

Theology for Life

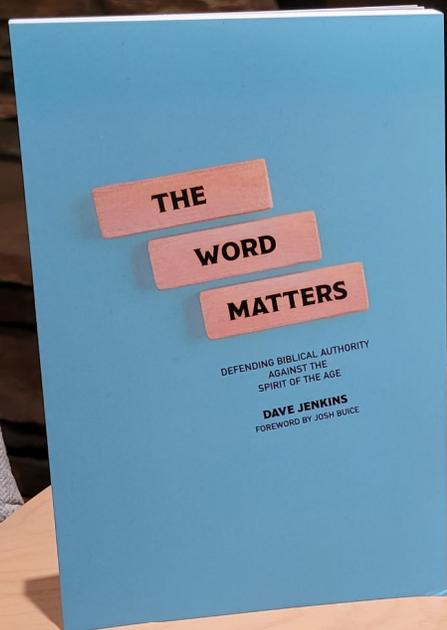
Volume 10 | Issue 2 | Summer 2023



Inside this Issue...

- **Marriage and Discipleship**
- **Six Questions to Ask Before You Use Social Media**
- ***Terms of Service: The Real Cost of Social Media— A Book Review***

In ***The Word Matters***, Dave Jenkins takes readers by the hand and helps them understand how serious the issue of biblical authority is and how the Bible is under attack, so that they can stand with confidence on the Word of God.

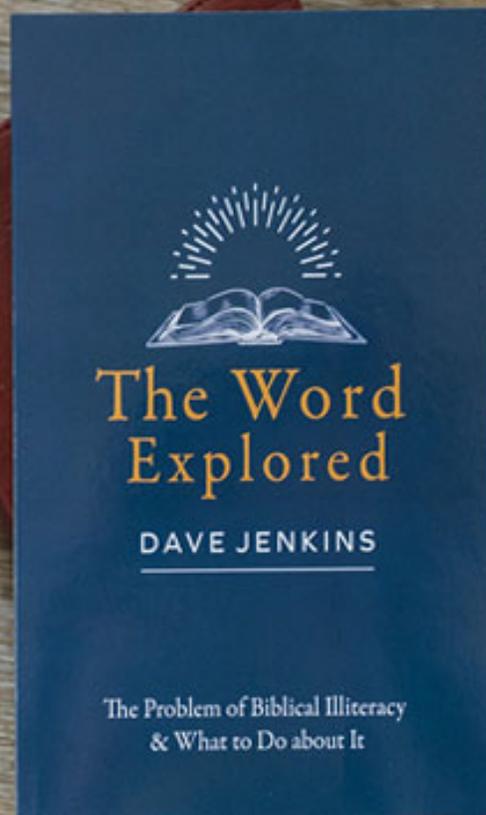


The Word Matters

DEFENDING BIBLICAL AUTHORITY
AGAINST THE SPIRIT OF THE AGE



Grow in your relationship with God!



*The Word Explored:
The Problem of
Biblical Illiteracy &
What to Do about It*
is an easy-to-read,
biblically-based work
for lay-people and
pastors alike.



hesedandemet.com

Table of Contents

Editor's Corner By Dave Jenkins	Page 6
Biblical Discipleship and How Church History Can Help Christians Today By Jacob Tanner	Page 8
Biblical Discipleship and Counseling By Joey Tomlinson	Page 13
Six Questions to Ask Before Using Social Media By Joey Tomlinson	Page 22
Biblical Discipleship and the Danger of Cultural Discipleship By Dave Jenkins	Page 27
Marriage and Discipleship By Scott Hurst	Page 35
Biblical Discipleship and Social Media By Dave Jenkins	Page 42

Table of Contents (Continued)

The Age of Confusion: Why Apologetics are Critical to the Christian Life By Kelly Benware	Page 54
Biblical Discipleship and Prayer By Jacob Tanner	Page 60
Biblical Discipleship and Evangelism By Jacob Tanner	Page 64
<i>Terms of Service: The Real Cost of Social Media</i> (A Book Review) By David Steele	Page 74
Recommended Reading on Biblical Discipleship By Dave Jenkins	Page 79
About the Authors	Page 80

Editor's Corner

EXECUTIVE EDITOR

Dave Jenkins

CONTENT EDITOR

Sarah Jenkins

DESIGN DIRECTOR

Sarah Jenkins

ADVERTISING

To advertise in Theology for Life Magazine, email dave@servantsofgrace.org.

COPYRIGHT ©

Theology for Life Magazine grants permission for any original article to be quoted, provided Theology for Life is cited as the source. For use of an entire article, permission must be granted.

Please contact dave@servantsofgrace.org.

Discipleship is a word we don't often hear discussed in contemporary Christian fellowship. Even so, it is vital that we understand this concept from within God's Word. Just before Jesus turned His face to go to Jerusalem (Luke 9:51), He calls His disciples to follow Him in all of life (Luke 9:23-27). This is but one example of Jesus calling His disciples to personally to follow Him. At the end of John 6, when Jesus gave a difficult teaching, He asks if all the disciples are going to leave Him. Yet Peter acknowledges that Jesus is the only One who has the words of eternal life (John 6:68).

In our current climate, we are seeing a cultural form of discipleship. You hear about companies today with their push for the LGBTQIA+ agenda—such as Bud Light, Target, etc. Or, similarly, with the push by many companies for “equality”—calling not just for people to believe that their products are worthy of purchase, but that their brand is “culturally acceptable”. Since when did virtue-signaling become a requirement for sales, often upheld as of even higher importance than the product(s) the company offers. In a capitalist system, should companies care more about their “brand” identity than about the products? In the cases of Bud Light and Target, we are seeing the answer—“no”. As companies wrongly prioritize their brand's ESG over their products, we will begin to witness people abandon those companies.

The companies that will do well moving forward are those that focus on their product quality and less on branding their products to the people. There's a big difference here: caring more about your brand means you care less about people. Caring about your product means you care that the product you are selling actually serves the audience that your product is intended for.

As Christians, we don't have a brand or a product to offer but the principle behind what I'm talking about here is vital. As Christians, we care about people because of the message we believe in the gospel of grace. Because of the gospel of grace, we are being formed by Christ so that

we might be His witnesses in all of the world.

Yet our world wants us to reverse the order. It wants us to be informed by the world more than we are informed by the Word of God. As Christians, we can never settle for this method, because the Word of God is the absolute truth. Scripture is the only way to know God and to know of Christ, as He is revealed in the Word. Scripture provides the Church with sixty-six books from which the Church may read, study, and proclaim biblical truth to a watching world. We do not need to adjust our message to suit the age, but we do need to faithfully proclaim the message of the Word so the age may adjust to the Bible.

And this is where biblical discipleship comes in and counters cultural discipleship. To be “in the world but not of the world”, or to put it another way—to fight the world, the flesh, and the devil (1 John 2:16)—we must know the Word and be under the Word in our local churches, for which must have biblical qualified male pastors.

One of the biggest challenges the Church faces is how we confront cultural discipleship in our current age. With the rise of digital and social media, we face challenges on every front. With the sexual revolution continuing to rise, critical race theory exploding into every sphere of life, intersectionality making a big debut, the New Apostolic Reformation, and New Age’s ubiquitousness, we need to make sure that our discipleship is firmly rooted in the biblical definition of discipleship. To be a Christian disciple means to be a learner, pupil, or student of Jesus. To be a disciple of the world means you are being shaped and modeled by the convictions and philosophies of the world. This is why many find the New Age and other world religions to be a valid form of following “god”, because they offer all the pleasure of following yourself apart from the exclusive demands of what the Bible says. Still, Romans 1 very clearly tells us that we would rather worship the creation rather than worship the Creator.

What about you today, Dear Reader? Are you being disciplined by Jesus from the Word and in your local church? Or are you being disciplined by the world? Is your life giving increasing evidence that you belong to the Lord Jesus? Is there even the tiniest bit of evidence that you have been brought from death to life by the Lord Jesus? Do you have anyone speaking into your life to help you grow in grace? Do you listen to them and seriously consider their life and godly example to you? Or are you a lone-wolf Christian, living on an island with no community and no one to walk alongside you, relying only on your Bible study at the local coffee shop?

In this issue of *Theology for Life*, we are considering what biblical discipleship looks like, especially in our digital age. Along the way, our prayer is that you’ll be instructed in the Word, pointed to Christ, and equipped even more to speak the truth in love to those in your local church, and to contend for the faith once and for all delivered to the saints.

In Christ Alone,

Dave Jenkins

Executive Editor, *Theology for Life Magazine*

Biblical Discipleship and How Church History Can Help Christians Today

By Jacob Tanner



Reading a biography on Martin Luther changed the entire course of my life. That may sound like hyperbole, but it is the truth. I had grown up in Arminian circles, with a heavy emphasis on works-based salvation. I believed salvation depended, at least in part, on me and my

ability to keep God's Law. If I sinned and lost my salvation, then I'd have to beg to have it restored to me once more. Not only did I live in constant fear of messing up, but I preached these same things within the church circles I was involved with. Congregations would practically applaud as they offered their loud "Amens!" in agreement with my warnings about losing what the Lord had blessed us with. And every time I found Scripture that disagreed with such a pessimistic and humanist attitude, I'd ignore it. I didn't know anyone personally who believed salvation couldn't be lost, and the few I knew of who believed salvation was secure in Christ were lauded as damnable heretics by the circles I was in. How could I ever go against friends and family?

Then, I read about Martin Luther. I read of his bold courage to stand up to the Roman Catholic Church and their various indecencies during the Protestant Reformation. I read of his insistence that salvation is by God's grace alone. I read of how Romans 1:16-17 became the catalyst of his own theological thought, as he recognized that faith alone was the instrument of our salvation in Christ. I read of how he courageously proclaimed to his enemies that he would not recant of his beliefs, for his conscience was bound to Scripture alone. And, somewhere along the way, I realized that I was wrong. Luther was right. A biography on Martin Luther changed the course of my theology, practice, and life. Church History can do the same for you.

Biblical Discipleship from Past Saints

Church history is essential to the health of the Church and the life of the Christian. I sincerely doubt my story is unusual. While I recognize that some may accuse of me of learning my theology from a man rather than the Scriptures, I simply offer in response the fact that Luther's biography didn't convince me apart from the Scriptures, but instead guided me to see the truth that I had been miss-

ing.

In fact, Luther himself is a prime example of the value of Church history. He learned *a lot* from the saints who came before. All the Magisterial Reformers did. Consider John Calvin, as well: Calvin's magnum opus, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, quotes from Saint Augustine. This is because the Reformers recognized that we are not islands unto ourselves; we depend upon the wisdom of the past. We stand on the shoulders of past saints. We learn from them the truths that we would never learn in our own lifetime. They help us to see our blind spots. Often, they help recenter us upon truth when we are off balance.

Yahweh commands, in Jeremiah 6:16, "*Stand by the roads, and look, and ask for the ancient paths, where the good way is; and walk in it, and find rest for your souls.*" Church history helps us to recover and stand upon the ancient paths. When we are in danger of veering dangerously off

"Discipleship involves iron sharpening iron. It involves intentionally being involved in the life of another."

course, God has graciously blessed us with creeds and confessions to keep us in our own lanes. When we are discouraged, God has provided us with the encouraging stories of past saints to lift our spirits. When we are confused over Scripture, God has graciously given us the commentaries, sermons, and letters of past saints to help explain difficult texts. And when we simply need to be stirred in our spirits, being uncertain of which way to go, God has given us the saints of the past to speak wisdom into our lives.

Discipleship involves iron sharpening iron. It involves intentionally being involved in the life of another. While those saints who are now in Heaven cannot engage in personal discipleship, they can actively disciple us through their writ-

ings and lives. This does not do away with the need to have living mentors and disciples, but it is an important tool the Lord has blessed us with. We need past saints. We need Church history. These are means by which God disciplines us as His children.

Speaking from Heaven

What do men like Polycarp, Martin Luther, John Calvin, John, Charles Spurgeon, C.S. Lewis, and Martin Lloyd-Jones all have in common? They're all in the presence of the Lord in Heaven. They are earnestly awaiting the return of Jesus to this earth; on which day they will be raised in physically glorified bodies. We cannot hear them speak right now, but we can read their writings. And, in one sense, reading them may be as good as hearing them speak.

The writer of Hebrews looks to the saints, both living and dead, as a great cloud of witnesses that surround us and point us to Jesus. *"Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God"* (Hebrews 12:1-2). The saints operate as a great cloud of witnesses that cheer us on, challenge us, and help us to finish our race with joy. They help to reorient our desires upon Christ and focus our affections upon Yahweh.

Often, as we read them, they lead us into greater understandings of Scripture. Sometimes they lead us to repent of sins we have committed, or to strive towards a greater pursuit of holiness. And, at the same time, they encourage us to live our lives in such a way that when we are called home (if the Lord should tarry), then those generations after us will be able to point to our lives and draw encouragement from them to live to the glory of God.

Yes, there is more to biblical discipleship than Church history. But Church history is a tool to help in biblical discipleship. To be without it is to be like a carpenter without his hammer. We may be able to get the job done without it, but how much easier and joyful is the process when we have the tools we need!

Biblical Discipleship and Counseling

By Joey Tomlinson



If you are reading this article, I am going to work from the assumption that you believe the local church should be involved in the process of coun-

seling in some way. The goal, therefore, of this article is to answer two questions:

1. Is there a relationship between counseling and discipleship?
2. If so, how should that impact the way we view counseling specifically?

In order to answer these two questions, there is one preliminary question worth exploring: What *is* biblical counseling? This can be a bit more difficult to answer because there are various theological streams and convictions that come under the label “biblical counseling”. But here are 5 definitions by people within the movement to help us form a complete definition.

Biblical Counseling According to Howard Eyrich

Biblical counseling is the process of dealing with human suffering in the context of God as Creator, designer, Savior, and enabler. The counselee is introduced to the richness of God’s life-design and the power of the Holy Spirit to enable him to live in sync with this design, thereby being able to glorify God and enjoy Him and life in the midst of living in a broken world.

“It’s a good goal to become more competent at self-control, the private ministry, but we always need other people.”

Biblical Counseling According to Elyse Fitzpatrick

Biblical counseling is the act of one believer coming alongside another to bring the truths of both the indicatives and imperatives of Scripture to bear on their heart and life for their edification, the strengthening of their faith, and the glory of God.

Biblical Counseling According to Bob Kellemen

Biblical counseling is Christ-centered, church-based, comprehensive, compassionate, and culturally-informed personal ministry that depends upon the Holy Spirit to relate God’s inspired truth about people, problems, and solutions to

human suffering (through sustaining and healing), and sin (through reconciling and guiding) to equip people to exalt and enjoy God and to love others (Matthew 22:35-40) by cultivating conformity to Christ and communion with Christ and the Body of Christ leading to a community of one-another disciple-makers (Matthew 28:16-20; Ephesians 4:11-16).

Biblical Counseling According to David Powlison

Counseling is one part of the overall ministry of Christ that meets us publicly, privately, and interpersonally. The public means of grace—preaching, teaching, the Lord’s Supper, worship, and fellowship—meet people in crowds. You never have to attach anyone’s name to it, but the Holy Spirit is able to personalize the public ministry of the gospel and the truth of the Lord.

Then there is the private ministry of the Word of Truth. This is your own prayer life, meditation on and study of Scripture, application, journaling, and your own implementation and meditations of the heart. Finally, biblical counseling is part of the interpersonal ministry of the Word. God means for us to bear each other’s burdens.

It’s a good goal to become more competent at self-counsel, the private ministry, but we always need other people. We need their prayers, encouragement, and insight. There may be something you have said to yourself a hundred times, but then you hear it from the lips of someone else, and the Holy Spirit chooses to work. Hearing it from another person’s voice makes it come to life. Wise counseling brings that personalized relevance of interpersonal ministry of the eternal Word of Truth that turns our lives upside down and inside out.

Biblical Counseling According to Deepak Reju

My definition depends on who I am speaking to—for lay people in our congregation, I describe biblical counseling as “an intensive form of discipleship” or “an opportunity to speak into someone’s life using God’s wisdom and not our own.” For my counseling students or counsees, I say something like, “My goal is to erect from the Bible a model and method to wisely help people with their problems.”

Ingredients of Good Biblical Counseling

There are things in each of these definitions that are helpful for formalizing our own definition and I’d like to draw out a few characteristics either implicit or explicit in each of the definitions that I think are “must haves” and then we will connect all of this to discipleship and how that should shape how we view counseling.

One: The Centrality of the Triune God

This is both a critical and foundational component of biblical counseling. In the ministry of counseling, the Triune God is central, *not* the counselee. We do not need help making ourselves the sole focus of our lives—that is what we tend to drift toward. A good biblical counselor understands this and is always compassionately re-directing the gaze of the counselee toward the glory and worship and enjoyment of the Triune God.

Two: A Biblical Anthropology

I’ll spend most of my time here. A wise biblical counselor seeks to help the counselee understand himself *in relation to God*. Mankind is the creature, and He is the Creator. He made us in His image for His own glory according to His good, unchanging character. We are made body and soul and we are (all of us) accountable to God and not autonomous, free agents. In other words, we are not

self-sufficient and un-governed. God alone is self-sufficient. God alone is autonomous and free.

Having a biblical anthropology also helps us form the categories of sin and suffering. We are in bondage to sin apart from the intervening work of the Holy Spirit. Our nature is one that is marred by the sin of Adam. As a result, we act freely according to our sin-nature and are unable to do anything in our own

“Yet because of [our] remaining corruption [we] do not perfectly nor exclusively will what is good but also what is evil.”

strength to remedy our condition.

The London Confession of Faith (1689)

summarizes it this way: “Humanity, by falling into a state of sin, has completely lost all ability to choose any spiritual good that accompanies salvation. Thus, people in their natural state are absolutely opposed to spiritual good and dead in sin, so that they cannot convert themselves by their own strength or

prepare themselves for conversion” (9.3).

We need outside intervention and that outside intervention comes from our Triune God alone. It is the Father who graciously sent His only begotten Son to die for the elect and to resurrect for our justification. It is the Holy Spirit who regenerates the heart and causes man to express repentance and faith in Christ alone for salvation, applying Christ’s active and passive obedience to our person. When this happens, it means that we have been transformed “into the state of grace” and freed from our “natural bondage to sin and by [God’s] grace alone [enabled] to will and do freely what is spiritual good. Yet because of [our] remaining corruption [we] do not perfectly nor exclusively will what is good but also what is evil” (9.4). Thus, the need for counseling this side of eternity.

Furthermore, we are also sufferers. Since the fall of Adam, this world is full of thorns and thistles and our bodies experience a biological brokenness that is not a result of our personal sin. A good biblical counselor should see every counselee as both a sinner and a sufferer, and the counsel one gives should be considerate of this.

Biblical anthropology is necessary—understanding ourselves in relation to God is essential. We are created in the image of God. We are sinners. We are saints in Christ. We are sufferers. Counseling should reflect this multi-faceted identity.

Three: A Mindfulness of the Authority, Sufficiency, and Application of Scripture

A biblical counselor knows that the Scriptures are authoritative because they are God-breathed. They are inspired by the Holy Spirit and because of that they are *profitable* to make a fully furnished man of God (2 Timothy 3:16-17). We really can—and should—apply the Scriptures to our lives.

The Scripture is *"living and active and sharper than a double-edged sword piercing to the division of soul and spirit, or joints and marrow and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart"* (Hebrews 4:12). No other book does this because no other book is like this. Yes, there are helpful books out there on developing good habits. Yes, there may be value in reading a felt-need book here and there. But there is no book (or collection of books) like the Bible. A good biblical counselor knows this and will teach this to the counselee.

Four: The Necessity of the Local Church

Powlison's definition above emphasizes this point masterfully. I don't exactly remember where I heard this, I only know that it is not original to me, but someone once told me that preaching is the public ministry of the Word and counseling is the private ministry of the Word. This has always been helpful to me. When I preach on the Lord's Day, I see that as the primary way that I counsel

the members of my congregation. And it is my involvement in their lives that informs me of their spiritual needs.

However, in my preaching, I am preaching to the whole of the congregation and not singling out anyone (that would be inappropriate and terrifying for one of my congregants). However, the Holy Spirit of God is taking the sermon and applying it specifically to various people in the congregation. That is the primary way the Lord grows His church spiritually.

The private ministry of the Word is still the administration of God's Word, but in a more personalized way. It is not preaching, rather it is a biblical counselor bringing the Word of God to bear on an individual and his/her particular circumstance(s). Both aspects of the ministry of the Word are necessary in the lives of believers.

Furthermore, the local church is the context in which we are all accountable (see Matthew 18). If a goal of counseling is change, I would argue that change happens only when there is accountability, and accountability works best in the context of the local church.

This does not mean that all counseling must come exclusively from the local church where you're a member. However, people in the congregation (and especially your elders) should know what is going on in your life.

Five: The Need For Wise Helpers

There is safety in a multitude of counselors (Proverbs 11:14). The local church should be the best place to find safety and counselors. Biblical counseling should be seen as a "one another" ministry in this way. I often push back on

"Biblical counseling should be seen as a "one another" ministry in this way."

the idea of counseling that is isolated, formal, and clinical. I increasingly do not like that idea of counseling.

I am not saying there isn't a need for clinical approaches to mental health at times. Also, I am not saying that the complexities of our human experience shouldn't be addressed by people that have a particular skill-set. However, far too often I've found that we overcomplicate the counseling process, and on my more cynical days I think that is by design. In my experience, when people say they want counseling, what they really need is a godly, wise helper that can give good, practical, biblical advice. The church is a good place to find wise helpers.

Six: A Goal Toward Holy Spirit Enabled Change

On a related note, we shouldn't seek to spin our tires in the same place. We should seek—by God's grace—spiritual growth, and God promises to grow us when we avail ourselves of the means He's provided to us.

Very rarely do I think someone needs long-term counseling. I've often seen counselors who take advantage of people by keeping them in counseling so that they can charge them co-pays for every visit. It reminds me of the woman with the hemorrhage for 12 years (Mark 5:25-26) who suffered many things from many physicians, who in turn took all her money and made her situation even worse!

Recently, I ran into a gentleman I counseled a number of years ago. Pretty early on, I could tell that he wasn't motivated to change the habits in his life. After a few sessions I ended the counseling relationship. Years later, we see each other and spent about 30 minutes catching up, and I could tell from that short conversation that he is in the exact same place he was years ago when we met. However, he was hundreds (if not thousands) of dollars poorer because he was going to regular counseling, and he seemingly has released himself of

any sense of responsibility for his own life. A wise counselor sees the goal clearly and helps his counselee see it clearly, as well.

Returning to Our Two Questions

These are 6 characteristics I think are noteworthy in all the above definitions. Ingredients we should keep and cultivate. The questions we must answer now are whether or not we see any relationship between discipleship and counseling and, if so, what does that mean for how we view counseling?

Based on the work we've done together, I pray you can see that there is a close connection between discipleship and counseling. In fact, the two are inseparable.

Counseling is the birthright of the Church, but the more modern psychotherapeutic approach to it, combined with our passivity, has hindered our ability to see that. Counseling is primarily a *theological* task—a discipleship ministry in which one person, seeking to grow and mature or lament, comes to someone they believe can help them do that very thing.

So how should that shape how we view the counseling ministry? In many ways, we should see ourselves in the context of the local church as both counselor *and* counselee. This doesn't mean that we are good ones, but for better or worse we are those things. Therefore, may we—by God's grace—grow and may we be people that, in humility, surround ourselves with godly mentors and disciple-makers, submitting ourselves to them and, in turn, maybe have eyes for those less mature than us, seeking to come along side of them and do them spiritual good.

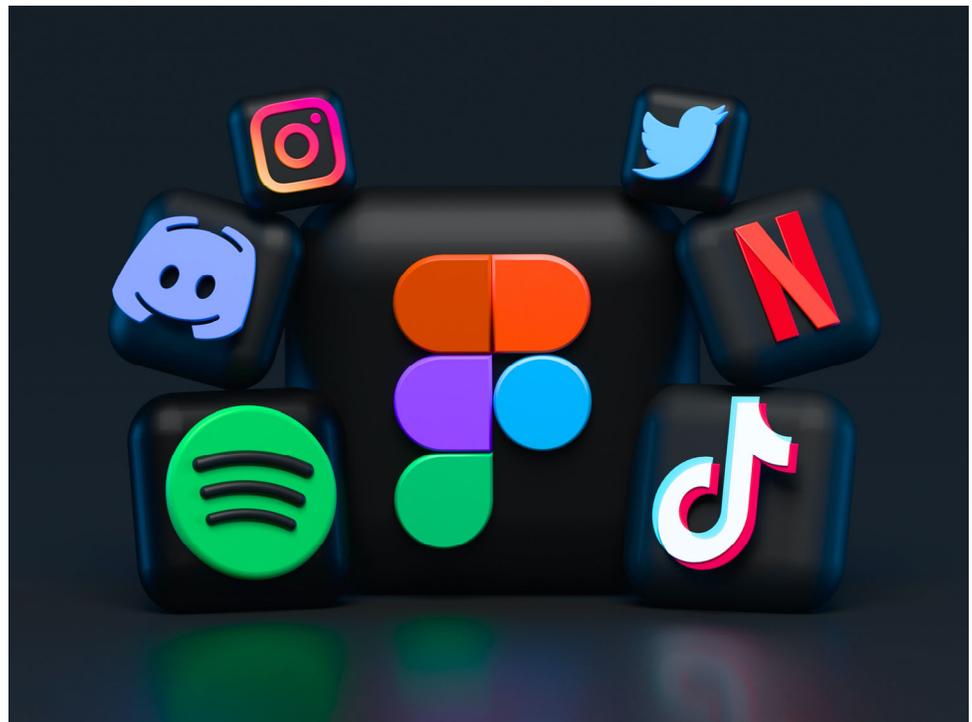
References:

- i. I am indebted to Bob Kellemen, who put this list of definitions together here: <https://rpmministries.org/2013/03/5-definitions-of-biblical-counseling/>
- ii. I genuinely can't think of any form of counseling that isn't discipleship. Even counselee led counseling in which the counselor just sits quietly (maybe he asks a question or two) but lets the counselee "self-discover" is discipleship. Nothing is neutral.

Six Questions to Ask Before Using Social Media

By Joey Tomlinson

In 2019, experts estimated that almost 3 billion people will utilize social media in some capacity. In 2017, 71% of internet users engaged with social media. If you are reading this article, chances are you saw this posted on a social media platform you engage in on your phone.



Social media is a tool, and for Christians, this powerful tool can be used to advance the gospel of Jesus Christ. Often times, however, our abuse of social media hinders our gospel witness and intrudes on the times we should

commune with the Lord and engage with people.

In this article, I want to ask you six questions that can help you engage with social media in a responsible, God-centered way.

Does My Use of Social Media Magnify Christ or Me?

The Apostle John says, “*He [Christ] must increase, but I must decrease*” (John 3:30, ESV). I find that many times we default to using social media in a manner that makes it difficult for us to decrease. Sure, socializing and sharing photos of your life with loved ones is fantastic, but are you using social media to indulge your vanity? What is your purpose as a Christian? Is it not to exalt Christ? If this is the case, look at your posts from the last month. Do these posts speak much of Christ or are they centered on you? Do you use social media to vent your anger about politics? Or do you use social media to remind folks of the God who is sovereign over kings? As a Christian, you are called to be a good gospel-steward of your social media posts.

Does My Use of Social Media Amplify the Sin of Covetousness in My Heart?

It seems like everyone’s life on social media is picture perfect. Everyone’s food looks amazing. Everyone’s kids are doing well. If their kids *do* make life difficult (which of course, never happens!), they post and speak about it in a humorous way that makes you think they are the perfect parents—so laid back, breezy, and enjoying the “journey” of parenting.

Speaking of the journey, everyone is traveling. All. The. Time. Everyone, except me, of course. I can’t afford it. I don’t have the time. I wish I were more like everyone else. They are so cultured. They are so informed. They are so put together. I wish I had *their* life. *My* life stinks.

Do you see the progression? We all break and are prone to breaking the

Tenth Commandment (“*You shall not covet*”, Exodus 20:17) without any help from social media. However, for some of us, social media can amplify our ability to indulge this sin. For some of us, social media is the *heat* drawing out the particular sin of covetousness in our hearts.

Does My Use of Social Media Hinder My Ability to Be Slow to Speak and Quick to Listen?

James encourages us, “*Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger*” (James 1:19, ESV). The first-century church had a difficult time doing this before social media. Certainly, social media can become an open market for being quick to speak, quick to anger, and slow to listen. Do you find yourself constantly engaged in debates and arguments on social media? Do those debates on social media dominate your thought life? I find that it is much easier to write angry, unsustained thoughts in 140 characters than it is to be quiet and seek understanding. How about you?

Does My Use of Social Media Amplify My Anxious Heart?

Many of the people I minister to at my local church are anxious and depressed. Many times, when I counsel anxious and depressed people, I find that uncontrolled social media intake heightens both. We have access to negative news through social media 24/7. And negative news certainly has an impact on our moods and anxieties. Studies show that negative news actually sells better than positive news. How much negative news content are you consuming in a 24-hour period? Even if you don’t think it is affecting you, it is. Maybe you need a negative news detox.

Does My Use of Social Media Hinder My Ability to Love and

Minister to People?

Some of you reading this are in vocational ministry. Some of you are volunteering at local churches. All of us should be engaged in Great Commission work. I find that angry opinions are flaunted on social media more than any other place because many people feel more comfortable sharing those opinions on social media instead of face-to-face. Is what you're seeing on social media from your people prohibiting you from loving them as Christ loves them? Is what you're seeing on their social media pages prohibiting you from laying down your life for them?

If you find yourself becoming bitter and upset with what the members of your church post on social media, it may be wise to take a break from social media so that you can effectively minister to these people face-to-face. Sometimes the knowledge you gain about the people in your church through social media is a burden that weighs down your love and ministry to them. Certainly, social media isn't the cause of the bitterness you begin to feel if you're too engaged, but again, it may be a heat drawing out that particular sin in your heart.

Does My Use of Social Media Allow Me to Ignore In-Person Relationships?

Finally, how much time do you spend looking at social media? You may not know. I promise you that your spouse knows. Your children certainly know, and they will model you. Some of us spend so much time looking at social media that it is killing the intimacy we could enjoy with those in our lives. One rule in my home is that no one can touch their phones or computers after 7:30 p.m., and we make sure we don't touch technology at the dinner table. I

even have an app called *AppBlock* on my phone that locks certain features of my phone down in the evenings and weekends.

Nothing says “I don’t care about you” more than when you are sitting face-to-face with someone but looking at your phone. I don’t even like taking notes on my phone when I’m with people because it can be misinterpreted. We need to learn the discipline of being present with people.

Social media is a great tool, and it is a tool that I engage in. I don’t think the answer is to disengage from social media entirely (although for some of us, that is precisely what we should do). However, we must learn discipline and glorify God with our engagement. I recommend the following steps to begin the journey of disciplining yourself:

1. Set a weekly limit for yourself and stick to it.
2. Never engage social media when you have flesh and blood people in the room looking to engage with you.
3. Utilize app programs like *AppBlocker* or *Buffer* to distance yourself from social media.
4. Consider using RSS feeds like *Feedly* to control the content you see.
5. Consider using the weekends to detox entirely from social media.

Bottom line: do all that you do for the glory of God!

References:

- i. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/278414/number-of-worldwide-social-network-users/>
- ii. <http://www.bbc.com/future/story/20140728-why-is-all-the-news-bad>

Biblical Discipleship and the Danger of Cultural Discipleship

By Dave Jenkins



Discipleship is a central issue within the Gospels. You can hardly read Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John without seeing a mention of Jesus calling a disciple to Himself or calling disciples to make disciples. Discipleship is central to what it means to be a Christian. To be a disciple means you are a learner, pupil, or student of Jesus.

What Biblical Discipleship Means and Requires

Jesus says, *“If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples”* (John 8:31). Jesus does not say they *“will be”* His disciples if they abide in His word, in His teaching, but *“you are truly my disciples”* if you abide in the Word. We do not earn the status of

“disciple” by following Jesus, though following Him *is* necessary. Instead, when we turn to Christ in saving faith, we receive and rest in Him as Lord and Savior. And the result is that we abide in His Word. True disciples of Jesus follow Him, not just at the beginning, but also to the end. John Calvin comments, “He distinguishes his followers from hypocrites by this mark, that they who falsely boasted of faith give way as soon as they have entered into the course, or at least in the middle of it; but believers persevere constantly to the end.”

“This is open revolt,” Mohler reiterated, “and of course, you’re going to see a division...”

True disciples are marked not by sinless perfectionism, but by abiding in the words of Christ. They do not just confess Jesus with their mouths, but they trust in Him with their hearts and prove it by seeking to do His will—repenting where they fall short and returning again and again to Him to learn His way. Biblical discipleship requires being grounded and shaped by the Word of God.

The Word of God and Cultural Discipleship

By understanding first what discipleship is, we can most clearly understand how the idea of discipleship is used not only “out there” in the world, but also in the professing Church today.

In an article published on May 31st, 2022, titled, “Methodist Church’s First Drag Queen Pastor: ‘God is Nothing’”, *The American Spectator* provides commentary on Isaac Simmons’ poem, in which the self-described “dragavangelist” exclaims, “God is nothing,” a refrain that repeats throughout the poem, followed by, “the Bible is nothing” and “religion is nothing”. In the end, Simmons concludes that God and the Bible are nothing “unless we wield it into something”. He states that the poem is “directed to those who actively and passively cause

harm against the LGBTQIA2S+ Community due to their understandings of Scripture.”

Commenting on Simmons’ statements, Dr. Albert Mohler, in the article titled, “‘Doctrinal Annihilation’: Theologian Blasts Methodist Church For Pushing Drag Queen Pastor, Claims ‘Two Religions’ Forming Over LGBT Issues” published by *The Daily Wire* said, the United Methodist Church’s decision to make Simmons a certified candidate for ordination was “an intentional refutation and revolt against the very order of creation that God has given us, and a direct violation of the clear teachings of Scripture concerning the fact that those whom God has made as men should identify as men.”

“This is open revolt,” Mohler reiterated, “and of course, you’re going to see a division between those who are appalled by it, deeply troubled by it, deeply concerned by it and opposed to it on the one hand, and those who celebrate it and say that it’s arrived far too late on the other hand.”

In an article written September 25, 2022, titled, “Trans Religious Leaders Say Scripture Should Inspire Inclusive Congregations”, says:

“Shannon TL Kearns is the first openly transgender man ordained in the Old Catholic Church, a denomination that split from Rome after the first Vatican Council in the 19th century. He's co-founder of QueerTheology.com and author of the book titled, *In the Margins: A Transgender Man's Journey with Scripture*. "The world of gender in the Bible is much more complex than I was taught growing up as an evangelical," says Kearns, pointing to numerous stories of biblical figures transgressing gender norms. "We have women who are judges. We have men who spend their time in the kitchen. There are eunuchs, which were considered this kind of other third gender," he says... "I think that we all read ourselves into scripture," Kearns says. "I think the kicker is that folks from marginalized communities are being honest about the fact that that's what they're

doing.””

The main problem with Kearns' statement is that he is engaging in what is known as “eisegesis”, which is reading yourself into the Scripture. In the case of Simmons, his statements of, “The Bible is nothing” and “Religion is nothing”, are espoused ironically since he preaches his own version of “theology” as a “pastor”. Because of how Christians supposedly use the Bible, Simmons directs his poem at those, “who actively and passively cause harm against the LGBTQIA2S+ community due to their understanding of Scripture.” But let’s ask a question here. Is speaking the truth in love from the mouth of the Creator a personal attack as Simmons claims? Is speaking what God has said about how He made man first, and then from man’s rib made Eve? Is that unloving? Or is it not what God has said? How else can we know God other than as He is revealed in the Word?

This is why the word *hermeneutics* means “the art and science of biblical interpretation.”

As Christians, we believe that the Bible is the reliable, trustworthy, sufficient, clear, and binding Word of God. So, when Scripture speaks, we are to believe what it says and obey all it teaches. In Simmons' case Scripture is not enough for him, nor is it binding. In the words of Kearns, “We all read ourselves into the Bible”, but what these two statements reveal is the wrong view of the Bible. When you view the Bible in the wrong way you will always get the wrong interpretation of what the Bible says. This is why the word *hermeneutics* means “the art and science of biblical interpretation”. Biblical interpretation is fueled by a right view of the Bible as the inspired, inerrant, infallible, sufficient, clear, and binding Word of God. So, because we believe the right things about the Bible,

we will aim to rightly interpret the Bible in context, and to rightly handle the Word of God (2 Timothy 2:15). It isn't only among those like Kearns and Simmons that we see Scripture and biblical discipleship under attack. It is also inside the walls of our churches.

The State of Theology statement No. 29 shows how those who strongly agreed with the statement that gender identity is a matter of choice, rose from 54 percent to 67 percent from 2016 to 2020. The percentage of those who strongly agreed fell from 24 percent to 15 percent in the same period.

Ligonier Ministries' biennial *State of Theology* survey provides key findings on what Americans think about God, truth, the Bible, worship, and ethical issues. Conducted with LifeWay Research, this survey polled a nationally representative sample of U.S. adults. The full results for the 2020 survey are now available at [TheStateofTheology.com](https://www.thestateoftheology.com).

The State of Theology reports:

"The unbiblical concept of relative truth has influenced every sphere of life in the United States, including ethical issues such as sexuality and gender that continue to be at the forefront of public debate. In 2020, 73 percent of U.S. evangelicals reject the arguments of "gender fluidity," while 22 percent believe that "Gender identity is a matter of choice."

The report states:

"As the broader culture in the United States increasingly embraces relativistic views of human identity, data from the State of Theology survey exposes a need for Christians to receive clear teaching from the Bible on the image of God, the creation ordinance of marriage, and the purposeful distinction between male and female gender."

Dr. Stephen Nichols, chief academic officer of Ligonier Ministries and president of Reformation Bible College, said:

"Children down to the earliest ages are now being told that they

have the autonomy to determine whether they are a boy, a girl, or neither. Not only does this threaten an entire generation with lifelong trauma, but more ultimately this message is one of treason against the supreme authority of God.”

Scripture and Biblical Discipleship

Christians must listen and submit to God’s steadfast Word in all that it teaches. Even so, the 2020 *State of Theology* survey suggests that many American evangelicals are instead listening to the changing voice of culture. This is why Christians must understand what biblical discipleship is. When people make claims about what the Bible says, we do not need to be intimidated by those claims. We can respond to those claims by refuting what they’ve claimed the Bible says by explaining—in context—what the Scripture means.

Halfhearted discipleship is anathema to our Savior. Indeed, Jesus will have all of us, or He will not have us at all. There is not one aspect of our lives that we may refuse to hand over to Jesus.

Some of the clearest teaching on the subject comes from the lips of Jesus Himself. Mark 8:34-35 gives a particularly clear description of the cost of discipleship. Peter, speaking for the disciples, rebuked Jesus for teaching that He would have to suffer and die, reflecting the common Jewish belief that the Messiah would be a conquering king to overthrow the Romans (Mark 8:31-32). Undoubtedly, Peter’s rebuke also reflected his own fears. If the work of the Messiah meant rejection, suffering, and death, surely the followers of such a Messiah would suffer as

Dr. R. C. Sproul writes in his commentary on *Mark* that “the Christian life is a throwaway life.”

well. After all, Jesus said in another context that “a disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master”, indicating that His followers should expect the same treatment from the authorities that He would receive (Matthew 20:24). Thus, it is understandable that the notion of a suffering Messianic King would be unnerving to Peter, particularly when suffering via crucifixion was the most shameful way for a person to die in the first century.

But truth is determined by Jesus Himself, not what unnerves His followers. Lest Peter and the disciples be mistaken about what the Messiah's suffering would mean for their lives, our Lord called the disciples to Himself to explain that suffering is a distinguishing mark of the Christian life and that it's also inseparable from Christian discipleship.

Note that in doing so, Jesus called a larger crowd to Himself and taught them the same thing (Mark 8:34). The point is that Jesus' teaching on this subject was not for the Twelve alone. Bearing the cross—the shame and persecution this world heaps upon believers—is the mark of a true disciple.

True, not every believer is called to the same kind of suffering. The disciples bear this out. Some, like Peter, were martyred for their faith. Others, like John, lived to a ripe old age, even though they suffered imprisonment and other trials at times. Yet both men suffered, so no Christian should expect a life free of trouble related to his profession of faith and attempts to live out the commands of Jesus. This will bring hatred from the fallen world, and at times even from others who profess faith in the Savior. Those who remain true to Jesus and are willing even to die for Him, if necessary, will paradoxically find that death for His sake leads to eternal life (Mark 8:35).

Conclusion

Dr. R.C. Sproul writes in his commentary on *Mark* that “the Christian life is a throwaway life.” We must be willing to lose all we have now in order to gain

everything in the world to come. This does not mean we merit eternal life by giving up everything, or that the degree of suffering is the same for all Christians. It does mean that true faith in Jesus—the kind of faith that saves us—will renounce everything, even this life, for the sake of Jesus and His glory.

This is the kind of discipleship that the cultural disciple makers of our day, typified by Kearns and Simmons, will never accept because it counters their claims by explaining that it is not their version of truth or sexuality that matters. The Lord defines and regulates the meaning of all these terms because His Word is the final, and complete on all subjects—from discipleship to marriage, sexuality, and everything in-between.

References:

- i. <https://spectator.org/methodist-church-first-drag-queen-pastor-god-is-nothing/>
- ii. <https://www.dailywire.com/news/doctrinal-annihilation-theologian-blasts-methodist-church-for-pushing-drag-queen-pastor-claims-two-religions-forming-over-lgbt-issues>
- iii. <https://www.npr.org/2022/09/25/1124101216/trans-religious-leaders-say-scripture-should-inspire-inclusive-congregations>
- iv. [TheStateofTheology.com](https://www.thestateoftheology.com)
- v. [ibid.](#)

Marriage and Discipleship

By Scott Hurst

Next year, my wife and I will celebrate ten years of marriage.

During those ten years, my marriage has had the most influence in my walk with Christ. I don't think that's by accident; I think it's part of God's design.

Marriage is a picture of

the gospel. When Paul gives instructions to husbands and wives in Ephesians 5, he peels back the curtain and reveals the meaning behind marriage. *"This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church"* (Ephesians 5:32, ESV).

Marriage is about Jesus. Marriage is an illustration of the Bible's story of "God choosing a wife for his Son—and, astonishingly, choosing wretched sin-



ners like us to be that bride, and so to enjoy his marvellous grace. Our happy marriage to Christ is the goal of history; and every earthly marriage, whether as a beautiful comparison or an ugly contrast, is a powerful reminder of it.”

Since marriage reveals Christ in this way, it ought to help married couples see and treasure Jesus more. We should be more mature Christians ten years after we say, “I do.” To say marriage is all about discipleship is an overstatement. To say that healthy marriages help husbands and wives follow Jesus is Biblical truth. As I’ve reflected on my marriage, I’ve seen four primary ways marriage has trained me to grow as a disciple of Jesus.

Marriage Trains Us to Surrender to Jesus

In Colossians 2, Paul describes the Christian life as a walk under the Lordship of Jesus. *“So then, just as you have received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to walk in him”* (Colossians 2:6). Maturing disciples learn to surrender every area of life to Jesus. Marriage may be one place where the Lordship of Jesus cuts most against the grain of our culture. We are not free to decide the meaning of marriage or dictate what the relationship between husbands and wives must be. Since Jesus is Lord over all things, our marriage is under his good authority.

“When God created people, He gave them work to do.”

Paul applies the Lordship of Jesus to marriage in Colossians 3:18-19 saying, *“Wives, submit yourselves to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives and don’t be bitter toward them.”* Even among many of my complementarian friends, submission and leadership in marriage is a messy topic. It comes with the baggage of being poorly applied to minimize wives as mere handmaidens to their “god-like” husbands. That’s not how Paul works out the

husband-and-wife relationship.

In Ephesians 5, his conversation on marriage is part of a larger section about walking in Christ (Ephesians 4:1). Marriage is one of the many spheres of life he brings under the authority of Christ, calling them to do it as *“pleasing to the Lord”* (Ephesians 5:10). So, when Paul says, *“Wives, submit, to your husbands as to the Lord”* and *“Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself for her”*, he is calling both spouses to surrender to Christ (Ephesians 5:22, 25). Wives submit to Christ in submitting to their husbands, and husbands submit to Christ in loving their wives with the same self-sacrificing and unending love of Christ. Marriage trains us to die to ourselves and delight in the Lordship and leadership of Jesus.

Marriage Trains Us to Be Co-Laborers in God’s Work

When God created people, He gave them work to do. *“God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, and subdue it. Rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, and every creature that crawls on the earth””* (Genesis 1:28). This work requires partnership. When Genesis 2 describes Eve’s creation, God describes her as a *helper*. *“Then the Lord God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper corresponding to him””* (Genesis 2:18). Adam alone could never do the work God gives to humanity. He needed a partner, a co-laborer, to fulfill the God-given task.

The concept of partnership is crucial for Christian maturity. God doesn’t hire independent contractors, rather, He calls believing communities to partner for the sake of the gospel. Paul’s desire to go to Spain required the partnership of the church in Rome: *“But now I no longer have any work to do in these regions, and I have strongly desired for many years to come to you whenever I travel to Spain. For I hope to see you when I pass through and to be assisted by you for my journey there, once I have first enjoyed your company for a while”* (Romans 15:23-24).

While working with others is necessary, it won't come naturally. Believing in the value of co-laboring and committing to gospel partnerships requires training. Marriage is not the only way to learn how to partner with others, but unlike anything else in my life, marriage has taught me the necessity and beauty of co-laboring for the gospel. Nothing has revealed my self-dependence like trying to raise children and maintaining a home together with my wife. God revealed my weaknesses many times and I'm sure He will again. I need those lessons to learn that I can't be a "lone wolf". In Christ, I am one of many co-laborers for Christ.

“James and John asked Jesus something that made everyone else upset.”

Marriage Trains Us to Be Lifelong Learners

The family is a learning institution. We see this early in Genesis as God says of Abraham, *“For I have chosen him so that he will command his children and his house after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is right and just”* (Genesis 18:19). God chose Abraham to train his family in what is good. Later in Deuteronomy, Moses instructs families, *“These words that I am giving you today are to be in your heart. Repeat them to your children. Talk about them when you sit in your house and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Bind them as a sign on your hand and let them be a symbol on your forehead., Write them on the doorposts of your house and on your city gates”* (Deuteronomy 6:6-9). They littered their homes with God's Word to learn of His character. A family is a place of learning. The formation of godliness and the fortifications of faith begin at home.

The expectation of learning is not just for children, but for spouses as

well. A bad application of this truth is placing husbands exclusively as teachers and wives exclusively as students (or research assistants). Husbands are called by God to be the shepherd leaders of their families. Leadership, though, does not mean being the expert with all the answers. Forcing your wife to attend your living room theology lectures is poor leadership. Husbands don't lead by force, but by grace. There is nothing unbiblical or threatening in your marriage if your wife is more theologically sharp than you are. Praise God for such women.

You can lead by making more space in her life to engage with the scriptures. Take the kids so she can join the mid-week Bible study at your church, or do the laundry so she can have 30 more minutes to read the Bible. You can lead by having theologically-rich conversations together. Ask her what God is teaching her and actually listen to what she says. Learn from her. Learn to understand *your wife* so that you can do all you can to nourish her by the Word of God (1 Peter 3:7; Ephesians 5:26). Marriage helps us follow Jesus because God made the family a learning institution.

Marriage Trains Us to Count Others as More Significant than Ourselves

James and John asked Jesus something that made everyone else upset. They asked, "*Allow us to sit at your right and at your left in your glory*" (Mark 10:37). This angered the other disciples, but for the wrong reason. *They* wanted those seats.

Jesus takes this opportunity to correct them and reveal a key to following Him. "*You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those in high positions act as tyrants over them. But it is not so among you. On the*

contrary, whoever wants to become great among you will be your servant, and whoever wants to be first among you will be a slave to all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:42-45).

Following Jesus demands sacrificial service, not chasing greatness. The greatest are not people in high places with important titles, but people with humble hearts. People who share His heart and *“do nothing out of selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility consider others as more important than yourselves” (Philippians 2:3).*

This humble, other-centered serving is key for a healthy marriage. God says, *“This is why a man leaves his father and mother and bonds with his wife, and they become one flesh” (Genesis 2:24).* Marriage demands dying to self-serving pursuits of greatness and becoming one with another person. Marriage demands a joyful humility by putting the needs and happiness of our spouse ahead of ourselves.

The mundane things in marriage train us to adopt the mind of Christ (Philippians 2:5), and live to serve, not to be served. Taking out the trash, buying new appliances, painting the basement, and cooking dinner are training grounds for putting someone else's needs ahead of ourselves. I thought I was a selfless person before I got married. It only took a month or two to shatter my self-assessment. Marriage, by God's grace, revealed selfishness which I couldn't see and allowed me to confess and kill it.

God will use your marriage to bring hidden sins to light. We should expect and treasure this because it is an act of love. *“If we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin” (1 John 1:7).* God uses marriage to expose hidden sin so that He can cleanse our heart and train us to reflect the character of Christ. Marriage trains us to count others as more significant than ourselves.

Conclusion

Marriage is not necessary for discipleship. If it were, every Christian would need to get married, but that is not the case (1 Corinthians 7). Yet, for those who are married or will be married, their marriage is indispensable to their walk with Christ.

The ways marriage has disciplined me over the last ten years are not accidental. In His providence, God is using my marriage to grow me up in Christ. It has been an important training ground for sharpening my faith, killing my sin, and revealing the glories of Christ.

References:

- i. Richard Coekin, *Ephesians for You*, ed. Carl Laferton, God's Word for You (The Good Book Company, 2015), 175.

Biblical Discipleship and Social Media

By Dave Jenkins

More than 70% percent of American adults use social media every day. Teens consume *nine hours* of entertainment media (this does not include education-related media) per day. And, likewise, tweens consume six hours per day.

A study of social media usage last year (2022) reveals that UK adults spend an average of 2 hours per day on Facebook. Instagram is the second most popular social media app, especially amongst Gen-Z users, who spend almost 1.5 hours per day on the site. Tiktok is also favored by younger adults who spend 1.25 hours per day on the app.



Medical research reveals scrolling on our phones releases dopamine in the brain, which can negatively affect impulse control. Every smartphone owner knows the cycle of repeatedly tapping, checking, and scrolling.

According to Pew Research, YouTube is the most commonly used online platform asked about in this survey, and there's evidence that its reach is growing. Fully 81% of Americans say they ever use the video-sharing site, up from 73% in 2019.

When asked about their social media use more broadly—rather than their use of specific platforms—72% of Americans say they ever use social media sites. In a pattern consistent with past Center studies on social media use, there are some stark age differences. Some 84% of adults ages 18 to 29 say they ever use any social media sites, which is similar to the share of those ages 30 to 49 who say this (81%). By comparison, a somewhat smaller share of those ages 50 to 64 (73%) say they use social media sites, while fewer than half of those 65 and older (45%) report doing this.

Biblical Discipleship, Fighting Temptation, and Using Social Media

Social media presents real challenges to people who are enslaved to pornography and to fighting temptation. We live in an age when screens compete for our attention from the minute we wake up. Updates abound, feeds fill up with news, and information is always at the tips of our fingers.

Since social media began to explode into society, I have watched controversy after controversy unfold over opinions, news stories, and rumors, some of which have resulted in full-on character assaults. This isn't something merely happening out there in the world; it's also happening within Christian spheres. We, however, have an opportunity to be light in a world marred by confusion and division. Yes, we too are divided, but we know the end of the story and can

begin to work toward that end—toward unity and peace.

So, how do we share our convictions, passions, and differing opinions, and still maintain brotherly love and affection? We start by naming the problems and then praying for gospel solutions. Here are four problems in our struggle with internet controversy in the Christian life.

Our Passions Wage War

We often quarrel because we want something we don't have. Perhaps we want others to view us as right and wise. Or we want to change others' opin-

ions...so we fight. Or we want someone to take action...so we threaten. James addresses this tendency with a rhetorical

“Studies have shown that people can speak an average of twenty-thousand words per day.”

question: *“What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within*

you?” (James 4:1). Passions can cause us to react, and—as is common on social media—passionate reactions far removed

from the matter under discussion often lead to sin.

Controversies Involve Real People

Because online discussion doesn't involve our physical presence, it is easy to forget the human aspect of the internet. In other words, we forget there is a person behind that blog entry, article, or social media post. That person is made in the image of God, regardless of his standing before God. As Christians, we have a responsibility to love that person (Luke 6:27-36). That doesn't mean we have to agree with him, but the way we respond will reveal whether we uphold his God-given dignity.

What makes this difficult is that we often don't *want* to love the individual on the other side of the internet discussion. Remember, our passions are waging war. But God's Word is clear: we are called to love. Did Jesus really say, "*Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you*" (Matthew 5:44)? That blogger you disagree with, the one who holds an opinion that is dramatically different from yours, and who mentioned you by name in a disparaging way—yes, even that person is to be shown the love of Christ.

Do you view the person behind the screen as a person made in the image of God? Or is it easier to share your thoughts in a tone that is rash, harsh, or unkind because the other person is far off? Love isn't an option for the Christian—it's a command (Matthew 22:39). And this is true even when the other person is interacting with us digitally.

Many Words

Studies have shown that people can speak an average of twenty-thousand words per day. That's an enormous amount of words. But with the advent of social media, the number of words we take in and send out is likely only increasing.

When many of these words give rise to warring passions around volatile topics, they can lead us to sin. As Solomon noted, "*When words are many, transgression is not lacking.*" Fortunately, he continues, "*Whoever restrains his lips is prudent*" (Proverbs 10:19). We must be prudent and aware that when we share our many words on the internet, there's a possibility that sin is present. This should help us pause and subsequently move us to measure and ask questions about our words: (1) Is our opinion needed? (2) Is what we are sharing helpful? (3) Does our post/tweet/update build up or tear down?

Busybodies

Social media tempts us to be busybodies and gossips. The internet makes this incredibly easy. I'm constantly aware of things I would not be aware of if it weren't for Facebook or Twitter. As Christians, we must ask questions about what we are reading—namely: does it pertain to us and the mission to which God has called us? If not, we are idlers, gossips, and busybodies when we engage with such topics and controversies (1 Timothy 5:13). Don't let the controversy of the day distract you from the great mission of the church—to share the gospel and make disciples of all nations.

A Fresh Start

Perhaps you realize that you've failed miserably in your online interactions. Please know that you're not alone, for most of us engaged with social media have made the mistakes above. I know I have.

The good news for you and me is that Jesus forgives and purifies (1 John 1:9). Yesterday's mistake doesn't have to be today's. The grace available to us through our Lord applies to our online sin just as much as it does to our offline sin. We can repent and be forgiven, and—whether face-to-face with others or interacting on social media—we can live for the glory of the Lord. Here's five helpful points to help us navigate social media well.

One: The Temptation to Create a False Identity

It can be so alluring, can't it? Presenting ourselves in exactly the way we want to, highlighting only our successes, and not having people see the parts of our lives that we wish to remain hidden. Social media "communities" can feel like a replacement for true, biblical community. With a few keystrokes, a person can see exactly (and *only!*) what I want them to see. However, they don't live

with me. They don't see me in person. As active as I may be online, I'm not in full community with readers of my tweets and posts.

New Testament instructions for Christian community indicate a genuineness that can only come most fully from regularly gathering in person. The little lighted rectangle-shaped device I hold in my hand, or stare at on my desk, however, can be a tool I use to allow me to think I am being authentic, when-- in reality—I am not. For the Christian, most of our coveted followers will not visit us when we are sick. They will not know when we sinned. They won't join us at the Lord's Supper table, and they won't regularly be the recipients of a well-deserved apology when our sin is on display.

It can also be so tempting to develop an idol of "likes".

While having online "friends" and social media profiles is not sinful, it can lead a person to think that relational responsibility and accountability only extend to what he or she wants to share. Therefore, perceptions can seem to feel like reality. One way to avoid this temptation is to ask yourself whether you are truly known outside of what you let others see of you on social media. A follow up question would be to ask yourself if people only knew you through your online persona, how accurate would their knowledge of you be? To be clear, I don't advise sharing everything about yourself online. Far from it! Rather, I am saying that we can be deceived, or deceive others if our main identity with others is our "profile".

It can also be so tempting to develop an idol of "likes". It feels good when family, friends, or a well-known person likes our Facebook posts, tweets, or Instagram posts. If we are not careful, this can become an addiction: Who likes me?

Who wants to interact with me? Will they notice if I say this or that? In that moment, we take center stage, and the Lord of glory is forgotten. Social media can tempt us to create a false identity and/or an idolatry of self. Thus, careful and regular self-examination is extremely helpful.

Two: The Temptation to Break the 9th Commandment

Next, there is the reality that social media makes it very easy, in some ways, to be openly or subtly dishonest. But we must ask, “How many ways is the ninth commandment (‘thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor’) broken every day through social media?”

For some, typing out tweets, Facebook posts, blog posts, etc., make it easy to slander others. We can write whatever we want about someone—for the entire world to see—without even having to look that person in the eye. At other

times, social media provides an inadvertent outlet for participating in the trafficking of falsehood.

“Social media can sometimes keep us from mental focus.”

Because of the brevity of our postings, it is nearly impossible to get, or communicate, the full truth about anything. We read someone else’s tweet, we “heart” it or “like” it, then retweet it, or respond favorably to it without even doing the research we need to do to know whether it is completely accurate. I can read or listen to information on a church, or minister, or theologian online in 280 or more characters and pass judgment, and then share that judgment with the world. Do I really think that 280 characters shared among my online community is typically sufficient to accurately portray a person’s intent, character, or even theology? We ought to ask ourselves regularly, “Am I using social me-

dia with a view towards the 9th commandment?" It has increasingly occurred to me that it is too easy to intentionally, or (often) unintentionally malign someone simply by assuming, based on a few words, that I know the sum total of another's thoughts, such that I know enough to comment. As believers, we must rejoice in truth as we have a God of truth.

Three: The Temptation to Be Idle

The book of Proverbs is a must read for the social media user. Consider the regularity with which that part of God's Word speaks to idleness or wasting time: Proverbs 14:23; 15:19-21; 20:13; 24:30-34; 26:11-16; 31:10-15, 27. Is the amount of time that the average Christian spends on social media of true and lasting value? Does it build up fellow believers? Is it a worthy use of the time that the Lord has granted us? *"In all toil there is profit, but mere talk tends only to poverty"* (Proverbs 14:23). Of course, recreation is good. Of course, connecting with friends can be of value. However, if we tallied up the hours we spend in online "socializing", would it reveal that we, in fact, had been idle or even online busybodies?

Social media can sometimes keep us from mental focus. Some scientific studies reveal we are becoming addicted to the pings, chimes, and lights of our social media notifications. And we don't just share our thoughts, we read others, and then the threads following their comments, and then we begin to check out what those individuals said elsewhere, and on and on it goes.

Meanwhile, the sun is going down on our days. Social media use doesn't automatically mean a person is idle. But it can certainly be a temptation. I fear many will get to the end of their days and wish that their device had not occupied so much of their time. The little girl who wants to crawl up in her daddy's lap, the son who wants to ask his mommy a question, the Bible passage that is

there to be read, and the evangelistic conversation with the neighbor over yard work are all much more important than the next Twitter glance.

Four: The Temptation to Be Caught Up in Narratives

We have reduced many complex matters to short hashtags. While often helpful and a quick way to collate information, what our short little hashtags reveal is that we are, among other things, increasingly susceptible to narratives. We read a post, like it, and then participate in the narrative.

Political narratives (they are really a thing), ministry narratives, and ideological narratives abound. And the temptation is to boil down ideas, or even people, to a narrative. (i.e., if they say this or don't say that, they fit this narrative that I've adopted). Are image bearers of God really reducible to simple tag lines and hashtags alone? Are complex ministry situations really able to be defined by a simple narrative (not to mention whether our narratives are honest, intentionally or unintentionally)? I don't want to reduce someone to a narrative, a hashtag, or write off a brother or sister based on a few tweets.

A person's view of his or her own local church may suffer as well from this temptation. Often, I have seen narratives (and good, well-meaning ones at that) become an expectation. For instance, a local church member spends time on social media, hears what a church across the country is doing, and then automatically assumes that their own church should be doing the same project as well.

This can become an unspoken way of judging a church, and all the while the Scripture's spoken expectations for the church become marginalized. No longer is the focus on the local church and the ordinary means of grace (2LCF 14.1). Rather, a new panoply of narratives can be adopted that a biblical church must be a "mercy ministering, city-touching, race-reconciling, relevancy-

considering, culture-touching, gender-highlighting, poverty-changing, justice-seeking, multi-ethnic” church.

Aside from whether these foci are the biblical mandates for the church, it is simply not possible for every context to take on all of these issues. However, social media tempts us into potentially downplaying what the Scriptures advocate regarding the local church, and instead adopting every new ministry narrative that comes our way. It also causes us to focus more on the state of the Church in the world than what God may be doing in our own local church—the church to which He has specifically called us. A helpful question here is, “Are my expectations, communication patterns, and interests the result of sifting through the Scriptures or are they narratives of the day?”

Five: The Temptation to Overvalue Our Own Words

Social media can tempt us to overvalue our own words. “A fool takes no pleasure in understanding, but only in expressing his opinion” (Proverbs 18:2). We live in a day when the platform of social media tempts us at every turn to “have something to say.” We are constantly speaking our minds. And social media can make it awfully difficult to be a maturing listener.

A temptation in our usage of social media is to assume that we either need to say something about everything; that what we say is not only important, but of equal value (even if it is a subject of which we are ill-prepared to speak); or that our words are *necessary*. There is wisdom in restraint: “Whoever restrains his words has knowledge, and he who has a cool spirit is a man of understanding” (Proverbs 17:27). In many ways, social media is a great tool and blessing. We can connect easily with so many. At our fingertips, we can have access to so much. And yet, if we are not discerning of ourselves, we can tend to assume that everything we think or say is necessary to put out on the internet.

So, is the answer to not use social media? Maybe for a few of us it really is. But for most, a better approach would be to regularly ask ourselves good questions about our own usage, and about how we are fighting the temptations that come with having the world at our fingertips.

It's a verse that challenges me. It encourages me. In the midst of temptation, it gives me hope. 1 Corinthians 10:13 has been repeated so often in the fight against sin that sometimes I forget to pause and reflect upon each of the words:

"No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it."

While this verse is challenging, encouraging, and hopeful, most of all, I find this verse incredibly humbling. There's one phrase in the verse that stops me in my tracks and makes me want to let out a long, deep sigh. It's the part about whatever temptation I'm fighting being "*common to man*."

Most days, I don't view my temptations as common. In fact, I want people to understand how terribly uncommon my struggle is so that they'll sympathize with me when I don't take the way out provided. Secretly, I want to tell them my tale of woe as a means to escape the guilt of my own sinful choices.

I want people to understand just how incredibly difficult interacting with that one friend is, so I feel justified when I tell them that little tidbit of gossip. I must explain just how crazy busy my life is so that they'll understand why I am always running late. I repeat again and again the difficult circumstances I'm facing to hide my grumbling and complaining under the guise of being authentic and real. The only thing I don't want to tell people about my struggle is that it's *common*.

The notion that whatever temptation comes knocking at my door is *typical* silences my inner justifications. My temptation isn't special. My circumstances

are not cause for disobedience. Others have faced this very thing and, by the Spirit, have faithfully endured. My pride protests, “Anyone facing this circumstance would give in!” But the Spirit faithfully reminds me that there’s a way of escape. By God’s grace, *obedience is possible*.

Whatever temptation you face, the power of Jesus is available to help. His Spirit is alive in you. God knows exactly what you can bear, and He’s actively arranging all the details of your life to provide a way out so you may endure. Whatever you face today is a common struggle. The grace He provides in the midst of the struggle will strengthen and protect you.

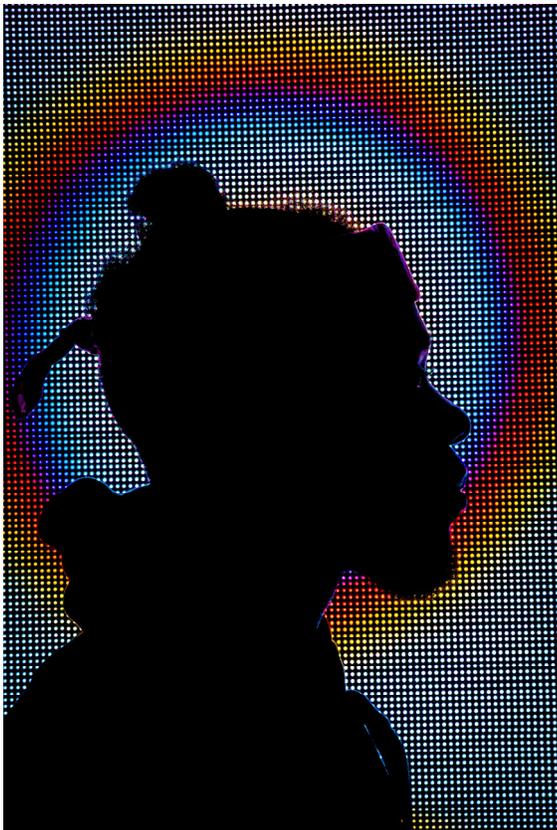
His commands are not burdens, but blessings. We can delight in the perfect law that gives freedom, knowing God’s Word is a lamp for our feet and a light to our path. Choose today to walk in His ways, trusting in His power to give you all you need to obey in every way.

References:

- i. <https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/fact-sheet/social-media/>
- ii. <https://www.uswitch.com/mobiles/screentime-report/>
- iii. <https://www.premierhealth.com/your-health/articles/health-topics/screen-addiction-affects-physical-and-mental-health#:~:text=Screen%20use%20releases%20dopamine%20in,negative%20impact%20of%20your%20life.>
- iv. <https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2021/04/07/social-media-use-in-2021/>

The Age of Confusion: Why Apologetics are Critical to the Christian Life

By Kelly Benware



I watched my daughter pedal by on her new periwinkle bicycle. She had always been skilled with her bike, always doing things like standing while riding. Funny that her immediate request to ride came after a long period of absolutely no interest in doing so. One thing that changed during this period of no riding was that she developed epilepsy. Her medications were so devastating at one point, that she was in her own world—forgetting memories, words, and skills. Over time, she experienced a reset of sorts; new taste buds, deciding she now likes neon colors over deeper hues, and re-learning interests. Some tidbits even came back naturally. Several months later, she very

decisively told us she wanted to ride a bicycle again! We were thrilled! Our girl has fallen back into bike riding with ease. Her memory held the functions needed to ride, though many other pieces were missing.

In numerous ways, the church is navigating new conditions of our digital age. Which begs us to ask, “Can leaders, pastors, parents, and mentors train others to be grounded in God’s Word when individuals are bombarded daily with digital (tech) content, news stories, global hardships, and the current status of all our friends that most of us were unaware of growing up?” The amount of processing has increased greatly. The idea of being equipped to help others remain ready for all things, let alone oneself, seems daunting, if near impossible.

So then, if it is too much for us as humans, why would God tell us in His Word, “...but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you” (1 Peter 3:15, ESV).

Did you realize our minds process the data of 16 movies through tech devices daily? (Heim & Andreas, 2017). Every year we absorb 5% more than the previous year, and the daily amount we take in is the equivalent of what an educated person would consume in their lifetime only 500 years ago (Heim & Andreas, 2017)! The fact that God is not fazed by the gravity of these specifics, and that He tells His children to be ready at all times, is a reminder of His omnipotence and omniscience. Even more amazing is the fact that the Lord sent His Holy Spirit to guide us in filtering truth. God’s wisdom and power are in each Christ-follower.

The gift of the Holy Spirit is critical in using wisdom and helping believers sense when we may be hearing something that is not of God. But how can we prepare our minds and clearly assess content? God also provided His Word and apologetics. Apologetics is the practice of studying why you believe what you believe. Remember: always be prepared to make a defense. In church,

Christians should learn what the Bible says and why it's important to study the Bible, which is the basis of all apologetics. If you only studied the Bible, but had no idea *why* you committed your life to Christ, or why you believe Jesus to be God, you will not likely hold firm to these beliefs when they are questioned. Knowing why you believe as you do is essential for your Christian walk.

Now, you may feel stressed that you need to know every argument and all things apologetic, but that is not realistic. If we live our lives in God's Word, and study why we believe what we believe, God will give us what we need in each moment. God gave our daughter enough memory to pick up her bike and ride after major brain trauma. Our daughter does not remember everything, but she remembered what she needed for the moment. God provides and He has imparted His Holy Spirit to help us, even if it is just sensing something is off, so we can then do our homework to further understand why.

As I daily engage with the digital industry and social media, I realize a greater need for wisdom from the Holy Spirit. People not only engage with a much larger mass of information, we also intake numerous uninformed and/or false "facts". Most anyone can post on the web. If we are honest, we often take what we read at face value. Filtering is essential in weeding out reliable versus unreliable resources and content. In addition to poor sources, Christians must learn to engage with apologetics in an age that does not value fact, actual truth, or the Bible.

Media splashes false information on our devices daily. Some examples of this are: (1) a woman is not defined by her physical make up, but rather gender is subjective and based solely on the decision of an individual; (2) a fetus is not a baby or a life when conceived, rather it begins whenever the government decides; (3) marriage is now legal between the same sex; (4) God's creation and natural order are not to the liking of society, so reality is now based on theory, emotion, and preference; (5) the Bible, reality, and fact are not reasonable arguments, even on the news or in official government meetings, so you should ex-

pect to find this also true in conversations with neighbors and co-workers.

In “theory” presented as truth, sources confirm that one’s own emotions and speculation overtake objective reality. In this cat and mouse game, words and their meanings change for the narrative to make sense of its inconsistent

“Our digital age has done many great things, like giving us access to our Bibles during a sermon via numerous mobile apps, but neither are we ignorant of the negatives attached.”

morality. Thus, confusion abounds.

“Critical Race Theory—like many Marxian Theories—resists being clearly and concisely defined” (Lindsay, 2022, p. 17).

Christian organizations and believers often take concepts from Marxist Theory and Social Justice, many without ever realizing this error. Twisted scriptural interpretation and CRT have flooded Christian academics and sources. Believers that are not familiar with the secular sources of CRT and its confusing dialect,

can easily fall prey to what now presents as a worldview and religion.

“I don’t mean to say that Critical Race Theory is *like* a religion here. I mean that it *is* one, both in terms of how it believes and behaves and also in terms of the relevant legal standard. (Since this is true of all Critical Theories, it’s probably more fair to say Critical Race Theory is a denomination within a constellation of related religions” (Lindsay, 2022, p. 30-31).

Our digital age has done many great things, like giving us access to our Bibles during a sermon via numerous mobile apps, but neither are we ignorant of the negatives attached. False content and false teachers have a platform to deceive. The Holy Spirit is needed, as one might even say this digital age is now the “Age of Confusion”. God imparted the Holy Spirit to help us discern when something is off and to give wisdom. Believers need to be grounded in absolute truth so they can stand firm if/when they face a counterfeit. If you ever feel con-

fused, remember that God is not the source of confusion, *“For God is not a God of confusion but of peace.”* (1 Corinthians 14:33, ESV)

This is where a good grasp of apologetics is even more necessary. Start by knowing how to recognize a fact. In a conversation, distinguish terms, and if a person is speaking with facts or through emotion and personal theories. Not all theories refer to CRT, a Marxist derived term. You may have trouble meeting on common ground if the other person will not agree with facts and reality. You, however, will not be left confused and can remain grounded.

You will find that you have questions and need to grow in your method of defense. That is natural; you are learning how to use new muscles, just like my middle schooler affected by tonic-clonic seizures. As you practice, you will remember things you have learned, but you will need to keep learning. Do not quit practicing. Satan is a master deceiver and is always twisting the truth. Read the Bible and know God’s Word, while also studying why His Word is true. Re-

search the facts. Learn how to defend your faith so you do not live in a state of confusion! The Savior of the universe is not worried, wondering if He is able to help humans filter the “16 movies worth of content” taken in daily (Heim & Andreas, 2017). Fellow Believers, God is fully capable to provide wisdom and He is living in us. Make a note on your bathroom mirror, or put a reminder in your phone to see first thing in the morning, that God is all-knowing and active inside you! Remain diligent to read new books, subscribe to an apologetics ministry, read some new articles and biblical commentaries to better understand your faith in Christ. Know the facts found within God’s Word, and the arguments that sup-

“What we do know is that Christ-followers who do not take time to know God’s Word or why they believe what they believe, will find that they do not have the answers when needed.”

port absolute truth. Pick up your bike and start riding—learn some new “tricks” and be confident navigating through this digital age!

What we do know is that Christ-followers who do not take time to know God’s Word or why they believe what they believe, will find that they do not have the answers when needed. These people will falter in life. It is also important to note that you are setting the foundation for those in your care. What might these individuals take away from your faith and knowledge of your Savior, who is the *only truth*? Do not just watch others ride by, while you sit in your lawn chair, coasting through life at a bare minimum. Live as God has taught us—by being prepared to always give an answer for the hope within.

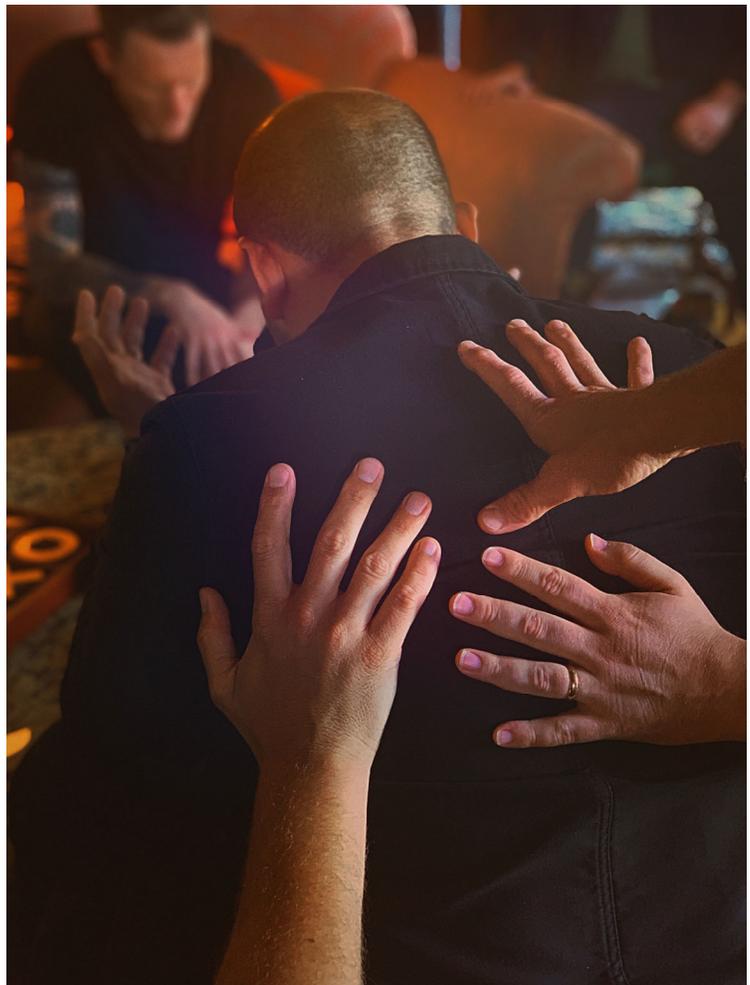
References:

- i. Heim, S. & Andreas K. (2017, June 1). *Too Much Information, Too Little Time: How the Brain Separates Important from Unimportant Things in our Fast-Paced Media World*. Frontier. <https://kids.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/frym.2017.00023>
- ii. Lindsay, J. (2022). *Race Marxism: The Truth About Critical Race Theory and Praxis*. New Discourses.

Biblical Discipleship and Prayer

By Jacob Tanner

Our church intentionally tries to get men involved in worship through prayer. There are times throughout our corporate worship services wherein we go before the Lord in prayer and, on some of these occasions, we call upon men in the congregation to pray. The beauty of it is that some of the men are clearly more comfortable praying aloud than others, some are more well-spoken, some are a bit rough around the edges, some are long-winded, some are short and concise, and yet all are praying to the same God, being heard by the same God, and trusting in the



same God.

Of course, this is not merely “trial by fire”. I, personally, will spend time

with the men in prayer, either within group settings or one-on-one. Over time, I begin to ask them to pray more and more.

“Prayer must be normalized for the Christian.”

Sometimes it starts off in an awkward manner and it’s easy to see how uncomfortable they are. But this is part of the disciple-making process. I want them to learn to pray well so that they are learning to “*pray without ceasing*” (1 Thessalonians 5:17). I want them to learn to lead their families in prayer. I want them to learn to lead the church in prayer. I want them to be comfortable praying to their God.

learning to “*pray without ceasing*” (1 Thessalonians 5:17). I want them to learn to lead their families in prayer. I want them to learn to lead the church in prayer. I want them to be comfortable praying to their God.

Discipling Through Prayer

To attempt to engage in biblical discipleship without prayer is a mistake. When we read Scripture, God is speaking to us. But no relationship is made up of one-sided conversation, is it? Of course not! Prayer, then, is when we speak to God.

Prayer must be normalized for the Christian. It must not be unusual to pray when we are alone in the car, or lying in bed at night, or about to eat supper with our families. Prayer must not be thought unusual when we are spending time with our friends. In fact, there must never be a moment wherein we find prayer to be strange or disconcerting.

We must discipline ourselves to pray more regularly and disciple others to do the same. Ask yourself: are you intentionally praying with your spouse, children, friends, co-workers, or neighbors? When is the last time you stopped what you were doing and prayed for the person in the grocery store? Are you actively

trying to teach others to pray, taking time to sit still and speak to the Lord together, making your petitions and pleas with thanksgiving to Him (Philippians 4:5-7)?

One of the great tools that we have been given by the Lord is the written prayers of past saints. These can be incredibly helpful in training us, or others, to pray. Likewise, we can engage with written prayers in our church services, which allows the whole congregation to pray together, in unison. Or we can simply turn to the Psalms. Let's turn our attention to an example of how prayer may actively disciple us in Scripture by looking at the Psalter.

Psalm 72

Psalm 72 holds the distinction of its final verse stating, "The prayers of David, the son of Jesse, are ended." Though this is not the last psalm of David to appear in the Psalter, it is evidently the last psalm that David penned. At first glance, and even within the psalm's heading, it appears that David penned this psalm as a prayer to God regarding his son, Solomon, who was soon to begin reigning as king in Jerusalem. From that perspective, David's prayers were answered, for Solomon's reign as king was truly one of prosperity. However, even within Solomon's life, there were various sins committed. Thus, the psalm points to an even deeper, longer, and more urgent need, for a true King who would reign eternally with blessing and dominion forevermore. From this vantage point, the psalm is prophetically pointing to Jesus Christ.

Verses 1-4 speak of a King who is just and renders justice to His people. He and His people enjoy peace, even as He meets the needs of the poor and downtrodden in the land. Then, in verses 5-11, Yahweh is praised for providing this King to the people. This King who is just and brings prosperity and peace is like rain that falls upon mown grass (vs. 6). He causes the righteous to flourish and peace to increase continually during His everlasting reign (vs. 7).

Verses 8-11 are, in my estimation, some of the most encouraging of all. In verse 8, the Psalmist prays that this King would have dominion from sea to sea—that is to say, His dominion would extend over the earth. Then, in verses 9-11, desert tribes are brought before Him, along with kings and queens. All bow before Him—a picture of the spread of the gospel and the salvation of sinners from every tribe, language, and nation (Revelation 7:9).

Then, in verses 12-15, the motif becomes one of salvation and praise. This King is called upon to save the people, and the people are called upon to praise the King. In fact, the call is for the people to *both* pray for and bless this King, who saves them and meets their needs. Continuing this prayer of blessing for the King then, verses 16 and 17 call for there to be physical prosperity during His reign, as well a salvation to extend over the entire circumference of the earth.

Finally, verses 18 and 19 return to praising Yahweh, especially in recognition that He is the one who both provides this King in the first place, and then ordains that He should bless the earth in such a way. The prayer, ultimately, is for the whole earth to be filled with Yahweh's glory (vs. 19). If ever there was a psalm to produce hope in evangelism, confidence in the spread of the gospel, and even optimism in eschatology, this is the one. Clearly, the reign of Christ is perfect, sure, and true, and He will reign until all dominions are placed beneath His feet, the elect are gathered into the Kingdom, and God's glory truly covers the earth.

Just look at the multitude of ways that David teaches us to pray in Psalm 72! He shows us what to pray for and how to pray for it. If you don't know what to pray, begin with the Psalms! If you know what to pray, keep returning to the Psalms!

Biblical Discipleship and Evangelism

By Jacob Tanner



Many Christians assume that evangelism starts and ends with simply sharing the gospel one time with a non-Christian. However, proper evangelism, when done the way that Jesus commanded, in-

cludes not only sharing the gospel, but then also following up with those whom the gospel has been shared with, and making disciples of those who have turned to Christ in repentance and faith. As Jesus commanded in Matthew 28:19-20, Christ-followers must, *“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”* A Biblical view of evangelism necessitates disciple-

ship. Disciples of Christ, rightly ordering their lives according to His Word and Law, must be made within all nations.

But discipleship is often neglected. Many Christians today have the revivalist mentality of, “Get in, shake things up, and then leave.” While it is true that, on occasion, follow-ups and disciple-making are not possible, these are exceptions to the rule—that is that the one who does the evangelizing ought to take special interest in discipling the one who has been saved by Christ. After all, the attitude of the Apostle Paul throughout Scripture is to look to those whom he has seen converted as his children in the faith.

“A simple plan for evangelism must include a few important elements...”

Timothy, for example, was one that Paul saw as his true child in the faith (1 Timothy 1:2), and he spent quite a bit of time discipling him and writing to him. We, as well, ought to love and care for those we see converted.

So, where do Christians begin? The answer is simple: begin with evangelism, follow-up, and then disciple. There are some helpful ways we can plan for each of these steps.

An Evangelism Plan

A simple plan for evangelism must include a few important elements: (1) Intentionality in seeking to share with those who are lost; (2) an explanation of what it means to be a sinner; (3) a description of God’s wrath against sin; (4) proclamation of Jesus Christ, including who He is and what He accomplished during His incarnation; and, finally, (5) a call to repentance and faith in Jesus.

The first key is intentionality. If we ever hope to share the gospel in an effective way with those who are around us, we must begin by seeking out those

who are lost. Intentionality in evangelism may also be described as “lifestyle evangelism”. This basically amounts to “living all of life for all of Christ”, as some may put it; or, “Purposefully engaging others with the gospel.” Dave Earley and David Wheeler explain, “When I use the term lifestyle evangelism, I am speaking of intentionally combining both proclamation and affirmation over a period of time through a friendship relationship.”

“That said, the gospel can only truly be proclaimed as good news if the bad news is understood first.”

This intentionality can often be revealed in a number of different ways. Perhaps it means putting the phone down and looking at the people that surround us on our daily commutes, or our walks around the mall. It may mean purposefully seeking out those who are down-trodden or lonely, and befriending them. It also may mean simply finding those who have various needs within the community and seeking to meet those needs. Whatever the case, it is sometimes helpful (though not always necessary) to build up trust before sharing the gospel. As Earley and Wheeler state, “Once we become aware of needs, we must do what we can to meet those needs. This can require food, medicine, or hard work. The key is a willingness to sacrifice time, energy, or money.”

Within every relationship, there is the need to know that the other party can be trusted. This is the idea of “building capital” with the other person. Once enough “capital” is built, trust is established, and the other party knows that they can trust you because they have come to find that you truly love and care for them. You want their best and, therefore, they will be all the more willing to listen to your gospel presentation and seriously weigh the validity of what is

proclaimed to them.

This does not mean that one must always wait to share the gospel until a friendship is established. In fact, on the contrary, the gospel ought to be shared as soon as possible and the normative principle should be that the gospel be shared immediately. Intentionality is still key, here. We must seek those who are lost around us and share the gospel with them as soon as possible. If we can establish a friendship, that is even better, but the purpose of our engagement is to share the love of Christ with the other party through proclamation of the gospel.

That said, the gospel can only truly be proclaimed as good news if the bad news is understood first. Therefore, every gospel presentation ought to include an explanation of the sinfulness and depravity of man. Depending on the amount of time permitted, it may be best to begin with an overview account of Genesis 1-3, wherein God creates man and woman to walk in fellowship with Him. Here, God also gives a command to not eat of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and evil. He warned that if the man and woman disobeyed, then death would be the result.

Genesis 3 includes the narrative of the first sin and reveals that the man and woman were deceived by Satan to disobey God. Once they disobeyed the command God had given them, they were ashamed. They experienced both physical death (they would now grow old, diseases were possible, and, eventually, would now die) and spiritual death (they were counted guilty before God as having transgressed His Law, were cut off from fellowship with Him, and were destined for Hell, where God's wrath would eternally be poured out upon them). As Romans 5:12 states, "*...sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned.*"

Romans 3:23 also plainly states that, "*all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.*" After the Fall of man, all humans were born with a sin nature. No one

needs to be taught how to sin; our wills are enslaved to sin, and we will always only choose that which is evil apart from God's grace (Romans 3:10-18). That all have sinned is clear from the Ten Commandments of Exodus 20. Look at any Commandment and, those who are honest, will recognize that they have transgressed God's Law. Those who try to say that they at least have not committed adultery or murder only need to be reminded of Jesus' words in Matthew 5:21-22 and Matthew 5:27-30—that whoever looks at another with lust has committed adultery and whoever hates another has committed murder in their heart.

The Good News is that, though we are great sinners, Christ is a greater Savior. According to Galatians 4:4-5, *"But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons."* Jesus was born to the virgin Mary, having been conceived by the Holy Spirit (Matthew 1:18), and that means that He is fully God and fully man, and the Son of God (John 3:16). This means that Jesus is able to redeem those of us who were under the curse of the Law by fulfilling the Law for us (Matthew 5:17-20).

Of course, the gospel includes the primary matters of Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection as well (1 Corinthians 15:1-8). Jesus not only fulfilled the Law on our behalf, but also paid our sin debt. This He did by exhausting the wrath of God that was ready to be poured out upon us like a waterfall. Jesus took the cup of God's wrath and drank it in full at the cross. There, He shed His blood for our sins, for without the shedding of blood, there can be no forgiveness from God (Hebrews 9:22).

Simultaneously, upon the cross, Jesus also defeated sin, death, and Satan. As Colossians 2:14-15 states, *"canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him."*

Romans 6:23 states, “*For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*” Eternal life, forgiveness of sins, and reconciliation to God can only come through repentance of sin (turning from sin to Jesus for forgiveness) and faith in Jesus. As Romans 10:13 states, “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” Thus, we must end our evangelistic encounters with a call for those who are lost to repent of their sins and call upon the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

A Follow-Up Plan

The follow-up plan is essential after having shared the gospel with the sinner. This is, effectively, the step that will—Lord willing-- lead into the proper discipleship of the born-again child of God. And, like the previous step, a great deal of intentionality is required.

A follow-up is where the evangelist makes a purposeful and intentional effort to engage once more with the person that they have shared the gospel with. There will, of course, be those occasions wherein the other party makes it clear that they do *not* want to be followed-up with. There will be other scenarios wherein the sinner did not repent and trust in Christ, but they *do* want to be followed-up with. Then, there are those situations wherein the person either did confess Christ as their Savior, or they want to, and thus, follow-up is essential. Since not every evangelism encounter is the same, not every follow-up will be the same. Yet, there are some key elements and principles that can be followed.

Let’s imagine a scenario wherein a church has held a sort of open house, and the community has come to support the event. There was free food, games, and a gospel presentation. A requirement for such an event is the collection of names, social media accounts, numbers, and/or addresses. (One-on-one evangelism, as much as possible, should operate the same way). Once the information is gathered, those who reacted most favorably to the gospel should receive top pri-

ority in being followed up with, though everyone who is receptive to being followed up with should be. These follow-ups may include emails, texts, phone calls, or in-house visits.

Visits can even include things like bringing gifts. Earley and Wheeler, writing about how a local church might hold a party to invite the community to attend, explained in-depth about the need to be intentional in every step of evangelism and then following-up:

“All workers receive training ahead of time and why you plan in advance to follow up immediately (within the first three to five days) with every registered nonchurch member. The follow-up is a good time to combine servant-evangelism activities by taking a small gift (cookies, McDonald’s gift certificates) when visiting the homes of registered guests.”

The gifts are not so much the point as is intentionally meeting with these individuals once more to reiterate the gospel, invite them to church, and begin the process of discipleship.

There is an example given in Scripture of what a true follow-up plan should consist of, and it comes from an unlikely source: The Apostle Paul. After the Apostle Paul’s conversion to Christianity in Acts 9, after having spent time persecuting the Church of Christ, he finds himself in a strange position. He wants to have fellowship with the Christians, but they are understandably fearful of him. After all, they had heard the stories about Saul of Tarsus (Paul’s Jewish name) and how he was persecuting the Christians. Could they really trust this man?

At least three men seemed to believe that Paul could be believed and trusted: Barnabas, Peter, and James. When people are terrified of Paul, Barnabas comes alongside him and vouches for him before others. In Acts 9:27-29 it is recorded:

“But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles and declared to them how on the road he had seen the Lord, who spoke to him, and how at Damascus he had preached boldly in the name of Jesus. So he went in and out among them at Jerusalem, preaching boldly in the name of the Lord. And he spoke and disputed against the Hellenists. But they were seeking to kill him.”

This kindness resulted in Paul’s acceptance into the Church as a whole, and many began to trust him. From here, Barnabas would continue to work with Paul and help him to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ on various missionary trips.

Paul also recounts how Peter and James spent some time with him. In Galatians 1:18-24, Paul recounts, *“Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas and remained with him fifteen days. But I saw none of the other apostles except James the Lord’s brother. (In what I am writing to you, before God, I do not lie!).”* It can be assumed that each of these men, in their own way, spent time with the newly converted Paul, instructing him in the matters of the faith and teaching him what it meant to be a Christian.

1. We can learn a few lessons about our own need to follow-up with others from these men:
2. We must go to new converts and be willing to live relationally with them.
3. If they have professed that Jesus is their Lord and Savior, we especially must follow-up.
4. We mustn’t wait before they come back to us; we must immediately invite them into fellowship with us and our church.
5. We must begin to support, teach, train, and equip them to do the work of an evangelist.

6. We must encourage the grace of Jesus Christ to grow within them.

A Discipleship Plan

As wonderfully important as it is to follow-up with those who have had the gospel shared with them, it is equally important that an overall discipleship plan be established. The Christian who is planning to fulfill the Great Commission that Jesus gave must go to those who are new converts and, *“baptize them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, [and be] teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you”* (Matthew 28:19).

Biblical discipleship will consist of at least two vital elements: baptism, which would also coincide with the new convert’s incorporation into the local church as a member, and instruction in the Word of God. Both things are linked. The new convert is discipled to be baptized, according to the words of Jesus, so that they will learn the importance of obedience to Christ in all situations.

Again, intentionality is key. Just as the sinner is not a statistic to be added to our numbers, inflating the total of those that we can say “we saved”, so the new convert is also not a project to simply conform into the image we most desire. The new convert is to be shown the love of Christ and taught in the Scriptures so that they can grow in the image of Jesus. As Earley wrote, “Acts 1:8 gives the famous last words of Jesus when He told His followers, ‘You shall be My witnesses’ (NASB). Note that His last command was to be witnesses, not merely do witnessing. Doing witnessing without being a witness tends to treat lost people as projects instead of friends.” In the same way,

“That said, discipleship, like evangelism, can happen anywhere and at any time, with just a little bit of intentionality involved.”

we must treat a new convert as what they are: a brother or sister in Christ that we love and desire to see transformed into the image of Jesus Christ.

That said, discipleship, like evangelism, can happen anywhere and at any time, with just a little bit of intentionality involved. Earley and Wheeler shared that, “Evangelism always thrives in the right atmosphere. The usual ingredients are compassion, love, intentionality, obedience, and the understanding that the call to evangelize is never limited by time or space.” The right atmosphere for discipleship is that of fellowship with the intention of being that iron that sharpens iron. During our meetings with fellow believers, we ought to instruct them in the faith, exhort them in holiness and the commandments of Christ, and share in one another’s lives. As Romans 12:15 states, we are to “*Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep.*” This means intentionally participating in one another’s lives.

Intentionally participating in the lives of the saints, studying the Scriptures, and instructing in the Word of God, is essential in cultivating the spiritual disciplines and growing in Christian maturity.

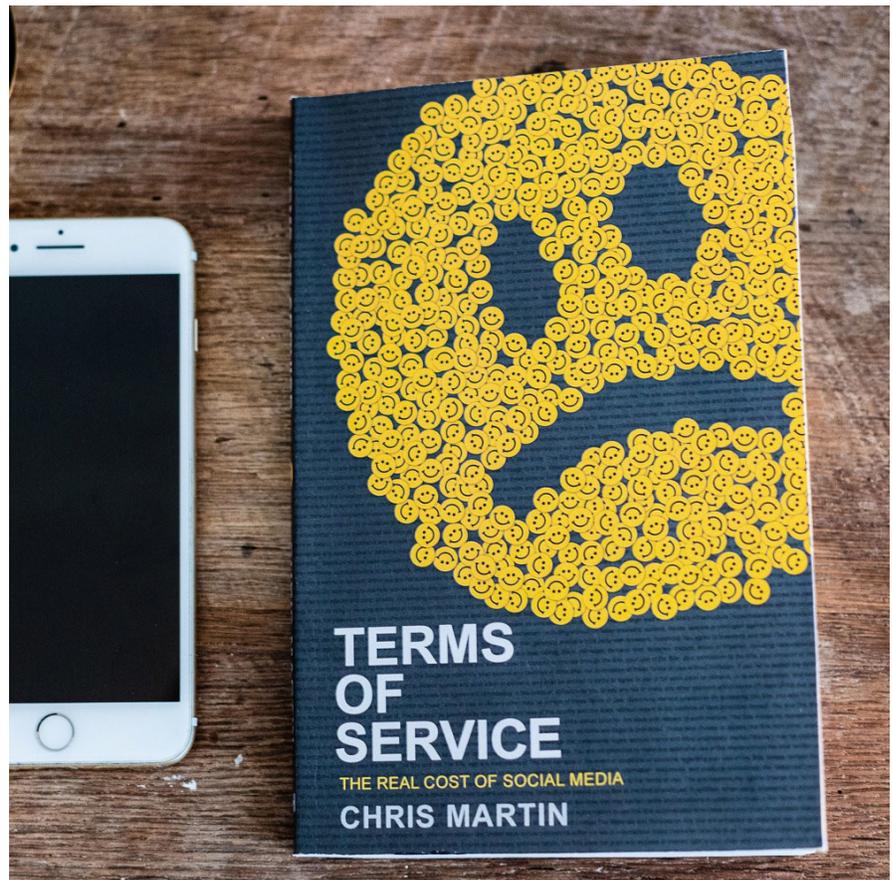
References:

- i. Dave Earley and David Wheeler, *Evangelism Is...: How to Share Jesus with Passion and Confidence* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2010), 185.
- ii. Ibid, 225.
- iii. Ibid 302.
- iv. I am, unfortunately, aware of various ministers who will post their end of the year numbers, wherein they will detail all the souls they saved. It almost seems they intentionally leave God out of the equation and fail to acknowledge that it is the Lord who saves.
- v. Dave Earley and David Wheeler, *Evangelism Is...*, 184.
- vi. Ibid., 328-29.

A Book Review: *Terms of Service: The Real Cost of Social Media*

Reviewed By David Steele

Chris Martin is convinced that social media is changing those who use it. He believes the social internet (a term he uses interchangeably with social media) is one of the defining influences of human history. In the conclusion of his book, *Terms of Service: The Real Cost of Social Media*, Martin writes, “In the last anthropology class ever held in the history



of the world, the social internet will be recognized as the fulcrum on which all human history shifted” (199). Is such a claim an overreach? Is social media shaping us, or is it simply a neutral tool? Martin convincingly argues that social media is *not* neutral, but rather is designed to shape and manipulate users. Reader,

Martin explains his aim, “This is my plea for you to stop scrolling for a moment and consider the state of the pixelated water in which you swim.”

your social media platforms may not offer you very clear disclaimers but understand this: this book will change how you think about social media.

Martin does not write mere theory, but provides exposing insights drawn from research and offers clear steps for application. He writes with years of experience in the social media world and is a

trusted expert in the field. Martin is a content marketing editor at Moody Publishers and a social media, marketing, and communications consultant. He writes regularly at <https://termsofservice.social>.

Martin explains his aim, “This is my plea for you to stop scrolling for a moment and consider the state of the pixelated water in which you swim” (2). Throughout the book, Martin reminds the reader that the social media platforms with which we have grown so comfortable and familiar are designed with an end in mind. And that end is *not* our godliness. “I am concerned about the terms of our service to an invention that was originally designed to serve *us* but which *we have come to serve*” (8). Yes, you agree to serve their terms of service whether you understand them or not.

In Part One, Martin reveals how we got here. In chapter one, he answers the question, “*How did the Social Internet Evolve?*” Here, Martin helps the reader understand the origin of social media and the social internet. Martin writes, “We need to explore what happened when the internet moved from government pro-

jects and university computer labs into our homes” (15). Martin also provides a helpful overview of the major social media platforms. In chapter two, he explains, “*How does the Social Internet Work?*” He peels back the curtain and reveals the intention behind many of these platforms. For example, “Facebook has engineered the platform in a number of ways to keep people scrolling, but one rises above them all: *divisiveness*” (40). Martin closes this chapter with the sobering point, “Are you uncomfortable yet? Have you begun to sense the toxicity of the water? This is how the social internet works” (42). In chapter three, he explores the deeper question, “*How does the Social Internet Affect our Lives?*” Here, Martin explains that we are polarized, gullible, unhappy, and anxious as a result of our digital connectivity.

In Part Two, Martin examines five ways the social internet shapes us. In chapter four, he shows that we believe attention assigns value. He explains that this is “one of the most pervasive lies we believe when we engage with the social internet” (63). Martin writes, “That one lie is really best understood as two separate, but related lies: (1) a trending or viral piece of content is inherently important simply because it’s popular; and (2) when people pay attention to me,

He explains, “I fear that we are so interested in being affirmed and ideologically coddled that, even though we recognize much of the content on our feeds is false, we simply don’t care...”

they’re telling me I’m valuable. The overarching lie is rooted in the belief that attention equals value—that what is *most popular* is *most valuable*” (63).

In chapter five, Martin warns that we trade our privacy for expression. He explains, “Most of the social internet apps and websites you use primarily exist to gather and monetize your data. Further, they are actively looking for ways to manipulate you

into making decisions that make them more money” (81). In chapter six, Martin discusses the danger of pursuing affirmation instead of truth. Martin reveals

how conspiracy theories spread so effectively on social media platforms. He explains, “I fear that we are so interested in being affirmed and ideologically coddled that, even though we recognize much of the content on our feeds is false, we simply don’t care because this content supports our understanding of how the world *should be*” (111). In chapter seven, he explains how we demonize people we dislike, and in chapter eight, he further explains how we destroy people we demonize.

Perhaps the most piercing part of the book is an almost blank page with only six words on the entire page. The text simply reads, “For Magnolia Grace. This is why.”

Finally, in Part Three, Martin points forward and provides healthy practices. These simple actions draw us out of our screens and into the world in which God has placed us. In chapter nine, he encourages readers to study history. In chapter ten, he calls us to admire creation. Here, he even reveals how Instagram has redefined ‘beauty’. In chapter eleven, Martin teaches the importance of silence. In chapter twelve, he reveals the importance of humility. Martin writes, “I am convinced that pride, generally, and the unwillingness to admit we are wrong, specifically, are at the heart of so much of the negativity that has come to define our experiences on the social internet” (176). In chapter thirteen, Martin provides a healthy call to accountability. This call is not limited to whether or not we use social media to get to pornographic content, but focuses on how we are treating others on a social platform. In chapter fourteen, Martin peels us out of digital relationships and points us towards friendships.

Perhaps the most piercing part of the book is an almost blank page with only six words on the entire page. The text simply reads, “For Magnolia Grace. This is why.” I don’t know Chris Martin, and I don’t know who Magnolia Grace is. But the parent and the former youth pastor in me concluded that this must be

his daughter, and this book dedication must be part of parental protection. Parents, you must understand the terms of service behind social media platforms. You must understand them for your children and yourself. Reader, you are not swimming in neutral water—a strong, unavoidable current sweeping users towards rough rapids and plunging waterfalls ahead. And, if Martin is correct, the water itself is poisoned. **Be careful how you swim.**

Recommended Reading on Biblical Discipleship

In this issue of *Theology for Life Magazine*, we've been considering the subject of biblical discipleship in a digital age. We understand that we haven't covered everything on this topic, but it is our prayer that, hopefully, readers of this issue will grow in their understanding of it so they can stand fast on the Word of God.

If you've found this issue helpful and would like to study this subject further, please check out the following reading list. These books are at the top of their genre in both excellence and readability.

- *Christianity and Liberalism* by J. Gresham Machen.
- *Growing in Christ* by J.I. Packer.
- *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God* by J.I. Packer
- *Grounded in the Gospel: Building Believers the Old-Fashioned Way* by J.I. Packer
- *Rediscovering Holiness: Know the Fullness of Life With God* by J.I. Packer
- *The Institutes of the Christian Religion* by John Calvin.

I hope you'll find these resources helpful as I have.

In Christ Alone,
Dave Jenkins
Executive Editor, *Theology for Life Magazine*

About the Authors:



Dave Jenkins

Dave Jenkins is the Executive Director of Servants of Grace Ministries, and the Executive Editor of *Theology for Life Magazine*, and author of *The Word Explored: The Problem of Biblical Illiteracy and What to do About It*. Dave received his M.A.R. and M. Div. through Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary. He and his wife, Sarah, attend Covenant Life Fellowship in Roseburg, Oregon. Check out

<http://servantsofgrace.org> for more information.



Joey Tomlinson

Joey Tomlinson (D. Min., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary) is a husband, father, and pastor at a local church in Newport News, Virginia. He blogs regularly on <http://broadoakpiety.org/> and hosts a weekly podcast called The Broad Oak Piety Podcast with another local pastor in the community.



Scott Hurst

Scott Hurst pastors at Northminster Baptist Church in Toronto. He enjoys sports, books, and spending time with his wife and their two boys. Keep up with his writing at Write to Understand.

About the Authors (Cont'd):



Kelly Benware

Kelly Benware earned a BS and MA in Intercultural Studies and spent time working in various Christian organizations and universities. After years in a seemingly woke “Christian” environment, she noticed the diversity conversation changing. The anti-biblical message of the new “social justice” gospel forced Kelly to ask some pertinent questions, as it should do the same for all of us. Her research led to the formation of “Steadfast Truth Ministries”, a 501(c)(3) of which she is both Founder and President.



Jacob Tanner

Jacob Tanner is a husband, father, and pastor, living in Pennsylvania. Holding to the *1689 Second London Baptist Confession of Faith*, Jacob is focused on both evangelism and reformation. He is the founder of the Sound of Truth Ministries, where they have regular podcasts and preaches whenever the opportunity arises. His passion and motto are, "To know Christ and make Him known because He has made us His own." He can be found spending time with his family or with a book in his hands in his free time.



David Steele

David Steele is a husband, father, author, and an experienced Pastor. He currently serves as the Senior Pastor at Christ Fellowship in Everson, Washington.

Servants of Grace Ministries

www.servantsofgrace.org

www.theologylife.org



<https://www.facebook.com/Servantsofgrace>



<https://twitter.com/servantsofgrace>

Executive Editor:

Dave Jenkins

E-mail: dave@servantsofgrace.org

Design Coordinator & Editor:

Sarah Jenkins

Email: sarah@servantsofgrace.org