SISSY GOFF &
MELISSA TREVATHAN

Modern

PARENTS

Vintage

VALUES

INSTILLING CHARACTER
IN TODAY'S KIDS

REVISED AND UPDATED

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This book is written in honor of the vintage characters whose stories have influenced ours: Margaret Trevathan, Robbie Stamps, Otie Trevathan, Hedy Patterson, Robert Goff, Marian Goff, and Dorothy Goff. It is also written in memory of our treasured friends, Noel and Molasses.

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Part 3: *Timeless Truths*

Foreword

Recently my husband and I took a short day-trip to a quaint small town about an hour's drive from our home base in the big city. We had lunch at a little café known for its peach tea and meringue pies and then made our way to the antique shops on the town square. While strolling through one antique shop in particular, I couldn't help but be transported back in time. It was a bit surreal to see some of the familiar mementos of my past covered with a light layer of dust and staring back at me from an antique store shelf. Vintage Barbies, Pet Rocks, AM/FM transistor radios, and even a Partridge Family record album! (Proud member of the David Cassidy fan club here.) In spite of my pleas, my husband refused to allow me to rescue the poor Felix the Cat wall clock and hang it in our bedroom in a last-ditch effort to return it back to its glory days. Never mind that I always found it a bit unnerving that Felix's eyes creepily shifted back and forth with each and every tick-tock and seemed to follow me wherever I went. On second thought, he's better off on the wall in the store!

On another aisle we found a shelf filled with old rotary dial phones. (If you are under the age of thirty and reading this, you may have to Google it to get an idea of what I'm talking about.) Of course, I couldn't resist the urge to put my finger in the "zero" and give it a sample dial. Oh, the patience it took to dial a number filled with "9's" and "0's"! Your family was on the cutting edge of technology if it was among the first to get the push button model when it released. As I stood there looking at the phones, I thought about my kids, armed with touch screen "smart

phones" that keep them connected around the clock to friends, family, and the World Wide Web. I found myself wishing for simpler times when phones were tethered to living room walls and moms and dads were the great and mighty gatekeepers to all things incoming. It seemed annoying at the time to share a single phone line, but now as a parent, I can certainly see the value.

As I read through the manuscript of *Modern Parent, Vintage Values,* I thought about my visit to the antique store. While vintage mementos from my past were worth only a fraction of their original price, the vintage values many of us were raised with have become rare and priceless qualities among today's youth. Values like kindness, compassion, integrity, responsibility, patience, gratitude, confidence, and forgiveness are timeless for every generation. Sissy and Melissa do an outstanding job of unpacking these vintage values from the old cedar chest and bringing them back to life.

I've had the amazing privilege of doing many events with Sissy and Melissa. Over the years we've served on a dozen or so Q&A panels for parents, and when the tough questions come, I often defer to them. They have shared their gift of relevant insight and wisdom with both young people and their parents for many years. Their wisdom is always encouraging and filled with hope. Most important, they are faithful to point parents right back to Scripture and the Author of all things of eternal value, vintage or otherwise.

It's time parents get back to the business of teaching their children the timeless, vintage values laid forth in God's Word. Several decades from now, antique stores will be filled with Nintendo Wii game consoles, iPhones, Justin Bieber posters, and Hannah Montana lunch pails—cast aside as vintage, valueless junk. I don't know about you, but I want to leave my children a legacy of vintage values that stand the test of time . . . long after that creepy Felix the Cat clock ticks its last and final tick-tock.

—Vicki Courtney

Dear Reader,

"You are the only you this world will ever know." These words are the beginning to one of our favorite quotes of Dan Allender's that we use often when speaking to kids and parents alike. You are the only you. You are also the only mom, or dad, or Papa, Aunt Robbie, or godmother your child will ever know. And you will impact the life and heart of that child in ways that no one else ever will.

This book is one that, we hope, will help you make that impact with more understanding, more clarity and hope. As counselors with more than seventy-five years of combined experience with kids, these pages are filled with truths we have learned from the parents and kids whose paths have crossed ours. We say often that we're not experts . . . we just have the privilege of sitting with parents and kids of all ages who are wrestling through this topic of raising children and growing up in our modern world.

So, as you read these pages, know that not every child will face the issues we cover in the first part of the book. Your child may not ever have to deal with some of these struggles, but statistics show that they'll know someone who does. We want to help not only equip you, but also help you equip your child. The vintage values and timeless truths sections, however, are ones we believe will speak to the hopes and prayers you have for each of your children.

Thank you for picking up this book. We are honored to come alongside you as you love your children. You are the only you, and you're already well on your way to helping your child become the only him (or her) this world will ever know.

An Introduction

Imagine a warm summer day. You're sitting outside drinking iced tea. Your children are in the yard laughing and playing, seemingly without a care in the world. They've got umbrellas out, and they're dancing in the water falling from the sprinkler. You can barely hear the strains of B. J. Thomas singing "Raindrops Keep Falling on My Head." What year do you think this is?

As much as it sounds like the summer of 1970, you're actually decades off. These kids were at Hopetown, the summer camp we run for kids involved in our counseling ministry. Allow us to introduce ourselves. We are two counselors who work with kids and have been doing so for a combined experience of more than seventy-five years, although most of those years are Melissa's. My name is Sissy, and I was barely born when B. J. was crooning about the falling raindrops.

We are part of a counseling ministry called Daystar. Our office is housed in a little yellow house with a big front porch. One seven-year-old boy called it, "the little yellow house that helps people." Our dogs—Lucy, the Havanese, and Blueberry, the old English sheepdog—help us counsel the kids and families who come to Daystar. Our offices house thirteen counselors and, at last count, currently see more than seventeen hundred families between individual and group counseling. We hold summer retreats and parenting classes both in the community and across the country. We believe in offering hope to families in any situation, and we believe in vintage values in this modern world.

Actually, we just like the whole idea of vintage in general. On most days we have spiced tea brewing in our lobby. There is a checkers table

in one of the waiting rooms with typically two or three kids gathered around it. At our camps the kids play chess, learn to water-ski (not just wakeboard), and help cook the meals. We sing old-timey hymns along with worship choruses and talk about the rich meaning behind the words. We even have Christmas at Hopetown and take the kids to a town made up of one entire street of antique stores. They have three dollars to buy a gift for the person whose name they drew. The gifts are symbolic, like a boy who gave a counselor an old walking stick because he said she helped people stand who were struggling. We like vintage and believe it often brings out good in the lives of kids.

This book is divided into three sections. In the first, which we call "Modern Parents," we tackle a few of the topics we hear most often from parents in our counseling offices. We talk about technology, entitlement, respect, anxiety, and eating disorders, to name a few—issues that are coming at parents with more frequency and intensity than ever before. Many of these issues will be around for years to come, and yet we know that new challenges will also emerge.

In the second section we introduce the idea of "Vintage Values." We outline nine values including compassion, gratitude, kindness, patience, and several others. We break each section down into children and teenagers and talk, not just about what those values look like but specifically how to instill them in both ages. And in each chapter of the first two sections, we end with something called "A Sunday Drive."

Do you remember going on Sunday drives with your family? You might not remember them, but you can be sure that your grandparents do. After church and lunch, they'd pile in the car and just drive. There wasn't a time frame. There wasn't really even anywhere to go. It was just time spent together. We hope these chapters can serve the same purpose. In them we give some practical suggestions you can do as a family not just to learn about but to experience the ideas we've discussed in the previous chapter.

The last section of our book is called "Timeless Truths." In it we share some final ideas of not just what but who enables us to parent in these times. The job is daunting. We're battling terrorism and

technology, attitudes and entitlement like our grandparents never could have imagined. But you can . . . and often do. We're guessing your imagination, however, causes you even more fear. What if I let her text and she sends someone an inappropriate picture? What if I let him spend the night out and his friend's parents don't watch him like I do? How do I shelter her and keep her from harm? Why is he acting like this?

We want this book to be a journey for you and your family. We hope that, in its pages, you will learn more about your child and more about yourself. We hope you will be reminded of truth and inspired to parent with more life and more freedom. Basically, our hope is that you'll find hope for who God is creating your child to be. And that you'll close this book knowing a little more of the ultimate truth of God's love in the life of your family.

Part 1

Modern Parents

The Age of Anonymity

> Technology promises to give us control over the earth and over
> other people. But the promise is not fulfilled: lethal automobiles,
> ugly buildings and ponderous bureaucracies ravage the earth
> and empty lives of meaning. Structures become more important
> than the people who use them. We care more for our possessions
> with which we hope to make our way in the world than with our
> thoughts and dreams which tell us who we are in the world.[1]
> —Eugene Peterson, *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction*

If you were holding the 2010 version of this book, your reading experience would be quite different. That's because being a modern parent today looks entirely different than it did ten years ago. With technology, it often looks different than it did ten *minutes* ago. The good news is that Vintage Values haven't changed. Timeless Truths that we gather from Scripture certainly haven't. But technology has undoubtedly changed since 2010, when this book first released. It changes at lightning speed. And, as a result, we see parents coming into our counseling offices who are more panicked than ever.

A friend once said, "What lice is to parents of elementary-aged kids, technology is to parents of middle schoolers." But it's not just middle

schoolers. It's children of every age. We recently had an eight-year-old come to counseling at Daystar because she was addicted to porn. We have two children in counseling currently because of anxiety over games they've been playing on their devices. Statistics and research continue to expose the lack of sleep, the lack of emotional regulation, the lack of social skills, and the increased anxiety these screens are bringing to bear on the kids we love. And we're just getting started.

We simply cannot cover every way that technology impacts the life of a child. We can't cover all of the bases from gaming to social media to apps to screen time. If we did, the apps they use and the social media platforms and settings would all change by the time this book is printed.

But what we can do is tell you exactly what we would say if you were sitting opposite either of us in our counseling office. We would give you some guidelines that you, in turn, can give your children. We would help you with some big-picture ideas that we believe can safeguard not just their eyes, but their hearts. And we would tell you that everything you're feeling is normal. Technology is a force in this modern world. And it will be a force that will, at times, help, but also hurt and can even hinder the growth of the child you love.

Because of our desire to help and our combined seventy-five-plus years of counseling experience with kids and parents, we're going to outline Eight Guiding Principles for Raising Digital Natives—in other words, eight of what we consider, as counselors, the most important ideas we need to understand and help the kids we love know when it comes to technology.

1. Technology is here to stay.

Today's generation of kids has several names: digital natives, the iGeneration, the selfie generation, and a host of other names revolving around technology. They are the first generation of kids who will have technology as a prominent force in their daily lives as long as they can remember. And it is a prominent force. For example, the statistics as of today include that the average person checks their screens every 9 minutes and 50 seconds during their waking hours each day.[2] Adults spend

an average of 10 hours and 39 minutes per day consuming media on screens.[3]

If those are the statistics for adults, what about these digital natives? According to one source, kids under the age of two average 53 minutes per day on screens. For two- to four-year-olds, it rises to 2½ hours per day. Five- to eight-year-olds spend approximately 3 hours per day on their screens.[4] The American Academy of Pediatrics says that children, across the board, spend an average of 7 hours per day on entertainment-related media.[5] Teenagers are averaging 9 hours per day on their screens.[6] And get this: Sixty-nine percent of children between the ages of two and five can use a computer mouse, but only 11 percent can tie their own shoes. 58 percent of children know how to play a video game, while 52 percent know how to ride a bike, and only 20 percent know how to swim.[7] By the time this book is in your hands, every one of those statistics will likely have risen.

Something's off. It's off in terms of how today's generation of kids are spending their time, and it's off in terms of how its impacting their brains.

2. Technology is literally re-wiring the brains of the kids we love.

All of our brains grow in response to how they're being used—as we get older, they just grow less (and work less, too, according to the two of us and anyone else over the age of forty). Between birth and two years of age, an infant's brain triples in size. It continues in a state of rapid development until the age of twenty-one. Early brain development is largely determined by environmental stimuli.

As we know, an overexposure to technology is associated with childhood obesity and diabetes, from a physical standpoint. In terms of a child's brain development, it's associated with diagnoses of ADHD, autism, coordination disorder, developmental delays, learning difficulties, and sensory processing disorder. From an emotional standpoint, it's also seen as a causal factor in anxiety and depression in children, as well as increased impulsivity and a decreased ability to self-regulate.[8]

All of us who love teenagers know that their brains are in constant flux, as well. Although by the age of six, the brain is already 95 percent of the size of an adult brain, the gray matter continues to grow throughout adolescence. The brain cells are growing extra connections, causing a period of rapid growth and thickening of the gray matter, which is considered the thinking part of the brain. This process peaks at approximately age eleven for girls and age twelve for boys. From then on, the excess connections are what scientists refer to as "pruned." It's literally like the gardening term, meaning that what is being used survives and flourishes, whereas the cells and connections not used wither and die. They call it the "use it or lose it" principle.[9] This doesn't bode well for the teens who are spending 9 hours per day on screens for entertainment purposes (as opposed to screens for educational purposes).

Socially, we all know the implications of this hyper-focus on technology. The overexposure creates a lack of time for relationships and delays their social skills learning. They, and we, learn social skills by, as obvious as it sounds, being social. This kind of vital learning hinges specifically on prolonged interaction with other human beings, and not machines or screens. In a study conducted at UCLA, 6th graders who went five days without screens were significantly better at reading human emotions than those who were continuing their regular use with their devices.[10]

In addition, an overexposure to technology impacts a child's creativity—and ours probably too. Think about it: where and when do you have your most creative thoughts? When we ask parents at our technology classes, their answers are typically "in the shower," "driving," "waking up," and "falling asleep"—times we typically aren't looking at a screen. It is in those times that we have what we call "aha moments." In other words, we have more creative thoughts when our minds aren't engaged elsewhere.

So, what can we do?

Research says there are four critical factors necessary for our children to develop: movement, touch, human connection, and exposure to nature. All four factors foster coordination, self-regulation, and many other skills necessary for school entry. Young children's brains need two

to three hours per day of active play to achieve adequate sensory stimulation.[11] As children grow older, those same four factors are crucial. From our counseling practice, we can tell you that the same is true for adolescents. Teenagers need to move, to connect with others in real time, and to be hugged (no matter how much they stiff-arm us with their embarrassed selves). They need time outdoors—to help them stretch their legs, minds, and the self-preoccupation that accompanies life on social media.

Technology not only affects, but *changes* the way the kids we love grow and develop. Screens can be helpful in furthering their growth in certain areas, too—an idea we'll come back to later. But we want children to put down their screens so that their exposure to technology is limited, but heightened to real life—where connection, creativity, relationships, and the things that matter most really occur.

3. You are the gatekeeper.

None of us would allow our eight-year-old to walk into an adult bookstore. But, in effect, that's precisely what we're doing when we allow them to use technology without any type of monitoring. Statistically, 60 percent of parents do not supervise their child's technology usage.[12] Although those numbers concern us greatly, we do understand.

I (Sissy) recently met with a mom who had lost her husband. She had three children, and an elementary-aged daughter who had just looked at pornography for the first time. "I know I'm supposed to have all of this stuff on the computer, so I know what they're doing. I honestly just haven't had the energy, and I thought she was young enough that we were safe."

No matter what your situation is as a parent, you are probably exhausted. All parents are, in different (maybe most) seasons. But, your child is not. He or she is curious and quick and likely already more adept at using technology than you are. And, think about it . . . What do you do with every question about which you might be wondering? You Google it. If you were a child, wouldn't you prefer Googling what a body part is supposed to look like to having an awkward conversation with your parent?

At Daystar, we have children as young as eight who are addicted to pornography. You are the gatekeeper for your child. You have to be willing to be the bad guy. Your child—yes, even your teenager—needs parents more than they need followers. A few gatekeeping ideas:

- *If your child gets the privilege, you get to set the boundaries.* Years ago, I (Sissy) taught my first parenting class on technology. It was when Facebook was first becoming a thing—before it was considered an "old-people thing" and before younger generations moved on to other types of social media. I was telling these parents that, as their child first started using social media, they needed to watch them closely. In fact, they needed to do more than "friend" their child in the beginning—namely, they needed to have their child's password (an idea I still advocate, no matter what social media platform your child is using). As their friend, you can't check their incoming and outgoing private messages, which is sometimes where the trouble occurs. A mom spoke up from the corner of the room and said, "There's no way my son will give me his password. He won't even accept my friend request." Now, her problem was clearly bigger than just technology use in her home. It was a respect and authority issue at the deepest level. Kids can and will try to argue this point, especially if they paid or helped pay for their phone or gadget. Don't be dissuaded. You are still the gatekeeper, *even* if they've paid for all or a portion of their device. If it's under your roof, you ultimately are in control. Remember that this role is not something you granted yourself or that your kids bequeathed to you (as if they ever would!). God is the one who has placed you in a position of authority over your children—and that authority extends to the arena of technology. The fact that your children are even in a household that allows gadgets at all—whether or not they helped pay for it—is a privilege that those in authority are offering, and there should be zero guilt on your part for

deciding how that privilege is used under your own roof, and under your own God-given role as parent.

- *You have to be ahead of the game.* Before you allow your child to download an app, download it yourself first. Play it and determine if it has a social media component. Many games and apps do, but parents don't notice until too late—because the interactive portion is placed at the very bottom of the page. And don't necessarily rely on the age recommendations given by the online store. App developers sometimes bank on the fact that parents will consider it a game only, and not an interactive social media experience. It's important to stay ahead of them.

- *Supervise video chatting.* Whether your children are using Skype or FaceTime or some other video platform that will be invented years from now, have them chat in a central location in your home. Because certain applications do not necessarily record the chat (though some do), they can be a place where kids feel freer to say or do things they wouldn't if they knew their parents were watching. You can monitor less as they get older, but young ones should always be supervised, unless they're chatting with a grandparent or other trusted adult.

- *Link your email to their iTunes or Google account.* You want to be aware of what apps they're downloading. If their account is set up under your email address, you will be able to check on what they've installed on their devices. Many smartphones and tablets also have a setting that disables the user's ability to delete apps. You want to turn this setting on, so your child can't download an app and then delete it right before they hand their phone to you. (Can you tell we've heard that story a time or two in our office?)

- *Put filters and monitoring systems on your computers and gadgets,* including yours if you allow them to use it. Filters prevent inappropriate content from reaching them. Monitoring systems keep you informed as to what they are doing and communicating online and via text.

- *Follow along with other like-minded grown-ups who are keeping you up to date on the best filters and monitoring systems out there.* They change often, and Common Sense Media, Screenagers, and following us at Raising Boys and Girls are all places where you can stay current on how to help safeguard the kids you love.

Also, check out the American Academy of Pediatrics site to create a specialized media plan for your family at healthychildren.org.

4. Start small.

Every time we speak to parents about technology, someone asks the question: "When should I let my child have _____?" In other words, what's the magic age? When will he be old enough to be responsible? When will she be mature enough to make good choices? Unfortunately, there is no magic age. But, there are some guidelines that we, and the good folks at the American Academy of Pediatrics, would strongly suggest.

- *When?* Our answer to that question is to parent in community. Basically, you want a group of like-minded parents walking this road with you. You can decide together when you're going to let your kids have their first email account, or their first cell phone, or Instagram account, or whatever the shiny new penny of the day is. That way, when your child says, "All the other kids have _____," (which your child will say at some point), you can say, "That's funny, because I know the Smiths and the Johnsons or (whomever your home team is), and they don't have those yet either." Basically, you have automatic backup.

In addition, you don't want your child to be the first and you don't want them to be the last. If they're the first, they'll often be perceived as the frontrunner—or fast—as we would say when we were both growing up. Others will see them as on the cutting edge. Basically, you don't want your child to be on the cutting edge of growing up. It's too risky, and the cutting edge gets scarier as they get older. But, if they're the last to have all things technological, they'll often be the ones who rebel.

They'll sneak around, "borrowing" a friend's device. Or, they'll be left behind. The reality is that, for teenagers, social media has become how they communicate.

Now, we believe you can let your child be second or even next to last, rather than the very last. We also have parents at Daystar who choose one item to delay. We have plenty of parents who don't let their kids have smartphones till sixteen, with the message that a phone is a convenience for the parent, not the child. Or, we have parents who hold off on Snapchat, certain beloved apps of their kids generation, or some other hot ticket item. But, if you hold off on all things technology, your child will often find their way to it without your knowledge—and rebel. Plus, the goal of taming the technology monster is to teach them responsible technology use while they're under our roofs.

- *How much?* In 2016, the American Academy of Pediatrics changed their guidelines. Up to that point, it was no screen time at all for kids under the age of two. Now, it's no screen time for children under the age of eighteen months. It used to also be no more than 2 hours per day of screen time for kids under the age of eighteen. Now, they say 1 hour for kids under the age of six, and they don't give any guidelines past that age, other than "place consistent limits on the time spent using media, and the types of media, and make sure media does not take the place of adequate sleep, physical activity and other behaviors essential to health."[13] Basically, they're saying it's up to the parent's guidance and discretion. However, the brain development of children did not magically change in the year 2016. They adjusted their numbers knowing the prevalence and sometimes helpfulness of technology today. Also, in schools, screens and technology are used as educational tools more and more—in fact, this is becoming more the rule than the exception. We still need to be good guides.
- *Require 10 minutes of rest for every 90 minutes of tech.* Researchers say children need 10 minutes of rest for every 90 minutes of

technology use.[14] It helps their brain development and calms the over-activity of the brain that can develop using screens.

- *Stop using technology 30 to 60 minutes before bed.* We've all read the data on technology-related sleep disturbances. I taught a technology class where one teenager said she had to have her iPad by her bed, because it was how she read her Bible. I tried to explain to her that there had been beautiful, leather-bound, hardback, and even paperback versions of the Bible that had been around for quite some time and work just as well.

- *Have screen free zones in your home, including mealtime.* We have cell phone baskets in our counseling offices at Daystar. You can have them in your dining room, or at the kitchen table. But, have some space where everyone collectively unplugs for the purpose of connection.

- *Keep computers in common spaces.* For as long as possible, keep the computer your child uses in a room you frequent. It's good accountability for them to know that you regularly enter the space where they're using technology.

- *Have a central plug-in station in your bedroom.* Kids really don't need their gadgets in their room after bedtime. We've heard story after story of teenagers who send inappropriate texts and pictures after everyone in the house has gone to bed. They need to plug them in somewhere centrally located, preferably in a room where you'll notice if they sneak them out. (Can you tell I've heard that one before too? Hallways and kitchens are all too accessible.)

- *Take technology Sabbaths together.* We know plenty of families who have screen-free Sundays, or weekends, or even spring breaks together. If the idea of a technology Sabbath causes you to perspire just a bit, it might be time to think about your own technology use.

- *Give them more freedom as they earn it.* I (Sissy) teach a parenting class on technology regularly and would tell you that a parenting class on technology is challenging to teach. Basically, parents look panicked the entire time I'm speaking on the subject.

Therefore, I try to make it as warm and fun as possible, which is not easy. I tell stories and show funny videos and smile a lot. I was teaching one such class at a church not too long ago, when the time came for Q&A at the end. A man in the back of the room raised his hand. I was slightly concerned, having noticed this man at different points during the class. I was highly aware that he was more than disgruntled with my philosophy on technology. When he got the microphone, he loudly said, "I have raised six children, and I just want to say—technology is NOT a child's God-given right. When we were raising my oldest son, it wasn't until we were driving him to his high school graduation that we let him get on the internet for the first time on his phone. It was also the first time we let him send someone else a picture from that phone." He stopped for a long, dramatic pause and then said, "If your child is on the internet, go home and shut it down!" And just in case someone missed his quite un-missable point, he shouted it—not once, but twice more, "IF YOUR CHILD IS ON THE INTERNET, GO HOME AND SHUT IT DOWN!!!!" All I could think to do was to say, "Why don't I close us in prayer?" and bow my head. My immediate thought was, *That eighteen-year-old boy. I cannot imagine him going from no freedom at all to 3 months later, sitting in his college dorm room with every freedom in the world.*

We want kids to learn responsible technology use while they're living with responsible adults. As in all things, we want to let the rope out gradually, giving them more freedom as they earn it. We start small and let the rope out slowly . . . pulling it back in, not *if*, but *when* they mess up. Because they most likely will. And, as we're pulling in and letting that rope out, we want to give them clear guidelines.

5. Include conversations and contracts.

We can't say enough how important it is to talk to your kids about all things, including technology. We are their gatekeepers, but we are also

their teachers. We want them to learn to be responsible with their technology use. In doing so, we want to talk with them and help them have ownership in the process.

- *When—not if—you put monitoring software on your computer and gadgets, tell your children.* We want our kids to trust us, to believe that we're being honest. We want to have integrity and respect their privacy and help them understand that privacy actually only applies when what they're doing is truly private. Nothing online actually is, which is one of the lessons we want them to learn. "If others can see it, so can your parents," in other words. Also, because I work with a lot of girls, I believe this full disclosure is important for another reason. If your teenager finds out that you caught him or her doing something when you were "snooping," there will be much more drama over the fact that you "violated their privacy" than what she was actually doing wrong in the first place. Again, lots of teenage girls in our office . . .
- *Give them a contract with each new gadget they receive.* Contracts give them ownership. As adults, when we sign our name on a contract, we know the item we are receiving has value. We are agreeing to the terms listed under that contract. We are communicating that we understand what's expected of us, and we understand what will happen if we void the contract. We want our kids to see the same weightiness to the technology they receive. Create a contract when they receive their first tablet, or first cell phone. Outline the consequences for inappropriate use of the device on the contract.
- *When your child is interacting with others online, they need to understand the same rules apply as in real life.* You can create your own list of rules to discuss with them, beginning with a few we believe are particularly important, such as:
  - Don't talk to strangers. In other words, never put personal information online about yourself, your family, or your home.

○ Virtual interactions can hurt as much as real ones. Just because you're not saying it to someone's face doesn't mean it doesn't affect them. Words hurt, whether typed or spoken. And those typed have the power to stick around, and be sent around to other friends, parents and school administrators.

○ Nothing private is ever private. Even if you send a photo to one person, they have the ability to screen shot that photo and send it to countless others. Snapchat isn't private either. Snaps can be caught and kept. Anonymity apps can be traced back to you, as well. And anything inappropriate you send or receive can cause the sender to be guilty of violating child pornography laws. For example, as one state's Bar Journal records, a teenager who takes a naked picture and sends it to another is technically guilty of committing three felony crimes.[15] Many states are in the midst of legislation to update laws around sexting. Our kids need to know the laws, and often don't.

○ Talk to you if they ever feel uncomfortable. Kids need to hear that they can always come to you, even if they've done something wrong. If someone approaches them that they don't know, even if it's on a prohibited site, you still want them to tell you. There may be consequences, but you can let them know the consequences will be less if they've been honest.

○ A dear friend of ours, who also happens to be a school principal, has three great questions when it comes to posting on social media: Would you share this with your grandmother? Share it on the news? Want it said about you?

Teenage brains aren't fully developed yet. Specifically, the frontal lobe which helps them think rationally has not yet reached its adult state. Therefore, the things that seem rational and logical to us, as grown-ups, just won't be to them. We need to include conversations and contracts with every new gadget or social media platform your child uses. We want to teach them responsibility, which includes setting boundaries around

their use and consequences when they violate those boundaries. In doing so, we're not only giving them ownership, but teaching them awareness as well.

6. Whenever your kids are on social media, you need to be there too.

- *Pay attention to age requirements.* There are actually age restrictions when it comes to social media apps. We get questions all of the time about the magic age for various social media sites. There is, again, no magic age. But there are age guidelines given by those very apps themselves, believe it or not. Most social media apps are set at thirteen. Many families do not abide by the age guidelines, although the language is strong calling the age a "requirement" and stating that the guidelines are "in compliance with the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act (COPOPA).

- *Take the following into consideration:*
  - Your child's maturity level. There are children we see who are mature beyond their years, and those who are very young for their age. Just because your child meets the age requirement for a certain app does not mean they're ready to use it. Pay attention to your own instincts, in terms of your child's readiness. Talk to your spouse or a trusted friend. And talk to your child. Find out why they want to use the app and tell them your concerns.
  - Their online responsibility thus far. If your child is showing readiness in terms of their maturity and they've been responsible with their first little email account with a few close friends and family members, it may be time to take the next step. You might want to give them access to their first social media account, with much supervision by you. If they have not been responsible, they're simply proving they're not quite ready. Give them another chance and outline specifically the behavior they need to show to reach their goal.

In teaching responsibility, goals and consequences are both powerful tools.

○ Their emotional stability. We have two children currently in counseling at Daystar for anxiety related to the same video game. It has frightening images these kids can simply not get out of their brains. The pictures loop and loop as the kids sit in class or try to fall asleep at night. If your child is struggling with anxiety, you want to be even more vigilant in terms of what they're allowed to use regarding apps and social media. Kids who are battling anxiety tend to get images stuck in their minds. If they're depressed, the same principle applies. Kids can get ideas for self-harm and other destructive behavior from online journals and social media apps. Again, wherever your kids are, you need to be there, too—and watching. The current state of your child's emotional maturity should be a huge factor in deciding whether or not they are ready for certain technological experiences.

○ Their peers. The same idea applies to social media as it does to gadgets. You don't want your child to be the first, but you also don't want them to be the last to jump on every social media train. Social media is largely how teenagers communicate today. Several years ago, a mom told me, "Our family just doesn't do social media." Her daughter was sixteen and significantly behind in her development. It was honestly time for her to start to connect with other kids in the way they were most frequently connecting. She had made good choices thus far and was the only one of her friends who wasn't on social media. And it was causing her to be even further behind. As believers, we are not of this world, but we are certainly in it . . . as are your children. At some point, technology is going to be a part of their daily lives, even in an academic setting. It may be easier to think you can just keep it out of your home, but the reality is they will be exposed to it. Your child can learn to navigate technology in a way that is

honoring to God and to themselves—but only with your help. Technology can actually be one of the most powerful teaching tools in your home to help them learn not only what it looks like to not be of the world, but to be a light to their peers in it. Keep a pulse on what your child's peers are involved in online. Hold off on technology as long as you can, until you believe they're ready. But don't hold off so long that they're not learning the responsibility that only you can teach under your roof.

- *Remember the default on most apps is not private.* Check the settings when your child first downloads each game or social media platform. Make sure they're set to private, and help your child learn the importance of privacy. It can also be important to ensure that they understand the consequences in place if they remove the privacy setting. This could be one of the points in your agreement or contract with them.

- *Anonymity apps are never helpful.* There are countless apps now where children can tell "secrets" to each other without the person who posts the secret revealing their identity. They can post photos, create groups, and share all kind of information. Basically, they can talk behind each other's backs and post hurtful content without anyone knowing where the content originated. But, again, kids are smart. One girl told me a friend of hers posted a naked photo from her room "anonymously." "What she didn't know was that lots of us have been inside her room. We recognized her bedspread, and it got out at school the next day that it was her." Nothing private online is ever truly private, and anonymity typically gets exposed.

- *Watch out for secret accounts.* Just this week, I had a group of girls talk about the prevalence of secret social media accounts. Kids create secret accounts for a variety of reasons. They want a group with just their closest friends, where they can post things others won't see. They want to be able to post things they wouldn't say under their own name. They want to post photos they wouldn't

normally post, sometimes inappropriate photos. Secret Instagram accounts also exist just for the purpose of showing pictures of body parts they've self-harmed. Again, anonymity doesn't really work on social media. Our kids don't need to post things they wouldn't feel comfortable with everyone seeing. We're teaching responsibility online. But we're also teaching integrity. Secrecy doesn't create much of either.

- *Be aware of secrecy apps.* Secrecy apps are created to hide things: other apps, photos, etc. They often look like an empty box or even another app. Two that are popular at present look like calculators. As you start to press buttons on the calculator, the social media site is revealed, or the place to hide other photos, videos, and apps you don't want others to see. It's important to be aware of the apps your child downloads, and check their phones with regularity, albeit less regularity as they get older and prove themselves responsible. Even if you have access to see what apps your child is downloading, know that the name of the app could seem harmless when it's in fact hiding something destructive. Again, make sure that whatever app you see downloaded is something you have downloaded yourself and used.

- *Loneliness doesn't show up on social media.* This is a sentence I tell girls almost daily in my office. Think about your own middle and high school years. Remember sitting in class and overhearing a conversation about a party to which you weren't invited? It hurt then. But how much would it hurt to see eight pictures posted by your best friends, looking like they're having the time of their lives? It happens to us, as adults. Everyone's holidays look happier, spring breaks look sunnier, and lives in general look better when it comes to social media. And our adult brains are fully developed. As we start the conversations about allowing our kids to be on social media, we also need to talk about the impact of social media. They need to understand that their feelings will be hurt. They'll feel left out. No one looks sad or lonely on social media—or if they do, it's for the purpose of getting likes

and attention. They also need to be aware of how easily it is to hurt others with posts. Talk to your child. Give them examples from your life. And remind them they can always come to you if they've seen something hurtful.

- *Stay current.* Make sure that you're following blogs and participating in forums to learn about the latest apps kids are using. They change with unbelievable rapidity, and we need to stay abreast of what's captivating their attention and impacting their hearts. Again, we'd default to Common Sense Media, Screenagers, and Raising Boys and Girls as resources that are committed to getting the latest information out to parents regarding technology trends with kids.

7. Use it to your advantage.

Although I do call my parenting seminar "Taming the Technology Monster" in a tongue-in-cheek sort of way, we don't want to view technology solely as a monster in the lives of the kids we love. We must remember that technology can also have profound impact for good. It has been cited as a tool in helping children learn critical thinking, reading comprehension, self-regulation, social skills, empathy, and a variety of other important skills we want our kids to have.[16] And you may have noticed that those are some of the very same skills we mentioned that it can impact negatively. Herein lies the crux of the problem. Technology can take kids in either direction—especially without our help. They need you to help them find their way to the apps and sites and programs that enhance their learning, rather than delay it. We want to use technology to benefit the kids in our lives, and us, as adults too.

- *Use it as a reward.* If you Google "earn screen time," endless images come up. There are grids upon grids for children earning more time on technology when they complete their chores, or when they show certain behaviors we're trying to enforce. As the gentleman in my class said, technology is not a God-given right in the life of your child. But, it's one you can give them as they

earn it. We want rewards that are the highest currency in the
lives of kids, and technology is often where the top dollars are.

- *Use it as a consequence.* We want the highest currency in terms of
both rewards and consequences for our kids. As soon as a child is
old enough to have a device, they are old enough for that device
to be used as a consequence. We're advocates at Raising Boys
and Girls of immediate, short-term consequences that build on
themselves. "If you continue to be disrespectful, you'll lose your
iPad. . . . You just lost it for an hour. . . . That's another hour."
If we start off taking their gadgets for a week, we don't have any
room to build, and consequences that build on themselves teach
kids cause and effect. They see the direct result of their behavior.
- *Use it as a teaching tool.* Apps abound to teach kids vital tools like
empathy and various social skills. They teach children to read
and name emotions using various games with characters with
over-sized features, helping kids see on a larger-than-life scale
what emotions look like in another's face. They also instruct
kids to regulate emotions, such as anger, using exercises that
include mindfulness. Common Sense Media regularly lists their
top-rated social skills building apps. In our newest book, *Are My
Kids on Track?*, we talk about the decline in kids' ability today
to express, read, and regulate emotions. These are vital skills to
our kids transition to healthy adulthood. If technology can help
them learn, use it to your advantage.

8. They hear you some, but watch you more.

Or, as our friend and coauthor David Thomas says in parenting
seminars, "Kids learn more from observation than information." Your
child is paying attention to your technology use—more attention than
you could ever imagine.

- *Be responsible for your own technology use.* I am saddened every
time I go out to eat and sit next to a parent and child, both on
their devices. Put yours down, so that they'll see the importance

of connection—even when they're thirteen and that connection is harder to come by. Don't be tempted to pick up your phone in the car, when you're soon going to be teaching them they're not allowed to look at theirs. Bath-time and bedtime are such rich times with kids that should be uninterrupted by our technology use, as well. We have to be aware of what we're modeling.

- *Kids don't need to feel like they're competing with technology for your attention.* We're hearing more kids than ever talk about this in our offices. Their dads won't stop playing video games to hang out with them. Their moms are so busy looking at their own social media that they're not listening. Put your phone down. Look your child in the eye. And connect in real time.

- *Be aware of what you post about your child.* A dear friend of mine recently posted a naked picture of her toddler-aged daughter. I'll admit it. The picture was adorable. But I, given what I do for a living, immediately called her and told her to take it down. You can guess the reasons. Some predators don't care the age of your son or daughter. And nothing private is ever private. You also want to be aware of what you're saying about your children. Just like we tell them, anything online is actually not private and doesn't go away. Three questions to ask *yourself* before you post: Would you be okay with your child reading what you've written ten years from now? Would you have been embarrassed if your mom told all of her friends (because this is a much bigger scale)? Are you telling something that is his story to tell?

- *Be aware of what you post about yourself.* For many of the same reasons, I often read what parents write on their social media sites and worry. I worry about when the child of that divorce reads what his or her mom posted about their ex-spouse. I worry about the personal information that child does not need about their parents' past, now that they're a teenager and doing their own experimentation. Make sure that what you post you would not only share with your grandmother, but with your own child . . . because, eventually, you will.

- *Social media brings out the narcissist in us all.* How much power do likes and favorites have in your life? How much focus are you placing on your own image, due to social media? Years ago, a friend told me, "You can't ask someone to go somewhere you're not willing to go yourself." The same holds true for us and our technology and social media use. We're teaching kids not to base their self-worth on others' approval. We're teaching them to value real relationships over online relationships. We're telling them that who they are is much deeper than what they post. And that they're God's precious creation no matter what is happening around them or being reflected to them online. If we actually believe those things to be true, it should be obvious in our own conduct. Kids can tell when we don't believe what we preach, and our own online habits will be their gauge on the validity of our teaching to them in this area. In short, if they see us talking the talk without walking it, they now have a pass to do the same.

We are responsible for teaching these little ones responsibility. We're given the high calling and honor of safeguarding their little hearts. We want to have integrity in this, as in all things parenting. And, mostly, we want to teach them who they really are in Christ . . . loved, delighted in, rejoiced over, and given more grace than they'll ever need for even their most monster-ish moments. We want to live out and love our digital natives into those kinds of truths.

In the end, let's remember that God is the god of technology too. And let's remember that your children will likely blow it in this arena. In fact, you might blow it right beside them. I don't think we typically think of Jesus hanging on the cross seeing the first time your child saw something inappropriate online or was unkind to a girl in her class over social media. But he undoubtedly did. Our mishandling of technology is part of what Jesus paid for when he absorbed the penalty of all our sins. So take heart, the things in this chapter that are mortifying—your own weaknesses and fears and mistakes—have all already been paid for and dealt with at the cross.

In parenting seminars, we talk often how the journey of parenting is about raising your children, but it's also about your own journey of sanctification. As a parent, you come to know and need Jesus in new ways daily. Technology will be one of the areas of your life and theirs that can lead you to deeper trust in a God who does not only delight in them, but is working—even in the midst of technology—for their good.

A SUNDAY DRIVE

A Few Non-technological Suggestions

1. Bake a cake together for an elderly neighbor.

2. Build a birdhouse and place it in the backyard.

3. Pick seasonal berries and make jam or jelly together.

4. Have a chess or checkers tournament.

5. Plant a garden. Let your child choose a favorite fruit or vegetable to plant and take care of.

6. Start an ongoing Monopoly game that relates to your family's life or interests . . . Hog-Opoly, for example, for Sissy or Lighthouse-Opoly for Melissa.

7. If you live by the lake, build sailboats with your children. Take them to the lake and have a family race.

8. Go fishing.

9. Go on a bike ride to lunch, to a park, or to a destination of some kind.

10. Pack a picnic basket on a Saturday or Sunday afternoon and have lunch outside.

11. Volunteer at the neighborhood animal shelter to walk their dogs or play with kittens.

12. Rake the leaves of a neighbor or family member who has been sick or is elderly.

13. Put these ideas and some like them in a basket and have your child draw one out for a surprise adventure!

Why is anxiety so rampant among kids today? What's the magic age for giving my child his first cell phone? Her first social media account? How do I teach my teenager things like gratitude and respect in such an entitled and disrespectful world?

Melissa Trevathan and Sissy Goff hear these types of questions on a daily basis in their counseling offices and at parenting events across the country. Today, more than ever before, we live in a culture that is at war against our parenting. And today, more than ever before, we're meeting parents who feel lost as to how to help.

This book does just that. It addresses the issues we hear parents struggling with the most when it comes to raising their children (technology, disrespect, entitlement, substance abuse, anxiety, depression, etc.), but it doesn't stop there. Melissa and Sissy move through those modern-day troubles to get back to the vintage values we all deeply value in the lives of kids. They help you discover—whether your child is a toddler or a teenager—what it looks like to cultivate kindness, gratitude, integrity, responsibility and more in the lives of the kids you love.

Modern Parents, Vintage Values, Revised and Updated offers you a roadmap—a way through the hurdles you are facing today in your parenting—helping you discover more of how to instill those true, foundational, vintage values that will make a lasting difference in the lives of your kids . . . values that are built upon an unshakable foundation of faith and hope. And that's ultimately where this map will lead—to Christ—and to what it looks like for both you and your kids to have hope in Him in these changing times.

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