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Is GOD on Facebook? May 2010

In a generation where new phones and other gadgets are easily available, and wireless Internet areas and mobile internet subscription are increasingly accessible, it is common to be constantly connected to the internet.

Being habitually on the internet exposes us to a whole lot of information. As the information posted in the internet are not necessarily truth or morally sound, we are vulnerable to unedifying information. It is not uncommon to stumble into an improper website with explicit graphics or to read an article without realizing the ill nature of the content.

With the message of cyber-wellness made compulsory in schools, the dangers and abuses of the internet are well known, but that does not stop youths, even Christian youths, from spending countless hours on the internet.

Ask any youth today what he/she does and quite surely his/her work, play and rest involves the internet.

Being online is now not a want. It has become a need.



Young people need to be constantly connected with their friends, to be updated on the latest songs, trends and movies, and to have an "online presence". Online gateways allow youths to freely express themselves as it is less inhibiting as expressing themselves verbally in the actual presence of others. Uploading their innermost feelings about an incident, or just casual thoughts off their minds, they find solace in friends who share common experiences and who empathize without seemingly judging them.

While all these are legitimate uses for the youngster, many are falling into the trap where their online freedom reveals what is truly in their hearts. It is most heartbreaking that Christian youths, so well-behaved and enthusiastically serving in church can use unkind or unwholesome words just to vent their frustrations on blogs or facebook, or that they hide information from their parents that the entire online community knows.

Careless Words on the Line

Here's a comment from a parent after he read a church youth's facebook entry: "It may be a way for her to release her stress and pressure from her mother but to use abusive words ('4-letter words') on her loving mother is something I find repulsive."

Why is this tragedy upon us?

We think it is because of a lack of integrity.

Matthew 12:33, 34 makes it clear that words flow from the heart, "Make a tree good and its fruit will be good, or make a tree bad and its fruit will be bad, for a tree is recognized by its fruit ... for out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks."

A Christian's integrity means all of his life is consistent with and submitted to the rule of God. There is no "personal space" between us and our personal and all-present God. Colossians 3:17 adds, "Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father."

If we take these words from God seriously, when our children's online words turn bad, we need to revisit what has happened within their hearts.

Behind some of those angry words lie the hurt of not being heard or not being accepted and so they tune out to vent via a different channel. Or perhaps our young naively think that their words, especially those used to vent their frustrations, are merely used in passing and thus mean little. Furthermore, these words help them channel away the bad emotions and prevent them from worse acts. Sometimes, youths use online acronyms with swear words thinking that since they are not spelt explicitly it is okay.

Whatever their reasons for using such offensive language, it throws us into emotional turmoil - anger at the rebellion, grief at the loss of our children's innocence, and embarrassment that others will think that we have not taught our kids well.

While our emotions overwhelm us, let us remember the battle is for the hearts of all God's children - us and our children. Matthew 12:36, 37 shows us that we will be judged based on our words that flow from the heart. "But I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken. For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned."

The crucial need therefore is to cope with our own frustration and in turn to help our teenagers to cope with theirs so that none be "condemned for our careless words." Repressing our feelings is unhealthy, so we must learn to express our feelings with a few points in mind:

1. Rather than expressing our frustrations online, express them to Christ in prayer because He understands perfectly how we feel (Hebrews 4:15).
2. When our emotions are exploding within us, all the more we need to mind our language.
3. Ultimately, we need to learn to resolve every matter with confidence in God. Here is where we can learn much from the Psalmists.
4. Express frustrations but do so with love for those around and those who are concerned for us.
5. Often, we withdraw from the people we have conflict with, but the Bible teaches us to seek peace. So we need to deal with the problem with people not virtually but to go to people to resolve the conflict.

Virtual Secrecy

There is great freedom indeed on the internet for the teenager and this makes it easy to hide from parents and authorities.

My Comments

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My Response

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Do we not find it uncomfortable if someone observes every website we visit and everything we 'say' online? Only when that person leaves do we feel at ease again. If so, then maybe we have forgotten that our omnipresent and omniscient God knows and sees all that we do online.

The psalmist says: "Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, ..." (Psalm 139) Even if we go on the world wide web, God is there. So, is God on facebook? An emphatic 'YES'! This is a thought we must continually remind our children so that they can have integrity on the internet.

Parents, training our children to live with integrity means helping them be transparent to us - the people God has placed in their lives to lead, direct and teach them to relate with our God. If teens are uncomfortable with revealing their online activities to parents, what more before the holy God in cyberspace?

As we train our children that hiding things from parents is against God's design, we can do the following too.

1. Encourage your children to honestly share their feelings with you. Listen and let them know you accept them despite their struggle.
2. Pray for and with your children (don't nag at them indirectly through your prayer).
3. Get to know your children through creative ways (meals together, do activities together, get to know their friends before passing comments about them, and even surfing the internet together).
4. Be courageous in admitting your own struggles with integrity.
5. Be proactive to do the hard work of doing research and introduce websites that might be helpful. Here are a few to start you off - www.rebelution.com, www.boundless.org and www.marshallchurch.org.

Parents, it is legitimate to be concerned that our teens do not squander precious time online; or that they become addicted to the internet; or that they get lost in cyberspace and lose touch with reality. However, let us be even more concerned that they live a life of integrity even when online. That they represents their faith and God well in the virtual world.

Young bloggers for God

Alwin keeps a blog to pen down lessons learnt from church and SYFC. Alwin hopes his blog will cause his readers (schoolmates, church and SYFC friends) to question what he writes, giving him the opportunity to share his faith in Christ.



It is not an easy process though.

He needs to be constantly alert about what he writes and who he represents because he does not want to impact his readers negatively nor affect his Christian testimony. For example, Alwin avoids sensitive issues that require careful explanation which cannot be done adequately on a blog. He also refrains from putting people's names so as not to damage their reputation. He is also careful not to express his thoughts and opinion as absolutes since it may just be his personal preference on the matter.

Apart from these caution, there is still much that can be said. Alwin writes to show God's words are true in his life, and so the way to live is to abide by His rules. He also wants people to see that life is not filled with uncertainty but with hope, because we are secure in God's hands.

Editor-in-chief : Lim Chien Chong
Editor : Gn Chiang Tat
Contributor : Grace Ng, Cassandra Tan Designer : Cassandra Tan
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