

THE PASTOR POST

Updates From The Council Room & The Pastor's Study



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SOME ADVICE FOR PARENTS

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This past Sunday, I hosted a “Can We Talk?” session focusing on the topic of advice for parents of adolescent children. Because some parents were unable to attend this session, and because I feel rather strongly about the helpfulness of this advice, I decided to share a summary of it in this issue.

First, let me state that the advice I am about to give is not my advice, it comes from the social psychologist, Jonathan Haidt. Second, let me confess that while I did employ parts of this advice with my own children, I have made mistakes as a parent. I wish I would have had Haidt’s insights when I was raising my children. As we have his insights now, and more data, I think it is worthwhile to share it. I am not suggesting this is the equivalent of biblical truth, but I am suggesting that parents should at least give him a hearing and consider what he is saying.

Jonathan Haidt has published many helpful books. His latest is entitled, *The Anxious Generation: How the Great Rewiring of Childhood is Causing an Epidemic of Mental Illness* (2024). As you can gather from the title, Haidt’s focus is the intersection of technology and adolescence.

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Advice For Parents (cont.)

In the book, Haidt cites the troubling data and trends regarding mental health issues among Generations Z and notes the correlation of the massive increases in these issues with the advent of the smartphone and the rise of social media. He notes that while this technology has affected all of us, it has had a particularly deleterious effect on adolescents given the stage of their brain development. He also notes that while parents have become overprotective with their children in the real world (restricting independent and unsupervised play), they have simultaneously become increasingly under protective in the digital world, which, he suggests, is far more dangerous. I won't give you all the details or data, you can read the book for that or review one of the many articles on the book (there is a particularly good one in *The Atlantic* authored by Haidt), but let me share with you his four recommendations:

- 1.No smartphones before high school (flip phones are fine)
- 2.No social media before 16
- 3.Phone-free schools (they exist - just ask my wife - shameless plug!)
- 4.More independence, free play, and responsibility in the real world

Some of these recommendations may seem impractical to implement, but Haidt provides advice regarding how to make them achievable. I encourage you to at least give him a hearing.

