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A Newsletter of The Amy Foundation



Think before you post

By Kevin DeYoung

I have been blogging—almost every day, normally 5 or 6 days a week—for five and a half years. I never imagined this would be a significant part of my ministry. I never thought I would write as much as I do. When I starting blogging at the beginning of 2009, I never, ever, ever thought I would still be doing this in the summer of 2014. Others have been going at this longer than I have, but still, five years is a long time in blogger years.

And in these five years I've had plenty of occasions to reflect on the nature of blogging, the possibilities of social media, and the pitfalls of everyone being connected to everyone else all the time. I made fun of bloggers until I started a blog. I made fun of Facebook and Twitter, and now I'm on both. I fit the demographic of Gen Xers and Millennials who spend too much time online and exert too much emotional energy in keeping up to date on the latest internet scuffles and kerfuffles.

I'm thankful for blogs and tweets and posts and embeds and links and all the rest. God is no Luddite when it comes to defending his name and proclaiming the gospel. And yet, on many days I would be thrilled if all digital sound and fury disappeared and we went back to the slow churn of books, phone calls, journal articles, newsletters, and (gasp!) face to face conversation.

But we won't and we aren't. So we need to think about how to post, what to post, and when to post. As Christians, we need to be more prayerful, careful, and biblical about our online

presence. After more than five years of blogging—less than that with Twitter and Facebook—and having gleaned lots of wisdom from others and having made lots of mistakes myself, here are some things to think about before you hit “publish” on your next blog post, status update, comment, or tweet.

Is this idea, question, or rant only half baked? The internet is public space. As such, it is not the place for every crazy thought or personal revelation you've ever had. Obviously, there is nothing wrong with putting out certain ideas tentatively, in hopes that your thinking can be sharpened and refined. But don't pull things out of your mental or emotional or experiential box that you may want to put back later. If you want to spill your guts and be completely raw and try out far flung new theories, keep a journal.

Have I considered that anyone anywhere at any time could see this? When I started blogging I knew people might read it, but I never seriously considered how public a post could be. After my second day of blogging a friend emailed me, “Wow, people are actually reading your blog. Very cool. But just remember this is going out there to everyone and people are going to see it.” At that time my friend was only talking about dozens or maybe hundreds of views. But his admonition was apt no matter the scale. No matter how many followers or friends you have, no matter how many subscribers, no matter how micro or macro your normal traffic, you have to consider that anything you put online can be seen by almost anyone on the planet. Are you sure you want to post that picture, slam that person, share that secret, make that accusation, go on that hilariously caustic riff?

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As Christians, we need to be more prayerful, careful, and biblical about our online presence.

Editor:

Mary Jackson

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Think before you post (Cont. from Page 1)

Do I really know what I'm talking about? One of the great things about working on my PhD is that I can see more clearly how hard it is to really, truly be an expert in something. The internet is full of amateurs who think they are experts. That doesn't mean you can't voice an opinion about the Hobby Lobby case without being a lawyer or that you can't explain the Bible without a seminary degree. It does mean that we should at least pause before posting to consider whether our brilliant manifesto is anything more than opinion rooted in speculation, based on hearsay, buttressed by a 45 second Google search.

What if I run into this person later today? Let me share another lesson I learned from an early blogging mistake. One of my first posts was a snarky jab at another author I disagreed with. A few days later I was speaking at an event and saw that this person's colleague and friend was at a table across the room. As soon as he saw me he made a straight line for my table and proceeded to dress me down for my snarky post. It was not a pleasant experience, in part because few people like this sort of confrontation, and because this man's friend had a point. For me as a no-name blogger it never registered that this big-name author I was tweaking was actually a real person. I never considered that he might get wind of my post, or that he might have friends, or that he might have a wife and kids, or that he might be having a bad day, or that he may be in the midst of profound grief, or that he might have had a much harder life than I've have, or that this famous pastor or author or leader or athlete was just like me in most ways, or that he could get in contact with me, or that I could meet him or someone close to him at anytime.

Again, there is nothing wrong with disagreement, even sharp disagreement. Even satire has its place. But you shouldn't be a bigger man behind the keyboard than you would be across the table from someone. Ever since this painful experience in the early days of blogging, I've tried to think with every polemical piece "Would I say this same thing if he or she were in the room with me right now?"

Will I feel good about this post later? Boy is it tempting to send off that witty retort in the midst of the battle. Dropping the bomb can feel so good. But it is often unwise. Why do we think that the biblical injunction to be quick to listen and slow to speak ([James 1:19](#)) applies to everything else except the internet? I know there is the rush to get the scoop. I know that we expect instant denunciations from everyone anytime something doesn't look right. I know that in the heat of the moment it cools you off to

fight fire with fire. But at the end of the day you need to be able put your head on your pillow and sleep with a clear conscience.

Too much of our online commentary is of the "post first, ask questions later" variety. When we rush to voice our opinion on everything under the sun it makes changing our mind that much harder when we learn five minutes or five days or five years later we didn't know what we were talking about. It makes repentance harder as a 30 year-old when we start to be embarrassed for the insouciance and ignorance we specialized in as a 20 year-old. Why not put off posting today what you could regret tomorrow?

Have I sought the counsel of others? Almost every blog I write is read by someone else before I post it. First by my assistant, sometimes by other staff members, often by other friends in ministry, and occasionally by my wife. If I'm writing something controversial or polemical I always send it to one or more friends before posting the piece. I can't tell you how many headaches I've been spared, how many silly lines I've deleted, or how many posts I've scrapped altogether. I'd rather go to sleep regretting the time I put in to an article I never posted or a comment I never made, instead of repenting of a stupid thought that had no business being made public. If you don't have a multitude of good counselors for your online life, get them ([Prov. 15:22](#)).

Do I have this person's phone number? It's been explained many times that the process of confrontation laid out in Matthew 18 is not meant to eliminate public discourse. You don't have to send me an email before you write a critical review of one of my books or before disagreeing with a blog post. Public material can be dealt with publically. But at the same time, we should not do personal work in public space. That's why the phone number question is a good rule of thumb (a rule I've followed at times and should have followed at other times). The closer someone is to you the more incumbent it is upon you to try to settle your disagreements personally before going public, especially if those disagreements have gotten personal.

This point should be commonsense, but it is easily forgotten. And you end up with one part of the family blasting another part of the family online, church members going after other church members, parishioners critiquing their pastor, and pastors going after congregants. Pick up the phone! Don't settle for public spats over private conversation.

(This post was originally published on June 10, 2014. It is reprinted with permission from the author. To read it in its entirety, go to The Gospel Coalition, www.thegospelcoalition.org.

Book Review Basics

By Mary Jackson

I have memories of bad books. Like salt when I expected sugar, they left an unpleasant, lingering taste. Most recently I ordered a book thinking it was review-worthy after an old friend raved about the author. Upon reading, I found myself concerned for this friend and disappointed in myself that I hadn't done my homework.

I've had to educate myself in recent years to find what is good as my kids have become avid readers, friends more often seek recommendations, and my own book searches expand. Now, I hit the library or Amazon with lists in hand. To the best of our ability, we make educated choices about we read and recommend to others.

Our family has been greatly aided in this process by trustworthy book blogs and online reviewers. For a long time book reviews primarily served school and public librarians, and book catalogues provided little information about actual content. Now, we have a broadening perspective on worldviews and the advantage of the Internet, which allows us as Christians and parents to make better choices. This is important as we seek to love God with all of our heart, soul, and mind, and guard our hearts with diligence, "for from it flow the springs of life," (Proverbs 4:23).

A book reviewer serves a worthy cause. We need more of them. Those with a solid biblical understanding can help us sift through new and enticing titles and fill our minds and hearts with what is true, noble, right, pure, lovely and admirable. If God calls you to such a task, here are some things to keep in mind:

Those with a solid biblical understanding can help us sift through new and enticing titles and fill our minds and hearts with what is true, noble, right, pure, lovely and admirable.

When reading, take notes. Start with a thorough reading of your selected title. Some prefer to take notes as they go. Others like to read a book through once, flagging pages that stand out, and then go back through to draw out major points.

Pray and consider God's Word. Much of my writing comes before I've even put words on the screen. Ask God to give you His perspective on what you've read. Humbly draw from and apply God's Word, for it is "profitable for teaching...for training in righteousness," (2 Timothy 3:16). Also realize that we are not the final judge of other's work.

Consider your opening. That first sentence sets a tone for your entire review. It can enliven and give structure to rest of your review, making it easier for others to read. Find something that grabs your audience's attention. It could be a question, a story, or an oddity contained in the book. It could be context that allows the reader to identify and contextualize an unfamiliar author or title.

Keep it short. Reviews are generally brief (100-400 words). You may have some great notes, but this means you have to pare it down and decide what is most important. When considering your points, ask yourself what will give the readers a sense of the book's unique style, and what points relate to the book as a whole. How can you portray the author's worldview and any cautions or concerns succinctly?

Revise and refine. Here is the hard part. Once you have a first draft, go back through and look for redundancy. Is there too much description? Did you forget something important? Can any of the sentences be condensed or combined?

Happy reviewing!

The Amy Writing Awards include an annual first prize of \$10,000. Second prize is \$5,000, third prize is \$4,000, fourth prize is \$3,000, and fifth prize is \$2,000. Up to 10 more awards for outstanding merit are for \$1,000 each.

The Awards are designed to recognize creative, skillful journalism that applies biblical principles to stories about issues and lives. The goal is for non-Christian readers to see the relevance of biblical truth and for Christian readers to become disciples. To find out more about specific guidelines and to read last year's winning entries, visit: www.worldmag.com/amyawards.

The deadline for submitting entries is **January 15, 2015**.

Book Reviews on the Web

▶ Redeemed Reader reviews good and popular children's books for all different age groups from a Christian perspective: www.redeemedreader.com

▶ Books for adults: Tim Challies offers good, insightful reviews on topics like theology, culture, and leadership: <http://www.challies.com/book-reviews>

▶ WORLD Magazine offers its Saturday "Weekend Reads" and weekly "Web Reads" online at www.wng.org. It's print edition includes book reviews and an annual Books issue that unveils its "Book of the Year."

▶ John Piper's Desiring God lists the "14 Best Books of 2014" at www.desiringgod.org/blog/posts/14-best-books-of-2014.

Dudley Hall is the president of Kerygma Ventures, an organization that helps equip believers and churches to proclaim the gospel message. He is a teacher, consultant, and author of several books including *Grace Works*. He holds a Masters of Divinity from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. Dudley and his wife Betsy live in Grapevine, Texas. They have two grown children and four grandkids.

Amy Writing Awards

Don't miss an opportunity to submit your published work for the 2014 Amy Writing Awards. See <http://www.worldmag.com/amyawards/> for more details.

Protection against deception

By Dudley Hall

I say this in order that no one may delude you with plausible arguments. For though I am absent in body, yet I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good order and the firmness of your faith in Christ.

Colossians 2:4-5 (ESV)

Everyone likes a mystery. There is something in us that knows there is reality beyond our reach. We resent our limitations of knowledge and are vulnerable to high-sounding prospects of discovering the newest truth or the most novel interpretation.

Charlatans take advantage of this propensity. They offer something besides the simple story of creation, redemption, and glory. They insinuate that we can find the final piece to the puzzle and the ultimate treasure in paths outside the revelation of Jesus Christ. If we will only pledge loyalty to their scheme, we will be in the elite few who are privileged to see behind the veil of human complexity. They offer us acceptance in their privileged band, and the opportunity to climb the ladder of significance—if only we leave that tired ole belief in the God who has made the way to the Father pass through the eternal Son.

Paul says their arguments are “plausible.” They make sense to the sensory mind. Of course, the re-

ward is given to those who do what it takes to get it. There are instructions to follow *in order* to obtain the prize. The offensive thought that we can't do this is rejected as passive and unworthy of human endeavor. So the gospel is abandoned. There is no glory to be gained for us if we can't muster enough gravitas to qualify.

The New Testament gospel is the announcement that all the longing in the human soul for mystery is satisfied in the relational knowledge of Jesus who is the sum of all things spiritual. No human mind would have ever come up with the story told in the Bible's

view of history. No one figured that the Lion of Judah who would defeat all enemies would be a slain lamb who was alive and ruling from the throne. No one could fathom a kind of power that would raise the dead and melt hearts of stone. Not even the best Jewish scholar in Old Testament time fully understood that one man would become the head of a new race that would fulfill everything prophesied about Israel's hope and the world's savior. Those who hear and be-

lieve the announcement find a rest in their souls that is not enticed by the various offerings of past or present mystery religions.

When we have been found by Christ, we have found what we have forever been looking for. If we can't see that we must stop and take a deeper look.

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From those of us at The Amy Foundation and the *Pen & Sword* Staff:

WE WISH YOU AND THOSE DEAR TO YOU A VERY

Merry Christmas

AND A HAPPY NEW YEAR!

For unto you is born this day in the City of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. Luke 2:11