

The Effects of Text Messaging

Today the news interviewed three teens that did a lot of text messaging. Two girls averaged sending over 34,000 texts per month and one boy averaged over 35,000 texts per month. The young man had an itemized list of 750 pages in one month! This medium has some significant benefits in the day in which we live. It allows for a message to be sent without having to use a pen or pencil. I like to use it for numbers. I have a hard time reading the numbers I write down. My fours often look like nines or my sixes sometimes look like zeroes. So when somebody says, "Pastor, would you call..." and then they text a number, I never have a problem reading it. Simple requests, answers or statements save time without all the cordial formal exchanges that accompany conversation. Texting can be time saving. Texting can transfer short, powerful and meaningful information such as: "we won; meet at 7; Happy Birthday! and I love you!"

I am thankful for the good use of texting, but I would also like to make some points about things of which to beware with texting:

1. Text messaging allows for quick, impersonal cruelty with long-term consequences.

Unkind messages cannot be pulled back. Once you press send, it's done. If you did not think through something, two or three words could literally devastate. Just imagine how many hearts have been broken by "It's over; good-bye; don't ever call again; you're fired; or you're a loser."

When important, serious messages must be delivered, it is best to do so face-to-face. Face-to-face requires answering questions, accountability and explaining exactly what you mean if what you say can be taken more than one way. Lynne Truss, the British author, gives the following story in her book dealing with modern problems of using proper English and punctuation:

A panda walks into a café. He orders a sandwich, eats it, then draws a gun and proceeds to fire it at the other patrons. 'Why?' asks the confused, surviving waiter amidst the carnage, as the panda makes towards the exit. The panda produces a badly punctuated wildlife manual and tosses it over his shoulder. 'Well, I'm a panda', he says, at the door. 'Look it up.' The waiter turns to the relevant entry in the manual and, sure enough, finds an explanation: Panda. Large black-and-white bear-like mammal, native to China. Eats, shoots and leaves." Isn't it amazing, although we may be laughing, one comma left out changes everything.

Clear communication has always mattered. When the British were receiving signals from across the English Channel during the Battle of Waterloo, the first signals read, "Wellington defeated...." Scores of English began to weep and mourn, until minutes later the entire message was finished which changed everything – "Wellington defeated Napoleon." One word left out and history changes. If you have some life-changing information, face-to-face is the way to go. *"Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift"* (Matthew 5:23,24).

2. Text messaging allows forbidden communication.

We have caught teen-agers text messaging in church. If the truth were known, we could catch some adults if we tried. Cheating has been done with the texting. Parents have forbidden communication between their kids and certain friends. Some kids may even deceive by saying, "I didn't call them!" No, but they did text them. *"Honour thy father and thy mother..."* (Exodus 20:12).

Think of the wonderful things we can learn from a lecture, a sermon or even a conversation with our family at meals, if we would just set the cell phone down and listen. *“Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God, and be more ready to hear, than to give the sacrifice of fools: for they consider not that they do evil. Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter any thing before God: for God is in heaven, and thou upon earth: therefore let thy words be few.”* (Ecclesiastes 5:1,2).

Many feel like they just have to communicate whenever they receive notice. The numbers of deaths are climbing due to cell phone use in the car and it is estimated that perhaps the most dangerous use is the text. When you take your eyes off the road and environment even for a moment, you can be in trouble. One of the saddest funerals to attend was the one where a young mother had dropped the phone and while reaching for it, went into a ditch and the baby was killed. There was nothing on that phone that was that important. It is highly suspected that the train crash last year in California, which injured 138 people and killed 25 people, was because the engineer was texting.

3. Text messaging allows for a great waste of time.

I am surprised at how fast time goes when we email or text message. There is an old saying, “So many books, so little time.” Think of the hours given to text messaging that could be used in Bible reading and good book reading! Walt Disney said, “There is more treasure in books than in all the pirate's loot on Treasure Island.” I would ask you to consider timing yourself when you text message, email, Face Book or Twitter. I am convinced time moves so fast when pre-occupied with these activities, we don't realize how much time is being used. I fear our youth are becoming illiterate due to the conveniences of our age. There is now serious proposition now to do away with teaching elementary children cursive writing. “Just teach them the keyboard” is the cry of some. Think of how many life-changing documents came through paper and ink: the Bible, the Magna Carta, the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution and the Bill of Rights. The prophet said, “...and I wrote them with ink in the book” (Jeremiah 36:18).

4. Text messaging allows the break down of personal the awareness of culpability.

Returning to the thoughts of point number one, we should have to give account of things we say. One day we shall: *“But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment”* (Matthew 12:36). Let us back up our speech by our life. I close with these words by Edgar Guest:

Sermons We See

I'd rather see a sermon than hear one any day,

I'd rather one should walk with me than merely show the way.

The eye's a better pupil and more willing than the ear;

Fine counsel is confusing, but example's always clear;

And the best of all the preachers are the men who live their creeds,

For to see the good in action is what everybody needs.

I can soon learn how to do it if you'll let me see it done.

I can watch your hands in action, but your tongue too fast may run.

And the lectures you deliver may be very wise and true;

But I'd rather get my lesson by observing what you do.

For I may misunderstand you and the high advice you give,

But there's no misunderstanding how you act and how you live.

- Pastor Pope -

[**Back to Pastor's Word**](#)