

Biblically informed thoughts on Christian use of social media

Don Hutchinson

“Preach the gospel at all times. Use words if necessary.” This quote, or words to this effect, are often attributed to St. Francis of Assisi. However, there is no record of Francis having said or written any such thing. The closest to this thought is found in his twelfth of the rules for friars (*frères* or *brothers*) from 1221 in which Francis required that those who preach “must first draw from secret prayers what he will later pour out in holy sermons” and “all the friars... should preach by their deeds.” These latter words align with the admonition found in James’ letter that faith without corresponding works is dead, a lifeless and meaningless claim to faith (James 2:17).

With the advent of social media many Christians seem to have adopted an inverse variation on the theme, “*Use words. If necessary preach the gospel.*” The absence of biblical influence on the behaviour of too many users of social media, including Christians, is evident by the tone in its use which is often self-focused or unrestrainedly negative. Taking into account an individual’s posting trend it can be jarring when someone quotes Scripture or identifies as a Christ-follower. What are we doing unto others?

Three months ago, I felt a prompting to address this inconsistency through ninety days of questions about our social media behaviour, framed in light of Scripture used in context so that those interested might either know the context or open the Bible to read the context. Ninety days of biblical quotes and relevant questions would daily be constrained by the 280-character limit of Twitter.

I don’t chase or follow every prompting, but experience has taught that when a prompting aligns with Scripture and the challenge to live with Christlike character it’s one to pursue. As Francis might have advised his friars, first draw from private prayer what will be poured out in 280 characters or less. This was *my* ninety day challenge as much as in sharing it became *ours*.

For those who might want to take up your own ninety days of biblical reflection about social media use, here they are.

Blessings, Don.

1

So we are Christ’s ambassadors; God is making his appeal through us.

2 Corinthians 5:20 NLT

When Jesus sees what we post on social media does He consider our post to be faithfully representative of Him?

2

The people of Berea were more open-minded...they listened eagerly to Paul’s message. They searched the Scriptures day after day to see if Paul and Silas were teaching the truth.

Acts 17:11 NLT

Before (re)sharing a message, meme or post on social media do we verify it’s true?

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3

Work for the peace and prosperity of the city where I sent you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, for its welfare will determine your welfare.

Jeremiah 29:7 NLT

Is our use of social media constructive for the people, politics, and overall well-being of the place where we live?

4

The Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

Galatians 5:22-23a NLT

Does our use of social media provide a harvest of the fruit anticipated from we who are rooted in Jesus?

5

So whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.

1 Corinthians 10:31 NLT

Do we Christians consider these words when deciding what we consume on social media? ...and before we share (whatever we share) on social media?

6

“It isn’t for you to know the times or seasons that the Father has set by his own authority. Rather, you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses...”

Acts 1:7-8a CEB

Are we arguing times and seasons here or bearing witness for Jesus?

7

Don’t you realize that you become the slave of whatever you choose to obey? You can be a slave to sin, which leads to death, or you can choose to obey God, which leads to righteous living.

Romans 6:16 NLT

Through social media, have we chosen to obey something/one other than God?

8

He told many stories in the form of parables, such as this one: “Listen! A farmer went out to plant some seeds. As he scattered them across his field...”

Matthew 13:3-4 NLT

When using social media, what kind of seeds are we planting? What might we be allowing to be planted in us?

9

I planted the seed in your hearts, and Apollos watered it, but it was God who made it grow.

1 Corinthians 3:6 NLT

Do we think God is pleased to grow the seeds we’ve planted or watered through our use of social media?

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10

A soft and gentle and thoughtful answer turns away wrath, But harsh and painful and careless words stir up anger.

Proverbs 15:1 AMP

Does our social media participation demonstrate thoughtfulness or carelessness toward people with whom we interact?

11

My dear brothers and sisters, how can you claim to have faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ if you favor some people over others?

James 2:1 NLT

Does our use of social media reveal a disposition of bias or partiality that might be better confessed than expressed?

12

“Therefore render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.”

Matthew 22:21 ESV

Are we ceding too much to ‘Caesar’? Does our use of social media suggest our Christ-following is being sidetracked by cultural, societal or political allegiances?

13

“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

Matthew 22:37-39 ESV

Are our social media neighbours feeling the love?

14

Do nothing out of selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility consider others as more important than yourselves.

Philippians 2:3 CSB

Does our social media presence suggest ambition, conceit, or humility?

15

Every prudent man dealeth with knowledge: But a fool layeth open his folly.

Proverbs 13:16 KJV

Are we making an informed contribution when we participate in (or start) social media conversations or revealing our foolishness?

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16

“God blesses you when people mock you and persecute you and lie about you and say all sorts of evil things against you because you are my followers.”

Matthew 5:11 NLT

If mocked, persecuted or lied about for participation on social media, is it because we’re emulating Jesus?

17

“You have heard that it was said, You must love your neighbor and hate your enemy. But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who harass you so that you will be acting as children of your Father who is in heaven.”

Matthew 5:43-45 CEB

And our social media adversaries?

18

“In everything, therefore, treat people the same way you want them to treat you.”

Matthew 7:12a NASB1995

How would people on social media say we are treating them? What would be Jesus’ assessment of how we are treating others?

19

“You are the salt of the earth. But what good is salt if it has lost its flavor? Can you make it salty again? It will be thrown out and trampled underfoot as worthless.”

Matthew 5:13 NLT

Is our social media savour inviting people to ‘taste and see the Lord is good’? (Psalm 34:8)

20

“Our Father who is in heaven... Forgive us for the ways we have wronged you, just as we also forgive those who have wronged us.”

Matthew 6:9a, 12 CEB

Are we forgiving toward those we believe have wronged us on social media? Does forgiveness even come to mind?

21

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

Acts 1:8 ESV

To whom or what does our social media participation bear witness as preeminent in our life?

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22

Arrogant know-it-alls stir up discord, but wise men and women listen to each other's counsel.

Proverbs 13:10 MSG

Do we participate in social media as people in conversation with people? Or, might we be aggressively asserting rigid opinions with a closed mind toward others?

23

Be thankful in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you who belong to Christ Jesus.

1 Thessalonians 5:18 NLT

Does participation on social media encourage or discourage our thankfulness—God's will for we who belong to Christ Jesus?

24

So encourage each other and build each other up, just as you are already doing.

1 Thessalonians 5:11 NLT

Are we Christians engaging through social media in a way that encourages one another and builds each other up?

25

Brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.

Philippians 4:8 NIV

Do our social media remarks suggest we think this way?

26

If possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.

Romans 12:18 CSB

Does our use of social media affirm the desire and effort to live at peace with everyone? Even people with whom we disagree? What does that live like and look like?

27

Since we also have such a large cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us lay aside every hindrance and the sin that so easily ensnares us. Let us run with endurance the race that lies before us.

Hebrews 12:1 CSB

Is our use of social media a witness for Jesus or a hindrance?

28

I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands, for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control.

2 Timothy 1:6-7 ESV

Does our social media expression suggest God's gift at work? Love? Self-control?

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29

“By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

John 13:35 ESV

Are people able to discern that we are disciples of Jesus by the love (agapē) we demonstrate on social media for sisters and brothers in Christ?

30

I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

Galatians 2:20 ESV

How might Paul have dealt with selfies? How are we doing?

31

“...she put on her earrings and jewels and went out to look for her lovers but forgot all about me,” says the Lord.

Hosea 2:13b NLT

Who is our intended audience and what are we seeking through our use of social media? Might we have forgotten Someone?

32

Your love has given me much joy and comfort, my brother, for your kindness has often refreshed the hearts of God’s people.

Philemon 1:7 NLT

Do God’s people experience love, joy, comfort, kindness, or refreshing of their hearts as a result of our social media participation?

33

“You won’t die!” the serpent replied to the woman. “God knows that your eyes will be opened as soon as you eat it, and you will be like God, knowing both good and evil.”

Genesis 3:4-5 NLT

Whose voice are we listening to when we engage on social media?

34

Don’t be impressed with your own wisdom. Instead, fear the Lord and turn away from evil.

Proverbs 3:7 NLT

Do our social media comments rely on being impressed with ourselves?

35

I said, out of fear, “Everyone is a liar!”

Psalms 116:11 CEB

Are we too quick to reject or too willing to accept what we hear/read on mainstream media? Alternative media? Social media? What criteria do we use to assess who and what we’re prepared to believe/share?

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36

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven... a time to keep silence, and a time to speak.

Ecclesiastes 3:1, 7b ESV

Before we 'speak' on social media do we check-in to make sure it's not a time, season, or matter for us to keep silence?

37

If one gives an answer before he hears, it is his folly and shame.

Proverbs 18:13 ESV

Do we approach social media as an opportunity for conversation, perhaps to listen and learn, or a place to speak our mind and opinions regardless of what others express?

38

"Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength."

Mark 12:30 CSB

Does our social media presence testify God is central in our life? Or might it suggest Jesus trails politics, gold, food, sports or other pleasures?

39

So the Pharisees and teachers of religious law asked him, "Why don't your disciples follow our age-old tradition?"

Mark 7:5 NLT

When we comment on social media about faithful living, are we promoting religious tradition or a nurturing lifelong relationship with Jesus and others?

40

Let me say first that I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith in him is being talked about all over the world.

Romans 1:8 NLT

Based on our social media expression, what might people be saying about us and our faith in Jesus?

41

God blesses those who patiently endure testing and temptation. Afterward they will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him.

James 1:12 NLT

What might social media reveal about our love, faithfulness, patience and endurance in testing or temptation?

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42

Understand this, my dear brothers and sisters: You must all be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to get angry.

James 1:19 NLT

Does our social media involvement reflect the ratio in the old adage about “two ears and one mouth”? Is our reaction to what vexes us Christlike?

43

Through Christ you have come to trust in God. And you have placed your faith and hope in God because he raised Christ from the dead and gave him great glory.

1 Peter 1:21 NLT

Do our social media comments suggest our faith and hope is in God or do they promote something else?

44

Do not put your trust in princes, in human beings, who cannot save. Blessed are those whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the Lord their God.

Psalms 146:3, 5 NIV

Do our social media posts convey that our trust is in political or ‘thought’ leaders? Ourselves? Or God?

45

We are instructed to turn from godless living and sinful pleasures. We should live in this evil world with wisdom, righteousness, and devotion to God.

Titus 2:12 NLT

What might our social media presence suggest about God’s grace, God’s instruction and our resulting life choices?

46

Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. Point out anything in me that offends you, and lead me along the path of everlasting life.

Psalms 139:23-24 NLT

Are we open to God’s evaluation of why and what we share on social media?

47

“Blessed are the humble, for they will inherit the earth.”

Matthew 5:5 CSB

In an environment designed for expressions of pride, does our social media presence testify to the humility of sins forgiven, our confidence in God’s grace?

48

Don’t let your mouth speak dishonestly, and don’t let your lips talk deviously.

Proverbs 4:24 CSB

How important to us is making the effort to ensure our social media posts and shares are trustworthy and truthful?

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49

Don't be conformed to the patterns of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds.
Romans 12:2 CEB

17 hours to listen to the New Testament on CD or app; 3 to watch one NHL/NFL/MLB game; 22 for a TV show season. What does social media reveal is shaping our minds?

50

"It's not what goes into your body that defiles you; you are defiled by what comes from your heart."
Mark 7:15 NLT

What does our social media participation suggest is in our hearts, put on display for the world to assess?

51

"Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted."
Matthew 5:4 CSB

Do our social media posts enjoin comfort when we comment on a death or those who are mourning?

52

Live wisely among those who are not believers, and make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be gracious and attractive so that you will have the right response for everyone.
Colossians 4:5-6 NLT

Does our social media life affirm Jesus' influence of who we are?

53

So you can see we were not preaching with any deceit or impure motives or trickery. For we speak as messengers approved by God to be entrusted with the Good News.
1 Thessalonians 2:3-4a

Are our social media remarks transparently without deceit or impure motives or trickery?

54

"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God."
Matthew 5:9 NIV

Does our participation on social media bear witness to the relationship we have as children of our Heavenly Father?

55

Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.
Galatians 6:2 ESV

The law of Christ is that Christians love one another, in addition to loving God and neighbour (see John 13:34-35). How might we help bear one another's burdens through our use of social media?

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56

“Don’t let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God, and trust also in me.”

John 14:1 NLT

Do our social media comments suggest we are troubled or trusting?

57

Conduct yourselves with all humility, gentleness, and patience. Accept each other with love.

Ephesians 4:2 CEB

How might others describe our social media interaction with sisters and brothers in Christ? How about when we disagree about something (e.g. theology, politics, etc.)?

58

I have dwelt too long with those who hate peace. I am for peace; but when I speak, they are for war.

Psalms 120:6-7 CSB

Does our social media presence attest that we follow the Prince of Peace (Is 9:6), bear the fruit of the Spirit which is peace (Gal. 5:22), and are for peace?

59

If my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land.

2 Chronicles 7:14 ESV

Is our social media approach to big issues aligned with God’s?

60

Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

Ephesians 5:1-2 ESV

What fragrance might be associated with our social media offerings?

61

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.”

John 3:16 ESV

This is one of the most widely shared New Testament verses. Does our social media activity reinforce it, undermine it, or something else?

62

Now the goal of our instruction is love that comes from a pure heart, a good conscience, and a sincere faith. Some have departed from these and turned aside to fruitless discussion.

1 Timothy 1:5-6 CSB

What might our social media discussion reveal about our hearts and faith?

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63

Avoid irreverent and empty speech, since those who engage in it will produce even more godlessness.
2 Timothy 2:16 CSB

Would an evaluation of our overall social media participation conclude we are encouraging godliness or endorsing godlessness?

64

So don't be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, or of me his prisoner. Instead, share in suffering for the gospel, relying on the power of God.
2 Timothy 1:8 CSB

Does our social media presence suggest our convictions about those being persecuted for faith in Christ?

65

And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.
Revelation 21:4 NKJV

Do our social media practices offer comfort for today and hope for tomorrow?

66

But Zacchaeus stood there and said to the Lord, "Look, I'll give half of my possessions to the poor, Lord. And if I have extorted anything from anyone, I'll pay back four times as much."
Luke 19:8 CSB

Does our social media activity witness to our transformation by knowing Jesus?

67

Well then, should we keep on sinning so that God can show us more and more of his wonderful grace? Of course not! Since we have died to sin, how can we continue to live in it?
Romans 6:1-2 NLT

Does our social media activity suggest we might be taking God's grace for granted?

68

The elders who lead well are to be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching.
1 Timothy 5:17 NASB2020

Do our social media interactions show honour to church leaders who endeavour to lead well? Even those with whom we disagree?

69

But now set aside these things, such as anger, rage, malice, slander, and obscene language. Don't lie to each other. Take off the old human nature with its practices.
Colossians 3:8-9 CEB

Have we set aside these things in life, including in our social media practices?

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70

Therefore, as God's choice, holy and loved, put on compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. Be tolerant with each other.

Colossians 3:12-13a CEB

Loved by God, and equipped to demonstrate His character, does our social media activity exhibit His qualities?

71

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

John 1:14 NIV

Does our social media participation provide confirmation that Jesus is dwelling with us?

72

The people refused to enter the pleasant land, for they wouldn't believe his promise to care for them. Instead, they grumbled in their tents and refused to obey the Lord.

Psalms 106:24-25 NLT

Do our social media posts show us as trusting and thankful or grumbling and ungrateful?

73

Those who mock the poor insult their Maker; those who rejoice at the misfortune of others will be punished.

Proverbs 17:5 NLT

Do we use social media to mock others or express pleasure at someone else's misfortune?

74

Trusting with the heart leads to righteousness, and confessing with the mouth leads to salvation.

Romans 10:10 CEB

What do our words on social media reveal about our heart? Where we place our trust?

75

We have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God.

2 Corinthians 4:2a NIV

Is our use of social media honest, trustworthy, and faithful to contextual biblical instruction?

76

Be patient, then, brothers and sisters, until the Lord's coming. See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop, patiently waiting for the autumn and spring rains.

James 5:7 NIV

Do our social media posts reveal patient waiting or attempts to predict the future?

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77

I urge you, first of all, to pray for all people. Ask God to help them; intercede on their behalf, and give thanks for them.

1 Timothy 2:1 NLT

How are we doing at praying (even briefly) for “all people,” including those we encounter, read, or hear about on social media?

78

The Word gave life to everything that was created, and his life brought light to everyone. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness can never extinguish it.

John 1:4-5 NLT

Does our use of social media demonstrate His life and light within us and shining through us ?

79

Jesus answered, “My Kingdom is not an earthly kingdom. If it were, my followers would fight to keep me from being handed over to the Jewish leaders. But my Kingdom is not of this world.”

John 18:36 NLT

What “kingdom” might others think is our priority by our use of social media?

80

When they heard the loud noise, everyone came running, and they were bewildered to hear their own languages being spoken by the believers.

Acts of the Apostles 2:6 NLT

Are our social media communications understood by those with whom we are sharing from a Gospel perspective?

81

Not that I have already obtained it or have already become perfect, but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus.

Philippians 3:12 NASB1995

Does our social media conversation attest we are imperfectly and humbly following Jesus?

82

God blesses those who are merciful, for they will be shown mercy.

Matthew 5:7 NLT

How merciful—mercy filled, i.e. compassionate, forgiving, benevolent—are our interactions on social media?

83

Wise words satisfy like a good meal; the right words bring satisfaction.

Proverbs 18:20 NLT

Are you being nourished by wise words? Do others find your social media words worthwhile?

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84

Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen.

1 John 4:20 NIV

How are we doing at meeting this test of our love in our social media activity?

85

Let the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be pleasing to you, LORD, my rock and my redeemer.

Psalms 19:14 CEB

Are the social media words from our fingertips and the thoughts that inspire them pleasing to God?

86

“Those who speak on their own seek glory for themselves. Those who seek the glory of him who sent me are people of truth; there’s no falsehood in them.”

John 7:18 CEB

Does our social media presence as Christians reveal us to be people of truth or people of self-glorification?

87

Truly my soul finds rest in God; my salvation comes from him. Truly he is my rock and my salvation; he is my fortress, I will never be shaken.

Psalms 62:1-2 NIV

Does our social media interaction suggest we are confidently secure in God or shaken by the events that surround us?

88

People may be pure in their own eyes, but the Lord examines their motives.

Proverbs 16:2 NLT

What might God have to share with us about the motives behind our social media activities? Although pure in our own eyes, might God see them differently?

89

Let your gentleness show in your treatment of all people. The Lord is near.

Philippians 4:5 CEB

Do others experience social media interactions with us as gracious, reasonable and considerate?

90

“Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves.”

Matthew 10:16 ESV

Does our social media participation demonstrate wisdom? Are we behaving as innocent, not harming others through our chosen words or memes?