

# Parenting in the digital age and the dangers of social media for youth

## TRANSCRIPT

October 1, 2024 | October 31, 2024

**NOTE: This transcript was AI-generated and has not been fully edited.**

### **Mark Turman (00:02.606)**

This is the Denison Forum podcast. I'm Mark Turman, executive director of Denison Forum and the host again today for our conversation where we hope to equip you to think biblically, to live holy, to serve redemptively and every opportunity that you have. And we're going to do that today by doing something that probably approaches more of a book club conversation. Now got to tell you, I'm 61 years old. I've never been in a book club, even though I've been both required to read a lot and also desirous to read a lot. so we're going to talk about one of the most popular books of the last few months called The Anxious Generation. And my conversation partner today is my teammate, Steph Thirling. Let me introduce you to her. You may not be familiar, but Denison Forum is actually one part of a larger four-part ministry called Denison Ministries.

Denison Forum focuses on current events and understanding them from a biblical perspective, what we talk about as news discerned differently. But we also have a devotional resource that helps people spend time with God. We call that First 15. Steph is the leader of our parenting ministry that's called Christian Parenting. You can find that at [ChristianParenting.org](http://ChristianParenting.org). And we'll get her to tell us a little bit more about Christian parenting and some of the resources there. But Steph, is a sought-after speaker in churches, in women's groups, moms groups. She's an author of a book called Raising Prayerful Kids, and she is a graduate of Fuller Theological Seminary with a master's degree in youth, family, and culture. And she's also a mom and has three great kids that will get her to tell us a few stories about maybe. She's married to Trevor and is a part of our ministry, and we're glad to have her again on the Denison forum podcast. Steph, how are you this morning?

### **Steph (02:02.814)**

I am great. Thank you so much for having me on.

### **Mark Turman (02:06.018)**

all right tell us anything you want to tell us that's not in the official bio that i just read tell us about your kids tell us about christian parenting whatever you want us to know

**Steph (02:17.995)**

Yeah, so I have three kids. We live in Minnesota and just outside of Minneapolis. And my kids are, I have two boys and a girl. So they're 12, 10, and eight. So I am in the midst of this technology stuff. So I think this book was really exciting for me, also very overwhelming and daunting for me because we are like right in it with technology and managing all the things.

We're in approximately 8,000 activities every week between baseball and karate and music and dance. And we're in this that really fun, but busy season of life. and then when I'm not driving around to activities and hanging out with my kids, I get to work for Christian parenting and we are primarily a podcast network. have a podcast for every parent. whatever it is that you're looking forward to equip yourself to raise your kids in the faith well. We have a podcast for that. We have printed resources. We have digital resources, articles, all the things you need to parent your kids confidently and raise them to love Jesus.

**Mark Turman (03:20.974)**

So tell us a little bit why Podcast is such a great platform for doing Christian parenting resources.

**Steph (03:29.371)**

Because we are busy. Parents are busy in a car driving to the 8,000 activities a night or driving to and from school. so podcasts are a great way for us to reach parents because you can put your AirPods in while you're doing chores or listen while you're in the car or on a walk with your kids if they're in the stroller age. You can just pop your AirPods in.

**Mark Turman (03:31.79)**

and usually in a car yeah

**Steph (03:54.531)**

turn on your car and you can be resource and encouraged in a way that doesn't involve taking a lot of time out of your already busy day. Because we're just in a unique season where there's not a lot of extra time.

**Mark Turman (04:05.752)**

Yeah, and which kind of goes in broad ways to what we want to talk about today, which is kind of the redemptive uses of technology. and you know, we're going to, we're going to be hard on technology in some ways in this conversation, because the book that we're talking about, the anxious generation written by Jonathan height is pretty hard on technology and particularly social media, but there are a lot of great redemptive uses. I'm an audio learner and, so I.

**Steph (04:13.293)**

Yeah.

**Mark Turman (04:35.522)**

found out a few years ago that I'm really actually a horrible reader. And so the idea of going anywhere, especially to the beach with a book does not appeal to me. unless that it, yeah, unless that's why I'm not in a book club, unless it's an audio book. If, if, I had been introduced to audio books 30 years ago, I think I would have been at a totally different place mentally. and in a lot of other ways as well.

**Steph (04:46.051)**

That's why you've never been in a book club.

**Mark Turman (05:05.132)**

But, you know, the idea of being a parent sitting outside the orthodontic office, waiting on one of my kids to go in for their regular appointment and being able to listen to something that might equip me to deal with them in a more effective and a holy way, would've been great. there was some of that that came through Christian radio, when I was parenting, but, podcasting wasn't even really a thing when I was in the throes of parenting actively. And now as a grandparent with three preschool grandchildren, I'm like, okay, well, maybe this works better. And the great thing about podcasts, unlike radio, is you can turn them on and turn them back on, turn them off and turn them on when you need to. And that's a great opportunity. So we hope people will check out Christian Parenting and all the things that are there so many great resources including let me say this as we head into the holiday season they'll be some special things anything you want to say about resources you're planning for in the thanksgiving or Christmas season.

**Steph (06:15.703)**

Yeah, we have amazing Advent resources for families that whatever it is that your family is going to do successfully together, we have a resource for you. So we have resources that are like a devotional just for kids. That's very engaging, lots of activities, short and easy for them to do. All three of my kids love the Christian parenting. And First 15 is a partnership devotional. My kids love them. We have more like hands-on family activities and then we have things that ar just for parents too. So we like to say whatever's gonna set your family up for success because I think parents in general have grand ideas of the things they're going to do to equip their kids spiritually and to have all these family traditions and sometimes it doesn't work out because kids are kids and their intention spans are different or we get busy or holidays get exhausting. whatever is gonna set your family up for success, we probably have an Advent resource for you so that your family can stay focused on Jesus during the season.

**Mark Turman (07:18.05)**

Yep. Cause what, no matter what season of the year you're in, it's we're all dysfunctional families. Right. And, I remember before I ever had kids, one of my mentors said, the definition of a dysfunctional family is when mom and dad can't agree on how to raise the kids. And so that means all of us. And, and so it's, it is a challenge. And when you have centers raising centers, you're just going to have issues. Right. And, that's just going to be the reality. So.

**Steph (07:23.831)**

haha

**Steph (07:41.965)**

Yeah. Yeah.

**Mark Turman (07:46.488)**

Let's go. Let's talk a little bit about this book, the anxious generation. think I first heard about this book maybe back in February or March of this year when it was about to be released and, heard some of the noise and some of the, attention that this book was getting even before it was released. what, what's, what's been your awareness of the author Jonathan height, Steph.

**Steph (07:49.016)**

Mm-hmm.

**Mark Turman (08:14.651)**

was this your first encounter with him or had you run into him before?

**Steph (08:18.625)**

Yeah, it was. So you actually brought the book to our attention and encouraged us to all read it together as a leadership group. And so we did. I listened to it on Audible. I'm actually a physical book reader, but I did listen to this one and I started reading it, really loved it. Started talking to some of my friends about it. But since then, I cannot tell you how many people I have seen on my own social media feeds posting like a photo of the book or them reading it being like, everyone needs to read this book. So I do feel like I hadn't heard of him before. I had not read any of his work or any of his research, but since then I just feel like he's everywhere. Like everybody is reading this book or should be or at least knows about it.

**Mark Turman (09:00.44)**

Yeah. So it's really just taken off in a big way and you can, you can go online now and not only get the book, but you can see multiple interviews, multiple podcasts, with Jonathan height talking about the book and others talking about the book. I, this is not my first encounter with

him. I think this may be the third of his books that I've read, but he runs in certain circles. I think the proper terminology for Jonathan height is that he is a.

**Steph (09:04.227)**

Mm-hmm.

**Mark Turman (09:28.91)**

cultural psychologist or a Sociological psychiatrist or something of that nature works primarily in the area of sociology Some people may have heard of his book. He wrote a book called the coddling of the American mind and some other books about that talking about big sociological trends and psychological trends within large groups and So he wrote this book earlier, released this book earlier this year. and I heard him say just on another podcast, said the whole theme of this book is that parents in our culture and around the world are over protecting their kids in the real world, the physical world, and they are under protecting their kids online. does that reflect the book to you in the best way, or would you summarize it some other way, Steph?

**Steph (10:23.907)**

Nope, 100 % I think it can be summed up in that sentence for sure. And I think it is a very, very true sentence as well. I think he is definitely correct in that analysis.

**Mark Turman (10:38.19)**

Have you been as a mom and as a minister as well? Have you been kind of sensing this as a problem in the last number of years? How much of how much of it does he give us a language for what we've all been kind of sensing in our soul?

**Steph (10:56.353)**

Yeah, I think for sure. And I will start by saying that we are a technology family. We are not completely limited of technology. My kids have screen time limits. They have to do their homework first. know, if I ask them to do a chore, they have to do that. Some of the basic things. But we are not people who have completely eliminated technology from our home. And so I just want to start by saying that, just so people know that this is something that we wrestle with and that we continue to wrestle with. Our 12-year-old has a phone.

He has an iPhone. I said he would not get an iPhone, but because of the way the payment worked out, it made sense to have that over a flip phone. And then our 10-year-old and our eight-year-old actually have a phone that they share. And then they all have video games too. But they do have phones because they get dropped off at activities and payphones aren't around like they were when we were kids and... Yes, all the adults around them have phones that they could ask someone, but it just has been easier for us to make sure that when we drop them off places they have somewhere where they can reach us. it's easy to give your kids a phone at a younger age

than you would think because you want to be able to be connected to them when you're bringing them to their activities or dropping them off at a friend's house. Some parents like their kids to have their phones at school because they feel like if there's an emergency at school, they're able to text with them.

so there's a lot of reasons that people are giving their kids phones at a younger age, younger and younger all the time. But I think parents in general are stopping to ask like, is, is this the right thing to do? And if we do it, how do we do it? Well, and how do we keep our kids safe? think safety is something that parents are thinking about all the time, but I think he also is right that we think of safety as we can't leave them alone to go to the park or we could never drop them off to have a sleepover, but we can let them go online and play games with strangers on the internet who we have no idea what they're saying. Or we can give them social media like Snapchat that's going to disappear and they don't know what's on there. So it's really, really hard because we do think of safety as physical safety for our kids. But I think that one of the things that Jonathan points out in his book is that we've done a really good job at making it hard for a predator, child predator to be in the real world because we have started locking them up. We've started making laws and regulations. We've been dealing with this for so long that now they're smart enough to go onto the internet. And then we give our kids a device that gives them access to that. And we don't think about it because they're in the safety of our physical homes. But that's not necessarily enough.

**Mark Turman (13:41.72)**

Yeah. And that's, that's just one of the, of the dangers that we found, found out, you know, and, and a lot of what we're experiencing and what height writes about in this book is kind of the experience of the law of unintended consequences. I don't know that any of the people in the big tech world that created the technology and facilitated and, you know, made possible all that technology and particularly the internet and, and

**Steph (13:46.251)**

Mm-hmm.

**Mark Turman (14:10.08)**

smartphones and social media. I don't know that they had a master conspiracy plan for all of this, but what they did put in play, and I think height and others have called it. This is, is we put in play basically a massive social experiment, and had no real idea what it would do. And so, but to kind of frame the context a little bit more, I remember, you know, going back 40 years now, being 19, 20 years old. And the first time I ever heard.

One of my Christian friends say that he was raised in a Christian family and in, and for their family, they didn't even have a television. So this is 1980 and he's saying, look, my parents

decided that the television was not a helpful and holy influence in our lives. And so we just didn't have them. that was not a part of our family. And I thought to myself, I thought that, that's the strangest thing I've ever heard but it was not strange to him. and so that these issues of technology, no matter how technology moves forward, there's always a tension in a tug of war. my family was, was, and is a technology family. but I would say that my children, experienced much of some of the experiment of technology of smartphones and of social media that were detrimental to them and detrimental to the overall dynamic of our family. And so, we're kind of looking there. I was all that to say is, is that if I was raising children, particularly preteens and teenagers now, I would, I would have different boundaries and different rules because I just didn't know that, some of the detriment of the, of the effects could happen that, I think are now coming into clear view and so it's been helpful to me to kind of get a frame of how this all played out. Jonathan Haidt particularly is talking about kids, that are what are today called Gen Z, which are basically 10 years old to 25 years old, approximately those born around the year 2000. And then if you frame that in a technological aspect,

**Mark Turman (16:34.158)**

basically the internet starts to come to life around 1994. nine, 2007 is when, there comes the advent of what we know as high speed, broadband availability, the, iPhone or the smartphone, I should say that has internet capability, which is basically a powerful computer in your pocket.

That really comes about in 2007, but becomes really widely available and accessed by families and particularly by young people about, 2012, 2013. Okay. so now those kids have had those, those phones and they've had that kind of computing. We've all had that computing for about 10 years now on a wide scale, because even though it came out in 2007,

Most people took a year or two before they started actually getting the most up-to-date phone and the most up-to-date technology. So, he calls this out in the books, kind of a five year window, particularly, of people who were 10 to 15 years old from 2010 to 2025 or 2015, 2010, 2015, they started to experience life in a grand scale through their phone.

And through social media, particularly on their phone. And, he talks about this phrase. says they, this technology shifted us into an experiment of what he calls a phone based childhood versus a play based childhood. Steph kind of explain how you understand that. And do you think he's right in what he's describing as this kind of unintended consequence?

**Steph (18:26.179)**

Yeah, I can definitely tell you think he's right. And I can tell you some of my personal experience in my family too, which I think kind of helps put it in perspective. But what he's really saying is that we as humans are designed to learn through playing, through experimenting, through risk

taking, through socializing. The idea of just the best thing for our kids is to come home after school and run out into the neighborhood and like.

not see them again for a while. Like that's how we're supposed to learn and experience things. That's how our kids learn to problem solve. It's how they gain independence. It's just how they interact with you, how they learn to interact with other humans. And we have replaced that with screen time. And so a lot of times there's like kind of a blurred line too, because one of the arguments that parents have and kids have is that they're able to socialize through their screens.

And again, I've said my kids, they don't have their phones a ton, but they have Nintendo switches and they're very limited during the school week, but in the weekends they're allowed to play and they will play and they'll use microphones and talk with their friends while they're playing this video game. And sometimes after a while Trevor and I would be like, Hey, you are literally playing a video game with your friend. Why don't we call their parent and have you guys get together and play like go outside and

Go play basketball or go play in the lake or go do something fun instead of sitting on your couch in different homes, kind of interacting, but not because you're really just doing a simulation of playing. They're like playing with these characters in a video game, talking to each other through a screen, thinking they're getting proper socialization because they're talking to their friend, but they're not getting what their brains actually need to develop properly.

And that's a really confusing line for kids because they don't know that. The kids don't know that they need to be going outside and playing to develop properly. And so it's our job as parents to get them off those screens and get them together as a person. But it's also hard to do because we're busy and it's easy. It's easy to turn on a screen for your kids. It's really, really easy and it's very tempting and they love it. And then you can get into fights if, you know, you take it away and all the things that come with that. But...

**Steph (20:47.553)**

Yes, I see it all the time. It happens in my home. We do step in and stop it, but it is, they definitely socialize through screen time instead of face-to-face time.

**Mark Turman (20:59.758)**

So Steph, do you think that this is, this just a older people being, you know, grumpy, cause you know, I'm old enough to remember that there were some of these same kinds of conversations about the television, you know, what's wrong with our culture is that we now all sit down in front of the television to watch, something while we're eating instead of talking to each other, around the dinner table, like,



**Steph (21:14.115)**

Mm-hmm.

**Mark Turman (21:26.99)**

They did before televisions were invented We now all sit around the television and we watch a game or we watch a show and we eat our food instead of interacting with each other We watch the television. Is this just that same phenomenon on steroids or is there something even more different than that? Do you think?

**Steph (21:46.551)**

think there's something more here. I mean, it's the same concept, right? There's always been technology issues. We are always afraid of the technology that is coming. But what he refers to in this book is like a rewiring of our brain. Like we are changing the way our brains are wired because of the amount of time we spend on technology and how we use technology. I kind of feel like when we were talking about just... TV or the internet that was in your family computer that was in one space in your house that everyone had to fight over, for the, you got to get off if a phone call came in. Those things, you're just adding something to your life. You're adding some technology. But the way this technology is working is we're really taking away from our kids. We're taking away the ability to just go outside and play, the ability to be bored.

**Mark Turman (22:17.165)**

Right? Yep.

**Steph (22:36.877)**

Like that's important is kids are supposed to be bored and then figure out how to entertain themselves. We're taking that away from our kids when they're on technology all of the time. And we're also losing some people skills. Kids don't know how to call up other people and ask to get together or interact with each other in the same way that even I did because they're always texting or just interacting in this different way. And so I think we're losing some of those skills and you have to be really intentional to teach them those skills because it's not something that comes naturally anymore. So I think that there's truth to the fact that we've always been worried about technology, but there is something more to what we're doing here because at the end of the day, some of those people skills that you learn from having to call someone up to have a play date when you're really little, that continues to translate to someday you have to call up somebody and ask for a job.

**Mark Turman (23:37.826)**

Right. Or something else. as the Bible says, we're made for relationship first with God and then with each other. so much of the joy of life is found simply in relationship. I was in a meeting with about 60 people a couple of years ago and I tried to break the ice when I was talking to this

group and I said, what's your favorite place? Where do you love to go to just get away and have a vacation? Some people were mountain people.

**Steph (23:38.497)**

You know? Yeah.

**Mark Turman (24:07.126)**

Other people were, you know, beach people. Some people were river people. And then this one lady in the front said, you know, it's not about the place. It's about the people. It's about who you're with. It doesn't really matter if you're in the mountains or on the beach. does. It's who you're with. I thought that's just a profound insight. and you know, whether it's asking for a job or just enjoying feeling a sense of being connected to somebody, having a good friend, it really doesn't matter what you're doing as long as you have, people that you're, you're building deep connections with and deep fellowship with. and what this book points out for not only younger generations, but for all of us, which is, there is a quantitative significant, even massive difference between talking to somebody in a text message thread or, in a FaceTime, there's just a huge difference between that and being in the room with somebody.

There are things that are happening when you're in the room with people that's different than when you're communicating electronically. And I say that full disclosure here, you and I are having this conversation through a screen. So I'm in Texas, you're in Minnesota. So there's great things that can happen, but this conversation would be better if we were in the same room. And I just would readily admit that. And I love what height calls out here, which I think all of us, need to really think about, which is this phenomenon that he.

**Steph (25:05.731)**

Okay.

**Steph (25:20.419)**

100%.

**Steph (25:24.525)**

Yeah.

**Mark Turman (25:35.064)**

called continuous partial attention. And that really is become the, the banner of our generation. If you've ever been out to dinner, with your spouse or with a friend or a child, and they are constantly picking up their phone. wait a minute. I got to answer this text or let me take this phone call. if that happens more than once, when you go to lunch or dinner with somebody or coffee,

All of a sudden you're, you're pretty much offended. Like, so you'd rather talk to the person coming to you through your phone than you would the person you're actually in front of. and that really seems to be the, the calling card of the way we live too much of our lives is in this, this mode of continuous partial attention without really being present in the moment and with the circumstances and with the people that I'm at, that I'm with in this moment. So it's not just something that applies to, Gen Z to those that are 10 or 20 years old right now. It's a battle for all of us. because as we're seeing more and more research come out, the experiences of what happens in our brain, as you said, the rewiring of our brain, dopamine hits that type of thing. It's changing the ability that we have to even be attentive so it's something for us to really think about. There's so many things in this book, Steph, that, really kind of will make you stay awake at night.

**Steph (27:14.401)**

I read it or I listened to it very slowly. I think I told you that, that I was like, I would listen to it little bit and then I'd have to take a break, because it really stressed me out. Really stressed me out.

**Mark Turman (27:17.336)**

Yeah.

**Mark Turman (27:22.606)**

So, yeah. Okay. So what are some of the things that you learned that maybe you kind of had a little bit of knowledge or a hint about, or maybe you hadn't thought about it at all. Were there some, some, realities, some statistics, some, things that he called out in this book that, that you learned that were just really startling to you.

**Steph (27:44.461)**

think that honestly, a lot of the statistics I kind of had an idea of, but there's something about when you put it all together and you say, is a global problem. I think one of the things that he talked about was that sometimes we think this is like an American issue. This is something the mental health decline is happening in America and we can point to COVID. We can point to all these by our youth mental health and young adult mental health is declining.

And he really pointed out like, you look around the world and this is happening everywhere. Like it's not just us. And so you're like, then it has to be something bigger than what we like to, you know, the usual things that we like to point to. And so I think that just really put into perspective that this actually is a really big deal and this is something that we have to change as a community. That part was really not, again, not surprising to hear, but hard to hear. Basically when he talks about what can we do to help our kids not experience this phone-based childhood,

and what can we do to help them not have technology rule their lives so much. And a lot of it was like, you've got to get your entire community on board. And that is daunting too, because in general, you're kind of an, if you limit technology a lot as a parent right now, you are an outlier.

There are some people I know in my kid's school where there, we wait till eighth, we wait till eighth, no phones till eighth grade. There's definitely a strong community of that. There are other people who have their kids have phones at a really young age and they're all on social media and there are very little rules. And so no one's really on the same page with this because it just is so individual too to what your family needs and what is, you know, what has worked for you, even though none of it's working. Things that make parenting easier right now are just tempting to give into because it's hard to parent in 2024.

**Mark Turman (29:45.944)**

Yeah. Yeah, it is. You know, in some, in some ways there are some aspects that are a lot easier, but there are other things that are much harder. but it, know, and for people that may not be reading as much in this space, but it's pretty startling when you can see indications that, you know, the average 12 year old is spending five to seven hours a day in unscripted time on the internet. And it could be higher.

Especially if they're drawn into games and that type of thing, like you mentioned before, it could be even nine or 10 hours of unscripted time that doesn't have anything to do with school or anything, but that's an amazing amount of time. yeah.

**Steph (30:15.969)**

Yeah. Yeah.

**Steph (30:23.619)**

Right?

Well, and then you add in school there, you know, like my middle schooler has a laptop that, and I know some elementary school kids have laptops too. And so they're on a screen for school too. And that's where they should be on a screen learning those technology principles, learning, you know, writing papers. Like that's the type of screen they should be using. So when you add that into all the extra, I mean, that's your entire day is in front of a screen, entire day.

**Mark Turman (30:53.506)**

Yeah. And it just, it just is profound how it's just affecting people. And then, you know, he calls out just something that's kind of simple and obvious, is, it, it's affecting the amount of sleep that kids get. And, you know, so, so much of what health experts will tell you, right. Is that that good

health starts with getting a proper amount of sleep. And when you're young, especially when, you know, teenagers need.

**Steph (31:07.267)**

Mm-hmm.

**Mark Turman (31:21.42)**

somewhere around nine or 10 hours of sleep. And so if you're listening to this and you're just wondering why your teenager's in a bad mood just need to sleep. And if you could get them into a pattern, I remember as a pastor of churches for three or four decades that, you know, we would tell parents when their kids were coming back from a youth event that had been, you know, a camp or something like that, we're like, don't ask them how it went. Just take them home, make sure they're fed and put them in a bed and talk to them in 24 or 36 hours because you're not going to get any kind of a conversation that you want, if you try to have that conversation on the way home after they've been with their friends, you know, for several days at a youth camp. And so, you know, that just those kinds of fundamental things. And really, you know, first kind of parenting rule that I ever remember talking about in a church context was nobody has technology in the bedroom. You know, you, you all the computers are in the common areas of the house. Your phones don't go with you to bed. They stay in the kitchen to be charged up and that, you know, parents needed to model that, right? That parents needed to do that. And I'm seeing some, you know, some positive signs, my, you know, like my adult children don't have televisions in their bedroom. Even though they kind of... grew up with an awareness of that or had that experience when they were in their later teens. But even they were like, you know what, I just got to get away from some of this now. And so, you know, I'll watch TV or use my phone or my computer in the living room or the common, the kitchen or whatever, but it's not, it's not going to, my bedroom. And that just, that seems so simple, but it really can have a profound effect. Have you seen that?

**Mark Turman (33:21.323)**

in your family, other families being helpful that way.

**Steph (33:24.661)**

Yeah, we have no phones in private spaces. Now that doesn't necessarily apply to me and Trevor because sometimes we need to have conversations that don't involve my children listening. But for them, there are no phones in Like, their phone cannot be in their bedroom. When they have friends over, sometimes they'll go up and they'll have a switch or a phone in their room. like, hey, sorry, guys. You got to come down to the main family room. Like, they just are not allowed in their rooms.

**Mark Turman (33:35.511)**

Right? Sure.

**Steph (33:54.465)**

or in a bathroom, like there's no phones there. And then we have a charging station in our mudroom when we come in from our garage. And I think most people that I know at this point have their kids charging their phone in a common space. Because of what you said of you just don't need it on your nightstand. And I'm guilty of it, but I also feel like I have a few more boundaries because I know I'm not texting my friends at two in the morning.

I do know when I worked in youth ministry, some of my kids, my youth ministry kids would come to me and they're like, I sleep with my phone under my pillow and I get texts all hours of the night. And I'm just like, I'm sorry, you sleep with your phone under your pillow? So it was just very clear from those conversations way before I even had kids. It was like, my kids will not have their phone in their rooms because for many reasons. But one, because I don't want them getting a text at two in the morning. Nothing good happens at two in the morning.

**Mark Turman (34:34.472)**

Yeah.

**Mark Turman (34:52.081)**

Yeah. Yeah. Especially among teenagers. So yeah, absolutely. And I don't know about from your perspective, but it also helped me that Jonathan Hyte indicated in the book and also in a couple of the podcasts I heard that he's experiencing this with us. He's raising two kids of his own.

**Steph (34:57.098)**

Yeah, yeah. And sleep is really important.

**Steph (35:14.488)**

Yes.

**Mark Turman (35:16.665)**

And so he's having these conversations and trying to, you know, sometimes back up and pull technology back from one of his children where he feels like he's given them too much room with it. And as we all do, you know, all parents of multiple children like, Hey, I think I messed up with this with my first child. So I'll do it differently with the next child. And so all of us do that if we have the opportunity, but it does.

**Steph (35:29.155)**

Mm-hmm.

**Mark Turman (35:44.939)**

I think gives some credibility to this. that's the other thing I think I would call out is that Jonathan Haidt is not writing from a Christian perspective. He will indicate in multiple conversations I've heard him. He's very respectful of all forms of faith and very respectful toward Christianity, but he is not a Christian. considers himself an atheist.

At this point, although he's very, very respectful, I've heard him talk in several contexts of all systems of faith, and he sees the value of faith, but he is not a Christian himself. So he's writing from that perspective of a social scientist. Steph, one of the things he calls out particularly is it relates to social media, to Snapchat and to TikTok and to all of the other apps that are so popular, particularly with younger generations.

And he says that the data that he has reviewed indicates that what's going on here is actually more detrimental to girls than it is to boys. It's detrimental to both boys and girls, but particularly more damaging to girls. Why is that from your perspective? What did you gain from that side of the conversation?

**Steph (37:02.855)**

Social media is so hard. It is the thing that in our family, again, my kids have phones, they have technology, we use them, they will not have social media. There's just no reason for it. And I think when I look at my own life, I am a grown woman with three kids and a husband, and I am confident in my identity in Christ. I know I am loved. I am happy with my life. But...

Sometimes if I am scrolling on Instagram for too long, I look around my house and I'm like, I didn't know I needed to be deep cleaning behind my oven every week. Like I didn't know I have to have these shoes and I didn't know that what I'm wearing is out of style, but now I do and I have to do all these things to make my life better. And the reality is that's all a lie. And I'm a grownup and I know it's all a lie. And so I can't imagine.

**Mark Turman (37:39.949)**

you

**Steph (37:58.007)**

giving my daughter who's eight and impressionable and trying to figure out who she is in the world and in Christ and what she loves and what she values, a device that's going to show her what everyone else is doing better than her. And it's not even that they're doing it better, it's just that their picture happens to be better in that moment. And so I just think girls in general, they're so prone to that comparison and that is all social media is. And so it is so dangerous.

**Mark Turman (38:09.821)**

Hmm Hmm

**Steph (38:26.125)**

to their mental health and it's so easy to say really mean things on social media with very little consequence. And you see that time and time again with girls is, and boys too, the language and the bullying that happens online is just hard. And so I will stand firmly on that. It is just not necessary for your kids to have social media.

**Mark Turman (38:51.511)**

Yeah, and it's a unique endeavor of potential embarrassment. I think I can remember, yes, I'm 61 years old, but I can still remember being eight and 12. First time I ever played a little league game, I didn't want to be the one guy on the field that messed up and be embarrassed that way, missed the ball or whatever the case might be. You didn't want to be that guy even when you were playing.

**Steph (38:57.025)**

Yes.

**Mark Turman (39:21.549)**

you know, fourth grade little league baseball. I can remember, you know, being 13, 14 years of age and calling a young lady in my neighborhood. And I called her and I said, Hey Jan, this is Mark. And her next statement was Mark who, which was completely destructive to me, right? I can remember it like it was yesterday. but the whole essence of life and particularly when you're younger is, is

**Steph (39:43.294)**

Aww. Yeah.

**Mark Turman (39:50.571)**

I don't want to do anything to embarrass myself, right? And then to be, at least in their mind, to be known for that moment of embarrassment for the rest of their life, right? I can remember when the bully challenged me when I was in the eighth grade and I was like, well, it looks like I'm going to have to fight him. He's bigger than me. I'm probably going to lose and that's going to mark me for the rest of my days.

**Steph (40:03.073)**

Mm-hmm.

**Mark Turman (40:17.517)**



But what social media does is it amplifies that, and Hype calls us out in the book, it amplifies that on a grand scale to the point where a person, a young person, particularly embarrassed in the context of social media feels like, now have been humiliated in front of the whole world. Not in front of two people or 10 people. I've been embarrassed in front of the whole world.

**Steph (40:45.229)**

Yeah.

**Mark Turman (40:47.097)**

in just how deeply that impacts a young person's perspective. Have you seen that from other things that you've read and other parents that you're talking to?

**Steph (40:59.371)**

Yeah, and I think that's a lot of the problem with things like Instagram stories or Snapchat because in theory you put something on there and after a certain amount of time, like 24 hours, it goes away. And so the hard part with kids is they're like, well, it was just Snapchat, so it goes away. You're like, well, within Snapchat there's screenshots. You know, like what you put on the internet and it also just doesn't, that's not the way it works. Like with...

With technology, when you put something on the internet, it is there forever in some form or the other. Kids screenshot and then it gets text around. It's something that happens on the regular. I think it happens a lot with girls who send photos to boys and they think that it's private because it's on Snapchat. And that boy screenshots it and sends it to everyone. And then now it is out there for the entire school to see. And it is very real thing that happens. And I know...

**Mark Turman (41:31.577)**

Hmm.

**Steph (41:57.027)**

personally of families who have been impacted by it. It's just a challenge. Yeah, because they're thinking about the short moment. know, like no one when they're... I mean, if you want to go to that example of no young girl sending an inappropriate picture to a boy is thinking, this is going to go around the entire school and it's going to be great. They're thinking like, ooh, I'm going to get his attention for a second, which is obviously wrong on many levels, but it is a thing that happens with social media.

**Mark Turman (42:02.192)**

Yeah, yeah it is. Yeah.

**Mark Turman (42:23.511)**

Right.

**Steph (42:24.515)**

It is a real problem that we have in today's world, but they're not thinking about the long-term effect. They're thinking short-term. What can I get out of this? Not thinking big picture.

**Mark Turman (42:34.882)**

No, and then like I the humiliation factor and the bullying factor, know, just being able to really injure others by what you say and what you may not be telling the truth in many cases, that kind of thing. So we talked a lot about just some of the problems he identifies and one of the big

**Steph (42:39.351)**

Yes.

**Steph (42:51.555)**

Mm-hmm.

**Mark Turman (42:59.807)**

indicators of this book and we'll talk maybe if we have time at the end about some of the responses that are coming to this book. this book actually builds on a previous book called iGen that was written by another social psychologist named Gene Twing. They're actually two social sociologists working on different sides of the country. Gene Twing works at a university in San Diego, Jonathan Haidt works in the northeast.

But one of the things that Haidt does in his book, he builds upon gene twing and he moves the conversation from, well, we think these things may be related in what is called correlation. Haidt goes so far as to say, no, I think we're now looking at causation. That some of the things that have been going on with the younger generation relative to technology has caused them now in their 20s to be anxious, to be depressed, to have significant mental illness challenges that are directly related to the technology and the social media experiences that they had when they were maybe 10 or 12. And so that's one of the big, big claims of this book and something to call out. But at the end, Jonathan Haidt recommends what he calls the plan, sometimes called the Four Norms Plan, for how we change this. And I want to get your reaction to that. And mainly I want to know, do you think it has any shot at working? But here, let me just give you four, the four main things that Jonathan Haidt calls as recommendations to change the world of our children from a phone-based experience to a play-based experience. The first one is don't give your child a phone until they are 14.

Now I heard him moderate that a little bit, give them a phone, but make sure it can only do what a phone does, which is call a few people, maybe six people, but don't give them a phone that is a

smartphone that has technology and internet connectivity to it. So no phone until 14, no social media until at least 16. His third recommendation is to ban phones in school which is interesting, it calls that out. I live in Texas and there's now a movement gaining strength in our state legislature toward that and some other public school districts that have already adopted that plan. And then his last one is actually the one I like the best, which is increased unsupervised play and more childhood experiences of independence and responsibility. What do you think about those four?

There are a few others, but what do you think about those four steps?

**Steph (45:54.603)**

Yeah, I think in general, they're all really great. Again, my kids are not 14 yet. They have phones. So I did not follow that one. But I will say when our kids got their phones, our oldest is 12. He's not 14 yet. As more and more kids have gotten phones as well, he has more numbers in his phone. But our younger two that have a phone, we put phone numbers in their phone for them. And we said, these are the only people you can have in your phone. You cannot add a contact to this phone without asking me. And those people are not even grandma and grandpa who live far away because grandma and grandpa who live far away cannot help them. They are our next door neighbors. They are my sister who lives close to us and they're us. And so like those people, if you need a ride home somewhere or need something, you can call them. So we've put limits on that. Cause if they need to call anyone else, they can use my phone and that's, know.

**Mark Turman (46:38.201)**

Mm.

**Steph (46:53.485)**

So I think the idea of a flip phone instead of a smartphone is fantastic. In some ways, I wish we had done that. I know I could go back and change it. We're probably just not going to at this point, to be totally honest. But I think the idea of that is really, really great, limiting it for as long as you can, putting on whatever boundaries work for your family. I already said my kids will not have social media while they live in my house. When they are 18 years old, if they want to get social media, they can. I will just stand firm on that, and they're going to be really mad at me, and that's OK their life is really good. If that's what they get mad at me about, that's fine. Smartphones in school in general, I think is a great man. I know some of the schools here have those bags that they have to physically put their bags in. I think the pushback from parents there is that again, it's a safety issue. Parents, let's be very honest, are very concerned about school shootings and all those drills that their kids have to do and they want their kids to have a phone in case that happens to them. And that is a really, really sad but fair reality. And so that's something that has to be figured out. But that is kind of the main, that's truly the only pushback I've heard for that. Most people in general, I think, are on board with the idea that they don't need

to be texting during the day or distracted during the day. It's just that safety issue that parents are really concerned about and I totally understand that. And I am a huge unsupervised play type of gal. I think that if my kids can run off to the park, I would love for them to do that. In the book, Height talks about how his kids will, like they live in Manhattan, so they'll like walk to the grocery store, they'll walk to the dentist's office, they'll walk to all these different places.

**Mark Turman (48:26.307)**

Mm.

**Steph (48:45.557)**

I live in the suburbs. Like, they can't walk anywhere but the park or a friend's house. But I will let them go ride their bikes to their friend's house. That's a couple miles away. And ride their bike to the park. That's a mile away. And those are things that I did as a kid and never thought twice of. But a lot of parents today don't do that because it seems very, very scary to have your kids not within your eyesight when they're out playing because they could get taken or whatever.

**Mark Turman (48:49.132)**

No.

**Steph (49:14.595)**

It's important and I'm a big proponent of that. And the responsibility piece, I wish I was better at giving my kids more responsibilities. Again, their life is really good. So I think I did an interview on my podcast, the Christian Parenting Podcast with Sissy Goff and she challenged parents. She said, and I think about this all the time, what are two things that your kids can be doing for themselves and what are two things that your kids can almost be doing for themselves and stop doing all four. And I think he would agree that that's a really good call out because we just, we do way too much for our kids and we don't give them the opportunity to fail or to try something new because in some ways it's easier for us to do it or it seems scary to let them go walk to the grocery store, but we have to give them opportunities to figure those things out. It's just part of childhood. It's part of adolescence and it's being taken from our kids. And I'm trying to do better at it. It's just, again, I'm raising kids in this time and so all these things are my issues too. It's hard. I'm not perfect at it.

**Mark Turman (50:26.457)**

Yeah, and it's, yeah, none of us is, but it just, it's great when you can, you know, and we've talked about, right, for decades and maybe, maybe from the Garden of Eden, what it means to give your kids chores, you know, but chores are really, they have multiple purposes, right? But maybe their best purpose is to teach kids that they can do things and they can do hard things. And that

**Steph (50:40.577)**

Mm-hmm.

**Mark Turman (50:55.257)**

The more of those that they learn, the more self-confidence that they gain. I remember my mom did this to me and so, you know, I just decided I would do it to my kids. When my kids were 15, I made them go around the corner, which was all of a quarter of a mile, not even a whole mile. They had to go a quarter of a mile and get a job at the grocery store. And it was, you know, that first job of putting stuff into a grocery bag and pushing it out to the car, you know, for the lady or the man that came to buy groceries. And they, they were mad at me about it, but it changed them. In less than six months, they had gained a certain kind of social skill where they had to learn to make small talk with that mom or that grandmother or that guy that came in to buy a few things. They had to learn to talk to them for that five minutes it took to get from the from the cash register to the car. And it always involves social interaction and they had to make sure that they didn't bump the customer's car with the bags and with the cart and all, just basic social stuff. And my wife and I, we could see them change and just in their social confidence. They could now talk to older people and they could do it with greater ease. They could do it with greater confidence.

They would never give me credit for that today, but maybe in another 10 or 20 years, they'll give me some credit for that. But just enabling them to do things that they think are just maybe a little bit beyond their reach or things that they want or that they would enjoy, they just don't know until they're invited in. My daughter's raising a six, a three and a one year old right now.

**Steph (52:42.817)**

Yeah.

**Mark Turman (52:48.065)**

She's inviting her oldest two children into the kitchen to help prepare meals and they love it. They get to be with her and they get to have fun learning how to prepare food. And that builds their confidence, right? And all of those kinds of things. They taught my three-year-old grandson how to prepare the formula bottle for his now one month old younger brother.

He just loves going in there and doing all of the things to push the button and all that that actually prepares the bottle. And he feels like he's helping with the parenting. Right. So the more creative and consistent we can be to give them responsibility and like I said, to give them some freedom. They, they actually can do a lot more than we think they can do. And it builds their confidence that they know how to handle themselves in the world.

**Steph (53:28.152)**

Yeah.

**Mark Turman (53:47.673)**

And I think that's so helpful. I don't know if we'll actually see things like bans on phones in schools actually take place. He brought that down as maybe a place to land our conversation. He brought that down to the place of, well, if you can't get it within your whole school, maybe in your circle of friends. Have you seen anything like that working out with

**Steph (54:13.665)**

Mm-hmm.

**Mark Turman (54:17.471)**

other moms that you know in your area or you know the parents of your friends. You think that's a way to get at least started in this area.

**Steph (54:26.343)**

Yeah, so we actually, I do a morning Bible study and I had it this morning and I told everyone at the Bible study that we were having this conversation today. So we've already talked about this today and I do know that there is a group of parents at my kid's that they're fifth grade parents, which are not my kids' grades, but they all signed the wait until eighth pledge where they will not give their kids phones until eighth grade. And this was just one group of parents from one particular grade that just decided that that is what they were going to do. And I do know of other smaller group, I mean, it was a whole grade of parents, but I do, it wasn't the whole school, but I do know of smaller groups who have said, hey, should we all sign this pledge together? Wait until eighth. And so I think even just within your own group of friends, if you can get parents on the same page with phone usage and social media usage, I think there's just such a benefit.

Even on a smaller scale, this summer, my son's on a baseball team and we are at an out of the area tournament. So we were at a hotel and we are all taking a lunch break at just a place together, the whole team. And I walked around with a basket and took all of the boys' phones. And the parents thanked me for it. I was like, hope this is okay, but our boys don't need to be on phones in between baseball games. They need to be hanging out with each other as a team.

**Mark Turman (55:44.257)**

Hmm

**Steph (55:55.263)**

eating, cooling off and getting ready for their next game. So like, let's take these away from them. And it was just a small thing. It's not like we took it away for the whole weekend, but just one meal, we were all in agreement. Yes, let's take this away then. So even just small baby steps

like that, I think are really meaningful and impactful for our kids. And to see, they will survive one meal without their phones.

**Mark Turman (56:01.618)**

Yeah.

**Mark Turman (56:18.041)**

Yeah, yeah. So a great deal. You know, take a, take a step with your family and then widen that circle to like said, their baseball team or, you know, their immediate friends and try to get the, get the same parents to think about the same thing. And, and that would be, you know, recommending this book is something I've done a lot is to recommend it to others. And part of the reason we wanted to have this conversation as well. Steph, any thoughts that you would have, you know, you talked about this.

**Steph (56:25.379)**

Mm-hmm.

**Mark Turman (56:46.409)**

in the context of your own family. if somebody's listening to this and they're like, you know, I've opened this door too wide and I need to try to pull it back. Any suggestions, any thoughts you'd have for that person? Hey, I've given my 12 year old, my 14 year old, I've given them too much room here and I need to try to help pull this back. What would you say to that person?

**Steph (57:14.423)**

Yeah, I would say I am there too. And these are conversations we have had with our kids. this book, *The Anxious Generation*, has actually been really helpful because I do feel like I had words and statistics that were kind of right in front of me that I could pull from. But I sat my kids down, and I shouldn't say I sat them down, in the car. We have great conversations in the car when they're stuck talking to me for a while. They were pulling their phone out in the car. And I was like, there's a rule in my car that you cannot have your phone out.

Like you need to talk to me. And so we're here together. We're all going to talk. So now they know that rule, but they were kind of like, why? Why can't we have our phone? And I was able to, with the help of this book and other resources, say, hey, this is why we're putting limits on your phone. We're not trying to disconnect you from your friends. We're not trying to keep you from something super cool. We're not trying to make you feel excluded in your community. But.

Here are the facts about what your phone is doing. I think just being really, really honest with them and explaining the why of why you need to put boundaries down and change some of the rules that have already been there, I think is really helpful because it makes kids feel respected

and it helps them to understand that you have their best interests in mind. Not to say that they're gonna finish that conversation and be like, wow, mom, thank you so much for thinking of me. They're still gonna be mad at you, but.

**Mark Turman (58:18.455)**

Mm.

**Mark Turman (58:33.881)**

Right.

**Steph (58:40.021)**

At least you honored them in a way to say, think you can understand this and you may not like it, but I'm doing what's best for you. And also if you're going to take some steps back and put more limits on if you haven't had enough, don't just all of a sudden, which I can be guilty of being like, no, we're going to do this thing. We're making changes. know, little baby steps are good. One meal without your phone or...

**Mark Turman (59:03.362)**

Yeah.

**Steph (59:05.299)**

Absolutely no phone until your homework's done and your chores are done and then you can have it then just kind of keep adding to what feels appropriate for your family, but we don't need to take wild huge leaps. Baby steps are good and just the more conversations you can have. I think your kids just feel more respected and then they tend to handle things better or at least will understand it as they get older too. They might even thank you someday.

**Mark Turman (59:24.713)**

Yeah. Right. Yeah. Yeah, they might. They might. And I think there's a lot of

**Steph (59:30.089)**

Our nanny, our college-age nanny, did tell me that she was very grateful that her mom put limits on social media and phone usage for her. And I was like, well, have you told her that? And she said, no, but I will.

**Mark Turman (59:42.893)**

Yeah. Well, that and the power of modeling, I love it. Just having, especially the older your kids get having conversations with them. Here's the why, not just the what, you know, it's my job as, as the parent to set the boundaries and to decide what the what is going to be, but here's the why. And you need to add more why obviously as your kids get older.



**Steph (01:00:03.971)**

Mm-hmm.

**Mark Turman (01:00:08.173)**

But then I think there's a very strong principle of modeling here. You know, if you've been a parent who took your phone or your iPad to your bedroom by declaring, hey, no, I'm putting my phone in here now. It's not just going to be you. It's going to be me most of the time, except on rare occasions where there might be a real reason. Or, you know, hey, we're going to have a half a day or a whole day where none of us are on phones. You know, I've even done that. You know, I don't have

young people in my house now, but I've tried to get to the point where I don't carry a cell phone on Sunday when I go to church, when I go to worship. I leave it at home or I leave it in the car. I don't want the temptation of pulling out my phone when I'm in the church lobby or even while the pastor's preaching. I just don't want that temptation. Even though one of the best things about my phone is that I have a Bible app on my phone.

and I can access the Bible anywhere I have my phone. That's a great thing. That's a marvelous piece of technology, but I would rather not have all of the other temptations that come with the phone on a Sunday. And I don't like the fact that I feel like I can't go anywhere without this piece of a technology in my pocket. Why can't I just grab my...

**Steph (01:01:20.063)**

Mm-hmm. Yeah.

**Mark Turman (01:01:31.703)**

my driver's license and my credit card and my car keys and leave the rest of it behind. I used to do that, spent most of my life doing it that way. But for some reason I can't feel like I'm doing it now. And taking a periodic half day or a full day fast from your technology is really a liberating thing. And it declares something to your kids as well.

**Steph (01:01:55.051)**

Yeah. And I've been really honest with my kids about that too. Cause sometimes when we're having these conversations, you know, they obviously don't go over super well and they'll throw back things like, well, you're on your phone all the time. I'm like, well, you're right. Then I explained a lot of times I'm ordering your school lunches and I'm getting your shoes that you need. I'm doing a lot of things on my phone, but you're right. I also have an addiction to having my phone in my pocket. I don't like to leave the house without it.

I am on social media too much. I am too connected to people and I don't want that for you. And I'm working on it for myself, but I also want to make sure that I don't just hand it over to you. And so I think being honest to let your kids know that you are working on it too and it's an issue for you, that's very real, it's always good.

**Mark Turman (01:02:41.411)**

No. Yeah, absolutely. A lot to think about and a lot to work on both as individuals and as family. Steph, thanks for the conversation today and thanks even more so for the larger ministry that you're doing with Christian Parenting. I want to remind everybody that you can find those resources at [christianparenting.org](http://christianparenting.org). Check out the podcast and the written resources as well. And we want to thank you for listening to this conversation. If it's been helpful to you, equipping and encouraging in some way.

Please pass it on to family and friends, rate and review us on your podcast platform, that will help us. And we wanna thank you for supporting our ministry as well as this conversation today. We'll see you next time on the Denison Forum Podcast.