

Social Media and the Pursuit of God

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I love technology, more specifically the type that Apple creates. However, I really struggle when we as educators sometimes get easily seduced by the latest gadget and think that we have to use it in our classrooms because we think technology is the main way to reach modern students. Almost like we believe the adoption of the newest technology has to be better and the old ways of doing things without technology is well, old. I have seen a chart that displays the hours of the day when students use technology and when they do not. Students reflect that they have to "power down" when they arrive at most schools because the majority do not use technology as much as they do in their personal lives. This chart is used to illustrate the point that if we force students to turn off their devices we are forcing them to live in a world that is not relevant to them. We as educational experts must evaluate constantly what technology should be used and whether it will enhance student learning. Therefore, the question that must be asked is whether being "powered on" most of the school day is in the best interest of our students? It is my belief, as one who loves technology, that it simply is not.



My initial concerns with being "powered on" all the time are ones of a spiritual nature. When we are connected to digital devices, we are being constantly bombarded with information and there is little time to process it all. I enjoy when a thought or issue takes time to unpack and cannot be quickly understood. So why do we believe, then, that since we have at our fingertips more information than at any other time in our human history we do not need to take time to ponder new information discovered in our connected life? Further, our Creator did not create the universe in a way that can be completely figured out in a lifetime. We also know through the Bible about God's character but He is still a mystery. So shouldn't we teach students to give Him the time in reflection that He deserves?

As Christians, we believe that God communicates to us through a myriad of ways. Yet typically it is in the quiet moments of prayer and contemplation that we hear the still small voice of God. God, the Creator of the universe, could definitely speak to us through an email or text, but that does not seem to be His preferred method. We see in 1 Kings 19 where Elijah had an encounter with the Lord.

11 Then He said, "Go out, and stand on the mountain before the Lord." And behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind tore into the mountains and broke the rocks in pieces before the Lord, *but* the Lord *was* not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, *but* the Lord *was* not in the earthquake; **12** and after the earthquake a fire, *but* the Lord *was* not in the fire; and after the fire a still small voice. (NKJV)

When we are absorbed in technology, we are usually doing more than one thing at once. Typically, when I am working in my office, I have emails, phone calls, and texts to answer

and sometimes at the same time. Often technology distracts us so much that we do have much room for God. Elijah describes how the Lord did not communicate through all the noise on the mountain but rather with a still small voice. If we are preoccupied all the time with our devices how are we giving God the time to communicate with us? I purposefully explain this to our students as one of the reasons why we have a rule against using cell phones during the school day.

Social media like Twitter, Facebook, and Tumblr have provided amazing avenues for communication. While being useful, these websites can be quite misleading in that students mistake their conversations as quality human interaction. Most teachers have witnessed students communicating through technology in a way that is hard for us to believe . . . texting each other from mere centimetres away or communicating through some messaging service right within the same computer lab instead of speaking to the individual directly. We need a generation of young people who can use technology but are also able to properly interact with one another to demonstrate a positive Christian lifestyle. Our amazing new technology has allowed us to communicate with long lost friends all around the globe. But at the heart of any of our social media is a friendship most often based on some previous face-to-face interaction. I submit that people need to see with their own eyes how God is working in your life before they will decide for themselves if He is something they want in their lives as well. Technology can be used as a tool to witness to others but can be a hindrance if students have not learned the technologically unencumbered methods of social interaction.

As I said, I love technology and can't imagine a world without it at my finger tips. But we must be the masters of the technology and not let it be the master over us. Students are observing how we conduct our lives, and if we are so wrapped up in our devices, how are we being the role models that we can be? Let us demonstrate, through action and through words, how we allow for the still small voice of God to speak to us each and every day.