

HEADS UP, THUMBS DOWN!

Truth be told, one of my favorite times during elementary school was when our teacher would jettison her teaching time for a little classroom game called “Seven Up.” The teacher would choose seven students to go to the front of the room. She would then look at the rest of us and say, “Heads down, thumbs up!” Those of us left at our desks would close our eyes and put our heads down, while placing a hand on the desk and sticking up a thumb. Each of the seven in the front of the room would circulate, choosing one sitting student and pushing their thumb down. Once commanded to raise our heads, those whose thumbs had been pushed down had to guess which classmate had pressed down our thumb.

I got to thinking about that game and our teacher’s command when I picked up my first-grade grandson from school a few weeks ago. While waiting in the car queue, I kept my eyes on the door to see when he would emerge from the building. What struck me while I waited was the number of first and second grade kids who upon emerging from the

building, pulled out their smartphones and began walking with their heads down and fingers swiping the screen. Their only after-school interaction was with whatever they were focusing on behind those little 15-square-inch devices. I couldn’t help but wonder what the long-term effects would be on a generation that is spending more and more time with their heads down and their thumbs constantly up on top of their screens.

Social media expert Chris Martin, author of the book *Terms Of Service: The Real Cost of Social Media*, recently issued some directives to pastors on how they can equip their congregations to use social media. Because social media sits front-and-center in the lives of our kids and those of us who are older, Martin’s directives must be heeded by those of us who are parents as well. Specifically, he tells us that in our social-media-saturated world we must “encourage embodied, personal community over virtual community.” The reality is that God has made us for flesh-and-blood relationships,

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YOUTH CULTURE

Miranda Cosgrove, reflecting on the pressures of growing up as a child actress and the difficulties of navigating social media.

Reign with Josh Smith
podcast
September 6, 2022

“When I was younger, I would go through and kind of ignore all the nice [online] comments and look for the one mean one. I would be going through for a while and be like, ‘oh, found it!’ Which is the worst thing you can do when you’re on the internet because if you look long enough, you’re gonna find something negative and you’re gonna be upset about it... I think that’s another thing that’s hard for everybody.”



HOT QUOTE

“GOD HAS MADE US FOR FLESH AND BLOOD RELATIONSHIPS.”



with the family being primary and our fellowship with our brothers and sisters in Christ being equally important.

The writer of Hebrews addressed our tendency to check out and go solo when he wrote, “Let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near” (Hebrews 10:24-25). When those words were originally written, the option for virtual connections didn’t exist. How much more necessary it is for us to encourage and commit to embodied relationships and interactions as we live in today’s increasingly online world.

What steps can we take in our homes to lead our kids into experiencing, valuing, and growing from the kind of embodied relationships for which we’ve all been created?

First, power down. Not only should we set limits on the times and places our kids can engage with their screens, but we must do the same ourselves. A growing amount of research indicates that with the advance of technologies and smartphones that allow us to connect with each other, loneliness is on the rise. We can’t relate to each other when our sole focus is on our screens. Nurture your kids and yourselves into limited engagement with screens.

Second, spend time together. I’m hearing more and more parents say that they have little or no idea how to spend time together with their kids. Could it be that we’ve been lulled into our screens, while at the same time losing our “muscle memory” and ability to simply relate in healthy ways to one another. The good news is that these skills can be rediscovered and relearned as we begin to replace screen-time with family-time.

Third, listen up! One of the consistent complaints we’ve heard kids voice about their parents is that “they don’t listen, and they don’t understand.” Take that as a challenge to motivate you to spend your time with your kids to ask good questions and listen hard to their answers. When we listen to them, they will in turn listen to us as our relationships are strengthened. Doing this sets the table for us to effectively disciple them into following Jesus.

Finally, talk Truth. God has called us as parents to be the ones primarily responsible for their spiritual nurture. Take a moment to read Deuteronomy 6:1-9 and Ephesians 6:1-4 to hear your parental marching orders.

Let’s work to counter a culture that’s losing its ability to focus on each other as a result of focusing on our phones. We need to put our heads up and give our thumbs some rest.

WALT MUELLER
CPYU President

FROM THE NEWS

TEENS, HOODIES & HOT DAYS

Forbes magazine recently ran an article with the headline “Is there science behind why teens wear hoodies in summer heat?”

Perhaps you often find yourself scratching your head and wondering why that kid over there is wearing a sweatshirt on a 95 degree day. Meteorologist Marshall Shepherd decided to look into this and posits that there are some obvious reasons for the summer hoodies. They protect the skin from sun damage, guard against bug bites, have pockets to carry things, and cover the bodies of those who have body image concerns. In addition, some research suggests that hoodies provide the same kind of emotional comfort those struggling with anxiety often find in weighted blankets. Perhaps summer hoodies are a reminder of our need to lay off pressuring our kids too much, while reminding them of a God whose yoke is easy and whose burden is light for those who cast their cares on Jesus Christ.

TRENDS:

Deconstruction

Perhaps like CPYU, you too are concerned about the current trend, particularly among young people, of what is called deconstruction. If you are unfamiliar with deconstruction, it is the process where someone questions the doctrinal tenets of Christianity that they were raised to believe. Many wind up walking away from Christianity, while others lean into what's called progressive Christianity, which looks nothing at all like traditional biblical Christianity. Alisa Childers offers helpful advice on how to respond if one of your children begins to deconstruct. Begin by letting them know that you continue to love and accept them. Engage in discussion by asking questions and then listening carefully. Alisa says we should avoid reacting in fear, which might lead us to fire back with rigid statements and dogma. Journey with them to find answers. Read up on theology and apologetics so that you will be better prepared to give answers. Finally, faithfully pray for your kids.



LATEST RESEARCH:

Online Gaming and Addiction

Due to the fact that online gaming is a relatively recent phenomenon, research into the effects of online gaming on children and teens is still in its infancy. But experts are now suggesting that anecdotal evidence points to a 30-40% increase in cases of aggressive behavior by children addicted to online games.

Granted, the evidence is purely anecdotal, but we shouldn't dismiss it for that reason. Rather, we should sit up and take notice. Experts believe that the addictive nature of mobile-phone and computer screens feeds the pull into online gaming, and is gradually effecting not only cognitive abilities, but aggressive tendencies. Dr. Ameeta Watak says this: "Online gaming addiction has led to a lack of focus and concentration, which has further resulted in a huge upsurge of restlessness, leading to aggression and bullying among adolescents." Parents, it's not that online gaming is a bad thing. Rather, we need to limit time so that it does not become an idol that destroys our kids.

QUICKSTATS

In 2019, benzodiazepines like Xanax and stimulants like Adderall accounted for more than 1,600 deaths combined.

(U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention)

46% of American teens say they use the internet "almost constantly," an increase from 24% who said the same back in 2015.

(Pew Research Center)

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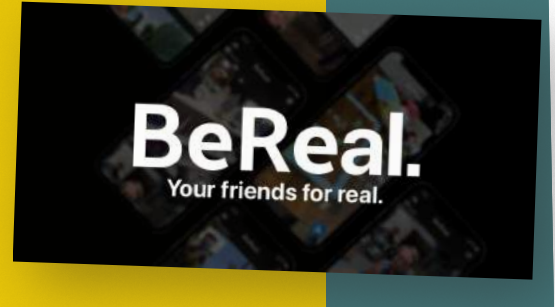
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APPS DOWNLOADED FROM THE APPLE APP STORE

Source:
Similarweb.com
(Top free apps downloaded for the iPhone in the U.S., September 28, 2022)

1. BeReal. Your friends for real.
2. Clime: NOAA Weather Radar Live
3. TikTok
4. Google
5. SkyView Lite
6. X-HERO
7. WhatsApp Messenger
8. YouTube: Watch, Listen, Stream
9. Instagram
10. Gmail - Email by Google



AR & IDENTITY FORMATION

by WALT MUELLER

I was recently chatting with some youth workers about the changes they are seeing in how their teenaged students form identity. They were lamenting the fact that kids are leaning less and less into God's will and way for discovering what it means to be human, while choosing their identities based on their own personal preferences and feelings. The youth workers said they fear what lies ahead for these kids and identity formation because of augmented reality, or AR, technologies.

Writer Robin Philips says that AR simply enhances and optimizes the real world by providing users with an experience that blends the real physical world with the

virtual world. Technology company Phiar is developing glasses that blend the physical and digital worlds to reach its mission of changing the way users perceive and navigate the world, forever.

Parents, be aware of this developing technology as we need to protect our kids from dangerous forms of escape from finding their identity in Christ.

FROM THE WORD

We live in an age of “expressive individualism.” All of us, especially our kids, are encouraged to live under the sovereignty of self rather than any other outside authority, including God, the government, teachers, law enforcement, and parents. You hear this new way of thinking about and living life in popular slogans like “You be you,” “Be true to yourself,” “Find yourself,” and “Follow your heart.”

When it comes to our faith, even those of us who confess Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior are influenced by this way of thinking, leading us to believe that it’s ok to isolate ourselves from other Christians and practice our spirituality alone. You will hear this in today’s world as “I love Jesus but I don’t like the church.”

The writer of Hebrews addressed this kind of attitude as he urged the Hebrews to understand their need for corporate fellowship. While his words do not neglect meeting together definitely refer to the regular worship gathering, his language is ambiguous enough to include all flesh-and-blood gatherings of believers together so that they might encourage, strengthen, stimulate, and love each other.

If you’ve ever doubted that Scriptures written 2,000 years ago can’t and don’t apply to our modern world of today, think again. These words directly address the spirit of our age that tells us that we can do everything and anything, including growing in our faith, on our own. We desperately need each other!

“Let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.”

HEBREWS 10:24&25



PODCAST



Youth Culture Matters

A CPYU PODCAST

Youth Culture Matters
is a long-format podcast from CPYU hosted by Walt Mueller.

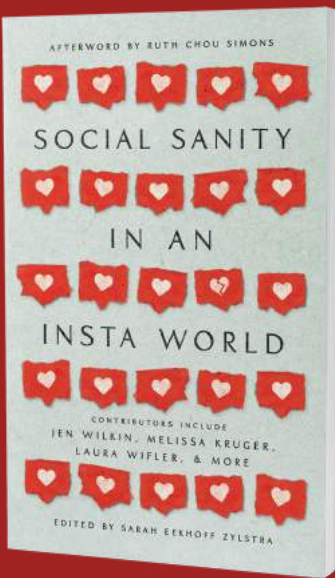
BE SURE TO CHECK OUT EPISODE 158:
“DOES SOCIAL MEDIA USE BRING OUT
THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT?” WITH
SARAH EEKHOFF ZYLSTRA

LISTEN AT WWW.CPYU.ORG/PODCAST



“Loving our female friends in a real-life community is hard enough. Loving them online, in a virtual community with algorithms, advertisements, and self-selected information, is far trickier. A lot of the advice we hear - be kind, share encouraging Bible verses, don’t humblebrag - is good. But it also doesn’t feel like *enough*. Social media is a huge beast, and we need more than “set a timer” - as helpful as that is! - to help us think about it in a gospel-centered way.” - Sarah Eekhoff Zylstra

HELPFUL RESOURCES



BOOK

Why do I feel so irritated after being on social media?

I just spent way too much time scrolling Instagram!

Why is everyone on Facebook having more fun than I am?

Should I delete all my accounts?

Social media can be both a delight and a disaster for women who want to love God and love neighbor. The industry has grown so fast that it’s been hard to figure out how to handle it wisely: in less than 20 years, more than 75 percent of American women have signed up for an account. The latest surveys show Americans spend more than two hours a day scrolling, posting, and liking. How can we navigate this area of our lives with grace and discernment?

Join nine authors as they explore social media’s potential and pitfalls—along with the biblical principles we need to honor the Lord online.

Contributions from Jen Wilkin, Melissa Kruger, Laura Wifler, Emily Jensen, Gretchen Saffles, Ana Avila, and Stephanie Greer. Afterword by Ruth Chou Simons, edited by Sarah Eekhoff Zylstra.