



# *Start a Conversation about...* **Social Media**

The average American spends 2 hours a day on social media and 4 hours a day taking in video content. Our young people are being raised in an era where being on social media is not only the norm, but the expectation. While generations past may have congregated at church events, the mall, or the Friday night sports game, today's teens are gathering online in digital spaces.

Even if they are digital natives, teens do not grow up simply knowing how to be safe, appropriate ways to use technology or how to handle bullying. They need adults to help them filter their social media use through the lens of faith and give guidance on how to handle difficult situations. As young people navigate social media, we want them to show warmth, challenge and grace to their family, community and peers. This includes on social media, in their posts, shares, and likes. As they are faced with many messages, from many sources, each day, we want them to be resilient in their identity in Christ and make God-pleasing decisions.

---

## **Potential Activities**

- Have students go through their own profile and pick out one of their posts with a funny story and one that isn't what it seems (maybe there was something more going on or there was heavy editing). Have them share the stories behind the posts with a partner or small group. Discuss that not everything they post or see on social media is exactly what it seems. When we are tempted to compare ourselves and covet what we see on other's profiles, we should recognize that much of that is cultivated to put out a particular face to the world. Through the conversation, ask how students think about what they post and what façade it might put out to others.
- Have students and adult leaders open up the places on their phone that shows how much time they spend on their phone and various apps. Have them calculate how much time they spend on social media per week. Then give them a chance to consider what benefits or pitfalls they might have when thinking about social media. Discuss how they set priorities for their time, whether they know it or not. Encourage them to consider setting boundaries (if they are able) on the amount of time they spend in each app. Be careful not to vilify social media or students here. Instead, encourage them to make small steps that help break unhealthy patterns of endless scrolling.
- Help students come up with a list of benefits to social media. Then have them create a list of ways that social media could be harmful to them, particularly their faith. Have the group consider what boundaries or practices could allow them to get the best of the benefits while minimizing the harm. Is that possible? If it is, what keeps them from putting up the appropriate boundaries?
- Show students a set of social media pictures, posts, and videos that are awe-striking, trendy, and cool. Talk about what makes these things popular – let the young people teach you! Discuss how trends might be exposing important truths about who we are and why we need salvation in Jesus. Talk about the need to be seen and heard by others on social media and how it often takes many takes to “get it right” – something they no doubt know. Discuss the positives (continuing to try), but also the negatives & adverse effects of constantly having the perfect post, dance, etc.

## Discussion Questions

For these questions, refer to the scriptures below for guidance and direction.

- What is your biggest challenge on social media? What is your biggest joy on social media?
- What image/vibe do you have (try to have) on social? Why is that what you're going for? Is that image/vibe the image/vibe of Christ?
- How have you seen social media change and how you use it change over time?
- How can you identify things to pray for this week as you scroll through your feed?
- What does God say about the value of every human being? How does that impact your actions on social media?
- What does repentance (asking forgiveness, receiving absolution, turning from sin) look like when we make a mistake on social media? How do we navigate the consequences of what we do online cannot be undone?
- We all have vocations (student, friend, neighbor, etc.) that connect us to other people. How can we use social media to positively live out our vocations and shine the light of Jesus online?
- Social media can often be a place where people experience bullying or condemnation for their actions. How can we respond differently when others are being hurt or facing the consequences of their sin?
- As a youth ministry, how can we encourage one another online?
- Which do you think is better: not posting on social media or posting Bible verses on social media? (This is not an easy or simple answer. Rather it is a kind of a play on "if you don't have something nice to say..." & an ethical dilemma. Use this to help encourage them to think frequently and practically about how they share their faith online.)

## Bible Verses to Consider

### Psalm 90

This Psalm can speak to a number of issues including how the things that seem important to us right now are just a small thing to a God who sees everything. Verse eight highlights how even the sins we hide from others are seen by God. Verses 12-17 can be a powerful reminder that God's love and forgiveness work through us to give us wisdom and the ability to show other God's power.

### Ephesians 4:25, 29

As God's Baptized children we are empowered to speak truth about people, build them up and give grace. This can be hard to remember when social media becomes angry and divisive.

### Colossians 4:5

Being part of God's family means we should always show Christ to others. The danger of social media is posting things in the heat of the moment that may be the exact opposite of God-pleasing. Remember when posting that we are called to be a witness to all people – especially those who do not believe.

### 1 Thessalonians 5:11

As Christians, we are called to encourage each other. Our sinful nature makes this difficult, and social media can double that difficulty. How can you build someone up on social media?

### Isaiah 43:1-4

Social media can sometimes leave teens feeling as though they are not valued and disheartened by our culture's response to God's truth. These verses remind us that God created, formed and loves us deeply. Even when there are difficult times, God walks with us and redeems us from our sins.

## Other Resources

- Listen to the episode where KFYO's Coffee Hour interviewed Dcs. Heidi Goehmann, LCSW about how to have empathy on social media.
- Youth E-Source has a Bible study series called "Teens Reaching Teens in a Digital Age" that can address some of these issues. It's also designed to be easy for youth to lead.
- Watch The Social Dilemma (available on Netflix) and consider the implications presented.
- Your young people! Ask them non-judgmental questions to help you understand more of what they are experiencing, thinking, etc. when it comes to social media. Be sure to let them know that they can come to you and other supportive adults to talk through any difficult issue they might be facing online.