

A man and a woman are sitting on a light-colored sofa in a room filled with bookshelves. The man, on the right, has a beard and is wearing a blue t-shirt and jeans. He is holding a tablet and looking at it. The woman, on the left, is wearing a red sweater and jeans, and is also looking at the tablet. The background is filled with bookshelves containing many books of various colors. The floor is made of light-colored wood.

# Lurking and loving on social media

*parenting in a digital age II*

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## Do you discuss your social media use with your teenagers?

Do you lurk on Facebook? Are you a keen Instagram follower, consuming others' posts while rarely contributing yourself? Or maybe you are an enthusiastic poster that has possibly dabbled in the occasional 'over-sharing'. Do you sometimes, if you are honest, post out of a kind of pride—more from self-love than from love of others, and wanting to be validated by being seen in a certain way?

Do you discuss your social media use with your teenagers? In this article I explore ways in which we can engage with, and post, wisely, and if it's possible to honour God as we post on Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, etc. I have struggled with the above questions myself (particularly with my use of Instagram) and I will be seeking to walk my children through the following questions when it comes time for them to consider engaging with social media, and how they approach posting.

### Questions to ask before we post

1. **Do I really need to make this post?** What is my motivation? If I knew that I was not going to get any response at all, would I still press send?
2. **Will this post enhance existing relationships?** Or will it be sort of replacing existing relationships? Will this post be an expression of me using the electronic to escape the personal?
3. **Will this post present an authentic me?** Or is this post presenting a crafted me which projects a more favourable me double?
4. **Will the nature of this post match the medium?** Social media is much more like a soap box or speaking from a stage than it is like an over-the-back-fence conversation. It's all too easy to under-appreciate its public broadcasting nature.
5. **Will my post stir up a few people—not just my followers but potentially those that they forward the post on to?** Though it may not always be a problem to stir up debate, have I weighed up the impact and the consequences?
6. **Will I regret this post?** As there is no delete key once the post key is pressed, have I looked at the comment from all angles and assessed how much emotion I have invested that I might regret?

7. **Will my post pass the grandma test?** Would I be happy to have this post written out, popped into an envelope, and sent to my grandma with a note saying, "Hi Grandma, this is the sort of thing that I say online"?

8. **Will my post build others up, or might it bring some people down?** How will my post make my 'friends' feel, not about me, but about themselves?

### Promoting the good news

There are great opportunities to share the good news on social media. However, I am not meaning to suggest that we must always be 'preaching'. Sometimes it will just be by being courageously authentic about our faith and life. Sometimes we might actively speak into injustice that might be occurring. Other times, there might even be an opportunity to specifically promote Jesus. So a question to also consider might be, "Do I have an opportunity to share my faith and possibly even highlight Jesus in this post?"

### Digital discernment

In an article in the previous edition of *Nurture*, I highlighted the need for being discerning about the effects of social media use. Even when we are using it well, technology still has a shaping influence on us, hence our need to be discerning about the design and worldview assumptions woven into it. I gave the example that even though social media is creating an increase in *connectivity*—with more and more followers—we may be experiencing a shallowing of the amount of genuine *connection* with real people. As parents, let's continue to nurture discussions around both digital discernment in general, and the effects of our posting in particular. \*

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