

Copyright © 2023 Jeffrey Michael Kelly

All rights reserved. The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary has permission to reproduce and disseminate this document in any form by any means for purposes chosen by the Seminary, including, without limitation, preservation or instruction.

HOW THE DISCIPLINE OF KOINONIA STRENGTHENS
THE CHURCH TO OVERCOME THE RISE OF THE
SELF AS PROMOTED BY SOCIAL MEDIA

A Thesis
Presented to
the Faculty of
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Educational Ministry

by
Jeffrey Michael Kelly
December 2023

APPROVAL SHEET

HOW THE DISCIPLINE OF KOINONIA STRENGTHENS
THE CHURCH TO OVERCOME THE RISE OF THE
SELF AS PROMOTED BY SOCIAL MEDIA

Jeffrey Michael Kelly

Read and Approved by:

Faculty Supervisor: Donald S. Whitney

Second Reader: Joseph C. Harrod

Defense Date: October 23, 2023

To my wife, Leyanah,
and our children, Will, Emma, Grant, and Kate

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
PREFACE.....	vi
Chapter	
1. INTRODUCTION.....	1
Familiarity with the Literature	4
Void in the Literature.....	12
Thesis Statement	12
Outline of Chapters	13
2. A THEOLOGICAL DEFENSE OF A “KOINONIAIC- FORMATION” OF THE SELF	15
Introduction.....	15
The Biblical Concept of the Self.....	17
Biblical Group Formation	20
The Formation of the Self through the Church	29
Conclusion.....	32
3. SOCIAL MEDIA: AN ANCENSTRAL OVERVIEW AND THREAT ASSESSMENT.....	34
Introduction.....	34
The Birth of Social Networking, the Internet, and Social Media.....	37
Social Media Bends Time and Space.....	44
The Underlying Threat of Social Media	45
Conclusion.....	54

Chapter	Page
4. THE MODERN SELF AND THE ROLE OF KOINONIA.....	56
Introduction.....	56
A Deeper Understanding of the Modern Self.....	57
Social Media’s Impact on the Body.....	65
The Church.....	79
Conclusion.....	83
5. IMPLICATIONS FOR THE CHURCH.....	85
The Identity and the Life of the Church.....	88
Practical Implications for the Believer.....	99
Conclusion.....	115
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	119

PREFACE

I began my doctoral work as a means of becoming a better practitioner of the Word of God. To this end, I chose the concentration of Biblical Spirituality. I was pleased and surprised by how personal and impactful this concentration was in shaping my own spiritual life as a husband, father, friend, and pastor. In short, this course work was the impetus used by God to help me become a more spiritually disciplined man.

I am eternally grateful for the teaching and mentorship of Dr. Donald S. Whitney, whose own discipline exemplifies the spirit of the course work. I appreciate his time and guidance through this project and in helping me become a better writer, thinker, and man fit for ministry.

I am also indebted to my wife, Leyanah, and our four children, Will, Emma, Grant, and Kate, for their support. While being fully observable and transparent, their real-world, real-time, flesh-and-blood experiences with social media and the church helped shape this thesis. In a sense, I wrote this thesis to help families like my own, whose lives are being radically impacted by the outside world.

Lastly, I would also like to thank Dr. R. Albert Mohler Jr., and the faculty and staff at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary for their relentless pursuit of providing a place of higher learning that is God-honoring in its academic rigor, and above all, its orthodoxy.

Jeffrey M. Kelly

Greenville, South Carolina

December 2023

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The Westminster Shorter Catechism states that the chief end of man is “to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever.”¹ However, in pursuit of greater joy, Adam and Eve, unsatisfied with their identity as created beings and living in relationship with a sovereign God, chose to defy God’s command and commit sin. Simply put, Eve was tempted because she wanted more out life; Adam, with her, ate of the fruit, willfully sinning. Eve wanted to experience more out of life, and Adam was willing to go along with her. Both were unsatisfied with their created identity and thought greater joy existed outside of God’s created order—and so, both Adam and Eve sought a new identity. Since the fall of Adam and Eve, humanity has exchanged a healthy perspective of identity in God with an unhealthy perspective of one’s identity in the self.² This exchange is driven by mankind’s vain pursuit of greater joy. However, Scripture is clear that true joy is found in Christ and by extension the body of Christ, the church.³ If one is to enjoy God to

¹ “Westminster Shorter Catechism,” A Puritan’s Mind, accessed July 7, 2021, <http://www.apuritansmind.com/westminster-standards/shorter-catechism/>.

² The *self* is a reference to the individual. *Individualism* is defined differently by different philosophers and will be addressed in subsequent chapters. Throughout this paper, the *self* is a generic phrase for the individual who seeks to identify in terms of feeling or rational thought.

³ First John 1:3-4 says, “That which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed, our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.” Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations come from the English Standard Version.

John Stott, in his commentary on the Epistles of John, writes that the preaching of the gospel in v. 2 was not to eternal life but to fellowship. He states, “The proclamation was not an end in itself; its purpose, immediate and ultimate, is now defined. The immediate is fellowship (*koinonia*, 3), and the ultimate joy (*chara*, 4). . . . The purpose of the proclamation of the gospel is, therefore, stated in terms not of salvation but of *fellowship*.” John R. W. Stott, *The Letters of John*, 2nd ed., Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, vol. 19 (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity, 1988), 67. This fellowship, Stott maintains, is the purpose of eternal life: fellowship with God and all the saints.

the fullest on earth and for all eternity, then one must settle the matter of identity. To help, Christ has gifted mankind with the church, in part so that man can be assured of his identity as being in Christ thereby allowing man to experience the full joy that can be found only in Christ.

The church is the physical representation of the greater spiritual reality that exists in Christ. Living in community, in a local church with other believers, one finds a connection to one's Creator. Belonging to the church is summed up in the biblical Greek word *koinonia*, which is usually translated "fellowship." Biblical fellowship helps repentant sinners find their identity in Christ.⁴ At the root, biblical fellowship means to share.⁵ In the New Testament, biblical fellowship is said to exist when believers share life together and enjoy, affirm, and celebrate their identity in Christ.⁶ A believer's identity in Christ stands in contradistinction to the worldly philosophy that identity is sourced in the self. However, like Adam and Eve, any attempt to discover or develop identity outside of Christ will ultimately fall flat and lead to ruin.

Social media⁷ is one such attempt created by man to help people discover, develop, and even create a new identity. This is done by giving people access to the tools

⁴ This thesis uses the phrase *biblical fellowship* as the English equivalent to the Greek word *κοινωνία*. See Gal 2:9; Phil 1:5; 3:10; Phlm 6; 1 John 1:3-7.

⁵ *κοινωνός* means "fellow," "participant." It implies fellowship or sharing with someone or in something. Friedrich Hauck, "κοινός, κοινωνός, κοινωνέω, κοινωνία, συγκοινωνός, συγκοινωνέω, κοινωνικός, κοινωνώ," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 797.

⁶ R. P. Martin, "Communion," in *New Bible Dictionary*, ed. D. R. W. Wood et al. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1996). In the NT the basic term, translated variously as "communion," "fellowship," "communicate," "partake," "contribution," "common." References to a common sharing in direct spiritual realities are Phil 1:7; 1 Pet 5:1; and 2 Pet 1:4, although in the first text the "grace" in question may be that of apostleship in which both the apostle and church share, and of which Paul writes in Rom 1:5; Eph 3:2, 8.

⁷ For the purposes of this thesis, I will use *Merriam Webster's Dictionary* for the definition of social media, which is "forms of electronic communication (such as websites for social networking and microblogging) through which users create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages, and other content (such as videos)." Merriam-Webster, "Social Media," accessed November 17, 2021, <https://www.merriamwebster.com/dictionary/social%20media>. Tufts University defines social media as "the means of interactions among people in which they create, share, and/or exchange information

they need to chisel out how they want to be identified. In this way, social media users desire to find affirmation of their chosen identity, which leads to acceptance, which in turn leads to their joy.

While social media architects design their products to provide a social experience that produces joy for the end user, the results show that it does just the opposite.⁸ Because of this unintended result, increased usage of social media such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat, and others highlights a growing concern that social media is having an adverse effect on the end user. One such adverse effect is identity confusion. Social media allows people to be someone they are not. Also, there is a temptation to find value in things outside of God's created design. Additionally, social media outlets create opportunities for Christians to develop a pseudo-fellowship in the digital domain that may replace biblical fellowship with the church to which they belong. This can result in further eroding the role biblical fellowship plays in sanctification of believers as more Christians turn from human interaction in their local church to

and ideas in virtual communities and networks." Tufts Communications and Marketing, "Social Media Overview," November 3, 2021, <https://communications.tufts.edu/marketing-and-branding/social-media-overview/#:~:text=Social%20media%20refers%20to%20the.Instagram%2C%20LinkedIn%20and%20YouTube%20accounts>

⁸ David Ginsberg and Moira Burke explain,

In one experiment, University of Michigan students randomly assigned to read Facebook for 10 minutes were in a worse mood at the end of the day than students assigned to post or talk to friends on Facebook. A study from UC San Diego and Yale found that people who clicked on about four times as many links as the average person, or who liked twice as many posts, reported worse mental health than average in a survey. (David Ginsberg and Moira Burke, "Hard Questions: Is Spending Time on Social Media Bad for Us?," Meta, December 15, 2017, <https://about.fb.com/news/2017/12/hard-questions-is-spending-time-on-social-media-bad-for-us/last>)

Amy Crouch and Andy Crouch write, "Sixty-eight percent of teens and young adults agree that electronic devices keep us from having real conversations." Amy Crouch and Andy Crouch, *My Tech-Wise Life* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2020), 66. Ginsberg and Burke quote psychologist Sherry Turkle who asserts that mobile phones redefine modern relationships, making us "alone together." Sherry Turkle, quoted in Ginsberg and Burke, "Hard Questions." Is social media doing the same thing? In other words, is social media, like the smartphone, giving people the best of both worlds: alone time and togetherness at the same time? In October 2021, Facebook employer and whistleblower Francis Haugen, testifying before a Senate Panel, said, "I believe that Facebook's products harm children." Anya Kamenetz, "Facebook's Own Data Is Not as Conclusive as You Think about Teens and Mental Health," NPR, October 6, 2021, <https://www.npr.org/2021/10/06/1043138622/facebook-instagram-teens-mental-health>.

interaction online, physically alone, and possibly with a spiritually mixed audience. Finally, social media is not designed for the promotion of one's spiritual development as in the local church, but rather for whatever spiritual and secular ideologies interest the end user.

As believers exchange their experience of face-to-face biblical fellowship in the church for connections online, they can be tempted to forfeit confidence in their identity in Christ and run a greater risk of developing an individualist identity apart from the church. In response to this, this thesis will seek to show the connection between biblical fellowship and one's identity in Christ, and how identity in Christ leads to joy. Further it will attempt to demonstrate how social media promotes a culture of self, how that culture of the self adversely affects a believer's joy in Christ, and finally, what steps can be taken to ensure that social media does not adversely affect a believer's identity in Christ and by extension weaken the testimony of the church.

Familiarity with the Literature

Identity matters. Scripture starts with a significant statement on identity: "In the beginning God created," and he created man—first, in the image and likeness of the Creator (Gen 1–2). Then, in Genesis 2, the reader learns that Adam was made from dirt and brought to life by the very breath of God. It can be said the first man—Adam—was an admixture of the temporal and eternal; part earthly and part supernatural. After Adam's fall, mankind continues to bear these temporal and eternal traits, which makes the human being complex because mankind is not just temporal, lost among the stars, here by accident, and destined to disappear. The Bible is clear from its earliest chapters that humans get their identity from God and live in relation to God. This helps one understand the grand narrative of Scripture: creation, fall, redemption, and restoration. It also gives mankind hope and purpose. Based on these considerations, one can look at identity as a fixed, rigid, and comprehensible thing. Believers know who created them,

who they belong to, who they answer to, and where they are heading. All other views of humanity, no matter how well-intended, are a suppression of that truth.

Works on Philosophy and Psychology

Modern psychologists have attempted to make sense of identity and the self outside of Scripture, but end up perplexed. For example, William James, who is considered the father of modern psychology's view of the self and personality, attempted in *Principles of Psychology* to offer a comprehensive treatment of identity. However, he would say later that his work was really never "finished."⁹ For the next two decades he continued to develop his views of the self and personality.¹⁰ Eric Erikson, one of the leading psychologists on the subject of identity in the twentieth century, wrote in *Identity: Youth and Crisis*, "The more one writes about this subject [identity], the more the word becomes a term for something as unfathomable as it is all-pervasive."¹¹ Particularly helpful to this thesis are those who have offered some concepts of the modern self, such as David Kinnaman, president of the Barna Group, Scott Degraffenreid analyst and statistician, Carl Rogers, father of Humanistic Philosophy, and more significantly Charles Taylor, whose books, *Modern Social Imaginaries* and *Sources of the Self* attempt to make sense of the modern self.

A significant underpinning of the concept of the modern self offered by Taylor is the work of seventeenth-century French philosopher René Descartes, who is regarded as the founder of modern philosophy. Descartes argued for a dualism that posits that the immaterial mind and the material body were different substances that interact with each

⁹ David E. Leary, "William James on the Self and Personality: Clearing the Ground for Subsequent Theorists, Researchers, and Practitioners," in *Reflections on the Principles of Psychology: William James after a Century*, ed. William James, Michael G. Johnson, and Tracy B. Henley (Hillsdale, NJ: L. Erlbaum Associates, 1990), 101.

¹⁰ Leary, "William James on Self and Personality," 101

¹¹ Eric H. Erikson, *Identity: Youth and Crisis* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1968), 9.

other.¹² For Descartes, the essence of human identity is wrapped up in one’s ability to think. He famously said, “*Cogito ergo sum*,” “I think, therefore I am.” He elaborates, “I am therefore, precisely speaking, only a thinking thing, that is, a mind, understanding, or reason, terms whose signification was before unknown to me. I am, however, a real thing, and really existent; but what thing?”¹³ For Descartes the ability to reason was in line with Socrates and sufficient to explain identity—that humans are thinking beings.

Works on Identity, the Church, and Koinonia

Christianity is a personal religion with a shared ideology and practice, making it a corporate religion. Unlike the world, a believer’s ideology and practice are informed by Scripture, but the church is more than creedal—it is also incarnational. This incarnational component of the church is manifest in part through the biblical fellowship of the church. The church expresses itself as a living body that shares life. By belonging to the church, a believer experiences what it means in earthly terms to belong to God.

Jerry Bridges in his book *True Community: The Biblical Practice of Koinonia* takes a deep dive into the issue of fellowship within the church and how fellowship is richer and deeper than mere socialization. Fellowship involves the exchange of spiritual blessings namely in terms of possessions, time, energy, and gifts. Bridges states, “God incorporates us into the body of Christ. He places us in a community relationship with all other believers in which we together share a common life in Christ. . . . This objective aspect of fellowship, however, is intended to provide a basis for experiential fellowship. . . . God intends for us to be active participants in the body.”¹⁴

¹² Descartes borrowed this “Cartesian Dualism” from Greek thought. Cartesian is the Latin form of the name Descartes.

¹³ Douglas Groothuis, *Philosophy in Seven Sentences: A Small Introduction to a Vast Topic* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2016), 18.

¹⁴ Jerry Bridges, *True Community: The Biblical Practice of Koinonia* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2012), 85.

Yosep Kim's *The Identity and Life of the Church: John Calvin's Ecclesiology in the Perspective of His Anthropology* examines John Calvin's *Institutes* III and IV as well as other related passages in Calvin's writings. Kim mainly addresses Calvin's idea of the visible identity of the fellowship of the church as the body of Christ and its functional identity as the "mother of all believers."¹⁵ Kim maintains that Calvin argues that "true and sound wisdom consists of the knowledge of God and of ourselves."¹⁶ Furthermore, he lays out Calvin's argument for the relationship between Christians and Christ as the bedrock of a believer's identity. This is all rooted in the fellowship or *koinonia* of the church.

Richard Lovelace, emeritus professor of church history at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, argues in *Dynamics of Spiritual Life: An Evangelical Theology of Renewal* that the church, since its inception, has practiced *koinonia* as a means of spiritual growth.¹⁷ He further points out that what the apostles practiced became the model for men like Luther, Count Zinzendorf, John Wesley, and others. Lovelace states,

What is important is not the mechanism or community, but the principle articulated in the body metaphor used by Paul in 1 Corinthians 12 and Ephesians 4. The latter passage makes it quite clear that full spiritual vitality cannot be present in the church until its macrocommunities and microcommunities consist of fully developed networks of Christians who are exercising their gifts and contributing to one another, so that the whole body, joined and knit together by every joint with which it is supplied, when each part is working properly, makes bodily growth and upbuilds itself in love.¹⁸

¹⁵ Yosep Kim, *The Identity and the Life of the Church: John Calvin's Ecclesiology in the Perspective of His Anthropology* (Cambridge: Lutterworth, 2014), 1. For a review of Kim's work, see Inseo Song, review of *The Identity and the Life of the Church: John Calvin's Ecclesiology in the Perspective of His Anthropology* by Yosep Kim, *Sixteenth Century Journal* 46, no. 3 (Fall 2015): 838-83.

¹⁶ Kim, *The Identity and the Life of the Church*, 19.

¹⁷ Richard Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life: An Evangelical Theology of Renewal* (Madison, WI: InterVarsity, 1979), 167.

¹⁸ Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life*, 166.

Lovelace effectively argues that the early church was a “commonwealth . . . which meant that the members were not being pulled apart by individual goals of success.”¹⁹ In other words, the fellowship or *koinonia* of the church had a magnetic effect on the members, attracting them and binding them together for the success of one another. That success was rooted and then fruited in love toward believers and toward God.

Works on Social Media

With the advent of social media, space has been created where Christians can be “alone together” while still belonging to a group. Jay Kim serves as lead pastor of teaching at Westgate Church in the Silicon Valley of California. In his book, *Analog Church: Why We Need Real People, Places, and Things in a Digital Age*, he argues how technology is creating this alone together model affecting the church. He writes,

Our unchecked pursuit of relevance isn’t only affecting the way we gather to worship. It is also changing our understanding of what it means to be a community. As more and more churches push headlong into online spaces, people are being asked not only to communicate but also to commune on digital platforms. . . . We’re changing the church experience from an extended meal at a dining table into a truncated series of tweets, and we’re losing our aptitude for nuance, generosity, and engagement.²⁰

The digital sphere, as Kim argues, is offering a form of digital-*koinonia*. This digital-*koinonia* is attractive because it offers fellowship without cost, sacrifice, and inconvenience and is void of necessary authenticity. More than that, the digital sphere allows the user to gain from others while only implying authenticity.

Tim Challies’s book, *The Next Story: Faith, Friends, Family, and the Digital World*, addresses the overwhelming power technology has on human identity and touches on the idea of authenticity. He writes,

Our digital technologies stand between to extend our ability to communicate. . . . As we do this, we extend ourselves beyond ourselves; we extend our mediated presence beyond our physical presence . . . but as we increasingly migrate to the digital world,

¹⁹ Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life*, 161.

²⁰ Jay Y. Kim, *Analog Church: Why We Need Real People, Places, and Things in the Digital Age* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2020), 8.

we find ourselves wrestling with new issues related to our identity, with how our digital presence relates to who we really are.²¹

In other words, social media has the benefit of allowing the user to control other's perceptions of them, even if that perception is not reality. Users control the narrative about themselves by controlling the content others see.

To illustrate this, in *Influencer: Building Your Personal Brand in the Age of Social Media*, Brittany Hennessy writes a how-to on becoming an influencer on social media. She starts by suggesting that users take control of their online identity by being the sole creator of content about themselves or being the sole provider of content about themselves. In this way, users can ensure that they are building a personal identity that will interest others.²² The goal of social media, according to Hennessy, is marketability. The value of creating a marketable identity allows influencers to benefit financially. Hennessy writes, "I once paid a dog \$32,000 for two Facebook posts, one Instagram post, and one tweet. It probably took his owner all of three minutes to take the photos and write the captions."²³ She cites another example: "I remember cutting a \$100,000 check for an influencer to shoot three YouTube videos."²⁴ This get-rich-quick nature of social media trickles down to all users. For instance, Hennessy is not in the business of social media to promote authenticity as much as to build viewership. This viewership means more money for search engines and social platforms in advertising sales. While many social media users will never see a dime from their posts, they do reap intrinsic rewards for being interesting. These rewards hook users. The intrinsic rewards offered by social media

²¹ Tim Challies, *The Next Story: Faith, Family, Friends in the Digital World* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), 97.

²² Brittany Hennessy, *Influencer: Building Your Personal Brand in the Age of Social Media* (New York: Kensington, 2018), 23.

²³ Hennessy, *Influencer*, ix.

²⁴ Hennessy, *Influencer*, ix.

platforms are more followers on platforms like Instagram and Twitter, and likes, views, and friends on Facebook.

As a result of social media's inherent nature to build a brand around an individual, it is tempting to post only the side of one's life that will gain more likes, more followers, and more social media friends. It is easy to see how the motive behind posting a particular picture or quote could be an attempt to create an alternative identity. While the question of a believer's identity is settled at the cross, and the cross defines a believer's struggles and successes, many believers manipulate that reality to identify as something less on social media for the express purpose of being more likable, thereby more joyful. One major challenge with social media is that users diminish their identity in Christ for an identity made up on social media. This new identity, which is less than what God intends, can be an inauthentic representation of the user. As Lovelace, Challies, and Kim argue, the point of biblical corporate *koinonia* is to engage with real people in real-time in the same space honestly, and with a measure of generosity for all. This allows others to see the person as an authentic incarnational expression of God's grace by making flaws and successes visible, and by accepting one another as a member of the church and the family of God. Social media, however, is designed to extract the believer from a meaningful identity found in Christ from the church and reorient them around an identity rooted in the individual. Therefore, social media promotes a social structure that adversely shapes the identity of individuals, which harms the church in contrast to the discipline of *koinonia* that shapes the identity of the believer in Christ promoting the health of the church.

Andy Crouch's *The Tech-Wise Family: Everyday Steps for Putting Technology in Its Proper Place* and Andy and Amy Crouch's *My Tech-Wise Life: Growing Up and Making Choices in a World of Devices* are two staples that layout the empirical data

along and helpful conclusions that help point parents toward solutions in navigating screentime and social media for their family.²⁵

Tony Reinke's book, *12 Ways Your Phone Is Changing You*, provides the reader with a wealth of wisdom and practical helps for the weary digitally overtaxed. He lays out in short form useful ways to control a device that often controls the user.²⁶

In her book *Alone Together*, MIT Professor Sherry Turkle gives the reader insight into the damaging effects of social media and technology, arguing that both social media and technology pull the user away from others, isolating them, creating irreparable personal harm.²⁷

Author Nicholas Carr offers a striking look at the physiological and mental effects of the internet in *The Shallows: What the Internet Is Doing to Our Brains*.²⁸ His insight helps the reader understand how social media and the internet are making users less able to think critically and enjoy social settings.

Adam Alter, in his book *Irresistible: The Rise of Addictive Technology and the Business of Keeping Us Hooked*,²⁹ argues that the business of big tech is to keep us on the hook by keeping the user scrolling, moving, clicking, and posting.

²⁵ Andy Crouch. *The Tech-Wise Family: Everyday Steps for Putting Technology in Its Proper Place*. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2017). Amy Crouch and Andy Crouch. *My Tech-Wise Life: Growing Up and Making Choices in a World of Devices*. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2021).

²⁶ Tony Reinke, *12 Ways Your Phone Is Changing You* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017).

²⁷ Sherry Turkle, *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other* (New York: Hachette, 2011).

²⁸ Nicholas G. Carr, *The Shallows: What the Internet Is Doing to Our Brains* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2019).

²⁹ Adam Alter, *Irresistible: The Rise of Addictive Technology and the Business of Keeping Us Hooked* (New York: Penguin, 2017).

Georgetown University Professor, Cal Newport, in *Digital Minimalism: Choosing a Focused Life in a Noisy World*,³⁰ offers hope to an over technologically taxed culture by suggesting practical methods to control one's digital consumption.

Void in Literature

I specifically want to deal with the role social media plays in shaping one's identity in contradistinction to the God-given role of the church through *koinonia* to help shape believers' identities. Therefore, the key void in the literature exists in the role of social media as a counter-influencer to the effect of *koinonia* in the church. Little has been written to address this adverse relationship, especially in its outcome of affecting the strength of the church. Ultimately, a void in the literature exists in showing how social media adversely affects the fellowship of the church, eroding one's understanding of identity in Christ, thereby causing weakness in the church.

Thesis Statement

For believers, understanding their identity in Christ produces joy. However, many believers act as though joy is circumstantial, elusive, and always in a state of flux. This belief negates the scriptural data that ties joy to a believer's identity in Christ and wrongfully places the responsibility of attaining joy in the inner self. For believers, individualism is absorbed in their new identity in Christ and in the church. However, for unbelievers, identity remains individualistic and becomes fixed to something apart from Christ (such as career, relationships, wealth). Because of the relative nature of identity, the world is always at a loss for true joy. Therefore, a believer seeking identity through temporal worldly means will forfeit joy. Social media is one relatively recent way in which the world promises identity in the pursuit of joy. However, social media often becomes little more than a vehicle for an individualistic pursuit of joy. This thesis seeks

³⁰ Cal Newport, *Digital Minimalism: Choosing a Focused Life in a Noisy World* (New York: Portfolio/Penguin, 2019).

to show how social media promotes a social structure that adversely shapes the identity of individuals, which in turn harms the joy of the believer and negatively affects the body of Christ. Finally, this thesis attempts to demonstrate the contrast between the negative effects of social media on a believer's identify with the positive effects of biblical fellowship.

Outline of Chapters

The following chapters will advance my thesis by surveying the role biblical fellowship plays in informing one's identity as a believer in light of the prevailing psychological and secular views on identity formation with special emphasis given to the role social media plays in shaping the identity of the individual.

Chapter 1: Introduction

This chapter begins the thesis by surveying a number of works regarding the concept of self, identity, biblical fellowship, and social media from a psychological, social, and theological viewpoint. It demonstrates that there is a void in the literature in regard to how social media reshapes a believer's identity to the detriment of the church.

Chapter 2: A Theological Defense of a Koinoniaic-Formation of the Self

This chapter will define the biblical usage of the term *self* and trace the concept of formation of the self through various biblical groups: the lives of Adam, Jacob, and the early disciples. And finally, I argue how the church, as a group, is specifically designed by God to form one's identity.

Chapter 3: Social Media: An Ancestral Overview and Threat Assessment

This chapter will focus on an ancestral overview of social media and its threat to the church. The intention is to demonstrate that social media is not a passive technology, but that it actively supplants what God established through *koinonia* in the

church by influencing mankind to find a new community liberated from religious chains. This society is an environment where the user can create an individual identity free from authoritarian or religious constraints.

Chapter 4: The Modern Self and the Role of Koinonia

This chapter seeks to show a contrast between the natural bent of the modern self and the opportunities the church has to rescue those who are adversely affected by social media and technology by establishing and advancing the spiritual discipline of *koinonia* or *κοινωνία*, or fellowship, in the church. First, tracing the philosophical thread of the self through time helps the church grasp the perduring nature of social media and understand social media's role in the rise of the self. This understanding should equip the church to address issues directly and indirectly related to social media's use by its members, and the church itself.

Chapter 5: Implications for the Church

This chapter will deal with the implications social media has on the practice of biblical fellowship. It will address current trends in the church in the use of social media and critically evaluate those trends. This chapter will also attempt to lay out foundational principles that will guide believers into healthy users of social media as a means of furthering biblical fellowship.

CHAPTER 2

A THEOLOGICAL DEFENSE OF A “KOINONIAIC-FORMATION” OF THE SELF

Introduction

A person’s identity is unique, personal, and in a constant state of formation.¹ While no two people are exactly alike, no one person is completely different or unique from all others. For example, individuals share physical traits with other people such as hair color, height, and common facial features making them look like someone else. More importantly, individuals also share beliefs, friends, a profession, or maybe a church with others, making the identity of an individual, to one degree or another, a collective of the community around them. So how should one think of the self?

To simplify, identity, or the self, can be thought of as a combination of natural and nurtured elements. Naturally, everyone begins life with some form of identity. In early infancy, for example, identity already exists; a set of biological parents, inherited DNA and related health issues, personality, gender, date of birth, weight and height, first, middle, and last name, a city and a country of birth, *et cetera*. From the earliest stages of life, and arguably even prior to one’s existence, a person’s natural identity is set by those biologically closest to that person and with no input from the infant. As children develop, their freedom to choose aspects of their identity grow and are nurtured by those around them. This is comforting, especially if one’s natural identity is less than impressive or, on the other hand, outstandingly impressive. In this way, it can be discouraging if one succeeds or fails, respectively, to live up to their family identity. As one grows beyond

¹ I use the term *Koinoniaic-formation* to refer to the influence the church has in the formation of the self, as opposed to the secular-formation of the self.

childhood, parental oversight, and into adulthood their identity continues to morph and shape. This happens as a person becomes more informed about the world around them, meets new people, travels to new places, and is exposed to new thoughts. Both natural and nurtured aspects of identity continue to shape “who one is.” However, things are never quite that simple. When lifting the hood, one finds the self to be even more complex.

For example, professor, philosopher, and cognitive scientist Paul Thagard, in his 2014 article in *Psychology Today*, suggests that the self is a “complex system operating at four different levels . . . [the] molecular, neural, psychological, and social.”² The molecular level is one’s genetic or epigenetic make-up, which can determine, as Thagard proposes, “personality traits and even mental illness.”³ The neural aspects are brain functions that “help people apply concepts to themselves and others and *also* use them for explanatory purposes.”⁴ Thagard argues, “We use concepts not only to categorize people but also to explain their behaviors.”⁵ The psychological level includes self-designated ways of labeling oneself. For example, does one see themselves as silly or serious, outgoing or reserved, confident or timid, and the like? Lastly, the social aspects are those “self-concepts and behaviors [that] all depend, in part, on the interactions you have with other people, including the ones who influence you and the ones from whom you want to differentiate yourself.”⁶ This final aspect is critical, especially in seeking to understand the value of social constructs or communities, including the church and social media. As I argue in this chapter, the church represents the primary group or community that defines and nurtures a believer’s identity.

² Paul Thagard, “What Is the Self?,” *Psychology Today*, June 23, 2014, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/hot-thought/201406/what-is-the-self>.

³ Thagard, “What Is the Self.”

⁴ Thagard, “What Is the Self.”

⁵ Thagard, “What Is the Self.”

⁶ Thagard, “What Is the Self.”

The self, therefore, is a confluence of psychosomatic, genetic, and social factors that make up a person. To unravel and address each source that shapes the self, as Thagard tries to do, would be to go beyond the scope of this work. This chapter strives to show how the spiritual discipline of *koinonia* helps strengthen the believer against the rise of self as promoted by social media. To this end, this chapter will define the biblical usage of the term *self*, trace the concept of formation of the self through various biblical groups: the life of Adam, Jacob, and the early disciples. And finally, I will attempt to argue how the church, as a group, is specifically designed by God to form one's identity. This will set the stage for chapters 3 and 4 that will argue how social media promotes an independent method of self-formation and how this independent method is incompatible with the "koinoniaic-formation" of the self found through active participation in the life of the local church.

The Biblical Concept of the Self

The Old Testament Usage of קֶרֶב [*qereb*]

The Hebrew word *qereb*, translated self, denotes the entrails of a person or animal, or the inner part of a group or city. Interestingly, this word is used "to parallel *lēb* (heart, Jer 9:8 [H 7]), *nepēš* (soul, Isa 26:9), and various other internal organs (frequently as seats of various psychological functions)."⁷ *Qereb* can also mean that which is in the center of something. *Qereb* is used this way in Habakkuk 3:2: "O LORD, I have heard the report of you, and your work, O LORD, do I fear. In the midst [*qereb*] of the years revive it; in the midst [*qereb*] of the years make it known; in wrath remember mercy."

Throughout the Old Testament, the phrase inmost self, קֶרֶב [*qereb*], takes on a wider semantic range over the course of time. For example, in Psalm 5:9, "For there is no truth in their mouth; their inmost self [*qereb*] is destruction; their throat is an open grave; they

⁷ Leonard J. Coppes, "2066 קֶרֶב," in *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, ed. R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke (Chicago: Moody, 1999), 813.

flatter with their tongue.” By the time of the psalmist *qereb* seems to have grown from just referring to the literal inward parts, or the center of something or of a person to a figurative meaning, suggesting that the self is a moral influencer.

For example, Proverbs 25:28 uses the third person singular pronoun “he, she, or it” [הוא, *huw*] with the word for spirit [רוח, *ruwach*] and the word for control [מַעְצָר, *ma’tsar*] to make the compound word *self-control*.⁸ In this verse, Solomon shows that the individual has a ruling relationship over his or her spirit. A person without self-control is one who is not ruling over their spirit. Therefore, Scripture explains that the spirit can be controlled by something other than the self, like anger, alcohol, or other people. In like manner, Exodus 32:13 couples the person’s action, “you swore” with the second person singular pronoun “you,” translated “whom *you swore by your own self*,” where the person is said to be acting on himself.

From these references one can make a few observations from the term translated *self* in the Old Testament. First, the *self* represents the inward parts of a person, but can range in meaning to include the body and soul or spirit,⁹ and focuses on the qualities of thought and emotion. Second, the *self* is the governing agent over the spirit. Lastly, the *self* is the source of personal action. In conclusion, the *self* is not subject to the whim of feeling or even the victim of personal choices; rather, the *self* is the curator of all that constitutes the person.

⁸ Proverbs 25:28 says, “A man without self-control is like a city broken into and left without walls.”

⁹ The argument of trichotomy versus dichotomy is irrelevant for this discussion. I am arguing that the person, in his entirety, is represented by the word *self*. Whether the soul and spirit are the same or different things does not change the fact that whatever parts make up a person are included in the concept of the self. For this paper, the words *soul* and *spirit* are used interchangeably, and the terms *body* and *spirit* are used to represent the self.

The New Testament Usage of ἄνθρωπος

Anthropos in the New Testament is often translated as man, person, or self, and figuratively points to the moral qualities of the self. For example, in 2 Timothy 3:2, “For people shall be *lovers of self*,” the phrase *lovers of self* is the single Greek compound word φίλαυτος (*philautos*). In this passage, Paul is instructing Timothy that in the last days men will grow more *selfish* and not others focused. Like the Old Testament, many verses use the phrase *self-control* to convey what kind of control the believer should exhibit over their spirit (2 Tim 3:3; 2 Pet 1:6; 1 Cor 9:25; Gal 5:23; 2 Tim 1:7; Titus 1:8).

Additionally, *anthropos* is used in combination with the words *old* and *new*. For example, Colossians 3:9 says, “Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the *old self* [ἄνθρωπος, *anthropos*], with its practices and [you] have put on the new self [*anthropos*], which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator.” The old self is referring to the man prior to salvation that is bound in sin, while the new self is the regenerated man born of the Spirit. In other passages the word *flesh* is the translation of *anthropos*, referring to the old self (1 Cor 3:3; 1 Pet 4:6).

Spiritual Formation

Both the Old and New Testament concept of the *self* represents the sum of a person: body and spirit. This includes the physical aspects of a person as well as the spiritual. The self is spiritual, and this spiritual component of the self is being formed. Romans 8:29a states, “For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his son.” The self is being formed to think like, love like, and treat our bodies like Christ did. Paul explains that this forming of the self is for a specific cause, “in order that he [Christ] might be the firstborn among many brothers” (Rom 8:29b). *Firstborn* is a word carrying two ideas. The first is that of first of importance because of his uniqueness. Christ is the most important of all of God’s children. Second lies the implication that there would be more children. Christ would not be the only son—there would be many others. The formation of self into the image of Christ is God’s way of

making much of His son. When the self is formed into this image, the individual is directly glorifying Jesus Christ. The self, however, does not form into the image of Christ on its own.

When one speaks of formation, one is speaking of sanctification—the process by which one is made more sanctified, holy, or like Jesus. This process of formation is not done in isolation from others. When tracing sanctification through the Bible, one will see how God forms individuals through groups. First (as will be shown below), Adam who is formed spiritually through marriage and family, then Jacob, as an extension of Adam’s family, develops into a nation, and ultimately this Jewish nation is formed into a church or the new family of God, along with Gentiles, in the New Testament.¹⁰ These groups serve a purpose. For Adam’s family it was to subdue and take dominion of the earth. For the nation of Israel, it was to subdue and take dominion of the Promised Land. And now, for the church, it is to advance the kingdom with the gospel. Therefore, a believer’s identity today must be viewed through the goal of advancing the kingdom by pointing people in every tongue, tribe, and nation to Christ.¹¹

Biblical Group Formation

God Creates Man into His Image as a Social Being (Gen 1:26-31; 2:7)

Genesis 1:26-31 presents the creation of man at the beginning of history. Verse 27 says, “God created man.” The Hebrew word בָּרָא [*bara*] translated “created,” denotes the concept of “initiating something new.”¹² Gerhard Von Rad states in his commentary on Genesis that “the use of the verb *bara* in v. 27 receives its fullest significance for that

¹⁰ The church, founded by Christ, was originally made up of Jewish believers. Only through time did Gentiles come to populate the church. Paul addresses this phenomenon in Eph 2.

¹¹ In chaps. 3 and 4 of this project I will show how social media was designed to form the self autonomously, outside of the rule of God and His church.

¹² T. E. McComiskey, “278 בָּרָא,” in Harris, Archer and Waltke, *Theological Wordbook*, 127. See Isa 41:20, 48:6-7, 65:17; Exod 34:10; Jer 31:22; Ps 51:10.

divine creativity which is absolutely without analogy.”¹³ He further points out that the verb is used three times in one verse “to make clear that here the high point and goal has been reached toward which all God’s creativity from v. 1 on was directed.”¹⁴ In other words, man was not just an addition to all things created; man was God’s *pièces de résistance*; man was the most important aspect of God’s creation.

Genesis 2:7 says, “God formed the man from of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature.” Commentators and theologians Bruce Waltke and Cathy Fredricks note in their commentary on Genesis that the Hebrew word translated *creature*, נֶפֶשׁ [*nepeš*], is also translated *soul* and means “passionate vitality.”¹⁵ They point out that this passionate vitality is a passionate “appetite for God (cf. Ps. 42:1).”¹⁶ Waltke and Fredricks further add, “Our distinctive *nepeš* distinguishes us from the rest of creation, but more important, it is the *imago Dei* that sets us apart for God.”¹⁷ They argue that Adam’s distinctive identity as a passionate worshipper of God set him apart from all other created things. They also add that it is the *imago Dei* that allows one to exhibit “godlike compassion with our ruling. Like God, we are to be merciful kings.”¹⁸ Adam was not created as just a man, but a ruling man; a king of the earth—a king made in the image of God who was to subdue the earth and take dominion over it. Genesis 1:27 further states that God created man in God’s own image. While animals are made in their own likeness, man would be

¹³ Gerhard von Rad, *Commentary on Genesis* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1973), 59.

¹⁴ Von Rad, *Genesis*, 59.

¹⁵ Bruce K. Waltke and Cathy J. Fredricks, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 70-71.

¹⁶ Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis*, 71.

¹⁷ Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis*, 71.

¹⁸ Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis*, 71.

made to image, or צלם [*tselem*], God.¹⁹ In verse 27, the word man (*'adam*) refers to both Adam and Eve; both bore this image and identity. Both were stamped with the image of God. Waltke and Fredricks state, “Being made in God’s image establishes humanity’s role on the earth and facilitates communication with the divine.”²⁰ One of the more important features of being made in the image of God mentioned is that “inseparable from the notion of serving as a representative, the image functions as ruler in the place of the deity.” They quote Ian Hart in his article in the Tyndale Bulletin on Genesis 1:1-2:3:

In the Ancient Near East it was widely believed that a god’s spirit lived in any statue or image of that god, with the result that the image could function as a kind of representative of or substitute for the god wherever it was placed. It was also customary in the ANE to think of a king as a representative of a god; obviously the king ruled, and the god was the ultimate ruler, so the king must be ruling on the god’s behalf. It is therefore not surprising that these two separate ideas became connected and a king came to be described as an image of a god.²¹

Waltke and Fredricks also point out, “In the ancient Near Eastern texts only the king is in the image of God. But in the Hebrew perspective this is democratized to all humanity.”²² The image of God in man endues man with a responsibility to rule on behalf of God on earth. Andrew Steinmann in his commentary on Genesis remarks about this rule, “The invisible God has placed human beings in creation so that, upon seeing the human creature, other creatures are reminded of Yahweh’s rule (cf. Ps. 8:5-8). This idea is then used of Christ (John 14:9; Col. 1:15) and of Christians (Col. 3:9-10; Eph. 4:22-24).”²³

¹⁹ Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis*, 65.

²⁰ Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis*, 65.

²¹ See Ian Hart, “Genesis 1:1-2:3 As a Prologue to the Books of Genesis,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 46, no. 2 (1995): 318, in Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis*, 66.

²² Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis*, 66.

²³ Andrew Steinmann, *Genesis*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, vol. 1 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2019), 24.

God Created Adam with a Need for Fellowship

Adam's rule and reign on earth would not be solely his to carry out. The Bible is emphatic when it says Adam's aloneness was not good (Gen 2:18). In Genesis 1, God declared that all he created was good (v. 31). Yet in 2:18 "it is not good that man should be alone." Adam's aloneness was not good because Adam was not yet complete. He needed a helper (v. 18). Adam's physical formation was complete—he was a stand-alone, fully functioning male. Yet, he needed something else—a woman. This woman completed Adam relationally. Adam lacked fellowship, companionship, eye-to-eye, skin-to-skin, intimacy. The fellowship God enjoyed in the Trinity is mirrored and extended into Adam and Eve and their union together in fellowship with him (v. 24). Adam and Eve's union was not merely a physical union, but spiritual formation that transcended them individually to a place where they could through fellowship worship God more completely.

God Forms Adam and Eve to Rule (Gen 1:27; 2:7)

Scripture points out that Adam was lacking "a helper fit for him" (Gen 2:20). Eve was like Adam but also very different. Eve was made with a body, a spirit, and a soul like Adam, but she was created with complementary features to Adam conducive for sexual reproduction, as well as mental and emotional features that completed Adam. God called Eve "a helper fit for him" (Gen 2:18). The word "helper" is the Hebrew word (אָזָר, 'āzar). 'Āzar is used eighty times in the Old Testament and generally indicates mutual assistance in a marriage relationship.²⁴ Additionally, verse 18 says that Eve was "fit" for Adam. The word "fit" or נָגַד (*neged*) is used only here and means "facing in the direction of." It most likely implies the idea of being on the same side or being united. If this is so, then Adam and Eve were not created to remain as individuals but were designed to form a partnership to accomplish the work God had for them on the earth. Genesis 2:24 underscores Adam

²⁴ Willem VanGermeren, ed., *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 378-79.

and Eve's union by saying that Adam was to "hold fast to Eve" and that "the two were made one flesh." "Hold fast" is the Hebrew word דָּבַק (*dābaq*) and typically refers to two things sticking together. For example, in Job's suffering he states, "My bones stick (*dābaq*) to my skin and to my flesh" (Job 19:20). Adam and Eve's union was not just a union of two casual lovers who happened to hang out from time-to-time. Their union was the cementing or sticking together of two individuals, binding them permanently into one flesh. This union was God-ordained to help them fulfill God's mandate to be fruitful, multiply i.e., to create a family and to subdue and take dominion over God's creation.

In conclusion, God is present in three persons in one being, enjoying meaningful and fulfilling fellowship together; Adam and Eve would form a union of two individuals into one flesh for fellowship together and with God (v. 24). This one flesh union was not a physical formation, but a spiritual formation that transcended them individually to a place where they could, through fellowship, worship God more fully. This union image is covenantal in nature and is used by Hosea to depict God's relationship with Israel and then used by the apostle Paul to show the greater more permanent and eternal aspect of Christ's relationship with his people, the church (Hos 2:14-23; Eph 5:22-32).

God Forms Adam into a Family

It is also important to note that Adam and Eve were created male and female. Victor Hamilton in his commentary on Genesis notes, "Unlike God, man is characterized by sexual differentiation. Unlike animals, man is not broken down into species (i.e., 'according to their kinds' or 'all kinds of'), but rather is designated by sexuality: *male and female he created them.*"²⁵ The image of God in man, as Hamilton observes, incorporates sexual differentiation: "Sexuality is not an accident of nature, nor is it

²⁵ Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1-17*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1995), 138. Hamilton also makes an important point that sexuality is applied to animal creatures, but not in the Creation story, only later in the Flood narrative (6:19).

simply a biological phenomenon. Instead, it is a gift of God. While sexual identity and sexual function are foreign to God's person, they are nevertheless a part of his will for his image bearers."²⁶ This sexual function was necessary for them to populate the kingdom.

Adam's rule and reign over the earth extended through this family. Adam's offspring would share in the help to subdue and have dominion over the earth. It is interesting that several of Adam's offspring bear the name of "help." For example, "‘*āzar* and ‘*ezer* are

used in compound with the divine name (either El or Yah) form several proper names: Azarel ("God has helped"), (Azarel, is one of Adam's offspring who is mentioned as helping David in Ziklag, 1 Chronicles 12:6) Azriel ("My help is God"), Azariah ("The Lord has helped") and Ezra ("help," but possibly from a form meaning "the Lord helps"), and cf. Ebenezer ("stone of help").²⁷

Adam's extended family served to subdue and take dominion over the earth. However, God would further advance part of this family into a nation and give this nation a land. Through Jacob one sees the same pattern as is seen in Adam, of formation from an individual into a greater group that is called to subdue and take dominion of something. The nation of Israel would be called to subdue and take dominion of the Promised Land.

God Forms Jacob into a Nation (Gen 12; 15; 32:28; 35:10-11)

The promise or command "be fruitful and multiply" extended beyond Adam and Eve. It is mentioned specifically or by inference eleven times in Genesis.²⁸ In the Genesis account of Jacob, Adam's grandson to the twenty-third generation through the line of Seth, the blessing or command to be fruitful and multiply is mentioned five separate times, once from his father Isaac (28:3), inferenced by God at Bethel (28:13), again from God when

²⁶ Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis*, 138.

²⁷ Carl Schultz, "1598, עָזַר," in Harris, Archer, and Waltke, *Theological Wordbook*, 660.

²⁸ Gen 1:22 (to animals), 28 (Adam and Eve), 8:17 (animals post-flood), 9:1 (to Noah and his sons), 9:7 (to Noah and his sons), 17:20 (to Abraham as a promise about his son Ishmael), 28:3 (a blessing from Isaac to Jacob), 28:13 (by inference from God) 35:11 (to Jacob), 48:4 (from God to Jacob; Jacob recounting the event), 48:16 (Jacob's blessing of Joseph).

Jacob was near Paddan-aram (35:11), as Jacob recounts the story to his sons at the end of his life (48:4), and finally as Jacob blesses Joseph (48:16). After the fall, filling the earth with God's image through procreation was God's plan. Waltke and Fredricks note, "Immortality is replaced by progeny, opening the door to redemptive history."²⁹

It's important to note, however, that Jacob was not just being formed into Adam's comprehensive family but was made one of the forefathers of a subgroup called a nation. This "nation" language began with Jacob's grandfather Abraham and would find fruition in Jacob. Genesis 12:1-2 states,

Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

This great nation would exist in a land that God would "show him." This land is described in verses 12:18-21: "On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, 'To your offspring I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates, the land of the Kenites, the Kunzites, the Kadmonites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites and the Jebusites.'" God revisits this promise with Jacob in Genesis 32:28, during his meeting with the Angel of the Lord at the river Jabbok. In Genesis 35:10-11, God said "Your name is Jacob; no longer shall your name be called Jacob, but Israel shall be your name . . . a nation and a company of nations shall come from you, and kings shall come from your own body." Like Adam, Jacob's offspring would rule. These kings would rule a land. Verse 12 states, "The land that I gave to Abraham and Isaac I will give to you, and I will give the land to your offspring after you." The Promised Land was ground zero for God's rule and reign on earth through his chosen people. In Deuteronomy 7:1-2 the military motif continues,

When the LORD your God brings you into the land that you are entering to take possession of it, and clears away many nations before you, the Hittites, the

²⁹ Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis*, 94.

Girgashites, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, seven nations more numerous and mightier than you, ² and when the LORD your God gives them over to you, and you defeat them, then you must devote them to complete destruction. You shall make no covenant with them and show no mercy to them.

What is clear from this text is that the nation of Israel would have to “defeat them,” “devote them to complete destruction,” and “show no mercy to them.” However, this is done with God’s help. He is the one who “clears away many nations before” them. Regarding these nations, it is God who would “give them over” to the Hebrew people. The subduing and taking dominion of the Promised Land was not just sanctioned by God, but to be done with God working through Israel.

This land was to be a place for Israel to rest, worship, and enjoy God. It was a place of peace. With God as their ruler, they would enjoy protection, establishment, and advancement as a nation. However, for Jacob this rest in the Promised Land would only come in death (46:1)—he and his family would have to flee to Egypt to survive a seven-year famine. This turned into a four-hundred-year relocation by the Hebrew people in Egypt. As commentator Russell Reno remarks, “Jacob is truly a figure for the people of Israel. Their settlement is never permanent, their dynasties never enduring, their temples in Jerusalem never eternal.”³⁰

The nationalistic identity of Israel was made up of the nation and the Land as a people and place of the worship of Yahweh. Like Eve completed Adam, the Land would act to complete the Hebrew People, aiding them to advance in a secure worship of Yahweh.

King David was probably the greatest hope of Israel experiencing this worship; however, David’s reign was destined to fail, as his offspring ultimately rejected God’s rule over them. With this failure brought the need for another ruler, a King of Kings who would not fail. This King referenced in the Old Testament is Jesus Christ. Isaiah 9:6 foreshadows him when it states, “For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government

³⁰ Russell R. Reno, *Genesis*, Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2010), 258.

shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.” Jeremiah 33:15 says, “In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David, and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land.” Zechariah 9:9 declares “Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey,” this being a prediction of Christ’s triumphal entry into Jerusalem found in Matthew 21 (cf. Mark 11:1-10; Luke 19:28-30; John 12:12-15). What is interesting is that the passages in prediction of the Messiah in Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Zechariah are ripe with military or nationalistic language: government, prince, execute justice, and king. It is clear that the rule and reign of God’s people would continue beyond Israel and into the church.

God Forms Disciples into the Church (Eph 5; 1 John 1)

The New Testament church is not a novel concept, but rather a continuation of similar Old Testament themes. As has been demonstrated, God’s pattern of taking individuals and joining them together into a community for a specific purpose has been demonstrated in Adam, and then in Jacob. This same theme can be seen in the role of the believer who is placed within the church for the purpose of advancing the kingdom of with the gospel. The mission mandate of Matthew 28:19-20 gives reality to the believer’s identity: who they are, what they believe, where they are heading, and what their purpose is. Believers are not just singular followers with individual goals and pursuits. Neither are believers to be passive, merely sitting idly and only responding to stimuli as it comes. Some believers may act this way, but the language of the church is militant in nature and suggests a purpose, a plan, and a responsibility.

In Luke 9, Jesus sends out the twelve disciples to various villages to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal. Verse 1 states that He “gave them power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases.” The word *power* is from the ancient Greek word

δύναμαι and means “to be able,” or “to be capable of.”³¹ The word *authority* is the ancient Greek word ἐξουσία and means “ability to perform an action to the extent that there are no hindrances in the way, as distinct from δύναμις in the sense of intrinsic ability.”³² The disciples were to use this power to subdue demons and to cure diseases, to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal. This proto-mission excursion was to demonstrate to the disciples the power of God in them to advance the kingdom. This was not going to happen with swords and spears, but with ordinary people proclaiming the Word of God. Romans 1:16 says, “For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.” The gospel is “the power [δύναμις] of God unto salvation.” The gospel message has inherent power in it by God that, when mixed with faith, brings salvation to mankind.

The Formation of the Self through the Church

While the self is a comprehensive unit incorporating the whole man—body and spirit—not all parts of the self are equally important. In 2 Corinthians 4:16, Paul says, “So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day.” Paul is not suggesting that the outer self is of no worth, though he is suggesting that what is being renewed or made stronger and more beautiful is not the outer self, which is dying, but the inner self; and in this he rejoiced that the inner self is destined for renewal. Paul states this renewing of the self is day by day. In this passage, Paul is not just trying to drive home a theological point on how one grows spiritually, rather he is emphasizing that it is reasonable to expect one’s new nature to be renewed in an ongoing, regular basis that is independent of the outer self or the body. This renewal of

³¹ Walter Grundmann, “δύναμαι, δυνατός, δυνατέω, αδύνατος, αδυνατέω, δύναμις, δυνάστης, δυναμώω, ενδυναμώω,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. G. Kittel, G. W. Bromiley, and G. Friedrich, electronic ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 2:284.

³² Werner Foerster, “ἐξεστιν, ἐξουσία, ἐξουσιάζω, κατεξουσιάζω,” in Kittel, Bromiley, and Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary*, 2:562..

the self is explained in Colossians 3:10: “[You] have put on the new self [*anthropos*], which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator.” Scot McKnight states in his commentary on Colossians that “the Spirit’s work of renewal is Christologically defined; each person, because of the regenerating work of the Spirit, is being renewed into the image of God, which is Christ himself, which means the renewal is into Christiformity.”³³ The concept here is that individual believers are being renewed through knowledge of God into the image of Christ. However, this renewal does not happen individualistically, it results primarily as through the outworking of the Christian community or the church.

Spiritual Formation through the Church (Eph 2:11-12; Acts 2:42)

In Ephesians 2:11-22, Paul unpacks a giant concept in terms of how the self is renewed or formed into this Christlike image. Paul, speaking to Gentile believers, reminds them in verse 11 that they were once “Gentiles in the flesh,” meaning they were ethnically and spiritually outside of God’s promised people, the Jews. In their identity as Gentiles, they were “separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenant of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.” That sounds very bleak; however, the next two words, “but now,” offer immediate and eternal joy for them. Paul says in verse 13, “But now in Christ Jesus you . . . have been brought near [to God].” God did this, Paul explains, so that “he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace.” This new man is explained as a new family. Verse 19 says, “So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God.” This household, Paul says, “is built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone [they] being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord.” Recording

³³ Scot McKnight, *The Letter to the Colossians*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018), 311.

the early practices of the church (Acts 2:42), Luke points out that this growth was caused by four distinct and important activities: preaching of the Word of God, fellowship, the breaking of bread, and praying. Since the first century, true church practitioners have included these four elements (among others) in their order of practice. While one may readily understand what it means to preach the Word of God and pray, the terms *fellowship* and *breaking of bread* may need more clarity. *Breaking of bread* is the phrase that points to the Lord's Supper, when Christ broke the bread at His last Passover with the disciples (Matt 26:17-30; Mark 14:12-26; Luke 22:7-39; John 13:1-17:26). *Fellowship* is a term meaning to have in common. It refers to the sharing of life together. It can mean having a meal together or sharing in one's needs. *Fellowship* is not the same as the English word *socialize*. To socialize one just needs to participate in a social activity by conversing, mixing, meeting, and keeping company with others. *Fellowship* is much deeper and carries the idea of suffering alongside of others, remaining with others, giving and receiving and conversing with others about the Word of God and the Christian life. The community or fellowship of the church forms the believer's spiritual identity in four distinct ways: fellowship marks the believer as being with Christ, fellowship affirms one's identity in Christ, fellowship informs believers who they are primarily responsible to share life with, and finally, fellowship gives the world—seen and unseen—a picture of the kingdom of God on earth (Eph 3:7-12).

The church is not an add-on to one's faith, nor is it a superfluous entity that one sometimes attends. The church and its communal life are incarnational. The church is referred to as the body of Christ (Eph 5:23). It is not a coincidence that Genesis 2:24 and Ephesians 5:31-32 use the same imagery of one flesh to picture Adam and Eve and then Christ and his church. Christ is pictured in Romans 5:12-21 and 1 Corinthians 15:45-49 as the new Adam. Like Adam, Christ is the head of his bride (Eph 5:23). Like Eve, she existed for the benefit of the groom. What was in shadow form with Adam and Eve is now made manifest through Christ and His church. While in Ephesians 5:27 Christ is said

to be working to “present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish,” in Matthew 28:19-20 the church is said to be subduing and advancing His kingdom with the gospel. This is done by putting on the whole armor of God (Eph 6:10-20). Like Adam and Eve, Christ and His church are spoken of in military language and are on the offensive.

This New Testament language underscores that the church’s primary role is to spiritually form a believer. Social media, on the other hand, presents multiple platforms or apps that enables identity formation into groups that may or may not support the work of the church. Social media, in contrast to the church, is virtual in nature and limitless in content. Where the church has a defined creed and a defined local membership living in community, social media offers a warehouse of ideas, beliefs, and interests with people that one may never meet. The nature of social media makes it a dangerous replacement for the role of fellowship found in the church. Additionally, social media’s amalgamation of content into one source allows for easier access to competing voices advancing a spirit of division among God’s people. Finally social media is a product of corporate interest in profit, not unity or truth, and as a result, social media tends to pander to the presuppositions of people instead of truth.

Conclusion

Since Adam and Eve, the fight for self-rule, or individualism, has wreaked havoc on the world, tearing apart people groups and nations. What God enables believers to experience through the church must be experienced through unity, believers working with one-another, on the same side. Spiritual group formation is essential to experiencing true community on earth.

By contrast, apps like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and Snapchat are designed to showcase and reward one’s individuality. Social media rewards unique lifestyles or living outside of the norm by increasing likes, views, and clicks, which can enhance the ego and lead to financial compensation. While the intention of social media is to bring

people together online to socialize, the result is a race to promote the self, and even market oneself to others and/or corporations. Social media is the new gold-rush, where everyday people are staking a claim on unlimited earning potential. However, do the benefits of social media outweigh the risks? The final consummation of time will reveal the existence of an ongoing, epic battle between good versus evil. This battle culminates in the salvation of the elect and the judgment of those who reject Christ. Therefore, the church must be ready for any attack that can weaken its resolve to glorify God. Therefore, I argue that individualism that seeks autonomy is incongruent with the nature and work of the church—where believers lay down individualism and take up a gospel-centric, shared identity of Christ for the glory of God.

CHAPTER 3
SOCIAL MEDIA: AN ANCENSTRAL OVERVIEW
AND THREAT ASSESSMENT

Introduction

Chapter 2 argued from Scripture that human connectedness and the need to live in community is the result of man's being made in the image of God and a means by which God uses to fulfill his purpose of advancing his kingdom. Therefore, community is not just a social benefit but rather a blessing of being made in God's likeness. Chapter 2 also traced the Old Testament concept of community by showing how God provided community in the Garden of Eden between himself, Adam, and Eve. This perfect community in the Garden, prior to the fall, continued after the fall in a broken state through the forms of marriage, family, friends, neighbors, and a personal relationship with God. Community that existed after the fall was further defined by God through the formation of a nation that would demonstrate how God desires to be worshipped by mankind. The formation of Israel then constituted a community defined by God-given laws and was more spiritual in nature. The nation of Israel was a precursor to the ultimate earthly expression of community demonstrated in the church, the bride of Christ, where both Jew and Gentile would be blessed. As the bride of Christ, this new community fostered the spiritual discipline of *koinonia*, which exists to fulfill man's need for fellowship, identity, peace, and purpose.

Koinonia, the Greek word usually translated "fellowship" in the New Testament, means to share with someone in something.¹ Luke 15:10a translates the root of *koinonia*, *κοινων*, as partnership, "and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were

¹ F. Hauck, "κοινός, κοινωνός, κοινωνέω, κοινωνία, συγκοινωνός, συγκοινωνέω, κοινωνικός, κοινωνώ," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. G. Kittel, G. W. Bromiley, and G. Friedrich, electronic ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 3:804.

partners with Simon.” The same Greek word can also mean sharing in the nature of something such as in Hebrews 2:14: “Since therefore the children *share* in flesh and blood, he himself likewise *partook* of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil.” In this verse the Greek word *κοινωνία* is translated as *share*, and the Greek word *μετέσχευ*, a synonym of *κοινωνία*, is used of Christ who *partook* or shared in flesh in blood. In the same way believers are said to be partakers, *koinonia*, of the divine nature in 1 Peter 1:4. In Paul’s writings, he uses *κοινωνία* for the religious fellowship (participation) of the believer in Christ and Christian blessings, and for the mutual fellowship of believers.² *Koinonia* described more than an activity of the church and more of a way of life of the church. For example, Luke mentions in Acts 2:42 four things that marked the practice of the early church: the apostle’s teaching, fellowship (*koinonia*), breaking of bread (communion), and prayer. The preaching of the Word of God followed by *koinonia* underscores the idea that truth is also learned in community as opposed to the nature of social media which pushes knowledge through isolation. Moreover, this passage indicates that a believer’s identity is formed significantly alongside other believers. This stands in contradistinction to the worldly philosophy that identity is sourced in the self. Additionally, *koinonia* is translated into the English word “common” (Acts 2:44), which implies a reciprocity with others that is essential to building up of the body of Christ. This commonality or reciprocity helps affirm one’s self-concept or identity as being in Christ.

It is important to note that *koinonia* is unique and is found only in the church and among God’s people where the Spirit of God is working. *Koinonia* is special in that it bonds humans based on a relationship with the Lord rather than gender, economic, racial, or educational equality. The *koinonia* of the church transcends every human delimiter and is open to anyone who is called by God to salvation. *Koinonia* is not just a blessing of

² Hauck, “κοινός, κοινωνός, κοινωνέω, κοινωνία, συγκοινωνός, συγκοινωνέω, κοινωνικός, κοινωνώ,” 3:804.

meaningful relationships with others in the family of God, but inclusion in the divine protection, provision, and leadership of God through a group of redeemed people. This protection, provision, and leadership foreshadow what will take place in heaven in God's eternal family. Through the church, God bathes believers in confidence of their eternal future with him. Therefore, it stands to reason that the self, now, is dependent on its relationship to a local church and his connection with the body of Christ. Professing believers who do not belong to a local church, distance themselves from fellowship of a local church, or have been excommunicated from a church should question if Christ would profess them as one of his children. However, believers making full use of *koinonia* build a strong confidence in their identity in Christ, yielding godly peace or spiritual and material contentment, ushering in a sounder mind, especially during life's more troubling moments. As a result, a firmly seated confidence in Christ yields a life that lavishly extends grace to others, enriching those around them. In short, *koinonia* is God's love on display through his children.

When individuals distance themselves from God, the church, and *koinonia*, a vacuum is created to be replaced by pseudo forms of God, the church, and *koinonia*. An extreme example of this is illustrated by Joseph Stalin who sought to strip his and other countries of Christianity. The dictator, the state, and the party became the new replacements, creating a new man. This new "socialist man," as Stalin called him, "was an atheist one, free of the religious chains that had helped to bind him to class oppression."³ Freed from religious chains, the new socialist man was bound to a new oppressor, the state. The question could be raised, has a sort of "digital communism" rolled in, offering an alternative to God, the church, and *koinonia*? Like Stalin's socialist man, is technology creating a new "digital man" with an alternative religion? Is this new digital man dictating a new morality? Is the internet becoming a new center for worship?

³ Natasha Frost, "Why Stalin Tried to Stamp Out Religion in the Soviet Union," *History*, April 23, 2021, <https://www.history.com/news/joseph-stalin-religion-atheism-ussr>.

And finally, is social media offering a new society, no longer bound by religious chains, freed to develop as he or she desires. As the people in Russia found, Stalin was no benevolent dictator. Instead, Stalin was a diabolical leader with nefarious intentions who would end up murdering millions of people.⁴ The question should be asked, “Is the world experiencing a digital takeover that will only prove deadly?”

This chapter will focus on an ancestral overview of social media and its threat to the church. The intention is to demonstrate that social media is not a passive technology, but that it is actively supplanting what God established through *koinonia* in the church by influencing mankind to find a new community liberated from religious chains. This society is an environment where the user can create an individual identity free from authoritarian or religious constraints. Chapter 4 will explore social media’s influence on the rise of the self. Chapter 5 will conclude with a study on the implications for the church and how *koinonia* can be strengthened to resist the rise of the self.

The Birth of Social Networking, the Internet, and Social Media

Social media is digital social networking. A simple Google search with the words *social networking* will result in a series of links leading to the discussion of internet-based social media sites. However, long before mankind developed computers, the internet, or social media, social networking existed. In Genesis, after the fall, man quickly understood the need for and power of social networking. As early as the story of Cain in Genesis 4, one can see the developing penchant for social networking as a means of self-preservation and self-glorification for the fulfillment of happiness. Cain, having killed his brother, Abel, was sent out from the presence of God and his family as a “fugitive and wanderer on the earth” (v. 14). The words *fugitive* and *wanderer* placed together convey

⁴ Hiroaki Kuromiya, *Stalin: Profiles in Power* (Harlow, England: Routledge, 2005), 101. See also Norman M. Naimark, *Stalin and the Fate of Europe: The Postwar Struggle for Sovereignty* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 2019).

“aimlessness.”⁵ As Victor Hamilton writes in his commentary on Genesis, Cain lost “all sense of belonging and identification with a community.”⁶ Therefore, Cain’s place in this world “is to become rootless and detached.”⁷ Upon the pronouncement of God’s judgment, Cain’s conclusion was that “whoever finds me will kill me.” Cain’s security was threatened by exclusion from his social network. Understanding his vulnerability, Cain saw the need to settle and reestablish a new network. So, he married, had children, and built “a city,” and then he named the city after his son, Enoch (v. 17). This city was a place to dwell, a place to ensure protection for himself and his family, as well as a way of establishing his name on the earth. Cain’s loss of community and purpose drove him to develop a new community for self-preservation and self-glorification, leading to greater overall happiness.

Likewise, in Genesis 11, the Bible describes the state of the world as having “one language and the same words” (v. 1). People from the east networked and decided to move west. Moving west, they eventually settled in the plain of Shinar to build “a name for themselves” because their fear was that they were going “to be dispersed over the face of the whole earth” (v. 4). So, like Cain, they settled and built a city. Like Cain, the people of Babel used the power of social networking for self-preservation and self-glorification. However, God shut “Project Babel” down because he saw that “nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them” (v. 6). God was not jealous of their power nor was God afraid of the power of men, but working together these people tapped an incredible power which, outside of God, brings disaster. Just a few chapters prior, God’s post-flood directive was to “be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth” (9:1), not stay in one place. The Babel settlement was in direct contradiction to God’s plan of filling the earth. Bruce

⁵ Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1-17*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1990), 232. See also Isa 24:20a.

⁶ Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1-17*, 232.

⁷ Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1-17*, 232.

Waltke argues in his commentary on Genesis that “the city functions as an anodyne to wandering and alienation as a protective against human irrationality and retaliation”⁸ and therefore, “challenges God’s supremacy.”⁹ God’s intention was not isolation, but to fill the earth with his glory which demanded that Noah and his sons and their sons and so on spread out and fill the earth to spread the news of God’s presence and judgement among all corners of the earth. To settle was antithetical to God’s plan. The Babel community wanted a society on their own terms and for their own purposes. This re-socialization effort was quickly snuffed out by God and “the Lord dispersed them” (v. 8). Again, the point is not that God disfavors the cooperation enjoyed by men working in harmony together, but that men naturally desire to live in community and naturally, and in their sinful condition, work together outside of the will of God to push agendas that are devastating to them and to others. One just has to compare the relative nature of the modern city to the countryside to see a vast difference in mindset, politically, socially, and materially, to prove this point.

Throughout centuries the drive for self-preservation and self-exultation and lust for happiness has caused man to make shrewd use of social networking. For example, it was common for a prince to marry the daughter of a neighboring king to secure an alliance between two kingdoms ensuring peace and smooth diplomatic process between them, in turn making each kingdom stronger and more glorious. Solomon married the daughter of Pharaoh for this very purpose (1 Kgs 3:1). Again, the hope was for preservation, exultation for greater peace and happiness. Today, social networking allows people to connect to one another for some personal advantage whether politically, socially, or economically. For most of mankind, and without knowing it, the goal for networking is the same: self-preservation, self-exultation leading to a heightened sense of happiness.

⁸ Bruce K. Waltke and Cathi J. Fredricks, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 100.

⁹ Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis*, 99.

Social networking is more than just connecting to other people—it is connecting to the right people for the right reasons. In 1929, a short story entitled *Chains* by Hungarian author Frigyes Karinthy depicted an argument among friends on the idea of the smallness of the earth and how connected everyone is to one another. The main character argues to his friends that within five links or people he could connect with anyone else on the earth. According to this theory, this means that a factory worker in Wales can connect with a tribal leader in the Congo within five or six people or six degrees, or that a schoolboy in Wisconsin can connect with the King of England within six degrees. Karinthy was the first to put forth the theory that would come to be known as the six degrees of separation.¹⁰ He was a man before his time. Thirty years later, in 1960, psychologist Stanley Milgram, testing Karinthy’s theory, conducted the “small-world experiment” to research how closely people are connected.¹¹ Journalist and author Malcolm Gladwell writes in his book *The Tipping Point* that Milgram

got the names of 160 people who lived in Omaha, Nebraska, and mailed each of them a packet. In the packet was the name address of a stockbroker who worked in Boston and lived in Sharon, Massachusetts. Each person was instructed to write his or her name on the packet and send it on to a friend or acquaintance who he or she thought would get the packet closer to that stockbroker. . . . Milgram found that most of the letters reached the stockbroker in five or six steps.¹²

Milgram’s experiment helped demonstrate that Karinthy’s theory of six degrees was plausible.

¹⁰ Frigyes Karinthy, “Chains,” accessed March 28, 2023, <https://short-stories.co/stories/chains-4w0n6QJmNDr>. The way six degrees works is that it is theorized, if everyone knows at least 44 people and those people know 44 people, then in six steps $44^6=7.26$ billion people. Facebook claims that their users are connected within 4.74 steps. John Sutter states, “The Palo Alto, California, company says 99.6% of all Facebook users studied were separated by five degrees or less from any other Facebook user; 92% were separated by only four degrees. Furthermore, that distance appears to be shrinking quickly. The average distance in 2008 was 5.28 hops, while now it is 4.74, Facebook says.” John D. Sutter, “On Facebook, It’s Now 4.74 Degrees of Separation,” CNN, November 22, 2011, <https://www.cnn.com/2011/11/22/tech/social-media/facebook-six-degrees/index.html>.

¹¹ Harvard University-Department of Psychology, “Stanley Milgram,” accessed March 10, 2023, <https://psychology.fas.harvard.edu/people/stanley-milgram>.

¹² Malcolm Gladwell, *The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference* (Boston: Back Bay, 2002), 34-35.

In addition, in Karinthy's short story the characters have a discussion that there are times in history when six degrees of separation would have been impossible. The characters point out an important concept that connecting with others in the past would have been impossible given the lack of vast technological means that we enjoy today. Greater time, distance, and travel methods made historical figures less famous than even in the 1920s. In *Chains*, the discussion of the contraction of the world is explored, yet without resolution. What boats, horses, chariots, and wagons did in the ancient world to bring people together, planes, trains, and automobiles did in modern world to connect mankind. In the twentieth century, the computer, the internet, and social media further contract the world. It can be argued that technology is the advancement of contracting the world.

While Milgram was busy with his "real-world experiment," MIT professor J. C. R. Licklider was busy writing several memos describing what he called a "Galactic Network" concept.¹³ In 1962, Licklider "envisioned a globally interconnected set of computers through which everyone could quickly access data and programs from any site."¹⁴ What he was envisioning through data exchange and communication was essentially what would become the internet and eventually social media.¹⁵

¹³ Leonard Kleinrock, "An Early History of the Internet [History of Communications]," *IEEE Communications Magazine* 48, no. 8 (August 2010): 26-36.

¹⁴ Kleinrock, "An Early History," 28.

¹⁵ Kleinrock, "An Early History," 28. Kleinrock writes, J. C. R. Licklider ("Lick") entered the story when he published his landmark 1960 paper "Man-Computer Symbiosis." He defined the title as "an expected development in cooperative interaction between men and electronic computers." This work envisaged a system "to enable men and computers to cooperate in making decisions and controlling complex situations without inflexible dependence on predetermined programs"; he had seen such a flexible system in the aforementioned SAGE system. Once again, we find a forecast of what future telecommunications might provide—and Lick was perhaps the first to write at a time when viable ways to create that future were emerging. Although a visionary, Lick was not a networking technologist, so the challenge was to finally implement such ideas. (28)

While the internet was being conceptualized by Licklider, new technology was being developed by UCLA and MIT professors, Lawrence Roberts and Leonard Kleinrock, that would make Licklider's vision possible.¹⁶ In 1965, Roberts and Kleinrock, partnering together, used a telephone line to connect a computer in Massachusetts to a computer in California "creating the first (however small) wide-area computer network ever built."¹⁷ While they proved computers could communicate and exchange information between each other, they knew the technology needed to support such an exchange needed development—telephone circuits would not do. Kleinrock, understanding the inefficiency of a circuit driven system used by telephony, developed a packet technology that could be used in digital communication situations where data bursts were adequately supported. Packet technology breaks communication into small blocks or packets and moves these individual pieces of data through various communication pipelines reordering them on the user's interface. The new packet technology made Licklider's vision of a world wide web achievable. As a result, Robert's published the ARPANET in 1967.¹⁸ ARPANET stands for the Advanced Research Projects Agency Network, the precursor technology to today's internet. By 1969, a whopping four computers were successfully connected into the ARPANET, officially birthing the "internet."¹⁹ However, this small network was done inhouse and out-of-public view. In 1972, ARPANET and its first and most useful application, electronic mail or e-mail, was successfully revealed to the public.²⁰ The potential of this connectivity was quickly utilized by the US Government and employed

¹⁶ Kleinrock, "An Early History," 28.

¹⁷ Barry M. Leiner et al., "Brief History of the Internet," InternetSociety.org, 1997, accessed March 4, 2023, https://www.internetsociety.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/ISOC-History-of-the-Internet_1997.pdf, 3.

¹⁸ Leiner et al., "Brief History of the Internet," 3.

¹⁹ Leiner et al., "Brief History of the Internet," 4.

²⁰ Leiner et al., "Brief History of the Internet," 4.

in national defense R&D and other organizations, but was not yet useful in the public domain primarily because computers were corporate machines and not a household item. Roberts, Kleinrock, and their associates were able to make this technology useful for the masses only in part because IBM and Apple were working to put computers in every school and in every home.

By 1994, the digital stars aligned, and the architects of ARPANET rolled out the world wide web as a way of providing efficient networking access for anyone with a personal home computer. The private internet was now freed from industrial and government use and available to connect personal computers together. This technology contracted the world by launching opportunities for social networking envisioned first by Frigyes Karinthy.

Just three years after the launch of the world wide web, the first successful social media app launched in 1997, appropriately named Six Degrees. The idea behind the app was in step with Karinthy and Milgram. Six Degrees allowed people to sign up with their e-mail address, make individual profiles, and add friends to their personal network. It reached 3.5 million, however, and only lasted a few years until it was shut down in 2001.²¹ David Kirkpatrick in his book *The Facebook Effect* describes Six Degrees as “the first online business that attempted to identify and map a set of real relationships between real people using their real names.”²² In 2002, similar platforms, Friendster and LinkedIn, made their debut, and in 2003 MySpace began. A year later Facebook officially launched. By 2010, Twitter and Instagram had become staple social media platforms and the world of social media as we know it was in full bloom. What makes these social media apps so popular is that they appeal to felt needs of self-preservation and self-glorification leading

²¹ Matthew Jones, “The Complete History of Social Media: A Timeline of the Invention of Online Networking,” History Cooperative, June 16, 2015, <https://historycooperative.org/the-history-of-social-media/>.

²² David Kirkpatrick, *The Facebook Effect: The Inside Story of the Company That Is Connecting the World* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2010), 68.

to greater happiness. By networking with others, man gains the protection and affirmation of group approval. This self-exultation or glorification lies in direct contradistinction to the advancement of the Lord's glory. Much like the people of Babel in Genesis, people have grabbed hold of social media to build their own echo chambers of approval rejecting God's greater plan of advancing his glory.

Social Media Bends Time and Space

It is easy to see why social media is so powerful and attractive. This tool is shrinking the space-time continuum. Hermann Minkowski, Albert Einstein's college mathematics teacher, advanced ideas about space and time. In a public lecture on relativity, he announced, "The views of space and time which I wish to lay before you have sprung from the soil of experimental physics, and therein lies their strength. They are radical. henceforth, space by itself, and time by itself, are doomed to fade away into mere shadows, and only a kind of union of the two will preserve an independent reality."²³

Are the internet and social media a new kind of *union* designed to preserve an independent reality? One can argue with the advent of the internet and social media that time and space are seemingly irrelevant to getting things done on earth, and by eliminating time and space the door ushers in a new iteration of communication and productivity. For example, a woman can post an image on Instagram in Indiana and her friend in India can view it, post a response photo to her friend back in Indiana, who can view that post and repost a second post back to her friend in India all within seconds. That same rapid-fire global-exchange of content happens across the globe billions of times a day. While phones and mail were useful prior to the advent of social media, these are now seen as limited and outdated methods to exchange communication and content. Additionally, phones and mail operate at a much greater expense and with less reliability. On a more secure, intimate, and

²³ Sten Odenwald, "What Is a Space Time Continuum?," Testing Einstein's Universe, accessed March 21, 2023, <https://einstein.stanford.edu/content/relativity/q411.html>.

financially feasible level, social media allows grandparents in New Zealand to interface with their grandchildren in New York through Facebook and other apps helping them feel less disconnected from their families and more up to date with real-time family events. On a political level, this connectedness means that a man living in rural Kentucky can speak into national political debate on a world-stage by simply commenting on someone's Instagram or Facebook post, or a news article. The speed of commerce has also grown exponentially through social media and the internet. Ordering goods through catalogues and waiting weeks for items to arrive has been replaced by one click on Amazon, Pinterest, or Poshmark. In just a minute or two an order can be created, the purchase made, and in some cases, delivered the same day and with very little human interaction.²⁴ Important legal documents can now be handled using secure online document exchanges that allow attorneys and clients to sign, date, and return important documents within minutes of receiving them. Medical information is now shared more quickly between providers, increasing the skillful management of diagnosis and handling of prescriptions. On the bright side, the internet and social media break the barriers of time and space to advance social networking at high speeds, bringing people closer, with low cost, and with striking reliability to seamlessly connect the human race.

The Underlying Threat of Social Media

Communication, like wealth, is a commodity that men buy and sell and is a means to control outcomes. Man was created to communicate with God and with others. Therefore, as man invents new tools to improve communication exchange, exploitation of that communication becomes more attractive. Interestingly, the words communication, community, and common share a related root word with communism. Each of these

²⁴ For this thesis, I regularly order books from Amazon in the morning that are delivered by the evening.

words come from two words “co, together, and mun-i, change, or exchange.”²⁵ Hayk Makhmuryan, in his article “Community: An Etymology of Sorts,” writes, “Being happily nerdy, I immediately went for the etymology of the word *community*. I got *comuner*, ‘to make common, share’; *comun*, ‘to talk intimately’; and *commun*, ‘free city, group of citizens.’”²⁶ This etymology sheds light on a core structure of human development where man is created to commune, communicate, and hold things in common with others. Luke records in Acts 2:44-45, “And all who believed were together and had all things in *common*. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and disturbing the proceeds to all, as any had need.” The word *common* is the Greek word *koinonia* and implies the voluntary exchange of goods for the benefit of others. Political communism, which is derived from the word *common*, is a perverted ideology, that seizes goods from people, against their will, as a means of control. Communism controls the economy by controlling natural resources and manufacturing, that is, what is manufactured, who can manufacture, how much can be manufactured, who can purchase the goods being manufactured, and even controlling the quantity one can purchase of a product. By controlling the economy and its people this way, outcomes are more predictable. Communism is antithetical to the Spirit-driven, voluntary, and loving exchange of goods found among believers. Political communism mimics *koinonia*, but fails every time because it lacks voluntary participation. When man attempts to create *koinonia* politically, it disembowels *koinonia* of love. This is what sets the church apart from the political communism of today. Like socialism or communism (words often used interchangeably)²⁷ that seek to put control in the hands of the community, that is,

²⁵ Hayk Makhmuryan, “Community: An Etymology of Sorts,” *Arts Journal*, July 25, 2016, <https://www.artsjournal.com/fieldnotes/2016/07/community-an-etymology-of-sorts/>.

²⁶ Makhmuryan, “Community.”

²⁷ Britannica, “Communism,” accessed June 8, 2023, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/communism>.

government, social media collects and analyzes data, enriching itself with lavish control to manipulate outcomes. Predictions and manipulations, that is, what people believe and how they behave, is a very lucrative business.

For example, TikTok, a leading video-sharing social media platform, is quickly becoming, if not already, the fastest growing social media platform on the internet. A *Fox Business* article dated March 22, 2023, by William La Jeunesse entitled, “Here’s the Data that TikTok Collects on Its Users” explains how this communication gathering works and why it is so dangerous. He lists the following information that TikTok collects from its over 150 million users:

Name, username, email, password, phone number, location, the content of your messages, when they’re sent, received and read, and by whom, text, images and videos on your clipboard, purchase information, including payment card numbers, billing and shipping addresses, a user’s activities on other websites and apps or instore, including the products or services purchased, online or in person. They also collect files and keystroke patterns and rhythms, one’s IP address, mobile carrier, time zone settings, model of your device and operating system . . . objects of scenery that appear in your videos, including tourist attractions, shops or other points of interest. Biometric identifiers such as faceprints and voiceprint (this info allows TikTok to target video ads and political messages based on your habits and interests).”²⁸

La Jeunesse also explains that TikTok stores cookies that collect, measure, and analyze which webpages users view most often and how they interact with content.²⁹ What makes TikTok unique is the level at which it can exploit personal data. La Jeunesse writes that the joint US-Australia firm Internet 2.0 issued this warning: “Finally, device mapping, external storage access, contacts and third-party applications data collection allows TikTok the ability to re-imagine the phone in the likeness of the original device.”³⁰ This wealth of data is in part stored in China, which is concerning to the US government. TikTok maintains that this data is voluntarily surrendered when a user agrees to their end

²⁸ William La Jeunesse, “Here’s the Data That TikTok Collects on Its Users,” Fox Business, March 22, 2023, <https://www.foxbusiness.com/technology/heres-data-tiktok-collects-its-users>.

²⁹ La Jeunesse, “Here’s the Data That TikTok Collects.”

³⁰ La Jeunesse, “Here’s the Data That TikTok Collects.”

user agreement. However, this agreement is largely ignored and simply checked off by unwitting teens who want access to the platform.³¹ With this in mind, cybersecurity expert Will Gragido states, “It’s a very, very real possibility that something like a TikTok has the potential to be very disruptive or lead to very disruptive acts and activities. Everything from misinformation, disinformation, espionage, and as we talked about the collection of data surveillance, monitoring, ultimately becoming a sort of Trojan horse in the modern-day sense.”³² This terminology is more akin to war than simple social media. In the case of social media, platforms are not stealing physical goods, but data. Like one’s DNA, data can be used to control or at least strongly influence outcomes, as Gragido alludes to, financially and ideologically.

What alarms most Christians about social media is the content found on apps. However, these cybersecurity and internet watch dog firms are warning the public about control, the unseen or invisible threat lurking below social media’s surface. Consider Gragido’s warning: “Even though something looks benign or looks in some degree or another kind as cute or safe doesn’t necessarily mean that it is.”³³ Social media presents a source of control, particularly for teens.

Social Media’s Control

Social media is not cute or safe; in fact, it is designed to profit from the user and exploit user’s data to influence user’s purchases, political ideations, organizational affiliations, or ideological beliefs. This in turn creates huge revenue streams for social media platforms via advertising. In short, the product of social media is the user. Users are selling themselves without realizing the consequences. The largest population of users of social media are age 14 to 25. This age bracket is arguably the most vulnerable, most

³¹ La Jeunesse, “Here’s the Data That TikTok Collects.”

³² La Jeunesse, “Here’s the Data That TikTok Collects.”

³³ La Jeunesse, “Here’s the Data That TikTok Collects.”

heavily influenced, and least self-controlled user group on social media. This generation of teens and young adults are referred to Generation Z, or Gen Z for short. Gen Z is searching for self-preservation and self-glorification in the pursuit of happiness through social media.

Social media controls by moving users in an ideological and or emotional direction. Movement or click potentials on social media are intentional algorithmic manipulations designed by architects to push people to new pages with new content and new ads. One may hop in their car to run to the grocery store, knowing that is where they will end up, social media presents a platform that directs the user to where it can achieve maximum gain. It is safe to assume users do not know where they will end up once they start. For example, a person hops online to research the melting polar ice caps and through data collection via ad retention, video clicks, and content tracking, one is now presented with options to move away from the subject of melting ice to a political debate on how climate change is affecting biodiversity. This slight movement then is given a second nudge intentionally toward a portal where crowd funding is raising money to support the campaign of a politician vowing to fight climate change. This directional flow is not accidental but designed to move money to a paid advertiser.

Running concurrently with monetization is the ideological flow that moves sentiments socially and politically. This control of social media often goes undetected by users because it is merely suggested movement; movement the user agrees to. This soft sell styled movement is a powerfully intentional and effective terms of monetization via ads or donations. This then drives social media as a tool shaping ideology in culture. For example, one may not be overly aware of or even care about the issues surrounding the melting polar ice caps, but through suggestion it may seem plausible to fight for those who will advocate for policy changes that will lead to more frozen tundra. Why does it seem plausible? Because the flow between links is stitched together by a master digital weaver moving logic and sentiment in a direction that will eventually lead to senator's ad

campaign. Is this a win-win? The user feels good about donating to a global cause, the social media site has proven its effectiveness, and the politician has made a few bucks toward his campaign. What is dangerous about manipulating movement on the web is that it is happening in streams of thought that are clearly anti-biblical, taking naïve users down a portal dealing with subjects surrounding the current sexual revolution which is pushing gender-identification policy issues, abortion rights, and homosexuality. In addition, users are exposed to influencers who advocate for things like delaying or even denying marriage.

The apostle Paul warns believers that false teachers will rise up forbidding people to marry (1 Tim 4:1-3). This “doctrine of demons” (1 Tim 4:1) as Paul calls it, is exactly what widely popular social media influencer Andrew Tate is advocating for. Tate shared in a YouTube interview his view of marriage in which he replied, “The idea of getting married is . . . completely and utterly fruitless.”³⁴ When asked if he would ever get married, he replied, “I’d never get married, no. I don’t see the tactical advantage to getting married.”³⁵ It is easy to hop on Instagram or TikTok and find influencers who advocate for beliefs that are far from traditional and convictional biblical thinking. Influencers who wield these anti-biblical positions are whittling away at the infrastructure of orthodox faith. In reality, Tate is responding to the vacuum he sees in modern cultural conceptions of marriage that are not rooted in biblical love and respect. He is giving his opinion on a corrupted institution that God regulated. Instead of calling for reform to marriage he ends up throwing the baby out with the bath water and disregards the value of marriage because the call for love and respect are largely ignored. As of January 2023, Tate had 4.5 million followers mostly made up of Gen Z. Without discernment, many may apply Tate’s position and delay or decline marriage as an option, simply because he has

³⁴ Jay Hunter, “Andrew Tate Shares Why He Will Never Get Married,” accessed August 6, 2022, <https://www.ginx.tv/en/youtube/andrew-tate-shares-why-he-will-never-get-married>.

³⁵ Hunter, “Andrew Tate Shares Why He Will Never Get Married.”

suggested an alternative to marriage. Satan only needed a few words to influence Eve to not listen to God. Likewise, Satan can use a few words from influencers to shape culture by bending theology. So, while mom is dutifully in the kitchen preparing dinner for the family, and dad is making sure the carport is nice and tidy so the neighbors will be impressed, junior is in his bedroom being saturated in the philosophical drippings of anti-biblical influencers completely reshaping his future plans.

Additionally, deep learning models of technology, such as Open AI's ChatGPT-4, are further influencing users. In a recent move, over 1,000 tech leaders, including Elon Musk and Steve Wozniak, co-founder of Apple, signed an open letter written by the Future of Life Institute.³⁶ This AI technology, the letter states, "exhibits human-level performance on various professional and academic benchmarks."³⁷ The risk is "of propaganda and lies spread through AI-generated articles that look real."³⁸ Of course, propaganda and lies are designed to move ideology, money, and society toward an outcome. This technology is personally dangerous. Tristan Harris, co-founder of the Center for Humane Technology, says that ChatGPT can take a three second clip of someone's voice, duplicate that voice, and simulate it into the English language. So for example, one could be having a phone call with who they think is their son, but is in actuality just ChatGPT using their son's voice.³⁹ When this "digital-son" asks for

³⁶ Chris Pandolfo, "Elon Musk, Apple Co-Founder, Other Tech Experts Call for Pause on 'Giant AI Experiments': 'Dangerous Race,'" *Fox News*, March 29, 2023, <https://www.foxnews.com/politics/elon-musk-apple-co-founder-tech-experts-call-pause-giant-ai-experiments>.

³⁷ Pandolfo, "Elon Musk, Apple Co-Founder, Other Tech Experts."

³⁸ Pandolfo, "Elon Musk, Apple Co-Founder, Other Tech Experts."

³⁹ The Brian Kilmeade Show intro explains, "Tristan Harris joined Brian Kilmeade on The Brian Kilmeade Show for a full hour and raised warning flags about the reckless speed in which AI is progressing. He talked about the startling range of implications from TikTok, ChatGPT and AI—how China is weaponizing them and how they can be used for other nefarious reasons." Brian Kilmeade Show, "Tristan Harris: The Startling Implications of AI, ChatGPT and TikTok," Apple Podcasts, 2022, accessed March 29, 2023, <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/tristan-harris-the-startling-implications-of-ai/id219258773?i=1000605431496>.

personal information, such as a social security number to fill out a job application, they will happily give it since he is their son, and they trust their son. This sensitive and personal information is then used to open bank accounts and lines of credit in the parent's names. Mapping and manipulating voices are fascinating and dangerous outcomes of AI technology. The full potential of artificial intelligence is yet to be realized, which is why the letter from The Future of Life Institute is calling for a six-month pause on the development of AI technology.

With that said, the current culture seems to be addicted to using these apps and technology despite their dangers because the reward is incredible: instant connection, data, knowledge, wealth creation, et cetera. This usage is demonstrated by the speed at which apps hit the market and then become heavily accessed. Launching in 2021, the anonymous app NGL hit a staggering 15 million users just one year into its existence. Yolo was created in 2019 and now boasts more than 10 million users. Predating both apps is Yik Yak, relatively ancient in terms of social media apps, created in 2013 and relaunched in 2021, has more than 200 million users. All this online activity is useful for predators, especially those who want to traffic people. PolarisProject.org is an online site that tracks and reports on human trafficking via social media. They state that twenty-eight million people are trafficked worldwide and that sex trafficking usually “begins with the trafficker and potential victim building a relationship through social media.”⁴⁰ The grooming process is deceptive and quick. They state that traffickers “may begin with commenting on potential victims’ photos and sending direct messages, carefully building the rapport and intimacy needed to entice victims into a false sense of trust.”⁴¹ The next step is “boy-friending” where the trafficker uses romantic language to lure the victim

⁴⁰ Brittany Anthony, “On-Ramps, Intersections and Exit Routes: A Roadmap for Systems and Industries to Prevent and Disrupt Human Trafficking,” Polaris, July 2018, <https://polarisproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/A-Roadmap-for-Systems-and-Industries-to-Prevent-and-Disrupt-Human-Trafficking-Social-Media.pdf>, 19.

⁴¹ Anthony, “On-Ramps, Intersections and Exit Routes,” 19.

through the use of flattery, promises of gifts, or other financial assistance.”⁴² After this is it easy to lure the victim to a location for sex or to kidnap them for trafficking. Facebook is seeking ways to mitigate online predatorial activity by offering users, for a fee, an opportunity to verify their identity. By verifying one’s identity, other users can be sure that they are actually interfacing with the person they are intending to network with. While this may sound like a good idea, cyber security expert Peter Tran says, “I think we are going to see an uptick in social engineering impersonation and hacks.”⁴³

It is generally accepted that social media continues to wreak havoc on everyday life. Without boundaries, the same caution God stated in the Babel episode rings true today: nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them. Social media has demonstrated that when groups of people working outside of God’s plan seek self-preservation, self-glorification for greater happiness trouble is the natural result. A recent illustration of this happened on January 6, 2021. Angered voters over perceived irregularities in the 2020 Presidential election allegedly stormed the Capitol building in Washington, DC, where one individual was killed directly related to the protest. Seven days later, on January 13, 2021, the *Washington Post* published an article by Elizabeth Dwoskin entitled, “Facebook’s Sandberg deflected blame for Capitol riot, but new evidence shows how platform played role.” Dwoskin writes,

In the days leading up to last week’s march on the Capitol, supporters of President Trump promoted it extensively on Facebook and Facebook-owned Instagram and used the services to organize bus trips to Washington. More than 100,000 users posted hashtags affiliated with the movement prompted by baseless claims of election fraud, including #StopTheSteal and #FightForTrump.⁴⁴

⁴² Anthony, “On-Ramps, Intersections and Exit Routes,” 19.

⁴³ Brandon Truitt, “Should You Pay to Get Verified on Facebook and Instagram? Experts Weight in on New Meta Program,” CBS Boston, February 20, 2023, <https://www.cbsnews.com/boston/news/meta-paid-verification-facebook-instagram/>.

⁴⁴ Elizabeth Dwoskin, “Facebook’s Sanberg Deflected Blame for Capital Riot, but New Evidence Shows How Platform Played Role,” *The Washington Post*, January 13, 2021, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2021/01/13/facebook-role-in-capitol-protest/>.

While many may argue that social media is not to blame for the riots or even death that day, others can argue that social media was a tool that shortcut due process and exacerbated political foment. So that makes social media as a tool a danger, not just the individual users, influencers or applications.

Prior to the advent of social media, hyper-connectivity, hyper-mobilization, and some argue hyper-misinformation that occurred on January 6, 2021 would have been impossible. The creation of a coordinated riot would have taken much longer to organize. It can be argued that time would have allowed the evidence of election tampering to be fully vetted, giving more people pause to respond with an informed and calm reaction. Illustrating that social media provides a platform where hyper-communication and hyper-misinformation can lead to coercion, influencing, mobilization that is often ill-informed, ill-timed, and poorly executed, creating loss in relationships, position, influence, and possibly life and ultimately robbing culture of a settled peace.

Conclusion

Richard Wurmbrand, in his biography *Tortured for Christ*, recounts how the church in Romania was seduced by the Communists. He writes,

The Communists convened a congress of all Christian bodies in our Parliament building. There were four thousand priests, pastors, and ministers of all denominations—and these men of God chose Joseph Stalin as honorary president of this congress. At the same time, he was president of the World Movement of the Godless and a mass murderer of Christians. One after another, bishops and pastors arose and declared that communism and Christianity are fundamentally the same and could coexist. One minister after another said words of praise toward communism and assured the new government of the loyalty of the church.⁴⁵

This seduction was masterfully orchestrated to gain the affections of the Romanian people. Wurmbrand writes, “I attended the Congress of the Baptists in the town of Resita . . . where the president of the Baptists praised Stalin as a great teacher of the Bible and proclaimed

⁴⁵ Richard Wurmbrand, *Tortured for Christ* (Bartlesville, OK: Living Sacrifice, 1998), 15.

that Stalin did nothing but teach the Bible.”⁴⁶ Wurmbrand is clear that Stalin used the church to gain entrance into the hearts of the people. After reading the biography, one may ask, “What was worse Stalin, or Communism?” In like manner today, society should be asking, “What is worse, the social media influencer or social media itself?” Thinking of social media as a large warehouse full of good and bad content misses the point that the warehouse, like communism, is itself an ideological construct. The next question that must be raised is, “Is social media gaining a footing in the church because well-meaning Christians have adopted it as force for good?”

While it is easy to view individual influencers or apps as a threat to the believer, the bigger and more pertinent point has been raised and addressed that social media is a threat to society. However, like the world, believers are engaging in the same system that is designed to promote self-preservation and self-glorification, and without knowing it their happiness in the body of Christ is being replaced by a virtual happiness rooted in the self.

⁴⁶ Wurmbrand, *Tortured for Christ*, 16.

CHAPTER 4
THE MODERN SELF AND THE ROLE OF KOINONIA

Introduction

Self-preservation and self-glorification—in the pursuit of happiness, were modeled by Eve, Cain, and the people of Babel, and can be traced throughout most of Israel’s history. This same pursuit of happiness is what captivates today’s youth. Through the person and work of Christ the self is radically modified. No longer does man need to remain enslaved to self-development, leading to insecurity and despair, but he is freed to enjoy God by losing himself in the person of Christ for a greater purpose—the glory of God and the advancement of his kingdom. It is important to note that this transformation of the self is not purely behavioral, toward some new morality, but a radical new birth in regard to one’s thinking which is based on objective truth that leads to the worship of God, which in the end affects one’s behavior, leading to right feelings and one’s heart affections. This chapter will seek to show the prevailing make-up of the modern self in contrast to the make-up of the church. Chapter 3 captured the reality that social media has in influencing the self. This chapter seeks to show a contrast between the natural bent of the modern self and the opportunities the church has of rescuing those who are adversely affected by social media and technology by establishing and advancing the spiritual discipline of *κοινωνία*, or fellowship, in the church.

First, tracing the philosophical thread of the self through time helps the church grasp the perduring nature of social media and understand social media’s role in the rise of the self. This understanding should equip the church to address issues directly and indirectly related to social media’s use by its members, and the church itself.

A Deeper Understanding of the Modern Self

Borrowing from various streams of thought, a discussion of the self can be laid out in three ways: the inner self, the outer self, and the malaise of the self (see figure 1). By looking at the self in these ways, one can begin to construct a meaningful understanding of the church's challenges and opportunities to combat the rise of the self. Figure 1, displayed later in this section, gives a pictorial representation of these three views of the self.

The Inner Self

The inner self can be defined by three distinct layers: concern, control, and concept. The inner-most layer is concern. In her book *Screens and Teens*, Kathy Koch tackles the idea of the self by quoting analyst and statistician Scott Degraffenreif who argues that most youth have five distinct self-concerns: security, identity, belonging, purpose, and competence.¹ These self-concerns lead the self to take control. Control is the layer that mediates between concern and concept and controls how one conceptualizes themselves. Like the heart pumping blood to all parts of the body, the control center pumps fuel to all parts of the self. Carl Rogers, father of Humanistic Philosophy, believed that “for one to ‘grow’, they need an environment that provides them with genuineness (openness and self-disclosure), acceptance (being seen with unconditional positive regard), and empathy (being listened to and understood).”² Genuineness, acceptance, and empathy, as defined by Rogers, are the fuel to satisfy one's self concern and to control one's self-concept. Rogers believed that self-concept, the third layer, can be viewed in

¹ Kathy Koch, *Screens and Teens: Connecting with Our Kids in a Wireless World* (Chicago: Moody, 2015), 15.

² Saul Mcleod, “Carl Rogers: Founder of the Humanistic Approach to Psychology,” *Simply Psychology*, May 18, 2023, <https://simplypsychology.org/carl-rogers.html>.

three different parts: ideal self, self-image, and self-esteem.³ According to Rogers, the ideal self is the ultimate vision of the self—who one hopes to become, self-image is a real-time snapshot of how one views him or herself, that is, physical characteristics, social roles, et cetera, and self-esteem is the value one places on him or herself.⁴

The Outer Self

The outer self can be defined by individualism, expressivism, and communalism.⁵ Individualism, or the isolated self, can be broken into several similar ideas: independence, self-direction, self-reliance, free thought, originality, unconventionality, and eccentricity. Expressivism occurs when these marks of individualism are believed to be the authentic self, or true to one's self. Finally, individualism and expressivism fall prey to communalism through new groups that affirm and validate the individual's perceived or felt identity. The result is a self that is oriented toward a community that celebrates one's authentic self. Most importantly, the modern self is affirmed by a group as opposed to the divine. The modern self believes, "What I think of myself is my authentic self" and "what others think of me is more vital than what God, if there is a God, thinks of me." This *tour-de-self* creates a societal malaise that is seen in the rise of anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation.

³ Kendra Cherry, "What Is Self-Concept?," VeryWellMind, November 7, 2022, <https://www.verywellmind.com/what-is-self-concept-2795865>.

⁴ Cherry, "What Is Self-Concept?"

⁵ Charles Taylor cites "individualism, secularization, and instrumental rationality" as three major components to the modern self which I address on the next page. I have elected to use individualism, expressivism, and communalism as a way of defining the modern self. See Charles Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries* (Durham, NC: Duke University, 2004), 1.

The Modern Self's Malaise

Author and Professor Charles Taylor, in his book *Modern Social Imaginaries*, sees the malaise of the modern self in three ways: alienation, meaninglessness, and social dissolution. This malaise, according to Taylor, is a product of multiple modernities such as “science, technology, industrial production, [and] urbanization.”⁶ However, as I argue in this thesis, technological advancements since the mid-twentieth century, specifically the invention of the computer and social media, are the chief contributing factors to this modern malaise, however, agreeing with Taylor, not the only contributor to this malaise.

The modern view of the self has been helped along, as Taylor suggests, by secularization and instrumental rationality.⁷ On secularization, he writes, “Modernity is secular, not in the frequent, rather loose sense of the word, where it designates the absence of religion.”⁸ Taylor continues, “Religion occupies a different place, compatible with the sense that all social action takes place in profane time.”⁹ Viewing the profane and the religious as compatible gives rise to ideas such as instrumental rationality, which views the natural and social world in terms of how individuals benefit others, holding no regard for human values. Human value is the chief concern of philosophers who seek to understand the concept of existence. A philosopher’s love of wisdom and drive toward the good life ironically leads them away from true wisdom and into humanism which elevates man and shuts God out of the discussion of existence.

Figure 1 gives a pictorial representation of these three views of the self, the inner self, the outer self, and the malaise of the self.

⁶ Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries*, 1.

⁷ Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries*, 1.

⁸ Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries*, 194.

⁹ Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries*, 194.

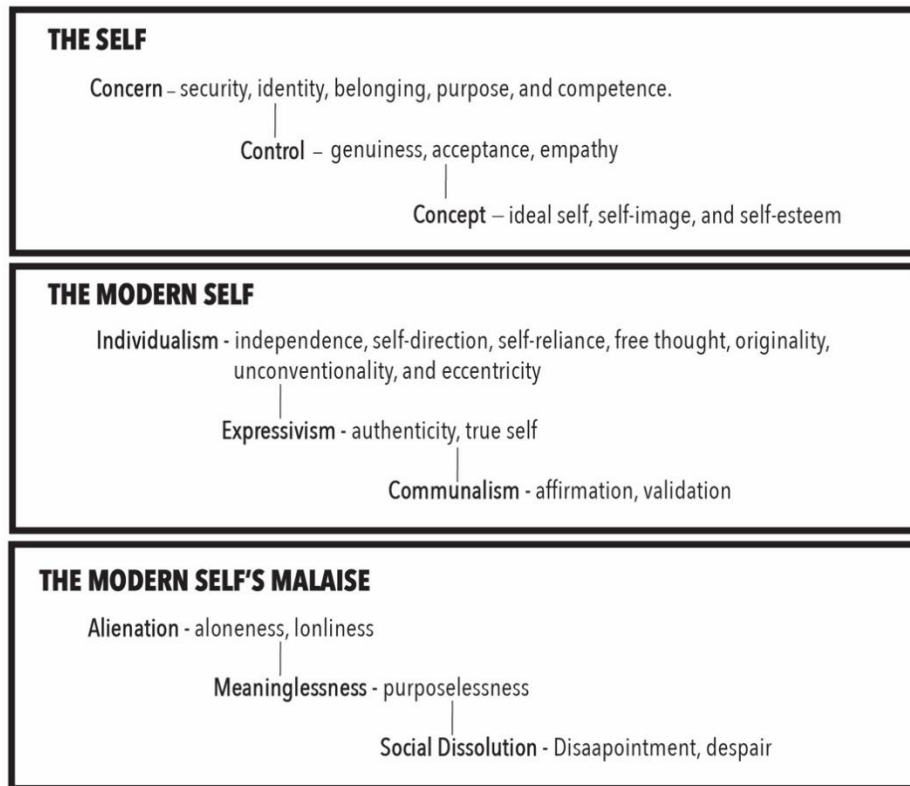


Figure 1. The self, the modern self, and the modern self’s malaise

A Philosophical Understanding of the Modern Self

One of the earliest philosophers and the founder of the school of natural philosophy was Thales of Miletus (620 BC-546 BC), whose theory was “everything was made of water; therefore, man is made of water.”¹⁰ For Thales to “know thyself” required knowledge of the source of the self, and according to Thales water was the one constant; water was the absolute source. His theory was eventually dismissed by later philosophers as it fell short of common sense and scientific reasoning. While Thales went on to develop the scientific method and initiate the first western enlightenment,¹¹ his water theory

¹⁰ Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, “Thales of Mileus (c. 620 B.C.E.-c. 546 B.C.E.),” accessed March 1, 2023, <https://iep.utm.edu/thales/#:~:text=Aristotle's%20lines%20in%20Metaphysics%20indicate,and%20floating%20islands%20do%20exist.>

¹¹ Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, “Thales of Mileus.”

demonstrates that men were actively seeking answers to man's origin outside of God or the gods of their making.¹²

Thales's philosophical failure did not stop other philosophers from arguing about the existence of life and the various absolutes to cure the soul's unrest. Greek philosophers were champions of this cause. Protagoras, writing in the fifth century BC, stated, "Man is the measure of all things: of the things which are, that they are, and of things which are not, that they are not."¹³ For Socrates, truth, not man, was the absolute.¹⁴ For the Stoics, virtue ethics was the absolute. These pre-Christian era philosophers demonstrated that man was looking outside mythology to explain existence. Without Scripture these ideas varied, and at times were at odds with each other.

Western post-Christian era philosophy sought ways to incorporate the supernatural or religious ideas into the conversation of existence. Sixteenth-century philosopher René Descartes had to grapple with such a confluence of the seemingly incongruent ideas of God and nature. His starting point was simply, "I think therefore I am," postulating that reason was the absolute.¹⁵ His conclusion was sourced not entirely outside religion. As philosopher Charles Taylor points out in his book *Sources of the Self*, Descartes was not a "closet atheist" neither an "eighteenth-century Deist," but a man who supported biblical ideas such as the existence of God and man's fallen nature.¹⁶ In fact,

¹² Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, "Thales of Mileus."

¹³ Douglas Groothuis, *Philosophy in Seven Sentences: A Small Introduction to a Vast Topic* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 2016), 22.

¹⁴ Groothuis, *Philosophy in Seven Sentences*, 38.

¹⁵ Groothuis, *Philosophy in Seven Sentences*, 82.

¹⁶ Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 1989), 157.

Descartes was a devout Catholic whose ideas of God and nature were his way of merging a natural understanding of existence with that of the spiritual teachings of the church.¹⁷

Descartes's contribution is mainly in his understanding of the nature of reason as holding an inward moral compass that acts to control man's passions.¹⁸ Reason, as Taylor suggests, was Descartes's way of representing the soul, which is distinct from the material body.¹⁹ Taylor argues that Descartes is suggesting that one must "disengage from our usual embodied perspective. . . . We have to objectify the world, including our own bodies, and that means to come to see them mechanistically and functionally, in the same way that an uninvolved external observer would."²⁰ Descartes states, "Bodies are not properly speaking known by the senses or by the faculty of the imagination, but by the understanding only, and . . . they are not known from the fact that they are seen or touched, but only because they are understood."²¹ Descartes was espousing a split between the soul and the body, creating two distinct parts of man. This bifurcation of soul and body is referred to as "Cartesian dualism," and is an essential philosophical building block that leads to the proliferation of treating the body as insignificant or just a mass of cells. Nancy Pearcey, a leading Christian apologist and author, argues that Cartesian dualism is Descartes's belief that the mind is a "free, autonomous self," and the body "a mechanism operating by natural laws."²² Essentially, Descartes was trying to appease both the church and scientists by splitting the soul and body. Pearcey, quoting Catholic philosopher Jacques Maritain, writes, "Cartesian dualism breaks man up into two

¹⁷ Nancy Pearcey, *Love Thy Body: Answering Hard Questions about Life and Sexuality* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2018), 50.

¹⁸ Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 143.

¹⁹ Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 145.

²⁰ Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 145.

²¹ Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 145.

²² Pearcey, *Love Thy Body*, 50.

complete substances—on the one hand, the body which is only geometrical extension; on the other hand, the soul which is only thought.”²³

Cartesian dualism leads to the discussion of the separation of personhood and humanness. Pearcey states, “To be human is no longer equivalent to being a person.”²⁴ A person, not a human, is one who exhibits, among other things “intelligence, self-awareness, self-control, a sense of time, concern for others, communication, curiosity and neocortical function.”²⁵ Conspicuously left out of this list is the body. The modern worldview would suggest that the body makes one a human but does not make one a person. To understand this further, Descartes’s mutation of man into two separate parts is like the teachings of Gnosticism, a second-century doctrine that treated the body as less important than the spirit.²⁶

A Biblical Response to the Modern Self

In Scripture, the use of the human body both literally and figuratively teaches the high value of the body. For example, man was literally embodied by God, and the literal body of Adam was judged as good by God (Gen 1:31). Adam and Eve were said to become one flesh figuratively (Gen 2:24), a union sanctioned by God. The church is referred to as the figurative body of Christ (Eph 4:16; Col 3:18). Christ himself lifted up his literal body on the cross, which was broken, literally, for mankind (Matt 26:26-28). On top of this, Paul makes the claim that there will be a literal bodily resurrection (1 Cor 15).

Believing the body is evil or even non-essential is to ignore personhood. Therefore, the neo-Gnosticism of Descartes is not only in direct contrast to Scripture, but paves the way for sins of the body such as homosexuality, gender dysphoria, abortion,

²³ Pearcey, *Love Thy Body*, 51.

²⁴ Pearcey, *Love Thy Body*, 52.

²⁵ Pearcey, *Love Thy Body*, 53.

²⁶ Pearcey, *Love Thy Body*, 35.

pornography, prostitution, the hookup culture, sex trafficking, molestation, physical abuse, overeating, laziness, drug abuse, self-harm, and the list goes on. By separating the body from the soul, one can justify any sort of activity that involves the body.

Descartes's philosophy disembodies personality. Author and professor Gregg Allison writes in his book *Embodied: Living as Whole People in a Fractured World* that "God's design for his image bearers is that we are embodied."²⁷ He states that the concept of human embodiment "intersects" with theology, specifically "creation and human flourishing. . . . Human embodiment exposes the devastating impact of Gnosticism/neo-Gnosticism on the American society and the church."²⁸

The split Descartes makes of the man into soul and body paves the way for one to question the value of the body. If the body is inherently bad, and the mind is good, then what I think is what I am. If I, as a male, think I am a woman, then I am a woman, independent of my natural body. One's true or authentic self is what one thinks about himself or herself. Why is this possible? One of Descartes's flaws was centering morality in man, making man, or specifically his thoughts, essentially good. In this way Taylor argues, "We no longer see ourselves as related to moral sources outside of us . . . an important power has been internalized."²⁹

Author and counselor John Street writes about the modern self's ethic in his book *Passions of the Heart: Biblical Counseling for Stubborn Sexual Sins*:

Trusting your feelings and allowing them to dictate your choices is the dogma of the day. Further, this culture says you must self-identify—because surely your own heart would not mislead you! A self-determined reality is the only trustworthy reality, according to the philosophic trendsetters. This social construction of reality theory declares that you cannot rely on anything external to yourself—you can trust only self. It is not difficult to see how the push for the "self-defining self" ideology is

²⁷ Gregg R. Allison, *Embodied: Living as Whole People in a Fractured World* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2021), 15.

²⁸ Allison, *Embodied*, 15-16.

²⁹ Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 143.

fueling a culture of self-indulgence and self-gratification. This is the heart turned on itself, leaving havoc in its wake.³⁰

The modern self can be defined by the axiom, “the only real is what you feel,” where what you feel defines who you are. The biblical view of the self, on the other hand, views feelings not as definitional of identity, but as the heart’s response to circumstances. Something may make one sad, but that something does not define the person. A boy’s feelings that he is a girl should not define him as a girl. His feelings are not definitional, but reactionary to other circumstances. Feelings may be normal albeit harmful. Therefore, biblical truth that lies outside of man cuts across the grain of man’s wayward feelings and orients him to the God who created him. Further defining him as a soul and body.

Social Media’s Impact on the Body

Social media use can have an adverse effect on the physical body by shaping one’s beliefs. Beliefs, in turn, can affect one’s overall health. This connection between belief and health is explained by both science and the Christian ethic.

Science

In the past one hundred years or so, a major change has happened in the way neuroscientists understand the brain. It was previously thought that the brain, made up of some 100 billion neurons, was largely fixed at adulthood. Author Nicolas Carr in his book *Shallows: What the internet is doing to our brains* cites Spanish neuroanatomist and Nobel Laureate Santiago Ramón y Cajal, who in 1913 said, “In the adult [brain] centres, the nerve paths are something fixed, ended immutable. Everything may die, nothing may be regenerated.”³¹ Carr argues,

The mechanical conception of the brain both reflected and refuted the famous theory of dualism that René Descartes had laid out in his *Meditations* of 1641. . . . Descartes

³⁰ John D. Street, *Passions of the Heart: Biblical Counsel for Stubborn Sexual Sins* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2019), 4.

³¹ Nicholas G. Carr, *The Shallows: What the Internet Is Doing to Our Brains* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2019), 22.

claimed that the brain and the mind existed in two separate spheres: one material, one ethereal. The physical brain, like the rest of the body, was purely mechanical instrument . . . [the mind was the] spiritual side, which was the realm of theology—and never the twain shall meet.³²

The end result was that “scientists rejected the “mind” half of Cartesian dualism even as they embraced Descartes’ idea of the brain as a machine.”³³ This rejection was largely due to the idea that the mind was outside the realm of observation, which made experimentation impossible.

Understanding the brain as a machine is critical to the concept of the modern self. Carr writes,

The machine metaphor was extended, and further reinforced, by the arrival of the digital computer—a “thinking machine”—in the middle of the twentieth century. That’s when scientists and philosophers began referring to our brain circuits, and even our behavior, as being “hardwired,” just like the microscopic circuits etched into the silicon substrate of a computer chip.³⁴

But as scientists discovered in the twentieth century, the brain is not a fixed set of neurons, synapses, and nerve endings. As Carr explains, “A handful of biologists and psychologists saw in the rapidly growing body of brain research indications that even the adult brain was malleable, or “plastic.” New neural circuits could form throughout our lives, they suggested, and old ones might grow stronger or weaker or wither away entirely.”³⁵ The results of this newer understanding of the brain have yielded the conclusion that brain cells can indeed change and brains can develop with input. Carr, quoting British biologist J. Z. Young, explains, “It may be therefore that every action leaves some permanent print upon the nervous tissue.”³⁶ Carr’s conclusion was that while “Descartes may have been wrong about dualism . . . he appears to have been correct in believing that our thoughts

³² Carr, *The Shallows*, 22-23.

³³ Carr, *The Shallows*, 23.

³⁴ Carr, *The Shallows*, 23.

³⁵ Carr, *The Shallows*, 21.

³⁶ Carr, *The Shallows*, 21.

can exert a physical influence on, or at least cause a physical reaction in, our brains. We become, neurologically, what we think.”³⁷

In other words, input is output. What one dwells on affects one neurologically, opening pathways of least resistance for the benefit of habit forming. Habit forming can be a gift or a curse depending on the quality of the input. Studies have shown that mere suggestion is linked to action. For example, if someone is told he is depressed, then he is more likely to think he is depressed and therefore will most likely struggle with depression. Likewise, if someone is told to commit suicide (action) because life is not worth living (belief), then that one is statistically more likely to follow through and commit suicide. Suggestion is application, and input is output.

Scripture

For one to feel right and have right affections, one must believe, think, and do right. This chain of events is found in passages such as Joshua 1:8 and Psalm 1 and is made possible by the empowering work of the Spirit of God. What precedes biblical prosperity and good success in Joshua 1:8 is the working out of Scripture in one’s life predicated on biblical meditation. In other words, the body is the agent directly correlated to either prosperity and success or to failure and misery. For example, when Satan suggested to Eve an alternative to the Word of God, the chain of events that followed were devastating, proving that what one believes affects what that one thinks, what one thinks affects how one behaves, and behavior affects both feelings and affections. Truth, on the other hand, is nothing unless transferred to action. The mind engaged in the Word of God produces a body engaged by Calvary love. To erase the body from this chain eviscerates the purpose of truth and leaves one feeling as if they were disembodied. Furthermore, disengaging the body from the process of learning leads to isolation, ultimately alienating the self from

³⁷ Carr, *The Shallows*, 33.

others and distancing oneself from purpose. This alienation creates a retreat from social constructs that the self is made to thrive in, which ultimately destroys the body.

Effects of Loneliness and Isolation

Social media's individualistic design isolates the user from real people, promoting aloneness that can lead to isolation and loneliness. Isolation is not to be confused by loneliness. Isolation is a state of being, while loneliness is a feeling. One can be isolated without feeling lonely, and one can feel lonely while not being isolated. Many argue that the use of social media mitigates the feeling or effect of loneliness because one is connecting with others. However, as the Center for Disease Control and Prevention explains, social isolation from people leads to an increased risk of premature death, dementia, heart disease, stroke, depression, anxiety, and suicide.³⁸ Echoing this, is more recent report put out by the US Surgeon General. This report shows that isolation breeds alienation and the feeling of loneliness and the body keeps the score. According to this report, loneliness and social isolation increase the risk for premature death by "26% and 29% respectively."³⁹ This study compared the lack of social connection with the effect of "smoking up to 15 cigarettes a day."⁴⁰ This study also reports that "poor or insufficient social connection" runs a "29% increased risk of heart disease and a 32% increased risk of stroke."⁴¹ Additionally, loneliness and isolation is associated with increased risk for

³⁸ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "Alzheimer's Disease and Healthy Aging: Loneliness and Social Isolation Linked to Serious Health Conditions," accessed May 24, 2023, <https://www.cdc.gov/aging/publications/features/lonely-older-adults.html#:~:text=Recent%20studies%20found%20that%3A,%2C%20obesity%2C%20and%20physical%20inactivity.&text=1-.Social%20isolation%20was%20associated%20with,50%25%20increased%20risk%20of%20dementia.>

³⁹ Office of the US Surgeon General, "Our Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation," US Department of Health and Human Services, 2023, accessed May 16, 2023, 8, <https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/surgeon-general-social-connection-advisory.pdf>.

⁴⁰ Office of the US Surgeon General, "Our Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation," 4.

⁴¹ Office of the US Surgeon General, "Our Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation," 8.

anxiety, depression, and dementia.⁴² The report also cites that loneliness and isolation increase the risk of cardiovascular disease, hypertension, diabetes, infectious diseases, cognitive function, suicidality and self-harm.⁴³ US Surgeon General Vivek H. Murthy relates how the statistics became clear to him:

When I first took office as Surgeon General in 2014, I didn't view loneliness as a public health concern. But that was before I embarked on a cross-country listening tour, where I heard stories from my fellow Americans that surprised me. People began to tell me they felt isolated, invisible, and insignificant. Even when they couldn't put their finger on the word "lonely," time and time again, people of all ages and socioeconomic backgrounds, from every corner of the country, would tell me, "I have to shoulder all of life's burdens by myself," or "if I disappear tomorrow, no one will even notice." It was a lightbulb moment for me: social disconnection was far more common than I had realized.

In fact, 50 percent of adults now report that they experience loneliness.⁴⁴ This is alarming given the rise in use of the internet, which was intended to connect people socially. The data is striking:

Nearly all teens and adults under 65 (96-99%), and 75% of adults 65 and over, say that they use the internet. Americans spend an average of six hours per day on digital media. One-in-three U.S. adults 18 and over report that they are online "almost constantly," and the number of teens ages 13-17 years who say they are online "almost constantly" has doubled since 2015.⁴⁵

In terms of social media use, the report says, "When looking at social media specifically, the percentage of U.S. adults 18 and over who reported using social media increased from 5% in 2005 to roughly 80% in 2019. Among teens ages 13 to 17 years, 95% report using social media as of 2022, with more than half reporting it would be hard to give up social media."⁴⁶ While the use of social media, when alone, may help ward off feelings of loneliness, health issues associated with isolation persist regardless of social

⁴² Office of the US Surgeon General, "Our Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation," 8.

⁴³ Office of the US Surgeon General, "Our Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation," 24-29.

⁴⁴ Office of the US Surgeon General, "Our Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation," 4.

⁴⁵ Office of the US Surgeon General, "Our Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation," 19-20.

⁴⁶ Office of the US Surgeon General, "Our Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation," 20.

media use. To prove this, a 2017 study by the University of Pittsburgh in Pennsylvania published in the *American Journal of Preventative Medicine* showed using social media for more than two hours a day made users feel socially isolated as compared to those who used social media for under thirty minutes a day.⁴⁷ This data demonstrates that social media is not socially oriented. In fact, quite the opposite is true. Despite the use of social media, “The rate of loneliness among young adults has increased every year between 1976 and 2019.”⁴⁸

In response to this data, the report urges people to find social groups that are in person and not online. The report begins with a definition of belonging: “A fundamental human need—the feeling of deep connection with social groups, physical places, and individual and collective experiences.”⁴⁹ Yet social media is replacing physical social groups, places, and experiences, creating a sense of belonging without the structures of what it means to belong. These structures as defined by the US Surgeon General’s report are sports groups, religious groups, member associations, policies, and physical elements of a community such as libraries, parks, green spaces, and playgrounds that support the development of social connection.⁵⁰ What may seem shocking is that the US government is urging people to move toward religious groups to ward off the effects of isolation as promoted by social media.

⁴⁷ Brian A. Primack et al. explain,

There were significant bivariable associations between PSI [perceived social isolation] and each of the primary SMU [social media use] variables. Compared with those who used social media <30 minutes per day, those who used social media ≥121 minutes per day had about double the odds for increased PSI (OR=2.0, 95% CI=1.4, 2.8) (Table 2). Similarly, compared with those who visited social media platforms fewer than nine times per week, those who visited ≥58 times per week had about triple the odds of increased PSI (OR=3.4, 95% CI=2.3, 5.0) (Table 3). (Brian A. Primack et al., “Social Media Use and Perceived Social Isolation among Young Adults in the U.S.,” *American Journal of Preventative Medicine* 53, no. 1 (2017), <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0749379717300168?via%3Dihub>.)

⁴⁸ Office of the US Surgeon General, “Our Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation,” 7.

⁴⁹ Office of the US Surgeon General, “Our Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation,” 7.

⁵⁰ Office of the US Surgeon General, “Our Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation,” 7.

To underscore the need humans have to be together, New York University professor and *New York Times* bestselling author, Adam Alter, cites a 2012 experiment where fifty-one boys and girls, ages eleven and twelve, from various backgrounds were taken to summer camp outside of Los Angeles, California, where they did not have access to their phones, computers, videogames, *et cetera*—a tech-free environment. Like a typical camp, these kids enjoyed the outdoors, such as fishing, hiking, camping, and exploring. Alter recounts, “They weren’t explicitly taught to look each other in the eyes, face-to-face, but in the absence of new media, that’s exactly what happened.”⁵¹ Alter states that on Monday morning, the first day of camp, these boys and girls were given a test called DANVA2, which stands for the Diagnostic Analysis of Nonverbal Behavior.⁵² The test is in two parts. In part 1, a number of faces are shown, and the test taker just has to interpret the emotional states of the faces in the photos. In part 2, test takers hear a sentence read aloud and the test taker again decides on the emotional state of the reader. While many faces and voices are obvious, many are more “subtle.” Alter explains, “Like deciding whether the Mona Lisa is smiling inside, or whether she’s just bored or unhappy.”⁵³ On average, these campers missed fourteen out of forty-eight items. At the end of the week, after just a few days without technology and just before leaving camp, these same boys and girls were given the DANVA2 again. They found that the error rate dropped by 33 percent, while a test group of boys and girls from the same school who did not attend camp took the test twice over the same span of time, saw an error drop on the second test of just 10 percent. Alter’s conclusion is that while taking the test twice produces better results, the “rate of improvement was much less impressive than the rate

⁵¹ Adam Alter, *Irresistible: The Rise of Addictive Technology and the Business of Keeping Us Hooked* (New York: Penguin Random, 2018), 238.

⁵² Alter, *Irresistible*, 238.

⁵³ Alter, *Irresistible*, 238.

shown by the wilderness campers.”⁵⁴ This study shows that being together in the same place, engaging with others physically, enhances one’s ability to understand and minister to the needs of others.

The Problem of Human Interaction and the Seduction of Technology

Human relationships are difficult. They require presence: physically, emotionally, and often materially. Human relationships come with emotion and expression, which creates awkwardness, tension, and uncertainty. Humans can be demanding, self-centered, and come with problems such as sin issues, annoying habits and idiosyncrasies, mental health issues, addictions, or even homicidal tendencies. For these reasons, the modern self is seduced by technology as a replacement for human relationships.

Financial need, for example, drives the constant call for a higher minimum wage. The corporate solution to this human cry is technology—eliminate expensive human employees behind the cash register or the factory floor for more cost-effective touch screens or robotic machinery. Now the customer can order exactly what he wants without the need for messy human interaction, and the factory manager can program exactly what he wants from the machine, avoiding miscommunication or personality issues related to a real human worker. Technology has been replacing humans at an alarming rate in factories and restaurants over the past few decades. Robots are now delivering food to tables at local fast-food establishments, computers are driving cars, and through AI, even one’s love notes can be written by technology.

At the heart of this drive for technology is the need to address the difficulties associated with real human relationships. Sherry Turkle points this out in *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other*: “Face-to-face

⁵⁴ Alter, *Irresistible*, 240.

conversations are difficult. Awkward. Spontaneous. Unscripted. Messy.”⁵⁵ Turkle is right. Real relationships are dynamic, non-scripted, and uncontrollable. For these reasons, real relationships with real humans cause many people to consider replacing humans with robots. “As I listen for what stands behind this moment,” Turkle writes, “I hear a certain fatigue with the difficulties of life with people. We insert robots into every narrative of human frailty.”⁵⁶ To demonstrate this, she writes about a young woman named Anne whom she met at a conference. Anne wanted to “trade her boyfriend in ‘For a sophisticated Japanese robot’ if the robot would produce what she called ‘caring behavior.’”⁵⁷ Anne is not alone. Turkle met a thirty-year-old man who remarked, “I’d rather talk to a robot. Friends can be exhausting. The robot will be there for me. And whenever I’m done, I can walk away.”⁵⁸

According to Turkle, man’s move toward machines for intimacy is the natural evolution of what has been happening in factories and fast-food restaurants for decades and that is to replace difficult, expensive, and messy people with machines.⁵⁹ This man and machine convergence is taking another yet another step in a darker direction. The sexual revolution is driving the advancement of intimacy between man and machine. Where man and machine can enjoy sexual relations without issues, that is, the messiness of emotion, menstrual cycles, expectation, and limitations, ultimately the idea of man and machine advances man’s control over the pain of real relationship, setting himself up for an ultimate sexual experience without obligation. Turkle writes, “I did not see marriage

⁵⁵ Sherry Turkle, *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other* (New York: Basic, 2011), xxii.

⁵⁶ Turkle, *Alone Together*, 10.

⁵⁷ Turkle, *Alone Together*, 8.

⁵⁸ Turkle, *Alone Together*, 10.

⁵⁹ Turkle, *Alone Together*, 10.

to a machine as a welcome evolution in human relationships.”⁶⁰ Turkle’s negative position on marriage between man and machine creates a problem for those advancing this idea. Writing about an exchange she had with a *Scientific American* reporter, Turkle states,

I was taken aback when the reporter suggested that I was no better than bigots who deny gays and lesbians the right to marry. I tried to explain that just because I didn’t think people should marry machines didn’t mean that any mix of adult people wasn’t fair territory. He accused me of species chauvinism: Wasn’t I withholding from robots their right to “realness”?⁶¹

Realness is taking the obligations and joys of marriage and sexual relations between one human man with one human woman seriously. Heterosexual marriage between real humans is God’s design to set man up for his greatest experience of life on earth (Gen 2). Anything less than this creates an artificial “marriage” relationship for the sake of taking greater control over the difficulties of real life, and it sacrifices infinite joy for temporal pleasure. In the end, technology moves man further afield from human-to-human connection and drives man into isolation where man’s base desires find expression.

Exchanging humans with technology is also finding its way into the corporate worship of the church. Online services and online-only churches are becoming more attractive because they satisfy man’s desire to worship God without the awkward nature of having to be with others. For example, *Life.Church*, based in Edmond, Oklahoma, promotes online services as an alternative to meeting in person.⁶² According to *Life.Church*, they offer an entire, functioning church online that serves more than 70,000 people every week. A 2019 article entitled “5 Biggest Online Churches” by Andrew Conrad on the website Capterra a business consulting site, asks, “Why are there online churches?” The answer: “As generations change and churches look for ways to change

⁶⁰ Turkle, *Alone Together*, 7.

⁶¹ Turkle, *Alone Together*, 7.

⁶² Andrew Conrad, “5 Biggest Online Churches,” Capterra, May 10, 2019, <https://www.capterra.com/resources/the-5-biggest-online-churches/>.

with them, the allure of connecting online rather than face-to-face has become too prevalent for church leadership to ignore.”⁶³ While he cites online services as being necessary for the sick, disabled, or distanced, in reality online churches are shifting the incarnational nature of the church for a disembodied experience due to convenience. Going digital embraces a *descartesian* ideal that the mind is more important than the body. As Scot McKnight illustrates,

We can communicate conveniently and quickly in digital formats—at my church we get an e-newsletter each week, and I like them. But we can’t get to know one another apart from embodied realities. One can’t “do” church digitally; the important things about church life are all embodied: knowing one another, loving one another, sitting and standing and praying with one another, listening to the sermon and watching the tone of words and the movement of the body when we sing and walk forward to take communion. These are the things that make a church a church.⁶⁴

Technology can be viewed as a replacement for in-person qualities that the church provides, leaving parishioners without the blessings of being known and cared for by others. Technology is used by some churches to circumvent *koinonia* while still providing the sermon and communion. To be fair, online connectivity via a church website and online services can be useful in helping the sick, shut-ins, those serving out-of-town, vacationing out-of-town, or those whose work hinders attending the service to stay connected to their local church body. However, the limitations of technology must be considered and explained carefully. Technology, while creating a sense of being together, which for a time may be helpful, cannot replace the incarnational elements of worship for which the soul was created. Jay Kim’s warning is simply,

We are indeed more scattered than ever before. This is the ultimate paradox of the digital age: at the moment in human history when technology allows us to be more connected than ever, we are so very far apart, to the point that our very understanding of “community” has devolved into a sort of collection of isolated individuals. . . . We live in an impatient, shallow, isolated culture. The idea of patiently journeying with a community of Jesus followers, doing the hard work of cultivating and excavating depth in our relationships with God and one another, and involving

⁶³ Conrad, “5 Biggest Online Churches.”

⁶⁴ Scot McKnight, foreword to *Analog Church: Why We Need Real People, Places, and Things in the Digital Age*, by Jay Y. Kim (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2020), 2-3.

ourselves in the messy work of forging a meaning community of diverse people doesn't seem like an attractive option. And the digital age is at the ready, offering a plethora of easier, quicker, shallower, more individualistic options.⁶⁵

Relationships are difficult, and the current cultural trend is to seek replacements through technology. One helpful way to understand this cultural shift is from David Kinnaman, President of Barna Group, a research and analysis company. Kinnaman makes a comparison of Jerusalem to Babylon as a correlative to what has shifted in culture toward what the Barna Group calls “digital Babylon.”⁶⁶ He notes seven major shifts: “Faith at the center, to faith at the margins; monoreligious to pluralistic; slower-paced to accelerated, frenetic; homogeneity to diversity; central control to open-source; simpler life to bitter/sweet tension; idol: false piety to idol: fitting in/not missing out.”⁶⁷ These cultural shifts highlight a growing trend where youth are moving away from central communal living, that is, the church.

Generation Z

In 2016, The Barna Group in partnership with 360 Institute⁶⁸ studied Generation Z by conducting a series of interviews, surveys, and panels to better understand the underlying beliefs and influences impacting this generation.⁶⁹ Gen Z, according to Barna, includes those born between 1999 and 2015. Citing the most recent census data, Barna reports that there are between 69 and 70 million children and teens in this group, making

⁶⁵ Kim, *Analog Church*, 86.

⁶⁶ Barna Group, *Gen Z: The Culture, Beliefs and Motivations Shaping the Next Generation* (Ventura, CA: Barna, 2018), 9.

⁶⁷ Barna Group, *Gen Z*, 9.

⁶⁸ The Barna Group is a research firm dedicated to providing actionable insights on faith and culture, with a particular focus on the Christian church.

⁶⁹ Barna's qualitative field studies include US teenagers between the ages of 14 and 17 in four focus groups: two Christian groups and two non-Christian groups. They also conducted quantitative research consisting of two nationally representative studies of 1,997 teens ages 13-18 years old. Over 300 youth pastors were interviewed and over four hundred “engaged Christian parents” were also surveyed. Finally, one nationally represented study of 1,517 adults ages 19 and older were conducted using an online panel.

it the “largest American generation yet.”⁷⁰ Their report sought to study identity, worldview, motivations, and views on faith and the church. Their study focused heavily on teens, but they also interviewed adults 19 and older, youth pastors, and parents. Their results are both predictable and, at times, very alarming. For example, it is not surprising that Gen Z thinks happiness is defined by financial success,⁷¹ or that a majority of Gen Z says that “happiness is their ultimate goal in life.”⁷² While these ideals seem to remain relatively static from prior generations, statistics regarding faith and the church are shifting for the worse. Case in point, 37 percent of Gen Z says that it is “not possible to know for sure if God is real, this is a 5 percent increase from the prior generation.”⁷³ Additionally, only 4 percent say they have a biblical worldview.⁷⁴ This means that 96 percent of Gen Z has a worldview that is shaped outside of the Bible, and if the Bible is not shaping their world view, then what is? Barna’s conclusion is that “for many teens, truth seems relative at best and, at worst, altogether unknowable.”⁷⁵

Barna also reports that 61 percent of Christians polled who do not think church is important say, “I find God elsewhere.”⁷⁶ It may not be surprising that the vast majority of this generation is unchurched.⁷⁷ Therefore, is it also not surprising that 58 percent of teens and 62 percent of adults agree with the statement that “many religions can lead to

⁷⁰ Barna, *Gen Z*, 10.

⁷¹ Barna, *Gen Z*, 13.

⁷² Barna, *Gen Z*, 14.

⁷³ Barna, *Gen Z*, 64.

⁷⁴ Barna, *Gen Z*, 64.

⁷⁵ Barna, *Gen Z*, 64.

⁷⁶ Barna, *Gen Z*, 72.

⁷⁷ Barna, *Gen Z*, 62.

eternal life; there is no ‘one true religion.’”⁷⁸ Gen Z’s departure from truth and the church has twisted and reshaped once concrete biblical beliefs such as gender identity and marriage. For example, 69 percent say that one’s perception of their own gender does not have to match their birth gender.⁷⁹ These statistics affirm the departure of Gen Z from biblical norms and a biblical worldview.

Sadly, the rise of self, in addition to pulling teens away from the church, is pulling teens further from others, in general, and pushing them into isolation. This isolation makes today’s youth an easy target for those who want to do them harm, even if only ideologically. What teens desperately need in the church, which stands as a pillar of truth, a safe space, not just in ideology to influence belief and thinking, but wholistically, influencing behavior and affections, affecting one’s overall health.

Today’s teens spend half of their waking hours online. Barna’s study reveals that 29 percent of Gen Z reports that they use social media for eight or more hours a day.⁸⁰ Nicolas Carr cites a 2019 media-use survey by the Nielsen Company which reports, “The average American adult can now be found gazing into electronic screens—television, computer, or phone—a whopping nine hours and forty-five minutes a day.”⁸¹ The internet and social media are the largest purveyors of information that exists today. Information sets beliefs, affecting how one thinks and how one acts. Feeling and affection follow. Over exposure to rapid-fire information and entertainment is not only affecting belief structures but is also providing more down time where the user is not required to think. This information and entertainment exchange provide a see-saw effect, keeping the user from developing their critical thinking skills which are necessary for good decision making. In

⁷⁸ Barna, *Gen Z*, 64.

⁷⁹ Barna, *Gen Z*, 40.

⁸⁰ Barna, *Gen Z*, 14.

⁸¹ Carr, *The Shallows*, 227.

turn, the see-saw affect inhibits confidence in normal life skills, which can lead to poor choices, affecting how one feels about anything. Lack of critical thinking can inhibit thoughts about God, creation, eternal life, and moral issues, leading to a lack of interest in religion and the church.

The Church

Life is often hard, people are often difficult, and circumstances often prove challenging. In the midst of this chaos is a longing for relief. Mankind's answer to this chaos is technology. However, technology, in the form of social media, seems to create problems more than bring relief. Kinnaman's cultural shifts, as noted previously, included the cultural shift from simpler life to bitter/sweet tension. Kinnaman is suggesting that the ideal of peace is being replaced by the expectation or even desire for drama, conflict, and chaos. This cultural shift coincides with the advent of the internet, social media, robotics, and now AI. Sadly, mankind is acting the part of a lemming and just following wherever this technological revolution will lead. What is the price? Peace.

The God of peace desires peace for his chosen people (Isa 26:3; 32:17; Ps 29:11, 37:37; Prov 3:1-2; Rom 5:1; Gal 5:22-23; Phil 4:6-9)—peace between himself and believers (John 15; Rom 5:1-3), peace between believers (Acts 2:42; Phil 4:2-3; 1 John 4:20), and peace in this world (Phil 4:12-13). By contrast, social media is proving to create chaos. The church, on the other hand, through its proclamation of the Word of God and the power of the Holy Spirit, is a means of peace for the people of God. God established *κοινωνία*, in part, to help his children experience peace on this side of eternity. Theologian, Wayne Grudem, in his *Systematic Theology* writes, “In the fellowship of believers, ordinary friendship and affection from one another will grow, and Jesus' injunction that we ‘love one another’ (John 15:12) will be fulfilled. Moreover, as believers care for one another, they will ‘bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfil the

law of Christ (Gal. 6:2).”⁸² The bearing of burdens by believers, driven by love and affection, helps minimize daily cares associated with life and helps eliminate the effects of loneliness, bringing peace to the believer by eliminating the need for self-preservation. The word *κοινωνία* presents a communal preservation concept driven by the Spirit to meet deep-rooted needs of God’s children. Romans 15:22-29 illustrates how Paul in his missionary work and the church at Jerusalem, during a severe famine, were cared for by other believers. Paul writes,

I hope to see you in passing as I go to Spain, and to be helped on my journey there by you, once I have enjoyed your company for a while. At present, however, I am going to Jerusalem bringing aid to the saints. For Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make some contribution for the poor among the saints at Jerusalem. For they were pleased to do it, and indeed they owe it to them. For if the Gentiles have come to share in their spiritual blessings, they ought also to be of service to them in material blessings.

The aid in focus is material blessing. However, Paul does mention in this passage that a spiritual blessing is also given by the church. These blessings, spiritual and material, preserve the self. In 2 Corinthians 8:1-15, Paul writes in further detail about the church of Macedonia as a means of encouraging the generosity of the saints at Corinth. Paul writes, “For in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord, begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints.” In 8:1, Paul mentions that the Macedonia’s generosity is a “grace of God.” Then, in verse 7 Paul mentions to the church at Corinth that they too should “excel in this act of grace also.” These verses illustrate that God’s grace supplies a communal preservation both on the individual and

⁸² Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity, 1994), 958.

the church level to reduce need and establish peace.⁸³ In conclusion, communal preservation eliminates the need for self-preservation.

Additionally, Charles Taylor sees the church as “inspired by a love of God, for each other, and for humankind, whose members are devoid of rivalry, mutual resentment, love of gain, ambition to rule, and the like.”⁸⁴ In this way, the fellowship of believers is marked by an absence of striving for individual glory thus bringing peace to the believer by eliminating the need for self-glorification. Paul addresses this in 1 Corinthians where some believers were quarrelling about who they followed, as if they were somehow better for following a particular man. Paul’s response was, “Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?” (1 Cor 1:13). This division, according to Paul, was illogical and fleshly. Commentator Stephen Um argues, “Despite Paul’s teaching regarding security of identity in Christ, the Corinthians were trying to find their identity in the union with another patron.”⁸⁵ In other words, they were exchanging their glory in Christ with a glory in man. Commentors Roy Ciampa and Brian Rosner suggest, “This was based on stylistic and rhetorical lines (i.e., who was the most eloquent, who was the most impressive, who had the most pizzazz, etc.)”⁸⁶ While this sort of glory-seeking surfaces among believers in the work of the church today, it is no doubt antithetical to one’s position in Christ. This position in Christ, as Paul illustrates in Philippians 2:1-11, changes how believers perceive glory:

So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from

⁸³ It is important to note that both individual believers and churches need fellowship. Church fellowships and denominations are created to help establish networks so churches can help each other when opportunities arise.

⁸⁴ Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries*, 8.

⁸⁵ Stephen Um, *1 Corinthians*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 26.

⁸⁶ Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 55.

selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore, God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

This passage stresses Christ's unity and equality with God as the driving force for unity in the church. This unity drives sacrificial service which is antithetical to self-glorification. However, this does not eliminate one's need to experience glory.

Like communal preservation, a communal glorification is also met by the church. This is illustrated through Christ in Philippians 2:9-11 Christ's humiliation is met by exultation. Christ's exultation will culminate when all bow and all confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. This exultation of Christ is yet to come, however, in the church it should also be a present reality.

Strikingly, Luke 14:11 states, "For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted." Christ's glorification flows out and into a glorification experienced by all believers. First, his glorification prescribes the process of glorification. Humble service is the process by which one will experience exultation (Prov 29:23; Zeph 2:3; Matt 5:8; Jas 4:6; 1 Pet 5:6). Second, Christ's glorification promotes the nature and extent of the believer's glorification. Namely, the same God who exalted Jesus is operative in believers "to will and to work for his good pleasure" in the believer's life (Phil 2:12), so that believers may "shine as lights in the world" (Phil 2:15; Matt 5:16). This of course is reminiscent of John 1:6-9, speaking of Jesus, which says, "There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light. The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world." The glory that began in Jesus is now manifest in his followers. Because of this, Paul says believers should "glory in Jesus Christ and put

no confidence in the flesh” (Phil 3:3). In contradistinction to this, Paul says the “enemies of cross of Christ glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things” (Phil 3:19). But as Paul teaches, the believer’s “citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself” (Phil 3:21). This is why Paul then calls them in 4:1 his “joy and crown,” or his glory. The need for glory is not purely selfish, but one should seek that glory through Christ and through his church. However, as with Christ’s glory, the believer’s glory, while valued in the church today, is not valued in the world (John 15:18-19). The believers’ glory is yet future when they receive a glorified body and are with their glorious Savior. For now, communal glorification is possible through humble service to other believers and affirmation of believers through the church. In this way the church eliminates the need for self-glorification.

In conclusion, these passages show that the church is a unique institution that provides more than just a place to socialize but is established to help meet the believer’s need for preservation and glorification which leads to a greater experience of earthly peace.

Conclusion

The US is now classified as a post-Christian culture where a Judeo-Christian ethic is no longer a prevailing influence. The social and religious norms that older generations took for granted are now largely disregarded. This shift away from Judeo-Christian norms is exacerbated by social media. At this point, churches should not retreat to social media as the solution to building the church, creating more online options for believers, nor should the church turn a blind eye to the effect of social media, but the church should work toward buttressing the original mission of the church and keeping the foundations strong. A believer’s identity is established in Christ and in relation to other believers; however, social media presents opportunities for people to enjoy being a part

of something spiritual without being a part of a church, hearing preaching without having a pastor, giving tithes and offerings without the joy of being a part of the ministry of the church, and scratching one's conscience for obedience without accountability. This pseudo-church experience is devoid of *κοινωνία* and guts the believer of identity, robbing them of present preservation, glorification, and peace.

CHAPTER 5

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE CHURCH

“It’s never a good sign when the creator of a technology disowns his own creation,” answers Meghan O’Gieblyn in her June 2022 article for *Wired Magazine*.¹ O’Gieblyn’s article is a response to a reader who writes, “I read that Jack Dorsey, a cofounder of Twitter, claims to regret his role in creating the centralized internet. Given what we know about the divisiveness, violence, and misinformation that social media promotes—and now Dorsey’s remorse—is there anything left to redeem it?”² Is this a valid question? Redeeming social media may be like asking, “Can communism be redeemed?” Or “Can the coronavirus be redeemed?” O’Gieblyn’s answer points to the absurdity of thinking that what is inherently negative can turn into a positive. This negative view of social media and technology is affirmed by many in the tech industry. Author and professor Adam Alter, in his book *Irresistible: The Rise of Addictive Technology and the Business of Keeping Us Hooked*, points out that when Steve Jobs unveiled the iPad in 2010 “he believed everyone should own an iPad. But he refused to let his kids use the device.”³ Alter, citing a 2010 *New York Times* article by Nick Bilton quoting Jobs, “We limit how much technology our kids use in the home.”⁴ Alter points out that Bilton learned that Chris Anderson, the former editor of *Wired Magazine*, limited the use of technology for

¹ Meghan O’Gieblyn, “Cloud Support: Can Social Media Be Redeemed?,” *Wired Magazine*, June 2022, 28.

² O’Gieblyn, “Cloud Support,” 28.

³ Adam Alter, *Irresistible: The Rise of Addictive Technology and the Business of Keeping Us Hooked* (New York: Penguin, 2018), 1.

⁴ Alter, *Irresistible*, 2.

his children “because we have seen the dangers of technology firsthand.”⁵ Evan Williams, the founder of Blogger, Medium, and co-founder of Twitter, encouraged his sons to read, but as Alter points out, “refused to give them an iPad.”⁶ Alter’s point is simply this: “It seemed as if the people producing tech products were following the cardinal rule of drug dealing: never get high on your own supply.”⁷ Comparing social media to drugs may seem overreaching, however seeing social media as a *substance* to be controlled may be more the case.

Today, the internet is dominated by nine major companies: Amazon, Meta, Apple, Baidu, Google, IBM, Alibaba, Microsoft, and Tencent.⁸ O’Gieblyn laments, “Problems have sprouted from these centralized powers: misinformation, ideological polarization, data mining, mass surveillance, and algorithms that amplify the most extreme and sensationalist voices.”⁹ What is missing from her article is any praise for social media. In fact, overall positive feelings toward social media in the public sphere are dropping significantly. According to a 2021 Gallup Poll, “Positive views have fallen from 46% in August 2019 to 34% now, and 57% want more government regulation of technology companies, up nine points.”¹⁰ This negative view is due to a *big picture view* of social

⁵ Alter, *Irresistible*, 2.

⁶ Alter, *Irresistible*, 2.

⁷ Alter, *Irresistible*, 2.

⁸ Amy Webb, *The Big Nine: How the Tech Titans & Their Thinking Machines Could Warp Humanity* (New York: Hatchett, 2019).

⁹ O’Gieblyn, “Cloud Support,” 29.

¹⁰ Meghan Brenen, “Views of Big Tech Worsen; Public Wants More Regulation,” Gallup, February 18, 2021, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/329666/views-big-tech-worsen-public-wants-regulation.aspx>. According to the website marketingcharts.com which links to Brenen’s article,

When asked their overall view of technology companies such as Amazon, Facebook and Google, the largest share of the more than 900 US adults (ages 18+) surveyed held negative feelings about these types of companies, whether it be very negative (22%) or somewhat negative (23%). Only about one-third of respondents held a positive view of Big Tech, with 11% having a very positive view and 23% feeling somewhat positive. (“Almost Half of Adults have a Negative View of Big Tech,” Marketingcharts, March 16, 2021, <https://www.marketingcharts.com/industries/technology-116469>)

media that is not looking at anecdotal evidence for the minor positive aspects of social media that many may argue for, but from a wide-eyed view of the dangers pointed out in the data, some of which has been pointed out in this thesis. All this illustrates that whatever man attempts to build apart from God will eventually turn to ruin.

As chapters 3 and 4 demonstrated, screen time, like any illicit drug, is highly addictive and can produce narcissism, isolation, and indoctrination, tearing at the faith fabric of individual believers and leaving them suffering the effects of loneliness and ascribing to beliefs that ultimately can adversely affect their confidence in their identity as a Christian. The “digital-ick” associated with social media is more than a benign feeling. The digital-ick is twisting feelings and affections, compromising the well-being of God’s children. What is the remedy to the adverse effects of social media? Is digital abstinence the answer? Is social media separation a sustainable solution? The answer may be yes: however, the reality that the church lives in a digitally immersive environment where social media is a part of the everyday experience cannot be changed. Instead of offering a draconian solution that seeks total elimination of social media from one’s life, God has gifted the church with *κοινωνία*, which offers a spiritually-infused fellowship to the church that is a refreshing antidote to the flesh-driven digital social isolation and indoctrination of the day. Instead of the modern self being shaped and formed through affirmation by likes and followers, Christ invites all who desire to follow him to “deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me” (Luke 9:23). Christ’s call to *deny oneself* is not hyperbole. To deny oneself is to become less self-concerned and more others focused. To *take up his cross* is an invitation to suffering that leads to glory. And finally, *to follow him*, is a call to identify with Christ and leave off influencers who offer a sham sense of happiness to follow the one who is “blessed forever” (2 Cor 11:31).

Following Christ means more than just ordering your life in line with his example. The New Testament concept of following Christ is expressed in part by participation in the body of Christ. When one follows Christ, one is immersed into

Christ's figurative body. This figurative body is more than just a gathering of people, it is a present spiritual gathering that functions through *κοινωνία* or fellowship. This fellowship, though imperfect, points to an eternal reality of fellowship believers will enjoy with God and others for all eternity.

The Identity and the Life of the Church

The cure to the aforementioned problems with social media must begin with the question, "Who or what is leading the believer? Or another way of asking the same question is, "Who or what is the believer following?" If social media is leading, then the rise of the self and self-expression will result. If Christ is in the lead, then attention and service to his body is the result. What is important is that when Christ is leading, the effect of social media can remain in check and social media can be used for good. However, some may wonder what is at risk by letting Christ lead? Self-expression, authenticity, personal identity? For the believer, group identity in the church is the alternative to the self, but for many believers, especially younger believers, the fear of losing their individual identity by becoming immersed in the corporate identity of the church is a real fear. But is this fear justified? Is it fair to think that believers check their individual identity at the door of the church to become *non-player characters* (NPCs)?¹¹ Another way to ask this is, "Does *κοινωνία* absorb individuality into a corporate identity?" Two aspects of the church help resolve this tension and add more clarity to these questions. First, "What does it mean for believers to be a part of the body of Christ?" and second, "How does a believer benefit from advancing the Kingdom of Christ?" By answering these two questions, the reader will begin to see how the church maximizes personal identity for the good of others and

¹¹ A non-player character (NPC) is a character in a video game that is not controlled by the person playing the game, nor by any sort of AI. NPCs are not usually meant to function in the game with a specific role and are created to only populate the background of the game. NPC is slang used by Gen Z to refer to people who just populate life with no real purpose.

uses their creative energies in a constructive manner to advance Christ's kingdom on earth: the church.

Understanding how the body and kingdom aspects of the church deal with the rise of the self will help the believer avoid the trap of mere behavioral modification (outward change only) and work toward desire renewal (heart-change). When desire renewal is operative, then practical steps to limit social media can be understood in their rightful place as means to an end and not an end in themselves. The end, of course, is the advancement of Christ's kingdom for his glory.

To aid the reader in the quest to understand the concept of the body and kingdom of Christ better, Assistant Professor of Historical Theology at Chongshin Theological Seminary, Seoul, South Korea, Yosep Kim, in his monograph entitled *The Identity and the Life of the Church: John Calvin's Ecclesiology in the Perspective of His Anthropology* peers into John Calvin's understanding of these two concepts, offering helpful guidance and reflection that will aid the reader.¹²

The Church as the Body

In his monograph, Kim's intention is to show a relationship between Calvin's view of ecclesiology and his anthropology, or the church and the individual self. Kim makes the case that Calvin viewed the individual follower of Christ and his or her inclusion in a local church gathering as a natural and necessary outflow of their faith. To love God is to love others and to gather together as demonstrated by the early New Testament church. As Kim points out, Calvin suggests that the church is a unique body. Referencing Calvin's Commentary on 1 Corinthians 12:12, Kim writes, "It is usual, however, for any society of men, or congregation, to be called a body, as one city constitutes a body, and so, in like manner, one senate, and one people. . . . Among Christians, however, the case

¹² Yosep Kim, *The Identity and the Life of the Church: John Calvin's Ecclesiology in the Perspective of His Anthropology*, Princeton Theological Monograph Series (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2014).

is very different for they do not constitute a mere political body, but are the spiritual and mystical body of Christ.”¹³ This spiritual and mystical body is instituted by, built by, held together by, and led by Christ. While the body of Christ is represented in many locations throughout the world, Christ is the head of each and all true churches.¹⁴ Colossians 1:18a says, “And he [Christ] is the head of the body, the church.” Kim notes that Calvin sees this referring to the “government” of the church,¹⁵ where Christ is the final to which the body submits. An important aspect brought out by Calvin is that Christ’s authority is not merely a means of rule, but of sharing what the Father has given to him. Calvin writes,

Therefore, to share with us what he [Christ] has received from the Father, he had to become ours and to dwell within us. For this reason, he is called “our head” [Ephesians 4:15], and “the first-born among many brethren” [Romans 8:29]. We also, in turn, are said to be “engrafted into him” [Romans 11:17], and to “put on Christ” [Galatians 3:27]; for, as I have said, all that he possesses is nothing to us until we grow into one body with him.¹⁶

Calvin’s last statement should arrest the reader’s attention in that access to spiritual blessing, as Calvin sees it, begins by growing into one body with him. In other words, Calvin is suggesting that the fruit of one’s faith is produced in community with other believers. These blessings culminate into one’s assurance of salvation.¹⁷ This assurance is vital in that it gives believers confidence that they belong to Christ and have every reason to hope for a bodily resurrection and future glorification. This confidence in one’s salvation and future glorification transcends the malaise of the self that Charles Taylor mentions in his book *Modern Social Imaginaries* (referenced in chap. 4), which includes alienation,

¹³ Kim, *The Identity and the Life of the Church*, 126.

¹⁴ Kim, *The Identity and the Life of the Church*, 126.

¹⁵ Kim, *The Identity and the Life of the Church*, 126.

¹⁶ John Calvin, quoted in Kim, *The Identity and the Life of the Church*, 128.

¹⁷ Kim, *The Identity and the Life of the Church*, 127.

meaninglessness, and social dissolution.¹⁸ The church, on the other hand, transcends this malaise and provides acceptance, purpose, and constructive social influence.

For Calvin, the idea of being engrafted into Christ carried both a soteriological and an ecclesiological expression. Kim notes, “For Calvin, the beginning of Christian identity through grace coincides with the beginning of their membership of Christ’s body, the church.”¹⁹ Today, suggesting that one’s salvation is closely connected to participation with a local church can be troubling for some if not controversial. Foisting the yoke of the church on believers is seen by some as overreaching or infringing on one’s personal liberty. The modern view sees the church as an option for those with the right disposition rather than a prescription for all believers. Arguing against this view, professor, author, and public speaker Donald Whitney writes in *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, “So one of the clearest indications that people have truly believed the gospel of Jesus is that a new, Christlike desire to serve begins to overcome their selfish desire to be served. They start looking for ways to do something for Christ and His church, especially ways that will serve the gospel.”²⁰ When Christ saves, it is normative for him to situate the new believer closely with other saved people.

With this in mind, it is imperative for the church to understand the inherent roadblocks that unnecessarily disengage believers from church involvement. One such roadblock that needs consideration is the dilution of individuality within the construct of the body of Christ. When believers sense they are just attending a service and not serving in the body, involvement often leads to disengagement. Calvin sees in Ephesians 4:16²¹

¹⁸ Charles Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries* (Durham, NC: Duke University, 2004), 1.

¹⁹ Kim, *The Identity and the Life of the Church*, 128.

²⁰ Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, rev. and updated ed. (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2014), 158.

²¹ Ephesians 4:16 says, “From whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.”

the answer to this problem in three related foci of the church as the body of Christ. Calvin states,

[First] All the life or health which is diffused through the members flows from the head; so that the members occupy a subordinate rank. The second is that by the distribution made, the limited share of each renders the communication between all the members absolutely necessary. The third is that without mutual love, the health of the body cannot be maintained.²²

Kim points out that Calvin viewed the headship of Christ, the distribution made, that is, spiritual gifts, and mutual love as those things which “sustained the health of the spiritual community of the body of Christ.”²³ In other words, headship, service, and love are the DNA of the church. As stated previously, the headship of Christ is more than authority, as Kim argues, Calvin is saying that Christ is the “vital energy both for the individual Christian and for the church.”²⁴

As a part of this vital energy is the Spirit’s giving of diverse gifts to individuals. Calvin states in his commentary on 1 Corinthians 12:19,²⁵ “He [Paul] means, that God has not acted at random, or without good reason, in assigning different gifts to the members of the body; but because it was necessary that it should be so, for the preservation of the body; for if this symmetry were taken away, there would be utter confusion and derangement.”²⁶ As in any physical body, each member has a special function, so too Paul makes it clear in 1 Corinthians 12:12-13, “For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.” Does this inclusion in the body of Christ

²² Kim, *The Identity and the Life of the Church*, 137.

²³ Calvin, quoted in Kim, *The Identity and the Life of the Church*, 137.

²⁴ Kim, *The Identity and the Life of the Church*, 137.

²⁵ First Cor 12:19 reads, “If all were a single member, where would the body be?”

²⁶ Calvin, quoted in Kim, *The Identity and the Life of the Church*, 139.

mean the individual loses something by being a part of Christ's body? Or does the inclusion in the body of Christ mean the individual believer gains something by being a part of the body of Christ. Paul's point is clear that the individual gains a unique expression, a spiritual gift, that is meant to benefit others. Paul illustrates this corporate connection by using the physical body. If one cuts their hand off it will shrivel and die, but attached to the body, the hand is very much alive and can do all sorts of things. The hand can type on a keyboard, flip a page in a book, scratch an itch, tie a shoelace, or help a child remember the months of the year. Paul makes it clear that the individual by himself or herself is nothing, but as part of a body, the individual finds new expression, and to echo Whitney again, new "ways to do something for Christ and His church." The church then is not a means of losing identity or individual expression, but of gaining a new identity and expression.

Christ as the head, the diversity of gifts, leads to the last foci that Calvin sees in Ephesians 4:16 and that is mutual love. As Kim points out, "The communication of diverse gifts does not contribute to the health and edification of the church unless it is carried out in mutual love."²⁷ Calvin states, "Let there be mutual affection, mutual fellow-feeling, mutual concern. Let us have a regard to the common advantage, in order that we may not destroy the Church by malignity, or envy, or pride, or any disagreement; but may, on the contrary, every one of us, strive to the utmost of his power to preserve it."²⁸ Kim points out that Calvin "does not speak of love in terms of mere sympathy or charity between human individuals. Rather, what Calvin refers to as 'mutual love' is a more profound love based on faith, the conviction of God's grace of salvation."²⁹ Calvin saw faith as the conviction which bound members of the church in love. This is the

²⁷ Kim, *The Identity and the Life of the Church*, 140.

²⁸ Calvin, quoted in Kim, *The Identity and the Life of the Church*, 140.

²⁹ Kim, *The Identity and the Life of the Church*, 141.

essence of *κοινωνία*, where the mutual sharing of what believers share in Christ keeps churches unified and serving together.

In conclusion, the church, as the body of Christ, under Christ's sustaining headship, places a premium on the individual's gifting as a means of expressing mutual love. What is lost in the self, on its own, is obsolescence. What is gained through inclusion in the church is acceptance, purpose, and constructive social influence. This means that all believers are given a least one spiritual gift that needs cultivation. It is the responsibility of church leaders and the church working with the individual to stir up the gift(s) that are in them. This is especially challenging for younger believers. Churches historically overlook the youth and treat them as NPCs. These younger believers are searching for affirmation, purpose, and constructive influence. If the church does not allow younger believers opportunities to develop their gifts and come into their own meaningful existence in the church, then they are more likely to find meaning through outlets like social media. The church must offer more than just programmatic structure for youth, that is, youth group, occasional or sporadic social activities, short-term mission trips, et cetera. The church must philosophically endorse the validity of younger believer's giftings for service in the local church. To aid in this development, church leaders can develop a youth engagement plan (YEP) to help these younger believers find constructive influence in the church and to keep them from wandering off into what they may deem as the "greener pastures" of social media. Church leaders can no longer turn a blind eye to the heart-desires of younger believers and hope they will hold out until they turn eighteen.

Two of the biggest challenges for churches is that youth who claim salvation are most likely already addicted to social media and second, their giftings may be less clear or not developed like older more mature believers. Therefore, adopting a YEP must consider these two issues and work to mitigate social media addiction by increasing meaningful engagement in ministry opportunities. This means developing the gifts of younger believers by (1) helping them understand how the Spirit is equipping them to

serve the body of Christ now, and how this may develop into future ministry; (2) creating opportunities for younger believers to serve in the ministry of the local church; and (3) affirming youth engagement by noting successes and failures and celebrating spiritual growth.

What churches forfeit by disregarding the youth are opportunities to train them for present and future service, the blessing and encouragement that comes from their present service, and finally, the net effect of instilling them with a share in the advancement of the kingdom of Christ.

The Church as a Kingdom

As beings who are created in the likeness of their Creator to be like him, man is a natural born creator. Case in point, little children like to create their own kingdoms. They fight to rule at the center of their own universe and will, in no uncertain terms let parents know when that rule is threatened. From the story of Cain in Genesis to the group of nomadic individuals seeking to build their own kingdom of Babel, the reality is that human beings are naturally bent toward kingdom building. Today, great cities, institutions, and skyscrapers, marked by the names of their creators, dot the landscape of many of the world's towns and cities giving testament to this fact. God does not ignore this kingdom-building aspect of man's make up; in fact, he created it. Not surprisingly, God gives his people a kingdom to build or to advance. This kingdom is his church (Matt 16:18). Christ's church is in shadow form of the future eternal new heaven and new earth where Christ will reign as King over his glorious kingdom forever (Rev 11:15).

For Calvin, the visible church on earth can be called the kingdom of Christ because "God entrusts the Word into this church."³⁰ As Kim explains, Calvin sees that the "perfection of the visible church will be the completing and cessation of its functions

³⁰ Kim, *The Identity and the Life of the Church*, 156.

of teaching and proclaiming the Word.”³¹ While it must be noted that the church is an imperfect representation of the kingdom of Christ, it is nevertheless a representation. The imperfection of the church is by no means an excuse to ignore, castigate, or belittle its influence with the Word of Christ. Calvin argues, “But to consider the church already completely and in every respect holy and spotless when all its members are spotted and somewhat impure—how absurd and foolish this is!”³² The sanctification that Christ works out in the church is, according to Calvin, “only the beginning of its sanctification.”³³ For some, the imperfections of the visible church give cause to leave off local church participation and retreat to what is considered the invisible church or the great cloud of believers that operate around them. Calvin’s response to this thinking is, “He who voluntarily deserts the outward communion of the church (where the Word of God is preached and the sacraments are administered) is without excuse. Secondly, neither the vices of the few nor the vices of the many in any way prevent us from duly professing our faith there in ceremonies ordained by God.”³⁴ Some believers may be tempted to abandon the imperfect local church because it does not square with them in every jot and tittle, or because they do not want to put up with other’s perceived failures and problems. While not abandoning the Word altogether, these believers tether themselves to Christian pastors, authors, and bloggers to gain spiritual sustenance. Calvin boldly declares that these believers are “without excuse.” Calvin is justified in his opinion as was the writer of Hebrews who admonished the saints by boldly saying, “And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of

³¹ Kim, *The Identity and the Life of the Church*, 157.

³² Calvin, quoted in Kim, *The Identity and the Life of the Church*, 158.

³³ Calvin, quote in Kim, *The Identity and the Life of the Church*, 158.

³⁴ Calvin, quoted in Kim, *The Identity and the Life of the Church*, 161.

some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near” (Heb 10:24-25).

Despite the churches lack of perfection, a believer’s spiritual gift(s) are indispensable in advancing Christ’s kingdom, even if they are practiced imperfectly. Local expression of one’s gifts is God’s design. It is vital to note that God established the church not to perfectly mirror heaven, but to place Christ’s kingdom around this dark world so mankind can be rescued from this present darkness and turn to the beauty of Christ. The church with its flaws is far brighter than the world in its darkness, making the need for perfection a moot point.

Calvin did support the idea of the invisible church, stating that invisible church can be called Christ’s kingdom “because this church refers to the fellowship of the elect who are governed by Christ,” and then pointing out that the perfection of the invisible church will be “the attainment and perfect enjoyment of spiritual blessings with God.”³⁵ While believers are positioned locally in a church, they still enjoy and participate in the greater fellowship of the saints in common community fellowships through Christian universities and colleges, spiritual conferences and retreats, summer camps, evangelistic services, concerts, book clubs, social media access, hearing from speakers from other churches, et cetera. According to Calvin, the concepts of the visible and invisible church are both vital to understanding the multifaceted nature of Christ’s kingdom and help the believer understand what is being advanced when believers speak of advancing Christ’s kingdom.

Additionally, Kim notes that Calvin’s idea of advancing Christ’s kingdom was the “idea of the gradual regeneration of the individual Christian.”³⁶ Calvin writes, “Yet it also is no less true that the Lord is daily at work in smoothing out wrinkles and cleansing

³⁵ Calvin, quoted in Kim, *The Identity and Life of the Church*, 156-57.

³⁶ Kim, *The Identity and Life of the Church*, 160.

spots. From this it follows that the churches' holiness is not yet complete. The church is holy, then, in the sense, that it is daily advancing and is not yet perfect: it makes progress from day to day but has not yet reached its goal of holiness."³⁷ This progression marks the church as not yet complete. While many say amen to that, the fear of allowing believers in their youth to cultivate their gifts or serve in the church is predicated on the glaring imperfections and spotty holiness that is outwardly evident in most teenagers. It is true that the struggles of younger believers are often more evident than older more mature believers; however, should this fear cause the church to marginalize the youth and relegate them to their own space in the church? Or would a better solution be that churches integrate the youth into the church with the intention of building them up into maturity capitalizing on their presence with and in the church? Inherent with this philosophy is the idea that no one believer is yet perfectly mature, yet maturity is the goal (Eph 4:16).

While building up into maturity may be the catalyst for the church's youth group or youth Sunday school program, these programs traditionally marginalize youth into their own age groups and too often only offer teaching and socializing and fail to extend into the service of the church, visible and invisible. To meet the need of service opportunities for the youth, many churches offer a short-term mission trip option. These trips are usually very expensive for the church and the individual, usually only last a week or two, and are typically offered only once a year. This drive-by service exposure may be encouraging and even life-changing for those who participate, but these trips do not offer long-term rich discipleship opportunities that exist when leaders cultivate one's gifts to be used in the church on a regular basis throughout one's life. Building Christ's kingdom begins by looking inward at those who are regenerated in the local body and using them for ministry.

³⁷ Calvin, quoted in Kim, *The Identity and Life of the Church*, 161.

Calvin further notes that believers are advancing a kingdom, meaning there is purpose beyond the individual. This purpose gives meaning to individuals and satisfies them at soul level. Instead of sensing a need to build one's own kingdom for one's own glory, the individual believer participates with others to build the glory of God. As believers advance in holiness and become more like Christ, they fill a deep need that their creator gave them at birth.

Chapter 2 laid out the idea that all people begin life at birth with an inherited identity. A big part of this identity is the image of God. Mankind bears a resemblance to his maker. All people, whether saved or unsaved, understand the concepts of love, forgiveness, joy, peace, patience, et cetera. However, believers supernaturally express the fruit of the Spirit in a way that is greater than what is capable in the world. Therefore, love is often more perfectly displayed among believers than love in the world. Likewise, chapter 2 made the argument that people are created to benefit from each other. This is demonstrated in that God gives all people, saved or unsaved, the desire for deep relationships. So, while the unsaved gravitate to and enjoy the concepts of marriage, family, social events and more, believers can trace these graces back to their creator and receive from him the vital energy to meet these graces with greater success than what is normally experienced in the world, that is, lower divorce rates, greater joy and satisfaction in marriage, parenting, and life, and fewer financial issues. Simply put, the church is not some anemic, sickly, subcultural representation of Christ that is an embarrassment to be associated with, as some may argue. The church is pillar and ground of the truth that Christ is building up and placing into communities around the world to make himself more evident. Therefore, for Christ to be evident, it is vital that all believers partner with others to stir up their gifts and work out their God-given ability to serve and love others more perfectly.

Practical Implications for the Believer

When $\kappa\omicron\iota\nu\omega\nu\acute{\iota}\alpha$ is operative in the believer's life, then Christ is in the lead and participation in his church will result. What follows Christ's lead is every other good

thing in some measure. As stated, social media is predominately seen as a negative vice by the court of human opinion and many in the tech industry. Conversely, social media can also be used for good. This should not confuse the reader. Many things in moderation can be used for good, that in excess can prove deadly, such as water, fire, or pain killers. For social media to remain in check and be a force for positive influence, there must be digital philosophy in place. Cal Newport, author of *Digital Minimalism: Choosing a Focused Life in a Noisy World*, lays out a philosophy of technology use and practical and helpful suggestions for the reader to consider in deciding what technology to use and how to use it.³⁸ If adults have difficulty handling social media and tech usage, then what hope is there for children?

Creating a Digital Philosophy

Newport's philosophy is as follows: "A philosophy of technology use in which you focus your online time on a small number of carefully selected and optimized activities that strongly support things you value, and then happily miss out on everything else."³⁹ To minimize technology Newport suggests isolating those uses of technology that "offer minor diversions or trivial convenience" and "ignore" them.⁴⁰ This is contrasted by what he suggests is the "default" mode of the "the maximalist philosophy." This mode is a "mind-set in which any potential for benefit is enough to start using a technology."⁴¹ According to Newport, the fear of missing out (FOMO) is what drives a maximalist.⁴² The question many wrestle with is, "Is it ok to not know or to be unaware of what is happening

³⁸ Cal Newport, *Digital Minimalism: Choosing a Focused Life in a Noisy World* (New York: Portfolio/Penguin, 2019).

³⁹ Newport, *Digital Minimalism*, 28.

⁴⁰ Newport, *Digital Minimalism*, 29.

⁴¹ Newport, *Digital Minimalism*, 29.

⁴² Newport, *Digital Minimalism*, 29.

around you in your social circle or the world?” A similar question may be, “How up to date does one need be at any given moment?” The desire for connection can turn ugly when connection becomes a lust. It is here that Newport is helpful as he states, “Minimalists don’t mind missing out on small things; what worries them much more is diminishing the large things they already know for sure make a good life good.”⁴³ As argued in the first section of this chapter, the apex for the good life is connection with believers in the church. So, while minimizing technology means knowing less about an online circle of friends, it positions a person to maximize face-to-face influence with those who are close by. Newport gives plenty of anecdotal evidence of those who rejected social media for a minimized philosophy of technology. He reports that these people have experienced greater degrees of growth in their personal relationships with their spouses, kids, and friends, and have more concentrated focus on things that truly matter, they have even excelled in their careers.⁴⁴ To be clear, rejection of social media and screen time is not what Newport is purposing, but instead intentional use of media and screens that supports one’s values.⁴⁵

It is valid that downtime can be enriched through social media usage when supporting one’s values. However, the incessant desire to check one’s email or texts when talking to a friend, or to check how many likes one received on their latest post while sitting in church, is obtrusive and obstructive to one’s value system. Values drive use. This simple approach requires one to let go of what can be known. This is particularly challenging when churches or small groups set up online communication feeds that send notifications. If there is a large participation group on the thread, then notifications can become an immediate source of anxiety. New requests for prayer require an immediate

⁴³ Newport, *Digital Minimalism*, 30.

⁴⁴ Newport, *Digital Minimalism*, 30-31.

⁴⁵ Newport, *Digital Minimalism*, 32.

response. When preoccupied with important matters, a quick response may not be possible. This “tyranny of the urgent” effect can leave one feeling like they are not caring, or worse, one may fear that by not responding others will perceive them as not caring. While turning off notifications eliminates the anxiety to know, the alternative of ignoring the thread carries its own anxiety. Digital minimalists, according to Newport, learn to manage anxieties by letting go of these apps.⁴⁶

To some degree, life is messy, and believers are going to be inconvenienced. For this reason, it is wise to limit, not eradicate, use of such threads. Turning off notifications during times of work and turning on notifications during times when one has more time to respond is a necessary part of living thoughtfully in this digital world. Also, a simple response such as “praying” or sending an appropriate emoji may be all that is needed at that moment to encourage a brother or sister in Christ. Newport is arguing that there are ways to make social media or technology work for you as opposed to you working for it.

Newport also offers three helpful principles of digital minimalism: “Clutter is costly, optimization is important, and intentionality is satisfying.”⁴⁷ First, clutter or overuse of devices, apps, and services amounts to a “negative cost” that inversely impacts the positive effects of each element on its own. Newport points to Henry David Thoreau who spent time on Walden Pond pursuing the real meaning of life. Thoreau’s time enlightened him to the real cost of life. His definition of cost was “the cost of a thing is the amount of what I will call life which is required to be exchanged for it, immediately or in the long run.”⁴⁸ By understanding cost this way, Thoreau was able to see the cost-benefit of the anxieties, or wear and tear, on one’s life created when making wealth. Newport’s response is simple: “How much of your time and attention . . . must be sacrificed to earn

⁴⁶ Newport, *Digital Minimalism*, 29.

⁴⁷ Newport, *Digital Minimalism*, 35-36.

⁴⁸ Newport, *Digital Minimalism*, 39.

the small profit of occasional connections and new ideas that is earned by cultivating a significant presence on Twitter?”⁴⁹ For most social media users, social media usage totals more than eight hours a day. This would be, according to Thoreau, a ridiculously high cost for a minimal return. In other words, the offset is too great. Again, the solution is not to eradicate social media but to use social media, apps, and devices to serve one’s values. Spending forty minutes listening to an online message by one’s favorite preacher is more likely supporting a believer’s value system than scrolling on TikTok for the same forty minutes. This simple logic is admittedly not very profound, but it is useful in pointing out how lopsided many can be in their use of social media.

Newport also mentions the importance of optimizing the technologies one chooses to use. In the case of social media, Facebook is a tool many use. However, the architects at Meta do not offer users a primer on how to effectively use their platform to maximize one’s value system—neither does Instagram, Snapchat, or YouTube. This principle illustrates the need for self-denial. Many approach apps like an all-you-can-eat buffet and gorge themselves only to feel sick after eating. What Newport is suggesting is that social media users “eat” only those things from the digital buffet that will bring value and not diminish one’s life. This of course takes tremendous self-control or self-denial. This self-control is proving extremely difficult for adults. For the average pre-teen and teenager this kind of self-control is almost an impossible expectation. Hand a child a chocolate bar, one half is bitter dark chocolate while the other half is milk chocolate made with real cane sugar. Tell the child they can only eat the bitter dark chocolate but must throw the other half, the milk chocolate half made with real cane sugar, away. Leave them alone in their room with this decision and see what happens? What would most adults do in that situation? This is what today’s youth face when handed a smartphone with TikTok, Instagram or Snapchat. Parents expect children to discern and

⁴⁹ Newport, *Digital Minimalism*, 41.

weed out the unhealthy social media use and content when their child's value system is just beginning to form. The challenges here are almost insurmountable and will be addressed later in more practical terms. For now, Newport concludes this second principle by writing, "Once you . . . start seeing new technologies simply as tools that you can deploy selectively, you're able to fully embrace . . . reaping the advantages of vaulting up the return curve."⁵⁰ However sound this advice, this "vaulting up" requires an immense amount of self-control and self-denial that many admittedly lack.

Newport's third and final principle is that intentionality is satisfying. This principle points to the feeling of satisfaction that is unique to using a particular device or platform for the selective use that supports one's value system. This is the reward for self-denial. For this Newport suggests that the Amish and Mennonite communities are prime examples of living out the value that "intention trumps convenience."⁵¹ By citing many examples, he shows that these groups have mastered control over the role technology plays in their lives, ultimately giving them a sense of satisfaction.⁵² Newport's point is that this satisfaction or peace is attained through self-denial. By way of concluding these three principles he writes, "The sugar high of convenience is fleeting and the sting of missing out dulls rapidly, but the meaningful glow that comes from taking charge of what claims your time and attention is something that persists."⁵³

A good philosophy of technology is a starting point and will aid parents when attempting to navigate their children through this ever changing and always tumultuous digital landscape.

⁵⁰ Newport, *Digital Minimalism*, 49.

⁵¹ Newport, *Digital Minimalism*, 53.

⁵² Newport, *Digital Minimalism*, 56.

⁵³ Newport, *Digital Minimalism*, 57.

Implications for the Parent

Newport's three principles are a helpful guide that demonstrate meaningful ways of controlling technology or social media so that it can serve the user's values and not dominate one's life. However, the powerful apps that are mainstream are designed for intentional overuse. So, buyer beware. Christian parents who succumb to the pressures of their pre-teens and supply tech to their children are in for a roller-coaster ride of emotion, exasperation, and sheer exhaustion. Christian parents must understand that discernment is a skill that they must help cultivate in their children's lives. This cultivation requires patience, tough conversations, and regulations that are often met with examination, confrontation, and argumentation. While not all children lean into the addictive side of digital media, many will, making parenting that much more challenging. So, what is a parent to do? Throw up their hands and give their little one's unrestricted access to screens? The solutions may be less complex and more accessible than originally thought.

Pre-Parenting and Parenting Advice for Those with Small Children 0-5 Years Old

Kathy Koch's *Screens and Teens* offers a solution to digital issues related to children. Koch writes, "Children of all ages tell me they want and need to connect with their parents. They want to know and feel that their parents care about them, their friends and their activities. . . . Having easy going and meaningful conversations is an important way to do this."⁵⁴ Why is this such a novel concept? Most likely this advice is offered because many parents have glibly adopted screen time as a way to pacify unruly or bored children. This approach to pacifying a child is effective for the moment, but what is the return on investment? For children, they learn how to rely on tech to satisfy their natural desires. Parents, too, learn how to rely on tech to satisfy their desire for peace. Relying on tech is effective for temporary relief but leads to long-term dissatisfaction.

⁵⁴ Kathy Koch, *Screens and Teens: Connecting with Our Kids in a Wireless World* (Chicago: Moody, 2015), 203.

Newport cites the Law of Marginalized Diminishing Returns that says, “That after some optimal level of capacity is reached, adding an additional factor of production will actually result in smaller increases of output.”⁵⁵ This law used to manage production output can be easily superimposed on the issue of tech use. At first, children may respond to tech in a positive and cute way—who does not love telling the story of how their five-year-old is able to navigate daddy’s smart phone? But over time, this tech use will produce diminished returns. Lesson 1: Limit your 0–5-year-old’s use of your phone, iPad, or computer. While this may seem overbearing, it is more about training the parent than the child at this point. This restriction trains parents to stop what they are doing, step up, stand up, speak up, and use face-to-face communication or even confrontation when necessary. To ensure a proper foundation for tech use in the home, this training process for the parent and the child demands limiting and not eliminating all screen time to become disciplined in proper usage techniques and time limitations.

Today’s culture must return to the step up, stand up, and speak up model of parenting instead of hiding behind tech as a way to let children release the pressure of a dissatisfied moment. Admittedly, pacifying a whining child at two or three years of age with a smart phone or iPad is easier than taking time to address the child in conversation and even disciplining them. However, this methodology is causing a fracture within the home where children are desperately crying out for their parents’ attention. So, success over the adverse effects of social media begins before the child is born and is centered in the parent’s ruling desire to bring up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

Deuteronomy 6:4-6 suggests that parents and children are to be in constant conversation regarding life’s deep issues:

⁵⁵ Adam Hays, “Law of Diminishing Marginal Returns: Definition, Example, Use in Economics,” Investopedia, April 4, 2022, <https://www.investopedia.com/terms/l/lawofdiminishingmarginalreturn.asp>.

And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

Intentional parental guidance in God’s Word in the home lies at the root of a child’s spiritual growth. One effective way parents can guide their children spiritually, according to the mandate of Deuteronomy 6, is through family worship.

Don Whitney’s *Family Worship* lays out the biblical basis, history, methodology, and implications of family worship and is an indispensable resource for understanding the value of family worship in the home. Whitney writes in his introduction, “God *deserves* to be worshiped daily in our homes by our families.”⁵⁶ Whitney’s point is foundational: God’s right to everyone’s worship finds its foundation in the home. As with almost everything related to the flourishing of the nuclear family, there is little evidence to suggest anything other than a cross-denominational decline in the practice of family worship. But if the number of books from evangelical publishers on the subject in the past ten years is any indication, there may be hope of a resurgence of family worship, at least among conservative evangelicals in America.⁵⁷ Such a recovery, corresponding with

⁵⁶ Donald S. Whitney, *Family Worship* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 14.

⁵⁷ In addition to Scripture reading, a good resource to follow for family devotions is Champ Thornton, *The Radical Book for Kids: Exploring the Roots and Shoots of Faith* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth, 2016). Thornton’s use of color and vivid and varied illustrations throughout the book make it not only fun to read but engaging to look at. In sixty-seven chapters he covers a wide range of biblical topics that will keep children’s attention while avoiding monotony. For an excellent catechism for children, see Collin Hansen, ed. *The New City Catechism Devotional: God’s Truth for Our Hearts and Minds* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017). For a systematized Bible reading plan, see Trent Hunter, “The Bible Eater,” accessed August 17, 2023, <http://www.trenthunter.net/wp-content/uploads/2011/12/BibleEaterTrentHunter.pdf>. His plan organizes scripture in a practical way that is easily understood and can be downloaded for free. When reading Scripture, I use five questions to unlock discussion with my children: What does this passage teach us about God? What does this passage teach me about myself? What does this passage tell me to start doing? What does this passage tell me to stop doing? How can I use this passage to encourage others? Questions open the conscience and allow children to share their thoughts which can help parents gauge their children’s understanding of Scripture. Missionary biographies are a good way to connect God’s truth to real life. While many biographies are thoroughly written and hard to use for family worship, the series of biographies written by the husband-and-wife team Janet and Geoff Benge entitled, *Christian Heroes: Then and Now*, are shorter and more accessible biographies for shorter times and younger minds. See Janet Benge and Geoff Benge, *Christian Heroes: Then and Now* (Seattle: WA: YWAM, 2000).

the rise of smartphones and social media, would be a blessing to parents of children of all ages, not just those with children ages 0-5.

Like other foundational biblical practices for the individual Christian and the family, family worship is a timeless practice that has nourished believers since biblical times and through every sort of cultural upheaval. With that said, dating back to the seventeenth-century, both the Westminster and the Second London Baptist confessions share the same admonition: “God is to be worshiped everywhere in spirit and in truth; as in private families daily, and in secret each one by himself.”⁵⁸ Whitney further traces this tradition through the ages, beginning with the thoughts and practices regarding family worship of the early church fathers and continuing with Tertullian and John Chrysostom, reformers Martin Luther and John Knox, English Puritans, Richard Baxter and Matthew Henry, the colonial New England theologian Jonathan Edwards, through to contemporary Christian leaders such as John Piper and Don Carson. This legacy demonstrates a rich tradition establishing the need for biblical instruction in the home, suggesting that spiritual growth is born out of the family and then into the church.⁵⁹

However, these examples are men who are theologians and pastors. What about laymen who do not labor in the church fulltime? What is the “common man’s” experience with family worship? To this end, Whitney includes the story of Rick Husband, commander of the Space Shuttle *Columbia*. Husband is an example of one who balanced

⁵⁸ Voddie Baucham Jr., *Family Shepherds: Calling and Equipping Men* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011), 73. Whitney, *Family Worship*, 31.

⁵⁹ To this point, Whitney cites patristics scholar Lyman Coleman, who wrote, At an early hour in the morning the family was assembled and a portion of Scripture was read from the old Testament, which was followed by a hymn and a prayer, in which thanks were offered up to the Almighty for preserving them during the silent watches of the night, and for His goodness in permitting them to meet in health of body and soundness of mind; and, at the same time, His grace was implored to defend them amid the dangers and temptation of the day,—to make them faithful to every duty, and enable them, in all respects, to walk worthy of their Christian vocation. . . . In the evening, the same form of worship was observed as in the morning, with this difference, that the service was considerably protracted beyond the period which could be conveniently allotted to it in the commencement of the day. (Lyman Coleman, quoted in Whitney, *Family Worship*, 28-29)

daily work life with that of the spiritual care of his family. Prior to his mission to space in 2003, he recorded for his children—Laura and Matthew—a video that they could watch every day while he was in orbit. Whitney writes,

At the beginning of the tape he left with his seven-year-old son, Husband said, “Hi, Matthew. I wanted to tell you how much I love you and I wanted to make this tape for you so that you and I could have a devotional time for every day that I’m in space. So, what I am doing is I’m looking at your devotional book and I’m starting on the sixteenth of January, which is our launch day, and what I will do is read through this book and read the Bible verse also and go through the whole thing just like you and I are sitting here on the couch together. I just wanted to do this because I love you so much and I’m going to do one for your sister as well.”⁶⁰

Sadly, Husband was killed along with seven others as the shuttle reentered the atmosphere for landing, but his legacy of family worship is forever etched in the minds of his children and those who knew him as one who was devoted to their success in this life and the one to come.

While churches are still recognized in today’s culture as places of worship, the home—as space for worship—often is not. The way back to family worship requires, as Whitney makes clear, a firm belief in God’s worthiness to be worshipped daily in homes. However, the practical daily worship of God in the home is made difficult by culture’s fragmentation of the family unit. Whitney adds, “I was in England and heard a report on BBC radio about a government study there which indicated that as a result of TV, technology, and the like, families rarely spend time together.”⁶¹ The lack of familial togetherness, as suggested by this study, is caused by any number of distractions—including technology—which can easily erode any sense of cooperative engagement necessary for unified family worship. So how does the family begin to right the ship?

To right the ship on family worship, families—especially the father—first must be convinced of the need for family worship. To this end, famous eighteenth-century English Anglican preacher and evangelist George Whitefield, in his sermon entitled, “The

⁶⁰ Whitney, *Family Worship*, 64.

⁶¹ Whitney, *Family Worship*, 11.

Great Duty of Family Religion,” suggests five reasons for family worship: “gratitude to God,” “love and pity for your children,” “common honesty and justice,” “self-interest,” and “the terrors of the Lord.”⁶² Whitefield is arguing for the value of family worship in practical terms and in terms appealing to human sensitivities. These earnest appeals by Whitefield should not be overlooked. What is evident from this list is that the authority for family worship is established in God and his Word. This authority should be taught to children as early as possible and incorporated into their worldview at an early age. Having said that, what is implied but not explicitly stated in Whitefield’s arguments for family worship is the bedrock belief that God deserves to be worshipped daily in homes by families. Regardless of any perceived benefit one can gain from family worship, the truth that God is deserving of worship should be the primary motivation for this vital activity in the home, even when feelings wane or anticipated benefits are not met.

Establishing family worship may seem daunting when the family is fragmented. So, a good starting point is to make time spent together as a family normal and enjoyable. Family time can be built around the events and occasions when the family is at home together. When children are young, family dinners are an obvious place to begin discipling the family to be together and engaged mentally. This event can be the catalyst for the introduction of family worship, a time that can include Bible reading, singing, praying, Scripture memory, catechizing, and testimonies of how biblical truth is working itself out in one another’s lives.⁶³ It is important to note that family worship will seem less formal the more normal it becomes. And the more normal family worship becomes, the more easily family worship can be engaged.⁶⁴

⁶² Baucham, *Family Shepherds*, 73-78.

⁶³ See footnote 57 for a list of helpful resources for family worship.

⁶⁴ Whitney offers three “reminders” that help navigate family worship: brevity, regularity, and flexibility. He suggests ten minutes with the option to broaden out as the children grow in age or become more interested in spiritual conversation. Whitney, *Family Worship*, 50.

What Whitney and history are advocating is arguably missing from the Christian home today. To right the ship, family worship must be instated by the husband and wife, and then expand as children are born or brought into the home. This early practice establishes a discipline that shapes the DNA of the home and the well-being of the family. To this point, Whitney is not denying the importance of the church; rather, he is arguing that both the family and the church share in the spiritual formation of the individual believers. He writes, “Having your family in a Christ-exulting, gospel-centered, Bible-teaching local church is crucial to Christian parenting. But it is not enough for conveying to your family all you want to teach them about God and your beliefs”⁶⁵

So, from the earliest stages of a child’s life, family time establishes, in seed form, the construct of God’s authority, worship, and *koinonia*. This authority, worship, and *koinonia*, rooted in the home, is more completely experienced in and through the local church.

Parenting Advice for Those with Young and Pre-Teens 5-12 Years Old

Children, ages 5-12, will give parents every reason for why they need a smart phone. However, in this age range there is no easier time to say “not yet” to screen time and “yes” to family time. Koch makes it clear that easy going casual conversations need to be commonplace in the home.⁶⁶ These conversations begin when children are very small, require parents to be fully engaged with their child and not distracted by tech, and are moments that create success for the next phase of life.

The adverse effects of handing a smartphone to a child in this age range has already been stated. In place of the smartphone, the family must work at finding meaningful and fun ways to engage with their children. To be clear, eliminating all screen

⁶⁵ Whitney, *Family Worship*, 14.

⁶⁶ Koch, *Screens and Teens*, 203.

time is not necessary. The goal is to maximize activities that put you and your children in face-to-face settings with others. As stated, family dinners and family worship are the seed bed for a healthy appreciation for togetherness. However, sports programs, civic clubs, shopping, and serving others in the church are great ways for children to socialize on a peer-to-peer, in-person context.

As mentioned, dinner time can be a foundational activity that leads naturally into family worship. However, making the two times unique can be helpful. Gary Chapman and Arlene Pellicane write about cultivating mealtimes as a means of creating a rich family experience: “Don’t use the dinner table to preach or discuss stressful topics. Do that away from the table. At its best, dinner is about sharing stories, solving problems, no pressure, no meanness, no putdowns, no sarcasm—and no tech distractions”⁶⁷ With on-the-go lifestyles, the family dinner is more likely to look like hamburgers in the minivan than a three-course meal around the kitchen table. Demanding lifestyles distract from Deuteronomy 6 living. Parents must ask themselves, “Are activities that create frantic family experiences real demands that offer substantial value-payoffs, or are we as parents just utilizing busy-ness as a means to avoid real parental responsibilities?” In today’s performance driven society, most people live “crazy-busy” lives where it is easier to put little Billy or little Jennifer in soccer, piano lessons, and Tae Kwon Do and run around town three to four nights a week grabbing dinner on the go than to plan a decent meal at home and to engage their little minds with some meaningful conversation and family worship. Again, this advice is rooted in thousands of years of testimony that conversation and person-to-person connection drives meaningful existence. Parents at this stage would do well to lessen weeknight obligations to center their attention on a family experience that strengthens relationships with each other and the Lord.

⁶⁷ Gary Chapman and Arlene Pellicane, *Growing Up Social: Raising Relationship Kids in a Screen-Driven World* (Chicago: Moody, 2014), 280.

Parenting Advice for Those with Teens and Young Adults 13–22 Years Old

Ages 13-22, represent the final frontier for parenting, at least while children are still in the home. This is the age where teens hit puberty, find their first love, start to drive, play high-level competitive sports, consider the college they will attend and major they will study, graduate and, Lord willing, move out of the home. This age range is like whiplash for parents. Little Billy and Jennifer are now hanging out with friends more, staying at school longer, becoming more obligated in work and school activities, and are facing some of the greatest temptations of their lives. This is also the age when family togetherness is most tested. Family dinners and family worship, if not strongly established in the early years, may find their exit at this point in the family life. This testing is where creativity and established traditions can help carry the day. What was forming in the early years of one's family life through established traditions should work itself out in a family willing and even desiring to participate in meaningful time together.

Having said that, the transition from adolescence to adulthood happens before most parents realize it. Young adults wanting to be treated like full-fledged grown-ups creates its own drama; throw a cell phone with social media into the mix and parents are now dealing with a full-scale production. While it may be unwise to entrust a thirteen-year-old a smart phone, it will not be long before phone ownership becomes a reality for one's child and when this happens, the right-of-passage into adulthood begins. At the moment the parent allows a child to have a cell phone, that parent loses a good measure of control over their children's attention, affection, focus, and obedience. What is lost when a child becomes immersed in the phone is innocence. It is sad, yet no child enters adulthood with innocence intact. All are affected by sin and the sin nature and yet, surprisingly, it is possible to have a highly productive spiritual life in spite of the advent of social media. While it is reassuring to know that the sky is not falling, parents must hold the reigns tight on those first several years of phone ownership to make sure that the

sky is as bright as can be. The following guidelines help parents in setting policies for tech use in their homes.

Guideline 1: Set policies that are written in contract form that must be signed by both the parents and the child. Policies are necessary. No matter how much a phone is locked down the policies help set expectations.

Guideline 2: Follow policies without wavering, unless a good reason exists to temporarily adjust. Not holding to a policy will eventually weaken the parent's leadership in the home.

Guidelines 3: Regardless of who paid for the phone or who pays for the service, the parent is the ultimate owner. Therefore, a policy where the phone can always be observed or taken by the parent, at any time, for any reason, and without complaint from the child, is wise.

Guideline 4: Phones are first and foremost communication tools: calling and texting. A good policy to consider is for the child to keep their phone charged and always on, and always pick up or respond to texts, unless the child is in class, at work, or in church and cannot practically respond. Having said that, it is almost impossible to be in a situation where one cannot text at least a quick, "Call u back soon," which is better than silence.

Guideline 5: The phone will be regulated by the parent through programs that offer accountability and blocking, such as Covenant Eyes, Bark, Net Nanny, or Life360, as well as through the phone's operating system. The idea is not that the parent can keep their children from looking at pornography or engaging in sinful activities, however, regulation of the phone helps protect children from themselves and from others who wish to do them harm. Twenty six percent of teens are on their phones for eight or more hours a day,⁶⁸ it is reasonable to limit usage at first to only an hour or two. If one has a smart phone, the operating system will allow limits on screen time and apps as well as shut

⁶⁸ Barna Group, *Gen Z: The Culture, Beliefs and Motivations Shaping the Next Generation* (Ventura, CA: Barna, 2018), 16.

down the phone at a specific time in the evening. As one's child grows in age, maturity, and responsibility, those limitations can be lifted. In addition, security and monitoring programs alert parents to potential threats either originating with the child, such as viewing pornography, engaging in violence or drug related activity, or originating with some outside entity that is engaging in bullying, seduction, sexting, or indoctrination. Completely keeping evil forces at bay will prove impossible, but good regulation with smart use of today's monitoring apps help keep children safe.

Any child will be excited to get their first phone and will agree to anything just to get their hands on one. The hard part for parents comes when the child has the phone and begins to push against the policies—and they will. Children can become enemies of their parents when their phones become their god. Maximizing limitations and monitoring usage upfront is probably the best advice a parent can receive. The parent can always relax restrictions as the child grows to use tech with maturity. Though, it is much harder to move back into greater control once the child has had a taste of autonomy.

Conclusion

A news headline dated June 27, 2023, reads, “Phone-free zone: Finland introduces world’s first digital detox tourist island.”⁶⁹ The article is a telling example of how some are trying to deal with the technological revolution that has come to dominate people’s lives. Since the 1960s, technology has made staggering advancements with computing, the internet, social media, robotics, and now, its newest interface, artificial intelligence. While many lament the sweeping changes of this digital revolution, lamentation will not change technologies incessant drive to connect and control mankind. Therefore, believers and the church must learn how to handle social media by strengthening an old technology: *κοινωνία*.

⁶⁹ Charlotte Elton, “Phone-Free Zone: Finland Introduces World’s First Digital Detox Tourist Island,” Euronews, June 27, 2023, <https://www.euronews.com/travel/2023/06/22/phone-free-zone-finland-introduces-worlds-first-digital-detox-tourist-island>.

This thesis attempted to argue that the church is uniquely equipped, through *κοινωνία*, to handle smartphones, social media, AI, or whatever technology is invented next. The staying power of the church is its head, Jesus Christ. The expression of the church is its body, the saints. The purpose of the church is the kingdom, the glory of God. What believers are advancing is more than just a *Kum ba yah* moment expressing optimistic hope in God's presence among men, but the promise of an eternal kingdom—a kingdom that will exist forever! Therefore, believers should not take the posture of defeat in the face of confusing tech and overwhelming apps. The church is more than conquerors; advancement is mandated. This leads believers to face the future with optimism knowing that Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, Google, IBM, Amazon, Twitter, TikTok, and every other technology, are just man's attempt to build a digital tower of Babel, which at best is only temporary and ultimately dispensable. With that said, it is comforting to know that there will be no need to google anything when one is with the Lord. With this in mind, it is easier to swallow moving away from tech and screen time now toward more of what eternity has to offer: fellowship.

By turning from tech to engaging with believers face-to-face, one will experience a taste of eternity, that is, greater joy, a greater degree of satisfaction in this life, a greater degree of peace, and a greater degree of success in relationship building. In the end, the self is absorbed in the greater good of others for the benefit of the self. Therefore, the spiritual discipline of *κοινωνία* must be practiced with increasing thoughtfulness as a measure of combating the rise of the self that is promoted by social media.⁷⁰

⁷⁰ Donald Whitney in *Simplify Your Life* offers ten questions that can spark spiritual conversation among believers and enhance koinonia. He writes,

One simple way to cultivate koinonia is to ask questions designed to turn a conversation in a more spiritual direction. Here's a list to work from: 1. How is your [teaching, hospitality, outreach, deacon, or whatever] ministry going? What do you enjoy most about it? 2. Where have you seen the Lord at work lately? 3. What's the Lord been teaching you recently? 4. Have you had any evangelistic opportunities lately? 5. Have you had any obvious answers to prayer recently? 6. What have you been reading? How has it impressed you? 7. Where in the Bible have you been reading lately? What

Any attempt to rescue the next generation from the onslaught of quick digital-dopamine fixes means that the church must slow down, take stock of their youngest members, and make full use of everyone. Critical to suppressing the rise of self is the work churches take in engaging upcoming generations by empowering younger believers to flex their identity within the church through the use of their gifts. Christ said himself, “Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven” (Matt 19:14).

If the family and church fail in cultivating children by engaging them wholistically, mind and body, then the next generation of believers will continue in this digital drift, leading to the malaise of the self. This malaise will increase the threat of coming generations suffering from spiritual despondency and increasing mental health issues. As a consequence of these issues, the church will suffer in its purpose of advancing the kingdom of Christ: churches will grow smaller and weaker, leading to fewer resources available for more proactive and preventative work.

On the other hand, rescuing youth from this digital drift also means equipping the church with a fresh set of kingdom advancers who grow in confidence in their identity as a part of the body of Christ. This rescue is done by implementing a youth engagement plan (YEP). A YEP is executed by regular elder or pastoral engagement with younger believers in the church for the purpose of identifying gifting by creating and organizing ministry opportunities to evaluate the execution of the use of that gift, with the goal of encouraging younger believers and the church. By sidestepping the traditional *teenager* category and allowing younger believers access into the building of Christ’s kingdom, the

impact has it had on you? 8. How can I pray for you? 9. What's the growth point in your life right now? 10. What are you passionate about right now? (Donald Whitney, “Cultivate Koinonia,” accessed August 17, 2023, <https://biblicalspirituality.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/01/Cultivate-Koinonia.pdf>. See Donald S. Whitney, *Simplify Your Spiritual Life* [Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2003])

For additional help regarding koinonia see Stuart Scott and Andrew Jin, *31 Ways to Be a One Another Christian: Loving Others with the Love of Jesus* (Wapwallopen, PA: Shepherd, 2019).

church will develop adults who in turn make new translations of God's Word for ancient people groups, produce more global proclaimers of God's Word who sing, preach, and teach scriptural truths, turn out more biblical counselors who can refresh sin-worn saints, and produce more Christian organizations who serve the greater church body, ultimately yielding more believers who robustly worship God around the world now and for eternity.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Abrams, Dominic, and Michael Hogg, eds. *Social Identity Theory: Constructive and Critical Advances*. New York: Springer-Verlag, 1990.
- Allison, Gregg R. *Embodied: Living as Whole People in a Fractured World*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2021.
- Alter, Adam. *Irresistible: The Rise of Addictive Technology and the Business of Keeping Us Hooked*. New York: Penguin, 2018.
- Anthony, Brittany. "On-Ramps, Intersections and Exit Routes: A Roadmap for Systems and Industries to Prevent and Disrupt Human Trafficking." Polaris, July 2018. <https://polarisproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/A-Roadmap-for-Systems-and-Industries-to-Prevent-and-Disrupt-Human-Trafficking-Social-Media.pdf>.
- Barna Group. *Gen Z: The Culture, Beliefs and Motivations Shaping the Next Generation*. Ventura, CA: Barna, 2018.
- Baucham, Voddie, Jr. *Family Shepherds: Calling and Equipping Men*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011.
- Brenen, Meghan. "Views of Big Tech Worsen; Public Wants More Regulation." Gallup, February 18, 2021. <https://news.gallup.com/poll/329666/views-big-tech-worsen-public-wants-regulation.aspx>.
- Bridges, Jerry. *True Community: The Biblical Practice of Koinonia*. Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2012.
- Carr, Nicholas G. *The Shallows: What the Internet Is Doing to Our Brains*. 2nd ed. New York: W. W. Norton, 2020.
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. "Alzheimer's Disease and Healthy Aging: Loneliness and Social Isolation Linked to Serious Health Conditions." Accessed May 24, 2023. <https://www.cdc.gov/aging/publications/features/lonely-older-adults.html#:~:text=Recent%20studies%20found%20that%3A,%2C%20obesity%2C%20and%20physical%20inactivity.&text=1-,Social%20isolation%20was%20associated%20with,50%25%20increased%20risk%20of%20dementia>.
- Challies, Tim. *The Next Story: Faith, Family, Friends and the Digital World*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015.
- Chapman, Gary, and Arlene Pellicane. *Growing Up Social: Raising Relationship Kids in a Screen-Driven World*. Chicago: Moody, 2014.
- Cherry, Kendra. "What Is Self-Concept?" VeryWellMind, November 7, 2022. <https://www.verywellmind.com/what-is-self-concept-2795865>.

- Ciampa, Roy E., and Brian S. Rosner. *The First Letter to the Corinthians*. Pillar New Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010.
- Conrad, Andrew. “5 Biggest Online Churches.” Capterra, May 10, 2019. <https://www.capterra.com/resources/the-5-biggest-online-churches/>.
- Coppes, Leonard J. “2066 קָרָב.” In *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, edited by R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke, 813. Chicago: Moody, 1999.
- Crouch, Andy. *The Tech-Wise Family: Everyday Steps for Putting Technology in Its Proper Place*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2017.
- Crouch, Amy, and Andy Crouch. *My Tech-Wise Life*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2020.
- Crouch, Amy, and Andy Crouch. *My Tech-Wise Life: Growing Up and Making Choices in a World of Devices*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2021.
- Dever, Mark. *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004.
- Dwoskin, Elizabeth. “Facebook’s Sanberg Deflected Blame for Capital Riot, but New Evidence Shows How Platform Played Role.” *The Washington Post*, January 13, 2021. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2021/01/13/facebook-role-in-capitol-protest/>.
- Elton, Charlotte. “Phone-Free Zone: Finland Introduces World’s First Digital Detox Tourist Island.” Euronews, June 27, 2023. <https://www.euronews.com/travel/2023/06/22/phone-free-zone-finland-introduces-worlds-first-digital-detox-tourist-island>.
- Erikson, Eric H. *Identity: Youth and Crisis*. New York: W. W. Norton, 1968.
- Foerster, Werner. “ἔξεστιν, ἐξουσία, ἐξουσιάζω, κατεξουσιάζω.” In *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, edited by G. Kittel, G. W. Bromiley, and G. Friedrich. Electronic ed. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964.
- Frost, Natasha. “Why Stalin Tried to Stamp Out Religion in the Soviet Union.” *History*, April 23, 2021. <https://www.history.com/news/joseph-stalin-religion-atheism-ussr>.
- Ginsberg, David, and Moira Burke. “Hard Questions: Is Spending Time on Social Media Bad for Us?” *Meta*, December 15, 2017. <https://about.fb.com/news/2017/12/hard-questions-is-spending-time-on-social-media-bad-for-us/last>.
- Gladwell, Malcolm. *The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference*. Boston: Back Bay, 2002.
- Groothuis, Douglas R. *Philosophy in Seven Sentences: A Small Introduction to a Vast Topic*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2016.
- Grudem, Wayne A. *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*. Leicester: Inter-Varsity, 1994.
- Grundmann, Walter. “δύναμαι, δυνατός, δυνατέω, ἀδύνατος, ἀδυνατέω, δύναμις, δυνάστης, δυναμώω, ἐνδυναμώω.” In *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, edited by G. Kittel, G. W. Bromiley, and G. Friedrich. Electronic ed. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964.

- Hamilton, Victor P. *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1-17*. New International Commentary on the Old Testament. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1995.
- Hart, Ian. "Genesis 1:1-2:3 as a Prologue to the Books of Genesis." *Tyndale Bulletin* 46, no. 2 (1995): 315-36.
- Harvard University-Department of Psychology. "Stanley Milgram." Accessed March 10, 2023. <https://psychology.fas.harvard.edu/people/stanley-milgram>.
- Hauck, F. "κοινός, κοινωνός, κοινωνέω, κοινωνία, συγκοινωνός, συγκοινωνέω, κοινωνικός, κοινώ." In *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, edited by G. Kittel, G. W. Bromiley, and G. Friedrich, 3:804. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964.
- Hays, Adam. "Law of Diminishing Marginal Returns: Definition, Example, Use in Economics." Investopedia, April 4, 2022. <https://www.investopedia.com/terms/l/lawofdiminishingmarginalreturn.asp>.
- Hennessy, Brittany. *Influencer: Building Your Personal Brand in the Age of Social Media*. New York: Kensington, 2018.
- Hunter, Jay. "Andrew Tate Shares Why He Will Never Get Married." Accessed August 6, 2022. <https://www.ginx.tv/en/youtube/andrew-tate-shares-why-he-will-never-get-married>.
- Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy. "Thales of Mileus (c. 620 B.C.E.-c. 546 B.C.E.," Accessed March 1, 2023. <https://iep.utm.edu/thales/#:~:text=Aristotle's%20lines%20in%20Metaphysics%20indicate,and%20floating%20islands%20do%20exist>.
- James, William, Michael G. Johnson, and Tracy B. Henley, eds. *Reflections on the Principles of Psychology: William James after a Century*. Hillsdale, NJ: L. Erlbaum, 1990.
- Jones, Matthew. "The Complete History of Social Media: A Timeline of the Invention of Online Networking." History Cooperative, June 16, 2015. <https://historycooperative.org/the-history-of-social-media/>.
- Jung, Joanne J. *The Lost Discipline of Conversation: Surprising Lessons in Spiritual Formation Drawn from the English Puritans*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2018.
- Karinthy, Frigyes. "Chains." Accessed March 28, 2023. <https://short-stories.co/stories/chains-4w0n6QJmNDr>.
- Kilmeade, Brian. "Tristan Harris: The Startling Implications of AI, ChatGPT and TikTok." Apple Podcasts, March 22, 2023. <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/tristan-harris-the-startling-implications-of-ai/id219258773?i=1000605431496>.
- Kim, Jay Y. *Analog Church: Why We Need Real People, Places, and Things in the Digital Age*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2020.
- Kim, Yosep. *The Identity and the Life of the Church: John Calvin's Ecclesiology in the Perspective of His Anthropology*. Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2014.
- Kirkpatrick, David. *The Facebook Effect: The Inside Story of the Company That Is Connecting the World*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2010.

- Kleinrock, Leonard. "An Early History of the Internet [History of Communications]." *IEEE Communications Magazine* 48, no. 8 (August 2010): 26-31.
- Koch, Kathy. *Screens and Teens: Connecting with Our Kids in a Wireless World*. Chicago: Moody, 2015.
- La Jeunesse, William. "Here's the Data That TikTok Collects on Its Users." *Fox Business*, March 22, 2023. <https://www.foxbusiness.com/technology/heres-data-tiktok-collects-its-users>.
- Leary, David E. "William James on the Self and Personality: Clearing the Ground for Subsequent Theorists, Researchers, and Practitioners." In *Reflections on the Principles of Psychology: William James after a Century*, edited by William James, Michael G. Johnson, and Tracy B. Henley, 101. Hillsdale, NJ: L. Erlbaum, 1990.
- Leiner, Barry M. Vinton G. Cerf, David D. Clark, Robert E. Khan, Leonard Klienrock, David C. Lynch, Jon Postel, Lawrence G. Roberts, and Stephen Wolff. "Brief History of the Internet." InternetSociety.org, 1997. Accessed March 4, 2023. https://www.internetsociety.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/ISOC-History-of-the-Internet_1997.pdf.
- Lovelace, Richard. *Dynamics of Spiritual Life: An Evangelical Theology of Renewal*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1979.
- Makhmuryan, Hayk. "Community: An Etymology of Sorts." *Arts Journal*, July 25, 2016. <https://www.artsjournal.com/fieldnotes/2016/07/community-an-etymology-of-sorts/>.
- Marshall, Colin, and Tony Payne. *The Trellis and the Vine*. Kingsford, NSW, Australia: Matthias, 2009.
- Martin, R. P. "Communion." In *New Bible Dictionary*, edited by I. H. Marshall, A. R. Millard, J. I. Packer, D. J. Wiseman & D. R. W. Wood, 217–218. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1996.
- McCracken, Brett. *The Wisdom Pyramid*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021.
- Mcleod, Saul. "Carl Rogers: Founder of the Humanistic Approach to Psychology." *Simply Psychology*, May 18, 2023. <https://simplypsychology.org/carl-rogers.html>.
- Mccomiskey, T. E. "בְּרָא 278." In *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, edited by R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke, 127-28. Chicago: Moody, 1999.
- McKnight, Scot. *The Letter to the Colossians*. New International Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018.
- Newport, Cal. *Digital Minimalism: Choosing a Focused Life in a Noisy World*. New York: Portfolio/Penguin, 2019.
- O’Gieblyn, Meghan. "Can Social Media Be Redeemed?" *Wired Magazine*, June 2022.
- Odenwald, Sten. "What Is a Space Time Continuum?" *Testing Einstein’s Universe*. Accessed March 21, 2023. <https://einstein.stanford.edu/content/relativity/q411.html>.

- Office of the US Surgeon General. "Our Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation." US Department of Health and Human Services, 2023. <https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/surgeon-general-social-connection-advisory.pdf>.
- Oswalt, J. N. "951 כָּבֵשׁ." In *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, edited by R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke, 430. Chicago: Moody, 1999.
- Pandolfo, Chris. "Elon Musk, Apple Co-Founder, Other Tech Experts Call for Pause on 'Giant AI Experiments': 'Dangerous Race.'" *Fox News*, March 29, 2023. <https://www.foxnews.com/politics/elon-musk-apple-co-founder-tech-experts-call-pause-giant-ai-experiments>.
- Pearcey, Nancy. *Love Thy Body: Answering Hard Questions about Life and Sexuality*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2018.
- Primack, Brian A., Ariel Shensa, Jaime E. Sidani, Erin O. Whaite, Liu yi Lin, Daniel Rosen, Jason B. Colditz, Ana Radovic, and Elizabeth Miller. "Social Media Use and Perceived Social Isolation among Young Adults in the U.S." *American Journal of Preventative Medicine* 53, no. 1 (2017). <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0749379717300168?via%3Dihub>.
- Purdum, Matthew James. "Equipping Young Adult Small Group Leadership and Discipleship at Brentwood Baptist Church in Brentwood, Tennessee." DMin project, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2020.
- Reinke, Tony, and John Piper. *12 Ways Your Phone Is Changing You*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017.
- Reno, Russell R. *Genesis*. Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible. Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2010.
- Robertson, O. Palmer. *The Books of Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah*. New International Commentary on the Old Testament. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990.
- Santos, Henri C., Michael E. W. Varnum, and Igor Grossmann. "Global Increases in Individualism." *Psychological Science* 28, no. 9 (September 2017): 1228-39.
- Schultz, Carl. "1598, רָצַף." In *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, edited by R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke, 660-61. Chicago: Moody, 1999.
- Scott, Stuart, and Andrew Jin. *31 Ways to Be a One Another Christian: Loving Others with the Love of Jesus*. Wapwallopen, PA: Shepherd, 2019.
- Smith, James K. A. *You Are What You Love: The Spiritual Power of Habit*. Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2016.
- Steinmann, Andrew. *Genesis*. Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, vol. 1. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2019.
- Stott, John R. W. *The Letters of John*. 2nd ed. Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, vol. 19. Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity, 1988.

- Street, John D. *Passions of the Heart: Biblical Counsel for Stubborn Sexual Sins*. Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2019.
- Sutter, John D. "On Facebook, It's Now 4.74 Degrees of Separation." *CNN*, November 22, 2011. <https://www.cnn.com/2011/11/22/tech/social-media/facebook-six-degrees/index.html>.
- Tajfel, Henri. *Social Identity and Intergroup Relations*. European Studies in Social Psychology 7. Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2010.
- Taylor, Charles. *Modern Social Imaginaries*. Edited by Dilip Gaonkar, Jane Kramer, Benjamin Lee, and Michael Warner. Durham, NC: Duke University, 2004.
- _____. *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 1989.
- Thagard, Paul. "What Is the Self?" *Psychology Today*, June 23, 2014. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/hot-thought/201406/what-is-the-self>.
- Trueman, Carl. *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self: Cultural Amnesia, Expressive Individualism, and the Road to Sexual Revolution*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020.
- Truitt, Brandon. "Should You Pay to Get Verified on Facebook and Instagram? Experts Weight in on New Meta Program." *CBS Boston*, February 20, 2023. <https://www.cbsnews.com/boston/news/meta-paid-verification-facebook-instagram/>.
- Turkle, Sherry. *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other*. New York: Basic, 2011.
- Um, Stephen. *1 Corinthians*. Preaching the Word. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015.
- Von Rad, Gerhard. *Commentary on Genesis*. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1973.
- Waltke, Bruce K., and Cathi J. Fredricks. *Genesis: A Commentary*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001.
- Webb, Amy. *The Big Nine: How the Tech Titans and Their Thinking Machines Could Warp Humanity*. New York: Hatchett, 2019.
- Whitney, Donald S. *Family Worship*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016.
- _____. *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*. Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2014.
- _____. *Spiritual Disciplines within the Church*. Chicago: Moody, 1996.
- Wilhoit, James C. *Spiritual Formation as if the Church Mattered*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008.
- I. H. Marshall, A. R. Millard, J. I. Packer, D. J. Wiseman, & Wood, D. R. W., (Eds.). *New Bible Dictionary*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1996.

ABSTRACT

HOW THE DISCIPLINE OF KOINONIA STRENGTHENS THE CHURCH TO OVERCOME THE RISE OF THE SELF AS PROMOTED BY SOCIAL MEDIA

Jeffrey Michael Kelly, DMin
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2023
Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Donald S. Whitney

This thesis demonstrates the contrast between the negative effects of social media on a believer's identity with the positive effects of biblical fellowship and how fellowship shapes the identity of the believer in Christ and does so in a way that promotes the health of the church. Chapter 1 serves as an introduction and addresses major works concerning the concept of self, identity, biblical fellowship, and social media from a psychological, social, and theological viewpoint. Chapter 2 surveys a theological defense of spiritual group formation by reviewing biblical group formation in three unique stages of biblical history. Chapter 3 addresses the formation and threat of social media as a leading force in forming an individualistic pursuit of identity. Chapter 4 covers social media's role in the rise of the modern self. It addresses both the psychological underpinning of the self as well as a philosophical underpinning of social media's influence on the self. Chapter 5 addresses implications for the church and shows how the church can respond to the threat of social media by cultivating koinonia within the home and in the church.

VITA

Jeffrey Michael Kelly

EDUCATION

BS, Bob Jones University, 1996

MA, Bob Jones Theological Seminary, 2001

MINISTERIAL EMPLOYMENT

Pastoral Intern, Fairfax Baptist Temple, Fairfax, Virginia, 2001-2002

Church Planting Pastor, Harvest Fields Baptist Church, Queensberry, New York, 2002-2007

Church Planting Pastor, Cornerstone Baptist Church, Arden, North Carolina, 2007-2014

Elder, Redeemer Community Church, Fuquay-Varina, North Carolina, 2016-2019

Pastor for Assimilation and Student Ministry, Grace Community Church, Angier, North Carolina, 2019-2022

Director of Student Care, Bob Jones University, Greenville, South Carolina, 2022-