

4 Tips for Going on a Low-Tech 'Media Diet' During Christmas

These days, I think the song "Jingle Bells" might start like this:

"Dashing through the snow, with a high-def touchscreen display, o'er the fields we go, tweeting and texting all the way. Bells on smartphones ring, making bandwidth bright, what fun it is to stare and cling to a virtual world tonight ..."

Silver bells, tinsel and mistletoe are being replaced with smartphones, tablets, computers and social media. Our youth are catching on to the technology-driven era at younger and younger ages. They pay more attention to screens than people.

In fact, one toy maker rolled out a bouncy seat for infants with a built-in iPad holder. My co-worker told me his 2-year-old granddaughter toddled up to the TV to try and swipe it like an iPad. Another father in my office said his 18-month daughter knows how to unlock and navigate his smartphone.

A study conducted by the Common Sense Media group reported 72 percent of children ages 8 and younger have used a mobile device with 17 percent using the device daily.

When Jesus said to "Let the children come to me," I doubt he intended to give a slideshow from a mobile device with Wi-Fi.

Technology itself is not dangerous, and can be an important tool for our children's education. But, if we allow technology to get in between our parenting, then there will be problems.

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) released a statement saying children are "spending more time with media than they are in school ... more time with media than any activity other

than sleeping ... media has taken over the primary role of teaching kids from schools and parents.”

The average 8- to 10-year old spends nearly eight hours a day with a variety of different media and the AAP “continues to be concerned by evidence about potential harmful effects ...” noting excessive media use has been associated with obesity, lack of sleep, school problems, aggression and other behavior issues.”

While we’re gearing up for the holidays, let me suggest going on a media diet. Because as I look at our role model Jesus, his focus was to spend time with loved ones, teach through parables, pray and touch the untouchable. Here’s how it might look today:

Tips for a Low-Tech Christmas

1. Plan ahead for family time. Be intentional about spending time together, enjoying new or old traditions without phones, TV or other technology. I heard someone say once, “Quality time comes from quantity time” meaning that you have to invest time to get those precious memories that last a lifetime. By the way, you can create boundaries that allow moments with technology, like photographs and posting them together. But find ways to be together that doesn’t require technology. Heck, go outside and make a snowman. Take a family hike. Feed a family. Decorate the tree. Help at church together. Prepare and enjoy a meal together. Play a game. Do a puzzle. Shop and wrap gifts together.

2. Plan ahead for tech time. You don’t need to go on a media “starvation” diet. So allow flexibility for texting, posting, tweeting etc. for brief periods of time—in fact do it together! But don’t unplug your parenting when your kids plug in. Avoid letting your children to disappear to their rooms for hours on end. Put the computer in a “public” spot at home, so you can observe their online activity. Don’t let technology

replace your presence. You can also use technology to deliver the Christmas message, like watch the *Jesus* film on TV, or Google the “meaning of Christmas” or watch a Christmas service online as a family.

3. Reach out and touch someone, literally. Touch is a vital human need. Infants require it, as well as adults. Hold hands, hug, snuggle, put your arm around your children, playfully wrestle, play Twister or tag. There’s no way to replace a loving touch. Your kids won’t tell you, or act like they like it, but they do and they want that connection.

4. Talk. Conversations connect people. What we say matters. Actions often speak louder than words, but talking brings families together. Talk about Jesus. Remind your family about how God has worked in your life. Ask questions and listen. Be available to talk about issues. Talk about your favorite memories about your kids. Read the Bible version of Christ’s birth and talk about it. Pray together. Even if you talk about technology, you’ll connect in a relevant way.

Time. Touch. Talk. That’s how Jesus did it.

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