

Tweets, Posts, and Pins

Scriptural Guidance for Social Media

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INTRODUCTION

Social networking, in one form or another, has existed since the Garden of Eden. The modern form with which we are familiar, however, can be traced back to 1976.¹ Though crude when compared with today's standards of design and graphics, the initial online education experiment led to the development of basic applications like RSS feeds, community corkboards, and the creation of profiles. "By 2003, all of the elements we've come to expect in social networking (personal profiles, the sharing of favorite music and movies, posting our photos, voting for what we like) were in place."²

Since its humble beginnings, social media has become the sphere of communication for millions of people on the planet. According to January 2017 statistics, Facebook boasts 1.8 billion

users worldwide. Instagram clocks in at 500 million users, and Twitter has 313 million users.³ Not only has the number of users grown over the past ten years (970 million to 1.9 billion), but the number of available platforms has multiplied also. Facebook and Twitter, giants in the social media world, are no longer lonely friends, having been joined by Instagram (2010), Pinterest (2010), Tumblr (2007), Reddit (2005), LinkedIn (2011), and Snapchat (2012). Tweets, posts, pins, and shares have become the currency of communication in this Information Age.

When the Bible was being penned, social media sites had not been created. (Hard to believe, I know.) In fact, social interaction would have been primarily confined to face-to-face conversations and possibly letters. Even in their, what we would call, “limited social connectedness,” God provided guidelines for those interactions (“Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor,” “Debate thy cause with thy neighbor himself,” “Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth,” “He that keepeth his mouth keepeth his life,” etc.). God was, in effect, regulating communication so that His people would be honoring Him in their social interactions.

The Bible is clear that what we say can be helpful or harmful (Proverbs 18:21; 27:6; James 3:8-10). What we say and our manner of speaking should be loving; that is, our speech should be guided by what’s best for the one to whom we are speaking (Ephesians 4:25, 29). There are some subjects that are just not

worth talking about (Ephesians 5:4; Colossians 3:8; I Timothy 6:20; II Timothy 2:23), and some ways of speaking that should be avoided altogether (Psalm 12:1-2; Proverbs 7:21; 18:6; I Thesalonians 2:3-5).

But does God have an opinion about how we use Facebook and Twitter in the twenty-first century? Do God's principles of human conversation apply to tweets, posts, and pins? Since the Bible is the revelation of God's timeless truth, and since it is applicable regardless of culture or technological advancement, we can expect to find biblical principles providing guidance for our social networking today.

The point of this book is not to say that social media is sinful. However, we are such sinful creatures that our tendency is to misuse almost everything we can touch. Therefore, the purpose of this book is to explore the biblical principles that should govern our use of social media.

Maybe you've never even considered that God's Word might provide guidance on your use of social media. I hope this book will challenge your thinking. I pray that God will convince you of any changes that are needed in your use of social media and that God will help you honor Him in those changes.

“Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.”—Psalm 139:23-24

Across All Platforms

As children, we probably all played some form of make believe. Whether we were storming an enemy fortress or hosting a tea party for stuffed animals, the idea that we were somebody other than who we actually were at that time made us feel special. But even make believe had its limits. For example, when it was time for class, we weren't still the knights we imagined ourselves to be at recess: it was time to be the boys we actually were again.

Now that we've matured, we recognize make believe for what it is: unreal. As adults, we tend to view those who don't live in the reality of what they are as either odd or deceptive. However, many adults continue to live in their own make-believe world on social media.

As we consider the biblical principles that govern our use of social media, one overarching principle we need to mention is integrity. Some people treat their social media persona as a second life; maybe in some ways, as a better version of themselves (make believe). There's the life they paint for themselves on Twitter and Instagram; then there's the life they actually lead. Those two don't always line up.⁴ What does the Bible have to say about that practice? Consider the following verse:

“Most men will proclaim every one his own goodness: but a faithful man who can find?”—Proverbs 20:6

Here's a guy who talks about (proclaims) his own generosity and kindness. However, the opposing line of the verse suggests that his talk doesn't always translate into action. (The “faithful man” would be one who doesn't merely talk, but acts.) We are given the impression here that the inconsistency of talking but not doing is not a good thing. Social media has provided a platform for people to “proclaim” one thing about themselves, while living something entirely different. Not only is that unhealthy, it's wrong.

Contrast this kind of double-life with the biblical idea of integrity. One Hebrew word translated as integrity means “completeness” (see Psalm 7:8; 26:1, 11; 78:72; 101:2).⁵ A person with integrity is undivided; he is the same across all platforms, in different settings.