

Discipling Our Children in a Social Media Culture

Episode 238

Rachel Winchester [00:00:01]:

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Carole Joy Seid [00:00:50]:

Well, today, I'm going to continue my conversation with my son, JJ Side. Well, JJ, in talking about these topics, we cannot fail to address social media.

J. J. Seid [00:01:04]:

Yes. Remind me the name of the documentary that you're begging everybody. The social. The social dilemma. Yeah. Talk about that because you've seen it and I haven't, and it seems really important.

Carole Joy Seid [00:01:11]:

Well, so I did a seminar. Oh, I think it was a webinar, actually. Oh, that's right. I did a webinar called Taming the Media Lion, and I went away to a retreat center. But I went to I've I tried to find a, you know, a quiet place to prepare for the seminar, and I brought, you know, a huge bag of books on media, you know, and and the media issue. And I spent my days in this room, in this place. There's nobody else basically staying there, and I felt like I was trolling through a dumpster.

And you know that I'm germophobic, so it was my worst nightmare. And it would get so dark, JJ, that I would close the book, and then I go I brought my bike with me, and I would jump on the bike, and I would ride all over the grounds of this place to, like, wash myself from the darkness that I just was reading about. Yeah. Then I come back to the room, and I'd read some more until I couldn't stand it any longer. But if you've watched the documentary, it is so important to me that you understand how people are getting PhDs in how to addict your child, how to manipulate their brain. And it it, oh my word. And it's not even it has nothing to do with Christianity or anything like that. It's just understanding the battle that we are against for our children's minds and souls.

J. J. Seid [00:03:12]:

Yeah. You know, we think particularly of young women and how vulnerable they are with issues around body image

Carole Joy Seid [00:03:18]:

That's it.

J. J. Seid [00:03:18]:

And identity and confidence. And, you know, studies have shown over the years that just being on Facebook alone, which I know is no longer sort of the social media du jour. But in the day Instagram. Let's talk Instagram. In the day and age when people were on Facebook all the time or now on Instagram, Facebook was all about profile pictures. And so you were always seeing the one good photo that anybody could manage to take of themselves, you know, from the best angle after the 100th attempt. And what they found was it was starting to skew the American population's perception of average beauty.

And so now women were meant to think, oh, I'm in the bottom 5 percent when someone else would have said, like, no. You're actually lovely. You know, very lovely, but everybody's best photo that ends up really looking nothing like the real them is all you look at all day.

Carole Joy Seid [00:04:06]:

And watching someone's vacation pictures and the research on depression being linked with social media.

J. J. Seid [00:04:13]:

That's right.

Carole Joy Seid [00:04:13]:

And it's one thing for an adult. It's bad enough for an adult. But when your frontal lobe has not been fully formed

J. J. Seid [00:04:20]:

That's right.

Carole Joy Seid [00:04:21]:

And you are being, you know, catapulted into this world of fake beauty and fake wonderfulness.

J. J. Seid [00:04:28]:

The curated self. Right? You know, where it's like, my online spaces are places where I can delete,

Carole Joy Seid [00:04:34]:

That's right.

J. J. Seid [00:04:35]:

Alter, filter, and perfect, and present a false self. And I don't post when I just had a fight with my spouse, and I don't post when our bank account's overdrawn.

Carole Joy Seid [00:04:44]:

That's right.

J. J. Seid [00:04:45]:

But I do eagerly post when I go on that vacation you mentioned, and then everyone else thinks, man, everyone else is going on vacation all the time.

Carole Joy Seid [00:04:50]:

That's me. That's exactly right.

J. J. Seid [00:04:52]:

This fear of missing out

Carole Joy Seid [00:04:54]:

and false self. Hard enough for a suburban mother.

J. J. Seid [00:04:57]:

Yeah.

Carole Joy Seid [00:04:57]:

But what about a 12 year old little girl?

J. J. Seid [00:04:59]:

That's right. Who doesn't even have the instinct to know that people aren't telling you all the stuff. You know? And we think about bullying. We think about shaming. We think about it's one thing to be embarrassed in a hallway at school. It's another thing to be embarrassed online for years when that embarrassing video of you never goes away.

Carole Joy Seid [00:05:17]:
That's right.

J. J. Seid [00:05:18]:

I was just talking to a young man in a barbershop who was waiting to get his haircut after me, and he got arrested, for having marijuana. And they handcuffed him and let him away, and that's sort of embarrassing enough. But, of course, everybody filmed it and put it all over the Internet. So the amplification of that event in his life is radically different in the 21st century. The Internet never forgets. And so we just forget that with our kids. We're also afraid of being dogmatic about media, and there is a real fear. Christians and humans, create new false righteousnesses every day.

You know? You and I talk to a lot of people in the homeschooling space. You've been talking to the homeschool community for 30 years. You know? Just last month, I heard of one woman saying to another woman who sends her kids to school, I don't send my kids to school because I love my children. You know? Moments like that make me crazy. I just wanna tear my hair out and run outside screaming. Unbelievable. You know? It's human nature to try to find something else besides the righteousness of Christ.

I'm more flexible than you. I'm more, punctual than you. I'm more tolerant than you. I, I'm more devoted to my kids than you. We eat better than you. So homeschooling is not the righteousness of Christ. Sending your kids to private school is not the righteousness of Christ.

We don't do any media in our house can become a false righteousness, and yet we have to acknowledge that we're leaving some of our most vulnerable, people open to the most addictive things that have been invented in our culture where 1,000,000,000 of dollars are being spent to construct them. I really love Andy Crouch's little book, *The Tech Wise Family*, and that's worth flipping through. One of his daughters has sort of grown up in that Tech Wise environment where they talk about it in terms of discipleship, where they talk about it in terms of, hey. We wanna have real experiences with real people. We wanna put screens away and engage the world.

We wanna have wisdom and discernment about the things that we consume online. The TechWise family. Andy Crouch. And Crouch has written some great books on Christ and culture. So that's already a space in which he's thinking. I really like him a lot.

I trust him a lot. And, then what's really neat is one of his daughters has grown up in this home where she was taught to think really intentionally about her relationship to

technology and media. She's off to college, and she sat down and wrote a book of her own called *My Tech Wise Life*.

And Andy wrote a forward to it, which I thought was really neat. It contains a lot of research from the Barna Group. It has a lot of graphics in it. It's really well designed. Yep. And so it's a very accessible book for a teenager to pick up and read, written by another teenager. This isn't just my dad saying we're having a lot of fun playing parcheesi and being uncool.

You know? She's going, hey. I really liked my tech wise life, you know, that I grew up with and then my dad disciplined me into, and I wanna talk about it with my own voice. So I'm really glad that she wrote that book. I think that's an underrated resource. I just stumbled across it a couple months ago. But, I would probably say and I don't like making dogmatic statements, but I'm at the point now after talking to a lot of the parents in our church, and around the country. I think it would be good if our kids weren't on social media.

I think that's a statement that I feel pretty confident suggesting to people. I don't think you should feel some kind of shame, you know, if you do that and you disagree with me, But I think it's at least worth considering whether or not to keep your children off social media. You know? And I have fellow dads that I love and respect whose teenage daughters are going, dad, this stinks. You know? I'm the only one of my friends not on social media. When are you gonna let me have a social media account? And a courageous dad just kinda put his foot down and saying, honey, I love you. Like, if you've read the research I've read, and you're welcome to read it

Carole Joy Seid [00:09:07]:
Right.

J. J. Seid [00:09:07]:
You would understand that I'm protecting you.

Carole Joy Seid [00:09:09]:
You know? That's a good point, J. J.. So yesterday, I was doing an appointment with a precious family. I just love them to death, and they've been sucked into all sorts of media. One coach insists that they have an account. This is the only way the guitar you know, there's all sorts of ways that the enemy climbs in the back window in the bathroom and stuff. And their kids are just going, you know, downhill, and they're they as parents, they know this. And I finally just had to say, who's running the asylum here? And they said, I know. I know.

And I said, sometimes we just have to be parental, and sometimes we're not gonna be popular Yet. Someday our children are going to thank us. But right now, sometimes we have to take the hit.

J. J. Seid [00:09:53]:

Yep. Our 13 year old has a flip phone. You know, I bought her a flip phone. We made sure and deactivated, like, access to the Internet, which you can even do on a flip phone now, which is so bizarre. And it's a pain to use. I mean, it's a real pain to use. She tries to text with her friends. She's using t 9 like we did when we were in high school.

You know? And, it's not pleasant. It's inconvenient. But it means that I can call her if I need to. If we drop her off somewhere or when she's out walking in the neighborhood, she's safer. And she really kindly asked me this week, you know, when can I get a smartphone? You know? So that I can text my friends and we can send each other pictures. Married. That's a good and I just said, you know, we'll we'll talk about that, but not yet. You know? You're 13, not yet.

And that is something where it's where it's like, I wanna give her that gift of of not having the burden of being addicted. Smartphones are really addicting. You know, I'm low grade addicted to mine. Most of us are talking about the fact that we're addicted to ours. And so right now, she's having a really great time making art and hanging out with her friends and reading.

Carole Joy Seid [00:10:52]:

Swimming on TV.

J. J. Seid [00:10:53]:

Yeah. And so it's like, I don't wanna settle with the burden of that relationship. A day will come where she will have a smartphone because she'll be older, and that's what life in our modern life is like. But she will hopefully have the tools and the skills to engage sort of the low grade constant addictive nature of that device. So we've had to be creative. You know? She has a Kindle that she bought with her own money, which is really fun, and we can check out books digitally from the library. She reads so fast. You know? She'll often read a book in a day.

And so it helps that I can check out 5 new books for her from the library, send them to her Kindle, and she can read. She bought that with her own money from her own side job. You know? So there are some screens in our home, but if you will look closely,

they'd be like, oh, yeah. That's a flip phone, and, oh, yeah. That's a Kindle. You know? She doesn't have an iPad. She doesn't have an iPhone.

She doesn't have unfettered access to the Internet. She has an iPod touch that she bought with her own money, which was just discontinued by Apple because no one wants one anymore. You know? So we bought one of the last discontinued iPod Touches. We log in to the home Internet. She downloads some albums. We delete the Internet password back off it so she doesn't have access to it. And she knows these are inconveniences. "Hey, dad, can you log my iPod Touch on so I can download some new albums?" And then she likes to go walk in the neighborhood and listen to music. You know? And I think that's great. But, again, I'm doing my best to guard and protect her. And because the day is gonna come where she will have unfettered access to the Internet, just not yet. And when that day comes, I want her to have all the tools in her toolbox to wade out into that wild world and not be in a room with the door shut, bearing the weight of the world on her shoulders. It'd be like letting your kid wander around in unsafe parts of the city, and not even caring about what she might be exposed to. So, you know, the Internet is a wild place. There's so many good books. A couple more books. Hannah Anderson has written a book on discernment that I really love. And, you know, she has a great illustration in that book of she's trying to get dinner ready. She's a rural pastor's wife in the Blue Ridge Mountains, a brilliant author.

I love Hannah Anderson so much. And her son is going, mommy, can I light the candle? Mommy, can I light the candle? And she does just for the dinner table. I think it's part of their family worship. And she didn't hear him. And the next thing she turns around and her little boy is trying to light the candle. And she talked about how her hand came around his hand, and she sort of guided him to light the candle. We want to actually teach our kids how to engage the Internet, media, counter forming, deforming philosophies that are out there in the world with discernment.

We don't wanna have a Christ against culture view. The culture is this thing that can affect you, and so our job is to circle the wagons and never be exposed. Our children won't have any cultural immunity that way. So when we read that Rebecca McLaughlin book, that's us exposing our kids. To things in culture, but in the right way. In an awareness. Where it actually brings greater confidence in God's truth. Where they're experiencing those deforming, teachings with their parent, and they get to have a conversation about it.

Carole Joy Seid [00:14:01]:

That makes me think of a family many years ago in just in the days of television before we were dealing with the wild west that we're dealing with now. They taught their kids

that when they would watch, you know, old fashioned television, that when a when an ad would come on, they would teach their kids to yell at the ad. Who do you think you're talking to? Do we look stupid to you? Like, they would teach them this kind of just it was so cute and so funny to me. I loved it.

J. J. Seid [00:14:29]:

That's right. And I think, you know, we've all seen the sort of ham fisted approach where we try to squeeze God's truth out of any film, and we can't just laugh and say that was funny. Mhmm. And kids will get really annoyed with that. It feels really manipulative.

Carole Joy Seid [00:14:41]:

Everything becomes a sermon.

J. J. Seid [00:14:42]:

That's right. You know, I remember a friend years ago who had another friend who I don't know, and his friend said, hey. I'm gonna invite all the guys over to watch Braveheart, and then afterwards, I'm gonna try to steer the conversation towards how it's a picture of Jesus. And my buddy was like, man, I don't think that's really a good idea. You know? All they know is they're coming over to watch a movie, and it sounds like you're gonna do, like, a Jesus juke. You know? And the guy was like, okay. I won't do it. And then when the movie ended, he did it anyway, and my buddy just got up and walked out.

You know? He's like, I won't be party with this manipulation. But what is fun is when I watch a film with my daughter that does have some deforming. Things that are being preached in it, we do talk about it.

You know? And I say, like, man, here's something that I was thinking as I was watching that, and here's what's so beautiful about God's truth and the way in which Christ comes to redeem those broken things that that person is wrestling with how to address. So we need to show our kids that we can have fluency in connecting things to Christ and the gospel. It's really beautiful. So her little book, *All That's Good: Recovering the Lost Art of Discernment*. What a great title by Hannah Anderson. O

And she's written a bunch of other books. All of her books are fantastic. As a church staff our 80 or 90 odd full time staff, we all just read this book together and have discussed it for the last 2 months. And, I'm so impressed with her, and and she's just a gift to the church. So I would recommend that. That's a great book to read in this day and age where we need so much discernment.

Carole Joy Seid [00:16:13]:
May I have the title one more time?

J. J. Seid [00:16:15]:
Yeah. It's called, *All That's Good: Recovering the Lost Art of Discernment*. She's very folksy, and she'll tell stories about baking pies, and there's nothing wrong with folksiness, but don't be deceived. She's also brilliant, widely read, and tackles some really abstract concepts in a way that is really accessible.

Carole Joy Seid [00:16:34]:
That sounds awesome.

J. J. Seid [00:16:35]:
Another book that's really helpful is written by Alan Jacobs, who used to be a professor at Wheaton, is now at Baylor, called *How to Think, a Survival Guide for a World at Odds*. It's confusing. It's also been republished in paperback form with a different subtitle, *How to Think: A Guide for the Perplexed*. And this is also a book that teaches us how to have discernment.

It seems like everybody is at war with everybody else over political issues, over discernment issues, over media issue. So how do we actually think wisely and well about these things, and how do we engage humbly and thoughtfully even with people with whom we violently disagree? Yeah. And so that book, *How to Think* is really underrated.

Carole Joy Seid [00:17:11]:
That is the hardest one.

J. J. Seid [00:17:12]:
That's true for me as well. So a couple more. Talking about race, *Gospel Hope for Hard Conversations* written by an African American pastor named Isaac Adams.

Talking about race, *Gospel Hope for Hard Conversations*. I read about a 1,000 pages on race this summer, and this is one of the best things I've read in a long time. And the whole book contains vignettes, sort of stories about imaginary people on different sides of these issues and the ways in which we miss each other or don't listen well. And the book is incredibly redemptive, incredibly winsome, and, it's really rare in the way it's written. And then the last one I'll recommend is got a really long title. *Confronting Injustice Without Compromising Truth: 12 Questions Christians Should Ask About*

Social Justice. This is by a professor at Biola who has a PhD in philosophy, if I remember rightly. Name. And his name is Thaddeus Williams. John Perkins, the famous famous and beloved, man, wrote the foreword and just raves about the book. But the phrase justice, you know, is no longer something we can all assume we share the same definition of. The phrase social justice, is that different from biblical justice? How do all those things fit together? How should Christians think about these things with wisdom? Do we just stop talking about it completely? You know? Do we square off at different camps? So that book is something that, again, could be made part of somebody's homeschool curriculum say. If you've got a junior or a senior, they could easily engage with this content. He's written this at he sort of pitched it at college freshman. It's got a lot of humor in it.

Carole Joy Seid [00:19:03]:
High school kids are reading on a college level.

J. J. Seid [00:19:05]:
That's right. And and then he pulls in for each of those questions. There's 12 questions Christian should ask. 12 different testimonies from people who have sort of lost their way biblically around these issues and then recovered a clear biblical understanding of how to think about justice. That's wonderful. So you're getting testimonies. You're getting minority voices from around the world.

You're getting people from different backgrounds. But they're all affirming the centrality of scripture's authority and helping us think through these things. But the book is incredibly respectful and humble. And I won't name it, but there's another book that's very popular that's sort of sounding the alarm about critical theory and similar issues. But what made me so sad when I read the book is that the author does more harm than good because he doesn't fairly represent the views of those with whom he disagrees. And that is something that Christians must not abandon in this cultural moment even when the issue that we're addressing is that serious.

Say transgenderism. Is it a life and death issues, especially for a child who's caught up in it? But it doesn't mean that we get to lay aside our ethics. We don't get to misrepresent the views of the person that we disagree with just so that we can win the debate. You know? There needs to remain that principle that says my job is to represent or or recreate your view in your presence so well that when I'm done, you would say, I wouldn't add anything to that. I couldn't have said it better myself.

Then we can proceed to knock it down very lovingly and gently and say, I don't think that squares with scripture. Here's why. But when we invent straw men and when we,

slander people and when we misrepresent them and when we take their views out of context. And in this book, which is a best seller and a lot of Christians have read it, he names men that I know personally. And what's so fascinating is he doesn't interact with their written works, men who've written 20-30 books.

But he'll take a sound bite out of a YouTube video, and he'll quote that one sentence, and then he'll try to populate it with things that he's threatened by. And I just think that's an incredibly unethical way to engage a debate.

Carole Joy Seid [00:21:16]:
And unscholarly.

J. J. Seid [00:21:17]:
It's not helpful. And so we do need to sound the alarm in the church about a lot of these issues, but we need to not lose our head in the process or lose respect. We need to be more ethical even than the people we're debating.

Carole Joy Seid [00:21:30]:
Yes. And love

J. J. Seid [00:21:31]:
Yeah.

Carole Joy Seid [00:21:32]:
Is, you know, coming out of the Jesus Movement, that was what was hammered into us is at all times, love is the answer.

And so if we can love our enemies well, they may be philosophically our enemies, but there's still people for whom Christ died.

J. J. Seid [00:21:50]:
Yes. Because the Church is under attack in new ways, because unless God brings renewal to our nation, the Church may learn, what Christians around the world have known for decades and centuries, which is that the Church flourishes on the margins of society. You know, we may enter into an autumn or winter season in the life of the American church, and that's not something I'm afraid of personally. I don't celebrate suffering. I'm not a masochist, but I'm also unafraid to suffer for the sake of the gospel. I don't wanna suffer, as scripture warns us, for being a busybody, for being somebody who's unethical in the way in which I engage debate, for being unloving even as I try to, you know, advance truth.

I wanna speak truth in love, and I don't wanna be afraid to go into an autumn or winter season. And if and if that's God's will for the American church in this next season, what we'll discover is that the Church actually flourishes in those places. Go ask a believer in China. Or Russia.

Carole Joy Seid [00:22:52]:

When they opened the iron curtain, and pastor Chuck went in and all the Russians have been listening to his tapes all those years, and they said, we have been praying for the American Church. He said, "What are you praying for us for? We're praying for you." "They're like, no. No. No. We are praying for suffering to come to America, because suffering is really as as the famous statement, the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church."

J. J. Seid [00:23:19]:

Yes. So I think more Christians in America are being controlled by their own fear and anxiety than they realize. And as a pastor, I have to reckon with the fact that, it might be quite possible in my children's lifetime that their dad could go to prison for a sermon he preached last Sunday.

Carole Joy Seid [00:23:37]:

That's right.

J. J. Seid [00:23:37]:

It's happened to pastors in other countries. That's right. What makes me think I'm better than those men? And so Kristen, my wife, and I have already had those conversations. Are you comfortable with your husband doing this for a living if that day comes that, you know, you and the kids might have to visit me in jail? And we have to decide now if we're okay with that. I think some Christians are so angry at the prospect that that could happen and so offended, at losing cultural cast cache, losing cultural ground that we've kinda lost our head in some ways. And the truth is Jesus warned us that we would encounter resistance and even persecution, and that we're not to be surprised by it. Peter said, "Don't be surprised by the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you." So scripture again and again tries to prepare the church for pushback, for being unpopular, for possibly even losing your job over what you believe, and, that we're not to feel self pity for that. It doesn't mean that we're to seek out suffering. But when it finds us, we're not to be surprised by it.

Carole Joy Seid [00:24:39]:

It's what we signed up for.

J. J. Seid [00:24:40]:

That's right. So this has been a little bit of an egg heavy podcast. I think I feel a little self conscious because I talked a lot, and I talked about a lot of books. But I think that is part of the way in which we prepare our kids to suffer well.

To suffer for the sake of the gospel. To be willing to be unpopular, to do our homework, and to still love people even when they're slandering us, even when they're persecuting us. Even when they're threatening our way of life, and to trust that the Lord is gonna bring good out of it.

Because when his Church suffers well and endures under that, it gets people's attention. And you win a hearing for the gospel when you bless those who curse you.

Carole Joy Seid [00:25:17]:

That's right. That's right, J.J.. Well, would you pray for our families as we close?

J. J. Seid [00:25:22]:

Yeah. I'd love to. Lord, I know I certainly don't have this figured out. I know that I'm probably gonna go home today and end up losing my temper with one of my kids, because I just gave a podcast on parenting. That's pretty much how that works. So, Lord, you know how much help I need to parent and how much I'm in over my head. And, Lord, I can't reach my kids' hearts, but your Spirit can.

So I pray for myself. I pray for any parent who might be listening that you would help us to rely on you. Though, like Paul, we'd be able to say, as he says in 2nd Corinthians, that he learned to welcome weakness because that's the way in which the power of Christ came to rest upon him. And that your power was fully displayed in his weakness. So, Lord, in this cultural moment, as parents, we feel weak, we feel overwhelmed. We pray that your power would come to rest upon us in our weakness, and that you would equip us to equip our kids, and give us wisdom that we would teach our kids how to talk to people they don't agree with, that we would teach our kids how to love their enemies. Not that we would have enemies self consciously, but as scripture defines it, people that might seek your harm.

That we would not be shocked by that. Lord, make us resilient. Make us bold and courageous. Make us people who are willing to stand up for you no matter what, and do it with a smile on our face. Do do all these things for Jesus' sake, we pray. Amen.