



# SOCIAL MEDIA AND CONNECTING PEOPLE TO JESUS

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## Social Media Overview

As you open this file, hopefully you have a grasp on what social media is, but you may struggle to know how it is used. The proliferation of platforms over the last 15 years has created a sense of FOMO (fear of missing out) for some and has led to a heightened sense of awareness, even competition for others. Today, it is easier than ever to know where someone is going on vacation, what achievements a child has attained, or see the latest piece of emotional intoxicant. For some time, it felt like we had to be experts at the #hashtag or know how to use “@” properly. Many were eager to join the social media revolution, hoping to change the world. Today, many more are beginning to disappear into the virtual shadows. Social media is a set of tools that have the ability to stimulate, engage, and activate our communities. The viral nature of social media draws us in to an inflated system of being “liked” while the ease of access to stories (real and crafted) leaves us comparing our lives to others. Social media is neither good nor bad. It is a tool that we must learn how to use at the right times.

## The Platforms

Here is a list of the top platforms and how they are typically used.

### **Facebook**

The largest of the platforms is Facebook. It began as a way to connect college students with one another and has grown into a behemoth online platform that has its highest use among women. Over the years, as the number of “friends” has increased per user, Groups have become increasingly popular.

- **Individual Profiles** are typically used for personal purpose.
- **Groups** serve as an excellent place for discussions and event planning for up to around 20 people. You can have more, but the more you have the less engagement you actually receive. Group members will generally get a notification when someone has published in the Group. This makes Groups more engaging than Pages.
- **Pages** on Facebook work a bit like webpage or postcard. They are suited for large-scale communications and the publication of events or other public notices. Pages do not necessary create notification. Facebook prefers Pages to advertise or “boost” their post in order to increase visibility. Churches often will use Facebook Pages as an announcement page or platform to share their original content.

### **Messenger**

Private messaging option of Facebook. This service works like sending a SMS or text message to a friend or group of friends.

## ***Instagram***

Owned by Facebook. It is an image-driven platform that links easily with FB. When you think of Instagram, think of the old Polaroid Cameras that would instantly print a photo. You would hang it on a wall or share it with a friend. Instagram is very popular among teenagers, particularly the InstaStories feature. This is a less permanent posting of a picture as it has a limited lifetime of availability. Features like filters, video effects, and adding text make Instagram fun and playful.

## ***WhatsApp***

Also owned by Facebook. This private messaging platform is popular among people who travel internationally, including immigrants. It allows contacts to be connected via phone numbers instead of email addresses and uses the Internet to send messages. This platform can send announcements, photos, and videos, but the items are only visible to those in the direct chat.

## ***SnapChat***

This hugely popular platform came to fame for its “disappearing” act. SnapChat was originally all about posting messages for a limited time. This led to an increased use of the platform for sexting or other brazen taboo type posts. Today, SnapChat is popular for its many filters that change a subject into a dog, another gender, a glam star, or whatever.

## ***Twitter***

Twitter continues to be used, but it is less personal than FB or Snapchat. Twitter allows users to connect personally, but it is better used for following macro-level conversations and breaking news. It was the first platform to take advantage of the #hashtag markers to establish trends.

## ***YouTube***

Not typically thought of as a social media platform, YouTube’s comment section, subscribe features, and more keep viewers involved. YouTube is the number one social media platform, the number one music streaming platform, and the top avenue of artisans and creatives in being able to monetize on their followings.

## ***YouVersion Bible App***

By Life Church in Edmond, Oklahoma, YouVersion Bible App has led the way in developing an online platform as an excellent way for an individual to access the Bible and Bible reading plans. Users can add friends and like one another’s Bible activity. It also allows users to craft and share scripture verses. You can even participate in group reading plans that offer a “Talk it Over” feature for brief interactions within the group. Churches can craft reading plans, share sermon outlines, and more on this platform. Many popular curriculums create reading plans for the users to access.

## **The Challenge with Social Media**

With each platform, you need to understand what the audience expectations are before you seek to use it. Churches often produce content that is too long for most of these platforms. Additionally, all of the platforms lead to comparisons. The basic comparisons are the metrics of followers, shares, views, and likes. These metrics seem to have a correlation with the rise in anxiety among heavy-users, leading to some platforms looking at how to be more responsible in sharing that type of information. Some have identified the heavy use of social media as being a cause for the increased anxiety among teenagers.

## Church Use

All social media platforms are about creativity and followers. The higher your level of creativity and the increased number of followers often means your influence will be enhanced in social media. One of the best ways churches can use social media is to consider using it in a way that connects with their principle purpose: discipleship. Discipleship involves regular interaction, visible life patterns, encouragement, and announcing the good things of life along with dealing with the difficult moments, too. Social media can be used as an evangelism platform. The key is to have someone who understands the various platforms using them properly. Ask a teenager to help you. They may get it better than you do.

## The Christmas Project

As you consider the Christmas theme, you can use social media to help advance notice of your programming. For example, take the weekly marketing tags in the information and place in the appropriate social media venue of your choice. You can use the official, copyright free artwork to advertise service times. The point is to engage your community with the medium used by the community: social media. Don't just utilize one format; instead, create a strategy of use over the season.

You might even consider asking someone to serve as your social media director.

The chart below might help you to think this through more carefully what your church can do.

SM Medium	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat	Sun
 <b>FACEBOOK</b>	Post an upcoming ad for Sunday.			Post how Jesus has changed a life.			Invite your congregation to check in during service.
 <b>TWITTER</b>		Tweet a great Christmas quote.			Post your service time.		Tweet a great quote from the sermon.
 <b>INSTAGRAM</b>			Post a pic of your church stage.			Upload a funny pic of a Christmas moment.	Show an action shot of people in worship.