

INSTAGRAM

FOR JESUS

10-day challenge

BY WELL-WATERED WOMEN

Day One | Can I Love Jesus AND Social Media?

The first time I ever saw Facebook, I was on a study abroad program in England with two professors and 20 other English majors from my college back in Minnesota. Back then, Wi-Fi was rare and stupidly expensive, so whenever we traveled to a new city we would scope out the local internet cafés. I spent my time typing out long emails to friends and family back home while I watched my fellow travelers laboriously upload one photo at a time to Facebook from their digital cameras. I remember thinking it was all foolishness, but now sometimes I look back and wish I had an old Facebook album from my England adventure.

When social media first began, it was merely a means of maintaining connection with friends. No one cared about the perfect photo or the witty caption. We were just amazed that we could actually see pictures of our friends and family on the internet! When Instagram first debuted, I couldn't imagine why anyone would just want to look at a bunch of pictures all day. I loved words!

But things have changed so much since the early days of social media. The focus has switched from personal relationships to large followings, from sharing in the moment to an intensive editing process for creating a perfectly curated set of nine squares, and from sharing our hearts to sharing proof that our opinions are right.

As social media develops, so does our attachment to it. Social media has become a hobby. We might prefer to create or we might prefer to scroll, but we are all entranced by it. It might not be popular to admit, but most of us love it.

That love is not intrinsically bad, but it has a tendency to engulf the greater loves that we are called to: loving God and loving others. So, can we love Jesus and social media? We can if we keep our love of social media in its proper place. We cannot serve both Jesus and social media, but we can use our love for social media to serve Jesus through it. This transforms a self-serving hobby into a selfless expression of worship.

As followers of Christ, our entire lives are to be lived as an overflow of our adoration for who God is. We can choose to be salt and light, even on the internet. The gospel points us to our need for Jesus in all things, and social media is no exception to that need. Let's devote it to him and honor him with our lives—online or in real life.

RESPOND

When have you found yourself enslaved to social media? How can you fuel social media from the overflow of your adoration for God instead of your desire to be admired by others?

CHALLENGE

Identify signs in your life that you are beginning to love social media more than Jesus. Consider setting up intentional heart checks for your social media usage.

Day Two | Tool or Trap?

As I sit at my computer now, I feel a pull toward my phone. It would only take a second to check to see if I have any new likes on my latest post or watch one more story from my favorite influencer.

It's so easy, so accessible—so I sit and fight against the urge because I know it's really a trap. One little peek turns into a fifteen minute scroll. One quick check for likes turns into seeing who is actually liking my posts and wondering why my friend never does anymore. My goal to bring glory to God so quickly morphs into the pursuit of my own glory.

The enemy is having a heyday using social media to steal our joy, kill our focus, and destroy our mission. He is drawing women's attention to a small device rather than life that is right in front of our eyes.

Social media has become a stronghold in our culture and even in the church, and it is our role to fight for the freedom of those around us as we live out our own freedom in Christ. As Christians, we do not fight alone. With the help of honest accountability and the transformational work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts, social media can be redeemed from a time trap into a tool for honoring our King.

When you view social media as a tool instead of a hobby, it opens up a whole new world of people with whom you can share the light of the Gospel. Whether it's people you know in real life or people you only know on the internet, there is a whole army of women hungry for the truth of God. You don't have to be a writer or an influencer to display the Gospel on social media. You can reflect Jesus in the way you like, comment, and share—even using what you see your friends and neighbors share on social media as opportunities to connect with them in real life. As believers, we salt and light in a world full of depravity and darkness.

Social media is another mission field where God can bring glory to himself. He has given us the Holy Spirit to help us discern his best for our lives.

RESPOND

When has social media become a trap for you? When have you used it as a tool?

CHALLENGE

Find one way to share the love of Christ online today through posting, sharing, or commenting.

Day Three | Identify the Problem

We check social media everywhere ... in bed first thing in the morning and before we drift off to sleep, in the bathroom, while we feed our children, while we stir a pot of soup, and even while we watch TV. Social media developers use the science of the brain to keep us addicted to our social media apps. We are emotionally tied to our phones and our feeds, and oftentimes, what we see, hear, or read on social media can actually dictate how we think, respond, and feel on any given day.

It has been reported that the average teenager spends up to nine hours a day on social platforms, the majority of that time being on a smartphone. The average adult spends about two hours on social platforms each day—that's more than five years of one's life!—browsing feeds on a mobile device or computer. Why are people spending hours each day, and ultimately a portion of their brief life on earth, on social media?

To understand, we need to remember our creation and our fall. In Genesis 2, we see that humanity was created by God, for God, and with a purpose: to reflect him, to be in communion with him, and to bring him glory. But we all know what happened that fateful day recorded in Genesis 3 when Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit, disobeying God.

We fool ourselves when we think that we can keep social media in its proper place by our own power. We will always fall back into patterns of sin when we are not actively being sanctified by God. Social media isn't the problem—we are.

Because of the fall, we search for connection, meaning, purpose, and fulfillment in every place except the one place where we will ultimately find these things: *through a relationship with God made possible through the cross of Christ*. Our God is a redeeming God. Not only does he redeem our lives because of Christ's death and resurrection, but he also transforms the way we live, think, and connect with the world around us. Acts 17:28 says, "For 'In him we live and move and have our being.'"

God's process of changing us from the inside out brings him glory. If we humble our hearts and consider how we may be sinning in conjunction with social media, we'll find freedom through confession and forgiveness. Jesus died for that sin you're ashamed to admit. His blood washes away your sin and his resurrection empowers you to walk in new life. Invite God into your social media and ask the Holy Spirit to help you fetter out sin and experience the glories of his redemption, even in social media.

RESPOND

Where does social media lead you to sin?

CHALLENGE

Identify at least one time of the day that you can declare as social media free—perhaps when your kids get home from school or when you're having one-on-one time with your roommate or spouse. Walk in the freedom of not having to "check in" and know that God can satisfy your longings.

Day Four | Recognize the Potential

When my husband and I were trying to conceive our son, we were in the midst of deep sorrow and anguish as month after month passed by with no positive pregnancy test. With trembling hands, I finally shared our journey publicly on my personal blog and on Instagram. People I hadn't talked to in years reached out to me to let me know how our story was their story, too. It was incredible! High school friends who don't know the Lord were asking me questions and sending me messages. I counted it a huge honor and privilege to enter into their pain, too.

Sharing our story gave me an opportunity to step into others' stories. When we are cognizant of others' lives as we watch their stories unfold, we can look for ways to serve people in our community. We can choose to rejoice over new life by bringing a meal to a new mom. We can offer prayer when someone experiences loss. The constant updates others share on social media give us opportunities to minister to others within our real lives.

There are three specific opportunities to love others using social media:

Encourage: We can use our posts and comments to remind others of the truth and come alongside them by sharing about how God is working in our lives, in the hope that it brings them comfort in the midst of their stories.

Educate: We can use our social media platforms to bring awareness and attention to issues and bring light to the darkness by exposing lies that are rampant in our current cultural climate and pointing to biblical truth.

Inspire: We can allow our stories to bring inspiration and motivation to others as we share the steps of obedience we are taking to love God with all of our heart, soul, mind and strength.

As people watch the story of our lives unfold on social media, they can see how we react to pain and sorrow. When we walk in seasons of darkness we are not alone. When we are vulnerable with our pain online, we can hold up God's faithfulness to a world that is desperately longing to hear something good.

RESPOND

Are there people you can think of who share the good, the bad, and the ugly on social media? Does this make you uncomfortable, or are you glad to know you're not alone in your struggles?

CHALLENGE

Identify a unique challenge you have faced, and consider how you can bring the love of Christ to other women who have experienced that kind of suffering.

Day Five | Let Comparison Lead to Christ

Social media has led to a crisis of comparison like nothing we have ever seen before. Instagram is beautiful, so it naturally leads to longing. If only our lives could look more like hers, then we would be happy. Comparing our circumstances to those of other women leads us to believe that we don't have enough.

Sometimes we look at the feeds of other women and wish we could not just have what she has, but be just like her. If only I could be more like her, then I would be a good friend, wife, mom, business owner, etc. Comparing ourselves to other women leads us to believe that we can't measure up.

When comparison leads us to ourselves or our circumstances, it always leads to feeling disappointed. Even if we were just like her or had all that she had, it still wouldn't be enough. Instead we need to let the longings created by seeing other women online stir in us a longing for Jesus.

- When you see the woman who has the job you want, remember the God who calls and equips you to do good works he has prepared for you in advance (Ephesians 2:10).
- When you see the woman succeeding where you failed, remember that God's power is made perfect in our weakness (2 Corinthians 12:9).
- When you see the woman who has the friends/family you want, remember that the God of the universe has invited you to live in relationship with him (1 Corinthians 1:9).
- When you see the woman who loves the Bible like you wish you did, pray that God will make it like honey to your lips (Psalm 119:103).
- When you see the woman whose life seems easy, remember that although we are called to suffer, in Christ the yoke is easy and the burden is light (Matthew 11:30).

When you see the woman who has the very thing you long for or lost, cling to the God of all comfort (2 Corinthians 1:3).

- When you see the woman with the ministry you want, do the hard work of studying God's Word in secret (Matthew 6:18).
- When you see the woman on the vacation you want, remember that God offers rest for our souls (Matthew 6:28-29).
- When you see the woman with the perfect house and clothes, remember that you can be content through Christ who gives you strength (Philippians 4:13).

Dear Sisters, we can take these moments of comparison directly to the cross. When we compare our circumstances to the lives of women on social media, may we remember that Jesus died to meet the desires of our hearts with himself. We may not be enough or have enough in the things of this world, but Christ is enough for us.

RESPOND

To whom are you tempted to compare yourself or your circumstances on social media? What are you longing for that is only a shadow of what the gospel has to offer?

CHALLENGE

Find a verse related to your longing, write it on a sticky note, and place it on the back of your phone or somewhere you often visit during the day. Meditate on the verse, praying that God will use his truth to change your heart.

Day Six | Make a Plan

One of the most important parts of committing to use social media for the glory of God is to focus on people, not numbers. Comparing followers and defining yourself by likes will only lead to discouragement. Whether you have one follower or 1,000 followers, each number represents a person, and that person matters to God.

No matter how small our followings, we all have opportunities for ministering to others online. But that won't happen without a plan. Take some time today to consider how you can use social media intentionally for the glory of God.

Consider these questions:

- Why are you on social media?
- Why do you browse?
- What speaks to your heart?
- What is God teaching you that you can share with others?
- Whom is God calling you to love and encourage through social media?

Our goal should be to not add to the noise, but rather to be a place of hope and security that is rooted in Christ. Every single post we share need not be a sermonette. However, we can choose to allow our attitudes to be distinctly kind and encouraging in the midst of such darkness. We can share hope in the midst of hopelessness, levity in the midst of heaviness, and truth in the midst of deception.

RESPOND

What needs to change in the way you use social media?

CHALLENGE

Create a mission statement for social media using this template:

I will use social media to _____ by _____.

Examples:

- “I will use social media to connect with others by commenting on at least one friend's post every day.”
- I will use social media to share the gospel by including gospel-centered resources in my stories.
- I will use social media to apply the gospel to college life by writing a weekly post about issues college women face.

Day Seven | Ignore the Numbers

The trouble with obsessing over the numbers is that they will never be enough. We share a post and are really proud of it, thinking that it is going to be the one that finally gets lots of likes and shares. We think, “This is it!” So we go back to the app and refresh, looking for the number of likes and comments to climb and soar. “This is when they will finally notice me,” we assure ourselves.

We get to a certain number of followers, and there is a new bar to reach for. “If only I could have _____ number of followers, then I would be happy.” When we believe this lie, we are placing our identity in an app.

It’s so tempting on social media to comment, like, post, and re-share to be seen by others. We might do and say all the right things, but inside our hearts are rotten. We crave attention, affirmation, and identity. We’re addicted to the meaningless approval of a snapshot of our lives. We grow jealous of what other women have or the approval they receive.

In Galatians, Paul pens these convicting words: “For am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God? Or am I trying to please man? If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ” (1:10).

Sisters, it is not just about what we do on social media, but why we do it.

If you post for likes, you become enslaved to the approval of others.. When posting out of a heart to share Christ and the Gospel, you are free because of obedience and a heart that is serving God rather than man.

Our goal with social media is to give God glory through every post, comment, or share, even if only God sees our hard work. When we let go of our desire to achieve a certain number, we bring honor to Christ and Christ alone.

RESPOND

Think of a time when you have posted on social media purely for likes and comments, hoping for a response. Were you content with the responses you received?

CHALLENGE

Make it a habit to pray before you post, asking God to help you discern your deeper motives and post with wisdom.

Day Eight | Fight for Freedom

Sometimes our calling to glorify God's name on social media can be paralyzing. We think we have to look perfect if we're going to display God's glory. Or that we have to be perfect at writing or images to speak to the hearts of others. Or even that we have to manage perfectly sharing our imperfections in a way that's not too much and not too little.

Social media is never the full picture of someone's life, and it doesn't have to be. It is healthy to guard parts of your life (especially the other people involved in your life) from the opinions of the world.

But it's also important not to give a false sense of who you are. We don't want to give an impression that we have it all together, always know what's best, or do life better than the women around us. How exactly you go about sharing yourself as an imperfect but redeemed woman is up to you, but we shouldn't stop sharing just because we don't know how to do it exactly right.

When we respond to navigating the confusing waters of social media with silence, the enemy wins. He would love nothing more than to cripple us and keep us from offering hope to others.

Christ has called us to walk in freedom, not perfection. He never asks us to be flawless individuals. He asks us to be servants to others.

Think through what it would be like to view your social media life from the other side of the screen. Does what you share paint a full picture of the gospel? Are you showing the world glimpses of a life centered around yourself, or centered on Christ? Are you honest about your failures and clear about God's grace?

RESPOND

Who on social media helps you feel less alone and more seen in your problems? How can you walk alongside others with a "me too" spirit reflected in your feed?

CHALLENGE

Scroll through your last ten posts, and ask yourself what a follower would know about you through those images and words. Consider opportunities to shift that understanding to a clearer image of what it means to walk as a sinner saved by grace.

Day Nine | Take a Break!

The more I read my Bible, the more I see Sabbath woven through every facet of who God is and what he values. After establishing rest from work by example in Genesis 2:3, God continues to call his people toward this ongoing practice: see Exodus 20:8-11, Deuteronomy 5:12-14, and Isaiah 58:13-14. In the New Testament, Christ models this in his own life through time away with the Father (see Luke 4:16, 5:16; Mark 1:35, 2:13; Luke 8:23). As we see the way God values rest, it challenges us to ask: how does Sabbath apply to social media?

Social media has become an all-access, all day, every moment form of communication and media intake for people who were created to turn off from time to time. Have you ever thought about whether or not the rhythms of social media are actually helping or hurting you? The simple habit of scrolling can cloud our ability to draw away, get quiet, be still, and listen to the Lord. This is why I've started implementing daily, weekly, and seasonal sabbath into my social media patterns.

Daily: designate times to use social media in your day, then be diligent about giving yourself a cut-off. Even if you have a cut-off time, it's so tempting to just press "ignore" when the time limit prompt pops up. I would encourage you to *delete the apps*. If you're tempted to ignore the time limit, physically delete the app at the end of the day (or whenever your determined time is up) and remove the temptation.

Weekly: consider going an entire day each week without any social media. This could be a Sunday so you can focus on time at church, with your community, and resting intentionally. Or maybe Saturday makes the most sense for you so you can be present with your family. Pick a day, delete the apps from your phone (or at the very least sign out of them) and engage with the world around you.

Seasonally: I've taken several extended breaks from Instagram and have never once regretted it. Most recently, I've been off for about six months! This wasn't my plan—but this unexpectedly extended break helped me see the mental space I regained by removing social media. You don't have to take half a year away, but do consider going a few weeks or even a month to clear your mind from the temptation to scroll and post and consume every day. I promise you'll be encouraged by your time away (after the first few days of absentmindedly clicking where the app used to be on your phone!)

RESPOND

What is my gut reaction to removing social media? If my instinct is hesitation or resistance, what is it about the apps that keep me so drawn in I don't want a break?

CHALLENGE

Determine a daily time limit, one day of the week, and one season of the year when you will remove social media from your routine for a bit. Commit to the practice for the next few months and see how you feel. Journal about the process, how you experienced life without social media, and what you learned about yourself and the Lord during that time.

Day Ten | Soli Deo Gloria

Soli Deo Gloria is Latin for “Glory to God alone.” Social media was created as an avenue for pursuing our own glory: showcasing our abilities and earthly blessings and gaining likes and followers. God offers a different path: social media for the glory of God.

This means posting, commenting, and sharing for the fame of our Savior in the power of the Holy Spirit. 1 Timothy 1:7 tells us “For God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but of power and love and discipline.” God has given us an incredibly creative and powerful avenue to share his love. By the power of God we can be bold about the Gospel, loving to a world that does not understand us, and participating with discipline, not being controlled by social media but rather harnessing its power for God’s glory.

We don’t have to do Instagram the way the world tells us to, or quit it all together. Instead we can seek God’s wisdom and proceed with discernment that comes from knowing God’s Word and walking by the Spirit.

When we mess up and post out of selfish gain, God can still use it for his glory and he can change us in the process. When we post out of a deep love and affection for Christ, we walk even deeper in fellowship with him.

So don’t give up, sisters, but draw near to God. Knowing God deeply through his Word transforms how we interact with the world. He is the source for all we need to engage Instagram for Jesus!

RESPOND

Have you considered giving up social media altogether? How can you fight to submit your online presence to God’s authority?

CHALLENGE

Don’t quit now. Keep considering your motives, praying for wisdom, making plans of action, taking sabbath rests, and redeeming social media for the glory of God!