

How Facebook Makes You Lonely, Dishonest and Miserable

I absolutely love social media. My life is enriched in many ways through Facebook and its counterparts: Twitter, Instagram and all those new platforms out there that I don't yet know about (but that all the cool people are already using).

I love how it keeps me consistently in touch with people I care about. I love how it helps me reconnect with friends from the past. Even though it is sometimes polarizing, I love that my news feed allows me to discover information and content that like-minded people find to be meaningful. And, of course, I love it for the funny cat videos.

As much as I see the value of Facebook, I confess that there's a part of me that hates it. I hate what it does to my heart. You should hate what it does to your heart as well. In discreet and subtle ways, social media has the power to undermine some of the things that your soul is most longing for: friendship, character and lasting joy.

Social Media Can Make You Lonely

Facebook gives you a false sense of friendship. At the time of this writing, my Facebook profile declares that I have more than 2,200 friends. Truth be told, there are honestly about three people (beyond my family) who really know me, but my popularity on Facebook declares otherwise.

With social media, you can have thousands of friends but be very alone. You can "interact" on a website but go days or weeks without meaningful interaction with people. And because everybody's social life is displayed on your wall, you get to

watch as others go to parties or gather with friends. How depressing, especially for our teenagers!

The stakes are raised when you experience significant pain in life; pain that would benefit from some real, authentic community. But since you have all those friends, everyone will assume that someone else is walking through it with you. In those dark moments, you need more than what Facebook can offer. Trite comments like “I’m praying for you” just don’t cut it. You need someone to show up and get into the pit with you. Few people are willing to do that anymore. Their Netflix queue keeps them too busy.

Social Media Can Make You Dishonest

I hate that Facebook turns us into liars. We don’t tell blatant lies, but we typically only post the good parts of our lives. It’s not a full picture. It allows us to have a typical life that includes all of the good and bad parts, but present to the world a life that declares “all is well.” The danger is that you experience your good/bad life, but only see the good life of others.

Twitter makes things worse. It’s impossible to share your experience or feelings in 140 characters or less. Most things in our lives are a lot more complex than that.

Instagram actually encourages the unhealthy practice of seeing everything through “rose-colored glasses.” After all, if your picture doesn’t look right, you can use a “filter” to make everything look better than it actually is.

Using these tools inadvertently encourages us to present a false picture of our lives. By itself, this wouldn’t be that big of a deal if it wasn’t affecting our hearts so dramatically.

Social Media Can Make You Miserable

Our culture's tendency to only share the good stuff on social media has far-reaching implications to our emotional well-being. To be blunt, it has the real power to lead us into depression.

I could write a doctoral thesis on the emotional impact of "like" button. The power that tiny feature has to make us feel either good or bad about ourselves is absolutely mind-blowing. Nothing should have that much power. But I'll save that for another post.

The real problem is that scrolling through Facebook entices us to fall into the comparison trap. If my 2,000+ friends only post the good stuff from their lives, then my real life rarely measures up to anybody else's. Someone (not me) is always at the beach, always getting a new car, always seeing their kids achieve great things, etc. While my brain might know that these people also have difficult stuff in life, my emotions do not. And it depresses me.

It gets even worse if I do the same and only share the good stuff with my "friends." Everyone assumes everything is wonderful with me. Even when it's not.

Just like everyone else, our family has good days and bad days. Unfortunately, our Facebook-infused culture has turned us into dishonest people who rarely hurt out loud. And in this broken world we live in, this has the real power to make us lonely and miserable.

I'm going to keep on using Facebook because of the good things it brings to my life. But I'm going to pray that God helps me to remember that what I see there is rarely an accurate picture of what is actually happening in the lives of those I love. More importantly, I'm going to ask God to help me to look a little deeper and care a little more about the real

life pain that is likely present behind the facade of every person's Facebook wall.

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