

SOCIAL MEDIA + + +

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Well, have you ever spent a really long session of scrolling after scrolling and spending time on social media and then put the phone down and thought, that was deeply fulfilling. That's what I need more of in my life. My hunch is that probably not many of you experienced that and yet we've got this really complicated relationship with social media where we spend hour after hour after hour on it and at the end of time, it is shaping us into somebody. And the question is, is it shaping you into the disciple that God has called you to be?

And sometimes we don't realize it's shaping us because it happens slowly. Scroll by scroll, post by post, notification by notification. It's one of the reasons why it's in our guardrails sermon series, because it exists and many people are using it. And like the bumper video said, there are things that aren't right or wrong, black and white and are more gray. And we've got to figure out in the middle of it all, how do we, or do we use this tool or not? And so I'm excited to bring this message in our guardrails series with you.

It's important as we have these things that go about in our worlds, that we remain dead set in our pursuit to follow Jesus. And guardrails are important. They're not in our lives as Christians to restrict our freedom, but guardrails exist to protect and guide your and our future. And so today we're talking about social media. Next week we'll talk about politics. That'll be a fun one. After that, we'll talk about hobbies and finally artificial intelligence, again, realities of our modern life, that it's important to spend time talking about them and to understand them and to understand what are the guardrails around these things that are going to be a part of our life.

Now before we go any further, let me just say, I don't believe that social media is all bad. And I'll talk about that today. But the question that I want to ponder at the front is what kind of person is social media forming you into? Now some of you may be thinking, well, I don't use social media very much or at all. So this sermon's not for me. And you might be nudging your neighbor saying you need to listen today. But I believe this sermon is bigger than Instagram and bigger than TikTok. I believe it's going to hit on things that are deeper than just social media because before social media existed, people still struggled with comparison and distraction and time wasting and temptation and feeling insecure. Social media just amplifies what's already existed in the human heart, both good and bad. Before Instagram, it was keeping up with the Joneses. And before Facebook, it was receiving all of those Christmas cards with the perfectly dressed happy family that you compare your family to and think we're not perfectly dressed and happy. We're doing something wrong. So there's a deeper issue.

But let me do a poll across all campuses. How many of you have a social media account? How many hands up at all of our campuses? Do you have a social media account? How many of you use Facebook, have a Facebook account? How many of you have an Instagram account? How many TikTokers we got? The front row, we got some TikTokers, okay. Fremont's probably going wild with TikTok right now. How many LinkedIn? LinkedIn is social media, more on the business side. How many of you watch YouTube videos? That's a form of social media. Quite a bit, quite a bit. So this affects a lot of us. It affects all of

us. And even if you feel like, ah, maybe not my issue, deeper issues underneath. And it's also good for you to know what's going on in the world. Points at the front is whatever captures your attention eventually shapes your direction.

And I want to jump today to a story of the disciple Peter in Matthew chapter 14. The disciples were in the middle of a storm sitting on a boat. The waves, maybe you've heard this story. If you've been in church at all for the last couple of years, you've probably gotten wind of this one, where the waves were crashing in. The wind was strong. The disciples were terrified. And sometimes this feels a little bit like a metaphor for life that we've got a lot going on around us and it feels like we're in the middle and we're just not sure what to do.

And nobody in 1995 was saying, you know what I want in my life? Social media and more artificial intelligence. We didn't really have social media and we had a very limited view of what artificial intelligence was and what it would become. And yet it has been dropped on us, both of these things and others. And it's like this quarter century, 8 billion person experiment to figure out how you're going to do with this stuff. Can we admit that's complicated? And I think in complicated times or situations, the posture that we see Jesus giving to Peter in the story coming up, but that we need to operate with with one another is to operate with a posture of grace. It's challenging to know what to do, how to get it right. And even sometimes when we've gotten it wrong, it's kind of hard to know sometimes.

So here's the story from Matthew chapter 14. Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side while he dismissed the crowd. After he dismissed them, he went up on a mountain side by himself to pray. Later that night, he was there alone and the boat was already a considerable distance from land buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it. Immediately before dawn, Jesus went out to them walking on the lake. When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. It's a ghost, they said, and they cried out in fear. But Jesus immediately said to them, take courage. It is I don't be afraid.

First thing, an image I want you to capture today is that as you feel or when you feel like the world is crashing around you, like it's chaos all around you, Jesus walks calmly towards you and he is near. I love all the accounts of this story in the gospels, but one of them is really fun to read about because it talks about how the disciples were on the lake and that Jesus was just walking by, passing by as if like he's a car on the highway, that like this is normal. Like, hey guys, just passing by. Check your blind spots, right? And he's not walking on calm water. He's walking on choppy water too. It's crazy.

When life feels choppy, when the world feels like it's crashing, Jesus is near. Unhurried, relaxed, not panicked, calm, patient. Lord, if it's you, Peter replied, tell me to come to you on the water. And Jesus says one word, come. Then Peter does something crazy. Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. And for a moment, Peter walks on water. Only two people in history that we know of that have ever walked on water, Jesus and Peter. Can you imagine that? Peter is literally doing the impossible when his eyes are fixed on Jesus.

Then Matthew says, when he saw the wind, he was afraid and beginning to sink, cried out, Lord, save me. Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. You of little faith, he said, why did you doubt? And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down and those who were in the boat worshipped him saying, truly, you are the son of God.

Peter didn't sink the moment he got out of the boat. He sank the moment his attention shifted, when he got distracted. And friends, we are living in an age of distraction. An age where everything fights for your attention. Everybody has an opinion. Outrage spreads faster than wisdom. Comparison never stops. Algorithms feed desires. Notifications never end and silence feels uncomfortable and let's be honest, boring.

And many of us, if we feel like we're spiritually sinking, maybe you do at times, maybe you do right now. It's not necessarily because you stopped believing in Jesus. It's because your attention drifted away from him and the peace that he provides in the midst of all the circumstances. And rather your eyes got focused somewhere else and distracted. The storm became bigger in Peter's eyes than Jesus himself. And when the things of this world become bigger than Jesus, so many of the problems erupt in our lives.

It's why the apostle Paul in Romans chapter 12 verse 2 gives us this beautiful gem. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. What the apostle Paul and what Peter's story shows us is that where your eyes are, where your attention is, what your brain is thinking about that shapes you into the person that you are becoming. And so again, what kind of person are you becoming? What kind of person is social media forming you into?

And so today what I want to do is I want to give you three guardrails when it comes to social media. I want to give you one opportunity that social media provides and at the very end, give you some practical advice if this is an issue for you. Three guardrails. Here we go.

Guardrail number one is the guardrail of comparison. Social media makes comparison almost unavoidable and you can be having a perfectly fine day until you open up Instagram and suddenly your house feels smaller. Your vacation feels boring. Your meal tastes. Your marriage feels weak. Your body feels inadequate and your life feels behind. Why? Because many people have said it this way. You are comparing your behind the scenes with everybody else's highlight reels. And that's not a fair comparison.

And very few influencers post the anxiety behind the smile. Not many post the debt that our vacation caused or the argument before the picture. Instead it's pretending to be authentic reality. But it's not. In fact, I can show you from my own life an example of this. Here's a couple of pictures that I took of my son's first baseball game when they were seven and four. It looks really fun, doesn't it? To go to a sporting event with your kids.

Part of the reason this was a big day for me was because as a child, I think when I was 10 or 11, I got to go to my first major league baseball game. I loved the Cleveland Indians growing up. Manny Ramirez and Jim Toney and Kenny Lofton and Albert Pujols. These guys were awesome. And so I remember getting the chance to go to my first major league game. My family, my extended family got a couple of rows of seats right next to the bullpen. I remember there was a pitcher that warmed up and the ball went into the catcher's mitt and the catcher turned around and he tossed me the ball in about a six foot throw. I put my hands out and I missed it, but I still got it. He gave it back to me. I cherish that ball. I had nothing on it. No autographs, nothing. And I displayed that proudly in my room for a decade.

A few innings after, I remember a home run getting hit two rows in front of us and staying up late watching SportsCenter to see if my family would make it on SportsCenter. And we did. So cool. And so

when I've got boys of my own, it's going to be amazing. And so we went to a game in Milwaukee with their grandpa Buck. They're from Sheboygan, Wisconsin. And so we took the hour long ride down to Milwaukee to see the brew crew. We did some tailgating before this afternoon baseball game and we tailgated and we walked into the stadium and we did all the things. They got the pictures on the big glove and they did the fast pitch and the run and we got the ice cream and the nachos and in Milwaukee, we even got to see the sausage race. So lovely, is it not?

What the pictures don't show is that everyone had a miserable time. Turns out a one hour car ride to watch a baseball game in the middle of a hot, sunny Milwaukee afternoon, standing on a pavement of an hour of tailgating with average snacks where we don't know anybody else to watch a game with two teams that neither one of us, none of us cared about. And a sport that my kids just didn't share the same passion with me turns out to be a recipe for disaster. And the only reason I got nice pictures was because I had to bribe them with some dipping dots so that I could show you the rest of the world how great my life is. We left right after the sausage race in the seventh inning stretch and we haven't been to a game since. And I don't blame my boys, I blame me. I had unrealistic expectations.

This is a far more accurate picture of one of my sons upside down and me with a get me out of here face. Didn't post that one. But how often do you compare your behind the scenes, your real life with someone's highlight reel life? Not only can we portray things that aren't really as they are, but there's also an MIT study that shows that that false information spreads six times faster than reality. So you can't, and what I'm saying is you can't always trust what you're seeing is even real. And even if it is, it's probably some highlight version of real.

And if comparison is stealing your joy, you need guardrails because the truth is that God has ridiculously blessed you and me. And if we're not feeling like we're blessed because we're looking at what everybody else has or does, then perhaps our eyes shouldn't be in social media like they are. And while your feelings, a good therapist and counselor would tell you that your feelings are real, your feelings are not always true. And so the truth is you are blessed and God has ridiculously provided. The question in this one is, is the content I'm consuming on social media making me more content or discontent? Content can lead to contentment or not.

Guardrail number two is to guard your temptation. Another reason we need guardrails is because social media doesn't just distract us. Sometimes it tempts us. And we've said before, temptation itself is not a sin, but it also wisdom doesn't mean we need to walk right up to the edge of being tempted.

In fact, one of the dangers of the guardrails analogy that we're using, every analogy breaks down at some point is sometimes when certain things people will ask or say, well, how far can I go and still be okay? And sometimes that's okay. Like in a football game, you can go right up to the out of bounds line and that's good. But guardrails, if you are driving, like you want to know where to stay, but you don't want to go so far over into the guardrail that as you're driving, your car is getting scraped. Right? And so this is what it's like for social media is the stuff you're looking at, the things you're consuming, tempting you because the algorithms are not neutral. These platforms are designed to learn what keeps your attention, what stirs your emotion and what keeps you scrolling.

And they'll probably pick up something I'm saying here today and probably offer me Brewers tickets as a sponsored ad. They should have listened a little closer. I ain't going, but the scary thing is how subtle temptation can be slowly. One click, one video, several seconds, and you are looped into a new

algorithm, one purchase here and then everything about that industry opportunities for sponsored ads. And in social media, temptation is personalized, portable, private, and 24/7, which means wisdom matters. You don't casually tolerate things that might pull you away from God. And if something is tempting, there's no shame in admitting I may be tempted over there. And so I don't need to go there.

In fact, personal story for me, I haven't had an Instagram account for more than seven years now. I deleted it. And the reason I don't have it is because it's too tempting. I remember eight years ago, at least going to the search feature and I know algorithms are always changing with the times, but the search feature at that time would show a number of pictures and images and videos and, and it could be based on suggestions based on your past viewing activities, suggestions based on your age, suggestions based on your gender and even suggestions based on what your friends and followers are looking at.

And so I'd have this weird conglomeration on my search feature of golf courses and sermon quotes and Bible verses next to a girl in a bikini. And I'm like, that's, that's a, I hate that that world can coexist right next to each other, but it does. And I got to a place where like, this is just frankly, just too tempting. And I don't want it to pull me over the guardrails into a place I never wanted to go because I care more about who I am as a husband and a dad and as pastor and all the other titles than to tempt myself.

And so we've got to be careful because yes, temptation is not a sin, but it doesn't mean we got to walk right up to the line to it and say, tempt me devil. I preached before on a thing I call the sin cycle, that this is how it happens. It starts with what we see. I saw, I covet, I took, I hid. I saw, I covet, I took, I hid. And so unintentionally or accidentally seeing something is not a sin, but intentionally or purposely putting that stuff before your eyes. That's where the devil is going to get you. That's the cycle Eve. It's all the way in the garden.

I saw the fruit. There were so many trees she could be around, but she just happened to want to hang around the one tree that she couldn't be. I saw, I coveted, I took, I hid. David in the time when he should have been at war was on the roof. He saw Bathsheba, he coveted, he took, he hid. I saw, I covet, I took, I hid. I wonder how much sin we could stop in our lives by not allowing ourselves to see it in the first place.

So what are you looking at? In the middle of the storm, in the middle of temptation, the beautiful news that Jesus gave to Peter in that moment and to you in any moment, no matter where you are on the cycle is that he has a hand that can rescue you and provide a way out.

Guardrail number three is guard your time. One of another danger of social media is not just what it shows you, it's what it steals from you, your time and time is your most precious commodity. The average American spends two hours a day on social media. That means in a literal calendar year, you would have spent one month without sleep on social media. If you are Gen Z, it's double that, four hours, which means two months out of the year on social media. By the end of your life, you will have spent literal years scrolling, swiping, posting, comparing, consuming, reacting, and watching.

And you might think, well, it's only five minutes, but five minutes becomes an hour and an hour becomes a habit and a habit becomes a life. Apostle Paul says this in Ephesians 5, be very careful then how you live, not as unwise, but as wise, making the most of every opportunity because your days

matter and you were not created to just fit in with the crowd. And that's what social media is. It's the crowds. You were created to stand out.

But when so much of our time gets consumed by things that don't matter eternally, we lose sight of why we're even here and start saying yes to things that in the moment may feel good. But if it continues to take away from what's best, it's really hard to follow Jesus. If the average Christian American spends roughly 15 hours a week on social media and one hour in the word of God, we're standing a near impossible task to follow Jesus and to just not make him attack on in our life. And we miss out on what's more beautiful.

The other week I was watching my youngest son at his golf tournament and he's a stud player, which is both exciting and frustrating for me as a dad. Exciting because I'm really proud of him. Frustrating because he beats me regularly by a lot. And it used to be because he was a kid, well, the only reason you beat me is because you're playing on the front tees. And now he's playing on the tee set behind me and still whooping me.

I was watching his golf tournament and somehow he had had a great drive and a great wedge onto the green and somehow I got distracted. I didn't think it was his turn. I was on social media and a blog came up and it caught my attention. And then all of a sudden I realized when my eyes came up again, I had missed my son drain a birdie pot. And I'm like, man, there are not a lot of better things as a guy that loves golf than to see your 15 year old drain a birdie pot in a tournament. And here I was reading a blog. It wasn't a bad blog. It was a good blog, but I missed what was best, which was right in front of me because I was distracted. And it was a good reminder to me that if I'm not careful, man, my eyes can, and my time can just get wasted and settle for so much less.

Peter was not the only disciple in the boat. Every disciple had the opportunity to step out and Jesus had come and only one came. The rest stayed in the middle when they could have been with Jesus. And I wonder how many of us spiritually feel like the other 11 disciples that were sitting in the boat. And rather than our eyes fixed squarely on Jesus, our eyes are fixated on things around us and the distractions. And we start settling for good things, but not the best things. And then months go by and years go by and decades go by and it feels like, why is my life turned out like this? Why is my life so mediocre?

And Jesus didn't create you to just fit in with the crowds and to live a mediocre life. He created you like Peter and like the other disciples to stand out and to step up and to follow him and to do the impossible things with his Holy Spirit inside of you, to live with courage, to risk, to take big, bold steps of faith, to go on an adventure. And when we don't guard our time, we quickly fall into a life of mediocrity.

Now, three guardrails. Guard your temptation, guard your time, and guard your comparison. And you might think with all of that, that I'm anti-social media, and that's far from the truth. It's dangerous, but it's beautiful. And it's one of the greatest communication tools in human history. One of the greatest opportunities for ministry. Social media has the power, when used well, to connect people, to share stories, to build businesses, to strengthen friendship, and yes, even to spread the gospel.

The Apostle Paul used Roman roads, Martin Luther used the printing press. I bet some of you are here at church today because you found us on social media. It's a beautiful tool when used well. And we are

reminded by Jesus, the same Jesus that rescued Peter, told the twelve and others, you are the light of the world. We are called to be a light in this world.

And so the extreme that I, other guardrail that I don't want us all to jump over, is well then I'll never use social media. Now that may be right for some of you, but if every Christian left social media, where would those that stay on see the light? When you have an opportunity, whether you have millions of followers or one, to post and to make an impact and to share with others your life, and especially your life in Jesus.

And the truth is that every single one of us has failed in the things I'm talking about here today. And maybe social media is not your thing. But in other places, in other spaces, you've compared wrongfully, judged unfairly, wasted your time, sought approval of men, consumed garbage, argued foolishly, elevated yourself, given into temptation, seen, coveted, took and hid, and ignored what's best right in front of you.

The beautiful thing about Peter's story and your story is that Jesus is near. In the midst of all the distractions, Jesus is near. Jesus is here. His hand is not too short to save. He's here to rescue you. He still does that today. He rescues distracted people, anxious people, insecure people, addicted people, exhausted people, people drowning in comparison, people that have gone over the guardrails, people that have given into temptation, people that have seen, coveted, taken, and hidden.

That same God walks to you, even if it's a storm, calmly, unhurried, relaxed, patient, but with power to save. And the question for you is, will you get out of the boat and will you receive the helping hand of Jesus? He doesn't rescue you after you've already cleaned yourself up, but he comes in the middle of your mess, in the middle of your storm. I love Romans 5, 8 that says, God demonstrated his love for us in this while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

And this is the opportunity we have to receive his helping hand, to follow after him faithfully with our eyes, our attention, and our minds fixated on Jesus.

Now I promised you I would give you some practical advice. And so we're going to put it all on a screen and that same phone I've been talking about you using, you can take it out now and you can open up your camera app and you can screenshot that. None of these tips or tactics or strategies are original to me. There's nothing revelatory about them. They will be a combination of things of like, delete apps that are a waste of time, turn off unnecessary notifications, start your day with scripture before you go on social media and things like that.

And honestly, if you don't take a picture of that, you can Google, I'm a Christian, how should I handle social media? And you'll find the same stuff. It's not original. If you're looking for something to do outside of this proactively, I would encourage you to download the King of Kings app where you can pray for and with one another, you can record daily what you are grateful for and where there's scriptures for you to read. This and social media is a really powerful tool.

We got to have guardrails, but even when we go over the guardrails, his hand is here to rescue us. So I'd invite all campuses to stand and I'd like you to close your eyes. And as Jesus, as you picture Jesus offering his hand of help and salvation to you as he's bringing his hand down to meet you, if you feel led this morning to hold the hand of Jesus to rescue you and to bring you out as his hand is downward,

I'd invite you to raise your hand upward at all campuses. Reach for the hand of Jesus. If you want rescue, it's yours. If you're not sure, he's patient. He's not hurried. He's relaxed. Reach for his hand.

And so God, you have hands up for people that have gone over guardrails, got collectively and individually. We have wrongfully compared and become discontent with what you've given. We're sorry, God, we've sometimes walked right up to the line of temptation and gone over it and seen things we shouldn't have seen and coveted and taken and hidden. God, we're sorry. And God, we've just wasted a lot of time and we're sorry. Thank you for coming in the middle of my mess, in the middle of my storm.

Go ahead and close your hand on Jesus's hand now. I receive your grace. I receive your healing. I receive this new opportunity. I love you, Jesus. It's in your name we pray and together the church says, Amen.