



I am SO GLAD you are here. First, it would be really awkward to talk about this stuff to an empty room. But more importantly, your presence says something. In fact, as I was prepping for this, I asked myself a simple question: “Why am I doing this?” I mean, when I first said “yes” to God’s calling to be a youth pastor, I didn’t get into it just to hang out in a room full of parents. But, it’s become clearer than ever that this is an essential part of our ministry. So, let’s set the table as to why we are here.

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WHY ARE WE HERE?

There are five assumptions I am making about what is bringing us together during these three sessions we will be sharing together.

[SLIDE]

1. *You love your kids.*

I believe that your kids are your most prized and valued resource. Don’t get me wrong; I know they absolutely drive you nuts at times (OK, most of the time), but when it gets down to it, you love them deeply.

[SLIDE]

2. *We love your kids.*

We at [\[your ministry name\]](#) join you in those feelings. We believe the next generation is amazing. Sure, they drive us absolutely nuts at times (OK, lots of times), but we adore your kids.

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3. *We want your kids to encounter Jesus.*

You could define success in parenting in a lot of ways, but I believe for most of us in here, your greatest hope is that your students would be following Jesus five, 10, and 25 years from now. That’s our hope, too.

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4. *Parenting is tough.*

In fact, I think there is no tougher job in the world. It is absolutely confounding that God would entrust such a task to the collection of people in this room, isn't it?

[SLIDE]

5. *The current world of technology is overwhelming.*

Things are changing and developing rapidly, and it's nothing like when we were kids. I think, for a lot of us, we are experiencing a mix of emotions — from confusion to fear to cluelessness — and ultimately, we just are overwhelmed. And although I don't believe these sessions will get you all the answers, I do hope they will give you some, and in the process, breathe life and hope into you.

Discuss: That is why I think we are here, but I want to hear from you ... Why are you here?

[**Author Note:** I took time to allow people to share their thoughts. I added commentary to validate their statements as well as alleviate the level of awkwardness that was present in the room as we got going. I also took notes so I could reference back to moments when we were addressing some things shared (for example, “One of you mentioned you were here to get a better idea on how to set up some accountabilities and controls on your phones. Well, this next section is for you.”)]

DISCLAIMER: I am not here to tell you how to parent. I simply hope to give you some information and thoughts that will help you shape how you parent your teens. Now, I may give you my opinion at some points, but I'll try to be clear when that happens.

I personally have four kids. We are leaning into this stuff in our home. We're overwhelmed, and we're far from having all the answers. At the same time, my kids are not teens, so I'm not going to assume I know what you're going through. What I do have is 21 years of working with teenagers and parents, and I've seen some trends that I want to pass on to you.

[**Author Note:** I always give some form of the above disclaimer when sharing with parents. It helps parents understand I'm on their side, and that

they get the final say on how they will parent their kids. You will obviously want to change the last two sentences to fit what is more appropriate to your experience and setting. *Pro Tip:* If you only have a couple years of youth ministry under your belt and/or don't have kids, emphasize how much you don't know 😊. If you have teens, emphasize that you are on the journey with them.]

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PARENT HACKS

I believe, in a room this size, there are enough collective thoughts and ambitions to make one great parent! On the card provided, write down something your family has discovered as a valuable tool/tip/method when it comes to your family engaging technology. We are going to call these “Parent Hacks.”

What is a hack? It's “any trick, skill, or novelty method that increases productivity and efficiency, in all walks of life.”

Write yours down, and turn them into me at the end of the session. I'll collect these and share them throughout our time together.

[**Leader Note:** I printed off the Parent Hack cards (ParentHacks.pdf, included in this download) on cardstock and placed them on every other chair before the session began.]

Now that we've laid down some groundwork, I'd like to take the rest of this session for us to try to wrap our minds around our current digital reality and then make some time to lean into what the implications are for us.

A TECHNOLOGICAL TIMELINE

I did a Google search of “Technology in the ___'s (70s, 80s, 90s, 2000s),” filling in a decade. Here's what I discovered. I think you'd find the results interesting.

[**Author Note:** I put up the slide with each decade and added commentary on some of the items that were up there, along with some of my personal memories of these things.]

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- 80s: VCR, Personal Computer, Polaroid, Corded phone, NES

[SLIDE]

- 90s: AOL and dial-up internet, Palm Pilot, flip phone, laptop computer, Discman

[SLIDE]

- Early 00s: Myspace, iPod, Flat screen TV, Xbox, Digital Camera, GPS, texting

For us in here, these are the times when we came of age.

THE DIGITAL WATERSHED

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In 2007, there came a significant moment when Steve Jobs introduces the world to the iPhone. It was a sort of digital watershed that many say we will measure cultural time from: life before the iPhone/smartphones, and life after the iPhone/smartphone.

[Author Note: If you have the time, it could be fun to show some (around the first 3.5 minutes) of the Keynote session where Jobs actually introduces the iPhone: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MnrJzXM7a6o>]

Here is what makes this moment in history so significant.

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All the technology we just covered from the previous three decades is now accessible in that single device. Post-2007, we all began carrying supercomputers around in our pockets. This adequately sums up the fact that we are living in a new digital reality.

THE PHONE IS LIKE A KNIFE

Let's be clear about something. A smartphone, or any technology, is neither inherently evil nor inherently good.

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It is much like a knife. A knife can be used for some very productive thing: cutting bread, spreading butter, or whittling. It can also be used for some

very destructive things: slashing tires or even murder. The usage is determined by the user and his/her ability to discern proper and productive usage. This truth brings us to some things to consider right away when it comes to technology (especially smartphones) and our kids — like ***age and the need for instruction and supervision.***

Now, I’m not going to give you a specific age that you should allow your kid to have an iPhone, Instagram account, Xbox, or you fill in the blank with whatever. Maturity and readiness has many factors beyond the amount of years on this earth. That is going to take a lot of discernment and assessment from your end to determine. I will say (and here is an opinion) I think we, as a culture, are putting smartphones into our kids’ hands at a far younger age than needed.

But again, these things are not evil in and of themselves. In fact, I would go so far as to say technology is a gift from God. Some examples:

- Facebook changed the way I have been able to stay connected with students after they graduate from this youth group.
- I have a friend who is able to go into remote African tribes and provide solar-powered audio devices that contain the Bible in that tribe’s dialect.
- Just last week, I did a video conference with five youth pastors from Pennsylvania, Iowa, Kansas, Texas, and California. We are all walking through similar issues in our ministry.

[**Author Note:** Think through your own examples of how you’re seeing technology used in redemptive and kingdom-focused ways.]

This stuff is amazing, and we need to be thinking of ways we can use it to advance the kingdom!

AT THE SAME TIME, WE NEED TO RECOGNIZE THAT THERE ARE IMPLICATIONS TO THE TECHNOLOGY WE ARE USING.

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This news article showed up all over the place on November 2017. News article headline: “Facebook’s first president on Facebook: ‘God only knows what it’s doing to our children’s brains.’”

The article starts off:

The Facebook founders purposefully created something addictive, the social network's first president told Axios in an interview. “God only knows what it's doing to our children's brains,” Sean Parker said in the interview published Thursday.

Here are a couple other quotes from the article:

“I don't know if I really understood the consequences of what I was saying, because the unintended consequences of a network when it grows to a billion or 2 billion people and . . . it literally changes your relationship with society, with each other. . . . It probably interferes with productivity in weird ways,” Parker said.

When helping Facebook get off the ground in 2004, Parker said, he and others involved in the nascent social network thought: “How do we consume as much of your time and conscious attention as possible?”

“And that means that we need to sort of give you a little dopamine hit every once in a while, because someone liked or commented on a photo or a post or whatever. And that's going to get you to contribute more content, and that's going to get you . . . more likes and comments.”

[**Author Note:** Full article here: https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-switch/wp/2017/11/09/facebooks-first-president-on-facebook-god-only-knows-what-its-doing-to-our-childrens-brains/?utm_term=.28cc7e1dbb62]

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THE CURRENT DIGITAL REALITY

As we try to assess how this stuff is affecting us, let's walk through a few points that will help us catch what is unique about this time that our kids are growing up in, compared to when we grew up.

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First, the current digital reality gives us *constant connection*. Because we now are able to carry supercomputers in our hands, we are always connected. And you might think I'm using that word always in a hyperbolic

sense, but it’s not that far from the truth. Check out these statistics from Common Sense Media:

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Screen Time broken down by ages:

0-2: 42 minutes

2-4: 2 hrs. 29 min.

5-8: 2 hrs. 56 min.

9-12: 4 hrs. 36 min.

13-18: 6 hrs. 40 min.

Source: Common Sense Media

0-8 Study October 19, 2017

Teen/Tween Study November 3, 2015

[Author Note: Research is varied on this, but I have a decent level of trust in CSM’s approach.]

Subjectively speaking, we have noticed a much lower priority on students wanting to get their driver’s license at age 16. In my high school years, it was a major rite of passage and THE event of the sophomore/junior year. My license allowed me to get out of the house on my terms and connect with the people I wanted to. Now, it’s not nearly as big of deal. Is that due in part to the ability to be connected to friends at all times?

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Second, the current digital reality gives us *excessive access*. We can get any information about anything we want, thanks to Siri and Alexa and Google.

A popular show on Netflix is *Stranger Things*. [SLIDE] It’s a suspense/sci-fi/mystery story centered on preteens in small-town Indiana. It’s masterfully set in the 80s and pays homage to many of the shows and movies we grew up on.

I heard an interview where the creators talked about their desire to write a bit of a love letter to the 80s, but they also said that putting the story in that landscape allowed for them to build the mystery so much better because of

the technological limitations of the 80s. Photos had to be developed. Communication had to happen on walkie-talkies that could easily go out of range. This is a great example of the difference in “access” during our teen years compared to current access.

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Third, the current digital reality emphasizes *impersonal communication*

. Consider the following:

- Conversations through text messaging are void of nonverbal cues.
- Social media posts allow us to filter, edit, and modify our thoughts and even our looks before we send them out.
- Social media labels connections as *friends* or *followers*.
- Even in a video chat, full eye-to-eye contact is impossible. You are either looking at the camera and not into the person eyes, or at the person’s eyes and not the camera, which will take your eyes away from the person.

Although the connections we make through technology can be constant, there is a limit to how personal they can be.

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Fourth, our current digital reality gives us a platform to have *immediate reaction*.

The moment something happens, it’s there for the world to see. Not only that, everyone has the opportunity to respond. Unfiltered editorial commentary is EVERYWHERE. I personally see a two-fold implication to this.

1. It’s harder than ever to get students to open up and share in youth group. I think this is partly because they are doing too much impersonal communication (point 3), but I also believe because they have become more guarded than ever when it comes to taking risks.
2. On the other end, we all seem to be battling with deep Christian values like patience, discernment, and contemplation. James 1:19 is more

important than ever (be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to become angry).

I’m sure we could come up with even more ways to define our current digital reality, but I think these points give us a bit of a handle on where we are at, and they point us toward where I hope the rest of our time together will be focused.

So what can our response be?

In Walt Mueller’s great book *Engaging the Soul of Youth Culture*, he walks through three church or parental responses to the culture around us.

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Alienation: *The Church in a bunker.* In this approach, we live in fear of the world and its effects. We circle the wagons and remove all chances of getting “infected” by this stuff (basically becoming Amish).

Accommodation: *The Church on a leash.* In this approach, we just go along with the flow of culture. We do not take any of the spiritual implications of our actions or allowances into account. Rather than looking to Christ to define our values and actions, we allow the world to do so.

Infiltration & Transformation: *The Church in the world but not of the world.* This third way is obviously the way Mueller challenges his readers toward, and I think this is the approach we should be considering on how we engage the digital world with our kids.

We can be tempted to just ban all devices and constantly control all our kids’ content, and there is a place for this. We can just get overwhelmed and say, “kids will be kids.” Although we should never say this, we do have to recognize this stuff isn’t going anywhere and they will have to engage in it at some level. Ultimately, we must—in obedience to Christ—become wise consumers ourselves and teach our children to become wise consumers.

There are two Scriptures that will guide us along in this journey of infiltration and transformation.

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Romans 12:2 (NIV)

Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

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Ephesians 5:15–17 (NIV)

Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord’s will is.

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“There’s Just One More Thing”

I mentioned Steve Job’s introducing the iPhone toward the beginning of our time together. Well, Job had this thing he would do at every one of his keynote sessions for Apple. As things were about ready to wind down, he would say, “Oh wait. There’s just one more thing.” And that thing was often a big reveal or surprise that the people listening didn’t know was coming.

Well, tonight I want to say, “There’s just one more thing.”

[SLIDE]

I showed you this Common Sense Media’s research on screen time for kids.

0-2: 42 minutes

2-4: 2 hrs. 29 min.

5-8: 2 hrs. 56 min.

9-12: 4 hrs. 36 min.

13-18: 6 hrs. 40 min.

In 2017, they also did research on the parents of these kids. Their findings:

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Parents of Tweens/Teens: 9 hrs. 22 min.

Personal Use (not work-related): 7 hrs. 43 min.

Here is the point: This new digital reality is deeply impacting our lives as much/if not more than it’s affecting our kids, and we may be struggling to balance it all even more than our kids. Let’s lead by example.

Next week, we’re going to dive a little bit into what is out there and how we can best supervise our kids as they engage with this stuff. I hope to see you back!

Let’s pray.