Media Cautions

A New Struggle for Our Generation

A recent study showed that on average teens in America spend about 7.5 hours a day on screen time—and this doesn't even include schoolwork![1] The average American checks their phone every 4.3 minutes![2] We face a new struggle that the generations before us have not had to deal with. It's hard for most of us to imagine living without computers, phones, and social media. Modern technology is a new blessing, but with it comes many dangers which our generation must learn to overcome.

Technology in itself can be very helpful. There is nothing inherently wrong with technology. It's just a tool—an invention that has many great benefits and is extremely useful. These blessings include: communicating long-distance with family and friends, accomplishing tasks more efficiently, and accessing information quickly, to name a few. Also technology is used around the world to spread the gospel, including among restricted nations where it is more difficult to reach people with God's Word. We can praise the Lord for this!

On the other hand, there are many dangers with technology. I wrote this appendix to explore these dangers. I especially want to caution young women seeking to walk in purity as they relate with technology.

Possible Problems/Cautions with Internet Usage:

- It opens us up to things that are not holy. *"Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful"* (Ps. 1:1).
- It provides situations that make it easier to compromise our standards of purity and holiness. *"I made a covenant with mine eyes; why then should I think upon a maid?"* (Job 31:1).
- It can interfere with relationships with parents. When we are on our phones or computers, there tends to be an increase of secrecy and less communication within the family. In addition, individuals are encouraged to become introverted and not be aware of how to be of service to those around them.

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1.   Common Sense Media Census Study, October 29, 2019 *www.commonsensemedia.org.*
2.   Tony Reinke, *12 Ways Your Phone is Changing You* (Wheaton: Crossway 2017), 16.

- It often leads to an unhealthy emphasis of wanting to have many friends. The number of friends we have can become a status symbol, making us feel important or popular. Yet this is an attitude of pride and self-centeredness, not one of humility and genuine love for others. And, in fact, Jesus never told us to make friends—He told us to make disciples (Matt. 28:19)!
- It can produce "artificial" friendships—close friendships with people whom we don't actually know in "real" life.
- It can lead to sharing emotions prematurely or unwisely. What girls used to write in their personal diary, they now publish for the whole world to read. Yet Scripture tells us to guard our hearts diligently (Prov. 4:23).
- It can become an emotional addiction. An addiction is something that controls us, something we feel we cannot live without. *"All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient; all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any"* (1 Cor. 6:12).
- It can cause us to justify relationships with young men that we normally would consider to be unwise or unhealthy.
- It can become an area of independence. It's our own "world" that others don't know about. Yet any area of life in which we have no accountability is always a dangerous thing.
- It can lead to a double or hypocritical life. We are one person at home and a totally different person online.
- It can cause us to become very "me" focused as we share with others countless details about our lives. Pride often creeps in undetected. Ultimately, it is not important for everyone to know how we're feeling or what we ate for breakfast. What *is* important is that we help others focus on Christ.
- It often leads us to waste time or miss out on other more important things that are going on around us.
- It can breed discontentment. On social media we see what others want us to see: beautiful photos and posts showing close-to-perfect lives. This can create unrealistic expectations and cause us to feel that we need to compete in order to keep up with others.
- It teaches us to be constantly "multi-tasking." When working on multiple projects at the same time, we might think that we're being more productive, but much research has been done demonstrating

that we are actually less productive. It takes mental time and energy to switch from project to project, and we tend to be easily distracted and only half-heartedly focused on each task. Scripture reminds us, *"And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord..."* (Col. 3:23). As Jim Elliot said, "Wherever you are, be all there."

Guarding Your Heart

A mother came up to me recently and said, "If my daughter was receiving a letter in the mail every single day from a boy at our church, I would be uncomfortable. I wouldn't consider this to be an acceptable friendship at this time in my daughter's life, when she is seeking to guard her heart and not begin any romantic relationships. So why should I be comfortable if my daughter is receiving messages online every single day from young men at our church?"

I thought this mother asked a good question. How much online communication is wise for young ladies to have with young men? Maybe the "distance" and the fact that everyone else considers it normal makes it seem inconsequential. But the principle in Scripture still remains: guard your heart!

Another mother wrote me a letter saying she was concerned about the amount of time her daughter was spending interacting with her guy friends online. "I wonder about the wisdom and dangers of constantly checking social media and reading all these guys' updates," she said. This mother went on to say that her daughter and her friends didn't seem to think twice about this excessive amount of communication online and didn't seem to think it made any difference if the time was spent in interaction with guys as opposed to girls. "Our daughter sees no problem," the mom continued, "because it's just a way to keep in touch, and so many Christians are doing it."

A 17-year-old friend of mine told me, "Sarah, I had no idea how I had become emotionally attached to a particular young man, simply because we were emailing each other frequently. The young man and I had both agreed it was nothing more than a casual friendship. My parents also approved and said they felt this email friendship was okay. I even used a general email account so that my parents could read our correspondence. But when he left for college and the emails stopped, I felt crushed. It was really hard. The amazing

thing is that I hadn't even realized the emotional attachment that had developed."

Keep in mind that girls can give away emotions just as easily online as in person or when out on dates. In fact, they often share their emotions more freely online. Many young people write things in texts, on social networking sites, or in emails that they would never speak in person.

Here are a few questions to ask ourselves as we evaluate our texting or online interaction with guy friends:

- Am I communicating with my parents about my friendships? Do they have any cautions?
- Do my words edify my brothers in Christ and point them to the Lord? Or are my words flirtations, rude, gossipy, or self-focused?
- Am I pouring out my heart or sharing deep feelings with guy friends? Am I looking to these friendships to satisfy my emotional needs?
- Am I finding security and approval in friendships or in Christ?
- Am I leading a guy on by my communication with him?
- Am I careful and intentional in my guy friendships or just mindlessly having fun?
- Am I seeking the Lord about what *He* wants me to do, or simply doing what everyone else is doing?

"But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment" (Matt. 12:36).

"In the multitude of words there wanteth not sin: but he that refraineth his lips is wise" (Prov. 10:19).

"A fool uttereth all his mind: but a wise man keepeth it in till afterwards" (Prov. 29:11).

Be Aware of Predators

When you meet a guy online, you have no idea of his true character. He could be a totally different person than he is claiming to be, and you would have no way of knowing this. You don't know whether he is telling the truth or outright lies. Many girls have no idea of what a huge danger this actually is. There are men who are predators, who are deceiving young girls for their own selfish purposes. They know all the right things to say to thoroughly mislead young ladies. This is very concerning and

dangerous—and it's more common than you probably realize. Just this afternoon, as I was writing this paragraph, I learned of a tragic situation of a young woman I know from a Christian home who ran away with a young man with whom she had begun an online acquaintance. This is serious. It is dangerous. And it is happening.

Set No Wicked Thing Before Your Eyes

In 2 Timothy 2:22 we are warned, *"Flee also youthful lusts: but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart."* What does Scripture say our response should be to youthful lusts? Flee! Run the opposite direction as fast as you can. Do not stay and linger around. Do not get close to it. Do not look at it. Get away! The Internet is full of impure pictures, evil and inappropriate content, and much that compromises God's righteousness. Scripture is clear that we should stay completely away from those things which defile our hearts and minds. *"For it is a shame even to speak of those things which are done of them in secret"* (Eph. 5:12). *"I will set no wicked thing before mine eyes"* (Ps. 101:3).

We need to be resolute in our commitment to purity online. I strongly suggest that you talk with your parents about getting a secure and reliable Internet filter. This is important because it is very easy to get to an impure site accidentally. If you do see something online that you didn't intend to see, it is important to tell your parents.

Another frustrating thing is that sometimes even good sites have inappropriate ads that pop up on them. It is easy to get so used to seeing evil, that it doesn't even bother us anymore—we learn to tolerate it. But we should not tolerate evil! We should flee from it. Stay away from anything impure or questionable. Ask your parents to keep you accountable.

"I would have you wise unto that which is good, and simple concerning evil" (Rom. 16:19). *"Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good"* (Rom. 12:9).

Guard Your Time

Time is the passing of life. None of us want to waste our lives—do we? Yet, we don't seem to think much about wasting some time. We rarely stop to realize that when we waste our time, we are wasting our lives. We are going to stand before the Lord one day and give an

account for how we used this most precious resource He gave us—our time.

When a thief breaks into a house, he goes after the most valuable possessions—right? He usually doesn't steal the paper plates, the toys, or the table decorations, rather he looks for the expensive jewelry, the electronic equipment, and the silver or gold. Satan is a thief (Jn. 10:10). He is trying to steal our time because he knows how valuable it is. He is crafty, often trying to steal minutes, rather than hours. He tries to bring along things that are "good" to steal our time, so that we cannot focus on what is "best." Be aware of his strategies and be vigilant in protecting this resource God has given.

"See then that ye walk [carefully], not as fools, but as wise, Redeeming the time, because the days are evil" (Eph. 5:15–16). Redeeming the time is not merely time management. It is "buying" time from one thing, in order to invest it in another. In other words, it requires sacrificing *less* important activities to purchase time for *more* important activities.

Social media and modern technology are among the biggest tools the enemy uses to steal away the time of this generation.

How often do we neglect something we know we should do, using the excuse that we are too busy?

- *"I'd like to be more involved at church, but I'm just too busy."*
- *"I am planning to spend more time studying and memorizing Scripture, but I never seem to be able to fit it into my day."*
- *"I know I should be spending more time with my brothers and sisters, but my schedule is already way too full."*
- *"I'd like to disciple one of the younger girls at my church, but I don't have time."*
- *"I would like to help out more at home, but I'm too busy."*
- *"I'm planning to go out witnessing sometime, but I can never fit it into my schedule."*

It's so easy to say things like this, and yet, at the very same time, manage to find 45 minutes to spend online. It can happen without us even realizing it. We allow the valuable years of our youth to disappear as we allow precious minutes to be eaten up online every day. My question is, will we look back one day and see that we were too "busy" to fulfill the truly most important things God had given us to do?

Possible Safeguards to Build into Your Life

- Don't get online until after your morning devotions.
- Close your Internet browser and set aside your phone while you are working on important projects, school work, etc.
- Set personal guidelines/limits for time spent texting and online. Example: One friend told me that she decided to cut out all social media on Sundays and spend extra time in God's Word instead. Another friend shared with me that social media had been taking up too much of her time. She'd click on one post which would lead her to another post which would lead her to a video and so on. After she set some personal limits for herself, things really improved for her.
- Make a chart of how many hours you spend daily on the computer, phone, etc.
- Choose a certain time in the evening at which you will stop all activities online and on your phone. It is especially easy to waste time at night when the day's work is done. We should consider carefully how we use our relaxed time. Example: Most of us have a list of good, edifying books packed with biblical teaching which we hope to read "someday." Are we making time to read posts on social media, but missing out on these classics of the faith? An even more important question to ask ourselves is: are we spending more time online than we are spending reading God's Word?
- Ask your parents what kind of guidelines they want for your use of social media and technology.
- Create accountability by using the computer in an open place (e.g., in the living room vs. the bedroom).
- Give your parents all your usernames and passwords.
- Ask someone to keep you accountable.
- Listen to the cautions of your parents and others. Example: a friend of mine joined a social networking site, but she found that it was a big distraction to her because she was always wanting to check and see if she had any new comments. Her parents noticed that this was consuming much of her thought and energy, and they asked if this particular site was really necessary. As she weighed the advantages and disadvantages, she began to

realize that, in her case, it was something the enemy was using as a distraction in her life. She listened to her parents' cautions and decided to stop using it altogether.

- Be aware of the example you are setting to others.
  Example: my friend was considering joining a particular social networking site online, knowing that she would be careful to use it in moderation. But then as she thought of some of the younger girls who looked up to her, she decided that in her case it would be better not to be part of it at all. She might be able to use it wisely herself, but if some of her younger friends followed her example, she felt that it could easily be a stumbling block to them.
- Go on a social media fast where for a certain period of time (perhaps a week or a month) you cut out all social media activity.
- If your phone or social media usage is a stumbling block in your life which you are not able to control, remember that we should take whatever action is necessary to eliminate sin from our lives. Jesus said, *"And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee; for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell"* (Matt. 5:29).

Use Technology for God's Glory

Though numerous dangers exist with technology, there are also many ways you can glorify the Lord through your Internet usage. In everything you do, remember that, as a Christian, you represent Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 5:20). What do others discern about your character and priorities in life by scrolling through things you have posted online? Is it immediately obvious that you are an ambassador of Christ? Or does it look like you are an ambassador of yourself? Remember, we do not want to be simply a "cleaner version" of the world. No, our life isn't about us anymore at all! We are in Christ. Our lives *belong* to Him and are *defined* by Him, and our goal in life is to point people to Him!

In conclusion, here are a few questions to ask yourself:
- How can I use social media to bring honor to Christ?
- How can I use my phone as a tool to serve God?
- How can I use technology to help fulfill the great commission?
- How can I use social media to help my friends grow in Christ?