

How Social Media Made Me a Better Person



The problem isn't social media. The problem—and the solution—is us.

You often hear about the dangers of social media, including: narcissism, wasted time, envy of the lives of others, lack of integrity or the temptation to restart unhealthy relationships.

Of course, these are all concerns, and you need to consider them in terms of what role social media has in your life.

But I don't think social media is dangerous. I think we are dangerous.

DON'T BLAME SOCIAL MEDIA FOR YOUR ISSUES.

We don't need social media to sin. Social media, in fact, reveals our character. If I think too highly of myself, lack self-control, or lack integrity, these will be visible in my Facebook posts.

So don't blame social media for your issues. Too often Christians are the laggards, fearful and unsure about new opportunities. We are also the ones quick to call out the implications of sin and temptation in realms of human advance. But what if we thought carefully and constructively from the get-go?

Social media can make you a better person. Here's how:

1) Rather than envy, rejoice.

As Shauna Niequist recently wrote here, "It only takes one friend at the Eiffel Tower to make you feel like a loser." But, as she indicates later in the piece, this does not have to be.

When I see post from a friend in Paris, or a new baby, or having just run a marathon, I am happy for them. We are only as petty on Instagram as we are in real life. Seek God's grace to "rejoice with those who rejoice."

2) We need the accountability of the crowd.

We have different pictures of what "accountability" looks like. But these days, it's various people and groups demanding that the person they know is the same one, whether at work, on campus, at family gathering or in a bar.

When I got on Facebook eight years ago, I was only able to because I worked at a college. My peers and elders could not get an account at first. As they joined, I was pulled and torqued into more integrity in relationships as I needed all my stories to line up. I was not radically different when with different people, but Facebook has forced me to be consistent with different areas of my life. As a result, I am more at peace.

WE ARE ONLY AS PETTY ON INSTAGRAM AS WE ARE IN REAL LIFE.

3) You can't wax a rusty Ford Escort.

There is a temptation to share more positively than we ought, to make our lives look better on Facebook than they really are. But as Christians we know and accept that we're insufficient, that we're prone to selfishness. So I need to be honest with that, in an appropriate way, even online.

If I snap at my kids, I don't need to go to my Facebook friends as if they're the world's largest confessional booth. But I can be honest with, "I'm not the father I wish I was," or "Being a dad is really hard work." These little lines help all of us acknowledge life isn't all sunshine and puppy dogs.

4) Live a better life so you can post about it.

That's right—go ahead, share the good stuff about yourself. But do it in the way of "iron sharpens iron," where good friends push each other positively.

In "real life," we are excited to tell our friends about good stuff: "Guess what happened to me!" and "I

lost another five pounds!” and “I just got back from Bolivia!” And we’re excited to hear the same from our face-to-face friends.

As a result of this continual back-and-forth with friends on Facebook, I end up making better decisions, whether about time, relationships, or money.

Part of the joy of our accomplishments—simple and milestone—is sharing our joy with friends. And since I have more friends than just the ones next door, Facebook lets me expand that sharing. And I receive joy and ideas because my friends are doing the same on Facebook. We are redefining “normal” from just living vicariously through Netflix to really living (and posting about it).

5) Facebook helps us love other people better.

We are able to keep in touch with many more people. Yes, critics will say, “But how deep are those relationships? Aha! Got you!”

At the very least, social media creates a wealth of small talk relationships that can dip down into deeper topics more quickly. I know when people are really sick, when there are major life changes, or when someone goes radio-silent for a while, I can pop them a message, ring them up on the ol’ landline, or even drop by those who are in my zip code. And when we do interact more personally and directly, I can leap over the chit-chat and get to the heart of the matter.

Plus, social tools help us serve others more efficiently. We can find out who needs meals, who’s moving, who needs 30 refrigerator boxes to build “Fortlandia” (true story). And then we can help each other out.

We are now visible and accessible. Gone are the days when someone entered “church” by walking through the sanctuary doors. Today, the Church lives beyond the sanctuary walls—and that’s good because many people today wouldn’t be caught dead in a pew. Now, the life of the Church is at least partly visible and public via other interactions, including those on social media.

For example, because of Facebook, I was accessible to someone I barely knew in high school. She

friended me years later. I barely noticed. But she sure did.

She listened to some recordings of talks I gave at churches and colleges. She saw I was a Christian, I wasn't too weird, and she could silently follow what I was posting. Then at a reunion, she had a serious theological question for me. I had become a pastor to her. Why? Because I was sharing.

Social media, for all its benefits and harm to our lives and character, will always be what we make it. Twitter and Facebook and newsfeeds aren't the danger here—the danger lies with us and only us. So let's use it to become better—better individuals, better friends, better servants, better followers of Christ.

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