godly, better at the calling God has given to us? Or do we follow certain people or conversations because they feed the fleshly part of us – the part that wants to be in on the latest gossip or hear the dirt on other people's lives or stir up lustful desires or covetousness in our souls?

Are we letting our hearts be shaped by how much time and attention we give to social media in our lives? Or maybe better, in what ways is your heart being shaped by your social media habits?

Have you found yourself getting irritable or frustrated because of things happening in the online world?

“An immature Christian is hard to please and easy to offend.” – Matt Smethurst

We spent time last week considering how technology tempts us to misuse time, attention, and people. All of those things could be said again here.

I think the word we could use is discernment. Consider how much time you are spending on social media, what platforms you use, and why you use them. Take an inventory from time to time because it is easy to drift into habits that are unwise. Parents, talk to your kids about which social media apps they use and what they’re doing on there.

God calls us to keep our hearts. Guard what you are taking in, protect your heart.

### **Guard your Identity**

I had a bit of trouble trying to come up with the right wording for this one. One of the greatest threats that I see in social media today is that people are being tempted to told or they are catching the idea that each one of us is responsible to create our own identity. We are to show the world who we are; build our lives the way we want to live them; find our truth and live by it.

So people feel this pressure to curate who they are online. They carefully select which photos to share, which opinions to publish, when to say something and when to stay silent. Many young people have multiple social media profiles – one for their close friends, one for their family, and one for the public at large. Young people especially are under tremendous pressure to craft the right image for the world – to market themselves as though they are their own brand aimed at whomever they are trying to please.

I admit that this is almost unavoidable to some degree. With online dating, for example, expressing who you are is a necessary part of what you’re trying to do on there. And most social media follows that pattern as well to some degree.

But there is a great danger in all of this. It's a deep problem with our culture at large and with social media in particular. And the danger is this – the idea that you belong to yourself and that you are responsible to come up with your own meaning and purpose in life, that you're to cultivate a happy life for yourself that makes you enough money and is fulfilling and healthy and positive to the world in all the right ways – the pressure to do that is crushing people. I believe it's underneath much of the anxiety and depression and mental health problems in our society.

And even now, this idea – that you need to create your own identity and find your own truth in life that makes you happy – that idea sounds almost true to many of us, doesn't it?

But friends, that is not the message of the Bible. In God's grace and mercy, He doesn't leave us to try to come up with our own meaning and identity. God gives us a purpose. And it's one that brings freedom and everlasting joy! It gives us the forgiveness that we all need for our sin and failures. It provides the power to have victory over sin and death. It shows us the way to live with love and grace. It brings us to God.

The world says, 'you belong to yourself.' You feel the pressure to do and be all the things that everyone around you expects from you. But in God's plan, He has a purpose for our lives. He is the one who gives meaning. We don't create it.

Listen again to **1 Corinthians 6:19**

Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? **You are not your own, 20** for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.

Theologians will say that we are owned by God twice over. He owns us because He created us, and He owns us because He bought us with a price. That price is the blood of Jesus which was given in the place of sinners like you and me so that we might be forgiven and have eternal life. It is God who gives us a new identity.

We've entitled this series – Redeem the Screen. To redeem is to buy back something – like you redeem a coupon, you use it to purchase something. When we say we want to redeem the screen, we want to buy it back for good use.



But let me tell you, the only way to redeem the screen is by trusting in the one who redeems our souls. If you're not trusting in Christ, and you live in our culture, then chances are good that you believe this lie to some degree – that you can create your own identity. If that's you, I'm glad you're here. But I want to challenge you to consider that you're searching for what only God can provide. If you want to talk about how you can find rest for your soul in Christ, I would love to talk with you about that today.

For we who are Christians this morning, we have a purpose, we have meaning, we have value, we have significance, we have the approval of God through Christ. We don't need to have the approval of others to have value. My only hope in life and death is that I belong, body and soul, to Jesus Christ.

If I could impress one message on your soul today about social media and the Christian life, it would be this: let Christ be enough. Don't run to social media to feel important or part of the conversation or to gain the approval of others or to increase your power or wealth or whatever. Recognize the temptation to build your identity on your own, and instead rest in who Jesus says you are. We belong to Him.

We are His sons and daughters, redeemed by His blood, and nothing can separate us from His love.

So yes, let's live wisely with social media and technology, but let us never forget that Christ is enough.

I'm going to pray for us now and once again ask some folks to join me for a brief panel talk about these issues.

# Questions to Ask

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**Mike**

- 1. Are the dangers of social media really just for young people? Are there any particular dangers that older people need to consider in using social media?*
- 2. How are the challenges brought by social media and technology different that those of former years? How are they similar?*

**Josh**

- 1. What are some of the dangers you see in young people or teens using social media?*
- 2. How could social media be used positively in a young person's life?*
- 3. Let's say there's a student or young person struggling with anxiety and stress on a regular basis. Of course, there might be a number of things behind that. But what are some of the habits that you would want to encourage that person to be doing? What are some of the fundamentals that you would want to see in place?*