

## **LESSON PLAN #1: “Faith and Facebook” (Wes Avram)**

### **Concept:**

The following four lesson plans offer a way to explore questions about Christian faith in a socially networked world through conversation, reflection with the essays, and consideration of their own social media engagement.

In this first lesson, participants will primarily explore Wes Avram’s observations about the impact of social media on our ways of being and acting in present culture, including one’s experience of boundaries. Participants will apply these observations to their own experience of connectedness to God and one another.

### **Setting:**

This lesson plan is intended for an adult Sunday school or small group discussion. Familiarity with modern social media and social networking is not required, but may aid in discussion.

### **Timeframe:**

The lesson is written for a 60-minute class period. Adjustments may be made to meet the needs of your particular educational setting.

### **Objectives:**

At the end of a one-hour session, the participant will be able to:

- 1) Articulate Avram’s concerns about social media’s impact on faith and life
- 2) Explore ways participants experience connection to God and one another
- 3) Reflect upon how social media impacts the participants’ experience of transcendence

### **Preparation:**

All participants should have read Wes Avram’s essay prior to arrival in the class. Prior to the class, arrange the classroom in a way that will promote conversation.

### **Materials:**

- Copies of Avram’s article
- Pens/pencils
- Paper for small groups to make notes
- Newsprint

### **Course Sequence:**

#### ***Opening***

As participants enter the room, invite them to take a piece of paper and pen. On one half of the paper, write down all of the ways that they have communicated with others in the past week. You may provide some examples (face-to-face, snail mail, email, texting, tweeting, phone, etc). On the other half of the paper, write down all of the ways they have communicated or experienced connection with God. You may provide some examples (worship, prayer, scriptural study, a walk,

conversation with a friend, service to the community, etc). Have participants hold onto these lists for later in the lesson.

Open with prayer. Invite participants to lift up the forms of communication they listed in a popcorn style during the prayer below:

*O Lord,  
who governs heavens and earth, time and space, and mediates all our connections,  
we lift up the abundance of ways that we seek connection to one another and with you:  
\*\*invite participants to state forms of communication\*\*  
Permeate these networks with your love and grace,  
cross the threshold of our hearts with your presence,  
cultivate in us the desire for genuine relationship,  
through the one whose mediating love saves us and guides us still, Christ Jesus, Amen.*

### **Presenting**

Avram posits that connection and connectedness to God and one another are significantly impacted by social media tools, both in how we act and how we understand the nature of those relationships. He argues that the diminishment of boundaries between self and others, public and private, space and time complicates our experience of transcendence and may impede our connection to God.

Begin by inviting the participants to name together some of Avram's key findings (concerns) about social media engagement and its implications on faith. Write their observations on newsprint for a visual reminder throughout the lesson.

To dive deeper into the reading, split the participants into three groups to discuss the quotes and subsequent questions below. Have one member of the group serve as a scribe. After 5-10 minutes of small group conversation, invite the groups to gather again as a large group and share some of what they discussed.

Group 1:

“The telephone forever changed the idea of threshold, for no longer was the doorway the difference between inside and outside, intimate and shared, private and public.”

- What are characteristics of private space?
- How do characteristics of one's physical home differ from that of a virtual homepage? How are they similar?

Group 2:

“The basic experience of wired youth is of private and public less as spaces than as multiple networks of connection, disconnection, and desire...physical presence now temporarily supplements virtual presence rather than virtual presence temporarily enhancing physical presence.”

- How does virtual presence differ from physical presence? What similarities exist?
- How do you personally experience meaningful connection?
- How does/might virtual engagement enhance meaningful connection?
- How does/might it inhibit it?

Group 3:

Avram posits that the development of new technologies creates new experiences of connection beyond ourselves, but he questions, “This is connection, but it might not be connectedness.”

- What do you believe is the difference between connection and connectedness?
- How does the church enhance our experience of connection? of connectedness?
- How does technology enhance our experience of connection? of connectedness?

### *Exploring*

The development of social media tools is not new. Avram notes the communication shift from the telegraph to the telephone. Divide the participants again into three small groups. Assign each group one of the following historical technological inventions—the printing press, the telephone, and the Internet.

Discuss the following questions about the impact of one of these inventions on issues of communication, connection, and boundaries:

- In what ways did each of these inventions promote individual's connection to God? to one another?
- How did it change our social norms and expectations for communication?
- In what ways did this technological development change the boundaries between public and private?

### *Responding*

Avram's concerns about social media and technology relate to our experience of connection and connectedness to God and one another. Invite participants to review the list of forms of communication they made at the opening of the session. Reflect in small groups of 3-4 on their own experience, using the following questions as a guide:

- Using your list of communication strategies from the beginning of the class, what forms of communication promote your feeling of connection?
- Think of a time when you have felt most connected to God. What made you feel connected? What methods of communication with God make you feel most connected?
- How might our experiences of connection with God help inform how we can seek deeper connection with one another? How might our experiences of connection with one another help us seek a stronger connection with God?
- What communication practices should we adopt and practice regularly? What practices should we set aside?
- How might engagement with social media and technology help or hinder these practices?
- What boundaries might need to be put in place to create space to nurture one's relationship with God, oneself, or one's family?

After everyone in the group has had the opportunity to share in small groups, gather again as one large group. Invite participants to share one or two of the most significant observations from their group.

### *Closing*

Close with a prayer in your own words or the following:

*Holy God, who governs time and space and binds us closer together in love, through your covenant promise, you have sought relationship and connection with your people throughout history. As your people met you in a burning bush, a blinding light, the breaking of bread, and a still small voice, make your presence known in our lives still today. By your grace, quiet the noises and flurry of communication that encumber our ability patiently to seek you. Open us to experience you in the connections*

*and practices that link us to one another and to you so that our lives may reflect the loving, genuine relationship your Son modeled for us. In Christ's name, Amen.*

## LESSON PLAN #2:

### “Digital Natives, the Importance of the Nonverbal, and Niebuhr” (David G. Forney)

#### **Concept:**

In the second lesson, participants will join Forney in exploring and responding to Avram's observations. Participants will further consider the relationship between faith and social media and the *role of the church* in engaging multiple communication strategies.

#### **Setting:**

This lesson plan is intended for an adult Sunday school or small group discussion. Familiarity with modern social media and social networking is not required, but may aid in discussion.

#### **Timeframe:**

The lesson is written for a 60-minute class period. Adjustments may be made to meet the needs of your particular educational setting.

#### **Objectives:**

At the end of a one-hour session, the participant will be able to:

- 1) Consider shifting sources for acquiring information and its impact on the church
- 2) Explore the role of multi-sensory communication in culture and church
- 3) Evaluate the relationship between church and social media using Niebuhr's typologies

#### **Preparation:**

All participants should have read David Forney's and Wes Avram's essays prior to arrival in the class. Prepare the classroom in a setting conducive for conversation. Create a handout using the information listed in the *Presenting* section and any additional examples of your choosing (whether you choose to use the examples listed below or to generate your own list, the goal is to have a variety of information types from basic facts to more philosophical concepts).

#### **Materials:**

- Copies of Forney's article
- Pens/pencils
- Handouts
- Newsprint
- Markers

#### **Course Sequence:**

##### ***Opening***

Hang five sheets of newsprint around the room and on each sheet list one of the five senses—sight, hearing, smell, touch, and taste. As participants enter, invite them to take markers and write ways that they use each sense in Sunday worship. Leave these displayed for later in the lesson.

Once everyone has arrived and had a chance to respond on at least one sheet, gather for an opening prayer. Forney emphasizes the importance of non-verbal, multi-sensory communication; you may consider a prayer that includes multiple senses or allow for an eyes-open prayer where individuals may look at one another or at an object—a candle, a cross—in the room as they pray.

You may pray using your own words or the prayer below:

*Incarnate God,*

*We give you thanks for sending your son, Jesus Christ,  
who made your presence known tangibly in this world:  
who hugged friends,  
who looked upon the crowds with compassion,  
who heard the cries of those in need and offered healing,  
who tasted sweet wine at a Canaan wedding and bitter wine on the cross,  
who rejoiced in the smell of freshly baked bread that, when broken,  
enabled us to see and know him fully.*

*Meet us still in the tangible truths of community, made known through deep connection with one another.*

*Challenge us to see the ways in which the gift of technology can foster connection as well. Open us to the ways that you are moving in the digital world as part of your created world. For Christ's sake, Amen.*

### ***Presenting***

Forney introduces the concept of digital natives versus digital immigrants and raises consideration for the shifting role technology has in acquiring information. He further offers the helpful critique that age, gender, ethnicity, social-economic status, geography and other circumstances can contribute to access issues that muddy the waters of who qualifies as a “digital native.”

Begin the class by helping flesh out this definition for the participants in the room. Invite individuals to take a few minutes to respond individually to your prepared handout (see below). The handout should include a variety of types of information and ask participants to consider where they would look to learn particular information.

#### **Digital Natives v. Digital Immigrants**

Where would you look and how would you learn necessary information in the following circumstances? What resources/technologies (if any) would you use?

- Make a dinner reservation at a local restaurant
- Contact a friend who has moved to a new city
- Find out the time church youth group meets this week
- Purchase a plane ticket for an upcoming trip
- Create a budget for the fall church retreat
- Identify a new doctor for primary care
- Gather directions for a road trip to see your cousins in a neighboring state
- Understand the church's stance on a social issue
- Find out what happened in current events this week
- Identify the author of *Christ and Culture* (if you hadn't read the essay for today)
- Recall who won the World Series in 1918
- Learn the Great Ends of the church
- Communicate with a close friend
- Name the chapter and verse for the Ten Commandments

Once everyone has had a chance to work on this individually for several minutes, select several from the list and invite participants to share their responses. Consider the variety of sources individuals use to learn. Does anyone in the group self-identify as a digital native? a digital immigrant? What do participants believe is gained by the use of technology? What is lost? Forney raises the question about the impact of technology. Invite the group to discuss what impacts they already see—positive and negative—and what questions remain for them.

Now consider the senses needed to complete the tasks on their handout. To what extent are all five senses used in these varied tasks and settings? What's missing? Revisit the newsprint sheets on the wall. To what extent are all five senses used in worship life as a church? What's missing?

Discuss as a group Forney's questions raised in the essay:

- What changes might the church experience as people rely more on digital communications?
- What do we stand to lose if there is significant underdevelopment of non-verbal communication when we come face-to-face in worship, education, and mission?
- What might the church's role be in helping people experience richer forms of embodied communication as the body of Christ?

### *Exploring*

Forney's questions about non-verbal communication and digital natives v. digital immigrants all point toward the issue of the church's relationship with culture. His primary critique of Avram's work is rooted in differences in how the church should relate to and engage the world around it.

Briefly introduce Niebuhr's typology using Forney's summary of the five typologies. You may ask participants to identify them or explain their understanding of each based on the reading.

Forney argues that Avram fits the typology "Christ and culture in paradox" and leans toward "Christ against culture" at times. He challenges Avram that perhaps "Christ transforming culture" is a more productive way to theologically engage the rapidly shifting technological scene. Divide the participants into five groups, one for each of the typologies. If the class is small, you may choose to only split into three groups, using the three that Forney emphasizes—paradox, against culture, and transforming culture.

Take time for each group to explore their typology, using the following discussion questions as a guide:

- What is Christ's relationship to a smart phone or other digital device in this typology?
- How does this typology fit your experience of Christ's relationship to culture?
- In what ways is this typology helpful in gauging and guiding our relationship to technology?
- What helpful instruction or critique might this typology offer for the church's engagement with technology?

Return to the group to share responses and reflect together. Having heard each group's consideration of the different typologies, which typology does the class believe is the most helpful or best representation of the relationship between Christ and social media today?

### *Responding*

Now that the groups have shared their analysis of their assigned typology, return to the small groups to reflect further on their own opinion. Forney emphasized “Christ transforming culture” and Avram “Christ and culture in paradox.” Reflect upon and discuss the following questions with the individuals in the small groups:

- With which typology do you most identify in your own faith life? Why?
- How might that typology inform how you currently engage technology?
- What changes might be required in your life?
- What role should the church play in relating to technology if you live into this typology?

### ***Closing***

Close together in prayer, using the prayer below or a prayer of your choosing:

*Holy Christ, who came in the flesh to embody truth and meets us in the space between one another better than any technology ever can, we give thanks that, by your power, we are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another, for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit, by whose sovereign love we are able to pray, Amen.*

## **LESSON PLAN #3: Redefining Connectedness (Raj Nadella)**

### **Concept:**

In the third lesson, participants will reflect upon Nadella's writing by exploring the role of space and time in faith community formation. Further, participants will consider the role of technology in forming and engaging as a faith community.

### **Setting:**

This lesson plan is intended for an adult Sunday school or small group discussion. Familiarity with modern social media and social networking is not required, but may aid in discussion.

### **Timeframe:**

The lesson is written for a 60-minute class period. Adjustments may be made to meet the needs of your particular educational setting.

### **Objectives:**

At the end of a one-hour session, the participant will be able to:

- 1) Name characteristics of sacred space
- 2) Define what commitment to a faith community or social cause requires
- 3) Apply definitions of sacred space and commitment to one's present faith communities

### **Preparation:**

All participants should have read Nadella's response prior to arrival in the class. Prior to the class, arrange the classroom chairs in a circle so that there is an open space in the middle of the room.

### **Materials:**

- Bibles
- Copies of Nadella's article
- Pens/pencils
- Newsprint
- Markers

- Votive candles and matches

### **Course Sequence:**

#### ***Opening***

As each individual enters the room, invite him or her to take a votive candle, place it in the center of the circle of chairs and light the candle. Once their candle has been lit, invite them to sit prayerfully and quietly and focus on the light. As soon as everyone has gathered, open the time in prayer.

If your group enjoys singing, you may choose to open by singing the Taize text “Come and Fill Our Hearts” several times. Offer a brief spoken prayer, using your own words or the words printed below:

*As the sun rises each morning, O Lord, we are reminded that you bring light into this world.*

*As the light of these candles permeates the room,  
fill this time with your radiance and your goodness.*

*Enter this holy space that we might experience your presence here  
and grow deeper in relationship with you and one another;  
in the name of Jesus Christ, the true light of the world, Amen.*

#### ***Presenting/Exploring***

Nadella’s reflection focuses on issues of physical and emotional commitment as it relates to our engagement with social media and technology. Building upon Avram’s concern about thresholds between public and private space, Nadella invites exploration of the importance of sacred space in the experience of meaning making. He observes, “spaces where significant, life-altering events have occurred...become personal and sacred.” Further, “to belong to a community is to ‘be’ with that community and to be connected to it in a particular space.”

Consider a variety of sacred spaces throughout scripture. Divide the group into three smaller groups, providing each with one of the scripture passages listed below. Invite the group to read the scripture aloud together and then reflect on the questions below:

- Scripture Passages
  - Exodus 3:1-7—Moses and the Burning Bush
  - 1 Kings 8:1-13—Solomon’s Dedication of the Temple
  - Luke 22:7-20—Jesus and the Disciples’ Passover Meal
- Discussion questions
  - Describe the setting of this passage. What, if anything, is distinctive about the space? If you were to walk by this location on a random Tuesday would you notice anything particular about it?
  - What makes this space sacred?
  - How does the presence of this space create meaning for the community?

Once each group has had time to study their passage and discuss, return to the larger group. Invite each group to share a summary of their passage and what makes the mentioned space sacred. On a piece of newsprint, record for the larger group any characteristics of sacred space highlighted by this passage.

Nadella’s article engages both space and time in exploring the implications of social media on our lives and our communities. He raises concern about authenticity and commitment in relationships—



among individuals, communities, and social movements—and acknowledges the time and intentionality required. Beyond sacred space, explore together what constitutes a commitment to relationships and community using the following exercise:

Return to the three smaller groups, giving each group a different kind of relationship or community to consider: one's immediate family, a congregation/faith community, a political or social movement or organization of your choosing (i.e., Civil Rights Movement, Occupy Wall Street, the NRA, the United Nations). Take a few minutes to discuss the following questions together in a small group:

- What kind of commitment is required to “belong” to this group?
- How would an outsider know you were a part of this community?
- What kind of contribution is required? What kind of sacrifice?
- In what ways might social media enhance that commitment? In what ways would using social media create distance?

Return to the larger group and invite each small group to share their reflections. On an additional sheet of paper, record for the larger group additional criteria for commitment or belonging to a social group.

### *Responding*

Nadella's observations invite reflection on the nature of our own faith communities and the commitment of time, shared space, and embodied experience required to belong. During the remaining time, facilitate a full-group conversation about your specific congregation or faith community. Consider the lists you have posted on newsprint of the characteristics of sacred space and the criteria for community engagement. You may use the following prompts as a guide for this conversation:

- What spaces are considered sacred for your faith community? Why?
- What particular stories or traditions give meaning to the community?
- What scriptural narrative is your particular congregation living out together?
- What is required of its members to belong?
- What role does technology or social media play in the life of the community?
- Would it be possible to be a virtual member of the faith community? Why or why not?

### *Closing*

Of all the criteria for belonging to a group, faith communities use liturgy and music to help define and bind a community together. Choose a prayer or a hymn that is familiar and formative for your faith community to close your time together. If there is a particular prayer that is bedrock to your faith community, sing or pray that. Otherwise, pray the Lord's Prayer or sing the Doxology together, acknowledging the ways that these words bind the community in this particular space and the way that this liturgy connects the community to the whole church across time and space.

## **LESSON PLAN #4: “Faith and Community in the Digital Age” (Stacey Simpson Duke)**

### **Concept:**

In the fourth lesson, participants will explore Duke's challenge to engage and respond to the reality of technologies and social media structures. Participants will consider the nature of the church and

how the church has and may continue to engage technologies to form and deepen Christian community.

**Setting:**

This lesson plan is intended for an adult Sunday school or small group discussion. Familiarity with modern social media and social networking is not required, but may aid in discussion.

**Timeframe:**

The lesson is written for a 60-minute class period. Adjustments may be made to meet the needs of your particular educational setting.

**Objectives:**

At the end of a one-hour session, the participant will be able to:

- 1) Compare Avram and Duke's attitudes toward technological engagement for the church
- 2) Consider the defining characteristics and focal practices of faith communities
- 3) Reflect upon how social media can be incorporated into church life and mission
- 4) Apply technology to one's faith life

**Preparation:**

All participants should have read Avram's essay and Stacy Simpson Duke's response prior to arrival in the class. Prior to the class, arrange the classroom in a way that will promote conversation.

**Materials:**

- Bibles
- Copies of Duke's article
- Pens/pencils
- Paper for small groups to make notes

**Course Sequence:**

***Opening***

Invite participants to gather in chairs conducive to discussion and allow the group to greet one another. Begin by reading Psalm 46:10. Open with a guided, centering prayer that welcomes silence and space for reflection.

*Find a comfortable place to sit in the room.*

*Silence all cell phones and devices that make noise.*

*Silence all speech and chatter in the room.*

*Close your eyes. Notice the sounds that still persist outside in the world*

*—perhaps cars driving by, the rustling of trees, voices in the hallway.*

*Allow your mind to quiet those sounds that distract you.*

*Notice the thoughts and the noise that persists in your own mind.*

*Allow your mind to quiet those thoughts as well.*

*Take a deep breath in and out.*

*Breathe in God's Spirit. Breathe out God's grace.*

*Sit in silence for 30 seconds to one minute.*

Take a moment and ask the group to reflect:

- What happened? What did you notice?

- In what ways, if any, did you experience God’s transcendence or God’s imminence?

### *Presenting*

Avram’s lead article emphasizes concerns about the impact of pervasive uses of social networking on our ways of being, healthy boundaries, and the intuition of transcendence. Duke concurs with some of Avram’s concerns but takes a more hopeful tone. Invite students to compare and contrast the two authors:

- Recall together two or three of Avram’s primary observations.
- In what ways does Duke agree with Avram’s concerns about technology?
- In what ways does Duke disagree with Avram’s concerns?

### *Exploring*

Duke realistically acknowledges that “there is no going back to our pre-digital state” and thus invites us to explore how this reality affects us spiritually, relationally, and missionally. She lifts up Borgmann’s idea of “focal practices” as a method to define and shape communities.

Divide the class into four small groups. Each group will be given a scripture passage below and invited to consider focal practices of the church. After splitting into groups, invite the small groups to read their passage together and respond to the following questions:

- Scripture passages:
  - Acts 2:44-47
  - Matthew 25: 31-40
  - Ephesians 4:1-13
  - 1 Corinthians 12:4-13
- Questions for discussion:
  - Borgmann defines a focal practice as “the decided, regular, and normally communal devotion to a focal thing.” What particular focal practices are outlined in the passage?
  - This passage offers one picture of what it means to be the church. What characteristics define or shape a Christian faith community?
  - What are the methods and technologies by which these practices are shared in scripture?
  - How are these practices lived out in the church today? What methods and technologies can be used to engage these practices today?

Return to a larger group and have someone from each group share the practices highlighted in their passage and ways those practices can be lived out today.

Duke is optimistic about the possibility of social networking engagement in the church but desires for that engagement to be faithful to the gospel and the purpose of the church. In the same small groups as before, make a list of criteria that could be used to evaluate whether a particular use of technology is faithful (example’s include: promotion of human connection, honest sharing, cultivation of relationships, engagement with scripture, spiritual growth of participants, prayer, etc.).

### *Responding*

Duke retains a hopeful attitude toward the engagement of social networking tools in the life of the church. Now that the group has a deeper understanding of the focal practices that define church, consider Duke’s question about missional opportunities that incorporate social networking again.

Duke offers an example from her own congregation: a Facebook “Lenten Journey.” Using the criteria the small groups has established, evaluate the success of this social networking event.

- In what ways was this practice an experience of “being church”?
- In what ways was it lacking?

Gather again in a large group and brainstorm together:

- What are some missional opportunities to engage social media in your own faith context?
- What has been tried? What would you like to try?

### *Closing*

The closing prayer intends to create an opportunity to engage social networking and technology in one’s faith, using technologies with which the participants are familiar.

Have participants pair off to share prayer requests. Take a minute or two for each individual to share particular prayer requests with their partner. The partner is invited to listen carefully to the prayer requests; he or she may want to write them down. As a pair, decide in what way they can support each other in prayer throughout the week and what means of technology they will use to check in with each other—telephone, text, email, face-to-face, etc. Exchange necessary numbers, email addresses, etc. and invite participants to covenant with each other regarding how and when they will reconnect.

To begin the process of supporting one another in prayer, gather back in a circle. Invite each individual to pray aloud for their partner, passing the prayer around the circle until each person has had their prayer concerns raised before God. You may then choose to close by saying the Lord’s Prayer together.