

Powerful Parenting for October 14, 2020

We hope you find this information useful, inspiring, challenging, helpful, sobering, insightful, etc. If you want to be added or taken off this list, just let us know. If you know someone who could benefit from it, pass it along. If you have any comments, concerns, want to be added or deleted from this list, e-mail david@claytonbaptistchurch.com.

Powerful Netflix Documentary

Many people have boycotted Netflix over “Cuties”. But they have put out a documentary that every parent, child, and adult that consumes social media needs to see. It’s entitled “The Social Dilemma.” It is an interview with 10 former Silicon Valley inventors and leaders of the various platforms that exposes what those many platforms and apps are really up to and how they can sway, yes, even control a population. This is not conspiracy theory stuff. This is from the very people who created what we have today. It is a must see for everyone!

Christians Struggled with Relational Health Prior to Pandemic—What Has Changed?

Healthy relationships are supportive and life-giving, contributing to our resilience during challenging times (especially among young people), spurring us to grow in faith together and even allowing adults to be better parents. Unhealthy relationships—or even a lack of relationships—can leave us feeling drained, lonely and dissatisfied. During the COVID-19 crisis, these negative impacts have been felt even more prominently.

Half of all U.S. adults and practicing Christians report at least one issue affecting their relationships. The relational well-being of Americans was already strained prior to the pandemic. According to data collected for Restoring Relationships, more than half of all U.S. adults (58%) and practicing Christians (54%) say they have at least one relational or emotional / mental health issue that impacts their relationships. Younger generations were also already reporting higher levels of loneliness and a longing for connection. Now, a new layer of complexity and challenge has been added as couples are quarantining and working at home, singles are isolating alone, and friends are thinking twice about meeting for coffee. Relational strain has had much more potential to increase in recent months, perhaps exponentially.

In the early days of the crisis, Barna began conducting weekly pastor surveys to check in on the pulse of Protestant church leaders and their people during the pandemic. Just a month into tracking (April 14-20, 2020), Barna asked pastors about the immediate needs of their congregants. Emotional well-being (34%), spiritual well-being (25%) and relational well-being (23%) topped the list, and these concerns held steady throughout the summer. When Barna asked again (August 13-17, 2020), church leaders responded in higher numbers than before for two of the three needs (28% emotional, 35% spiritual, 27% relational).

Barna research indicates that challenges to emotional, relational and mental health tend to aggravate one another—that is, if someone is struggling in one of these areas, it’s statistically more likely that they will be struggling in the other two areas as well. Prior to the pandemic, U.S. adults and practicing Christians alike noted anxiety and depression as the most commonly faced challenges to relational satisfaction, with 40 percent of all U.S. adults and 34 percent of practicing Christians saying this is true.

Practicing Christians are generally confident that their pastor can help them navigate relational struggles. Among those who have experienced a relational hardship, one in three practicing Christians (34%) is likely to turn to a pastor or priest for help. Per a Barna pastor survey taken early in the pandemic (April 7-13, 2020), a vast majority of U.S. church leaders (89%) says they at least somewhat (65%) or definitely (24%) understand the immediate needs of their congregations regarding mental and emotional health. Even so, during that same survey pastors shared that they were largely not talking about mental or emotional health during their Sunday sermons—while two in five (39%) had broached this topic within the past month, a greater portion

either had not (58%) or cannot recall (3%). These percentages did not statistically shift even four months later, when Barna asked the same question of church leaders.

Congregants, however, are not the only ones feeling relational strain during the crisis: As of mid-May 2020, one in four pastors (26%) says that their relational well-being is a part of life that they're struggling with the most right now, second only (and, we can assume, intimately tied) to emotional well-being (31%). Pastors are also struggling with mental health and burnout during the crisis. As of August 13-17, 2020, while half of U.S. pastors rated their mental and emotional well-being as excellent (12%) or good (38%), a significant amount noted this area of health as average (31%) or below (20%). Contrasted to earlier in the pandemic (April 7-13, 2020) and research from *The State of Pastors* (2016), these numbers are both sobering and concerning. How can pastors be expected to tend to their churchgoers' relational, emotional and mental health struggles when they are wrestling challenges of their own?

In early May, Barna asked U.S. adults what they have done differently, if anything, as a result of the pandemic. While practicing Christians report more intentionality in maintaining close and healthy relationships during the crisis (48% vs. 37% non-practicing Christians and 39% no faith), nearly half of all U.S. adults (47%) say their time online or on social media has increased since the pandemic began—a percentage that exceeds the proportion of those who say they are being intentional about staying connected to people they care about (40%).

Generally, faith and church community correlates with stronger connections to loved ones. People naturally seek comfort and support from their closest connections, and recent Barna data (May 2020) show that this is especially true of practicing Christians, who are more likely than other faith segments to say that, in crisis, they feel connected to friends and family and have people to count on, no matter what.

Four months later, practicing Christians may also be experiencing a bolstered sense of communal support as churches reopen: As of Barna's most recent pastor survey (August 27-31, 2020), a large proportion of churches are currently open to the public (67%), though 65 percent have social distancing measures in place—precautions that are also widely implemented across the country right now. With personal interactions still significantly altered, half of pastors (55%) say their church is rethinking the way congregants connect with one another. How is that working? What about those outside the church? And even if connections are being facilitated, are those relationships also being strengthened and healed?

www.barna.com