

FEATURE
Real joy or
toxic positivity?

FAITH TALK
Inspecting your
life's foundations

MY STORY
Speaking from
experience

The desire for better connection

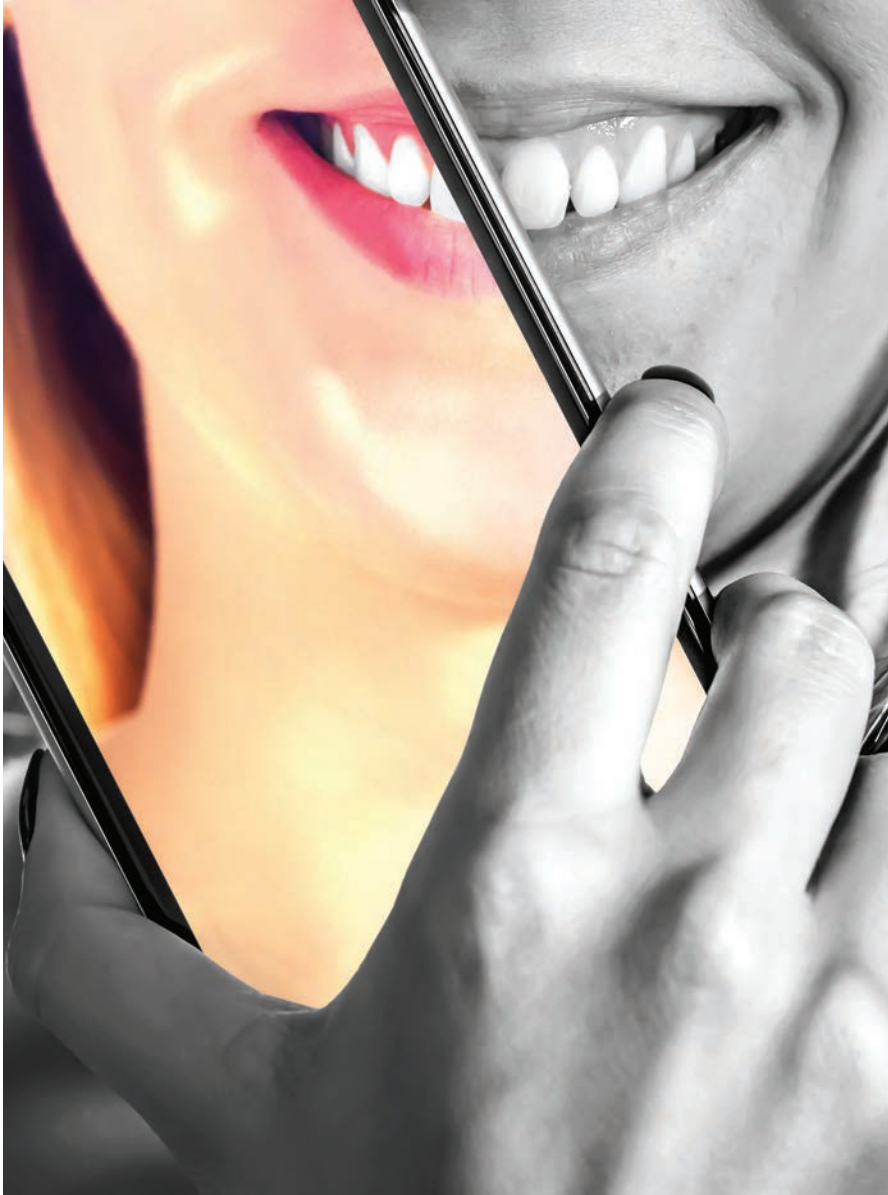
Teens struggling to navigate social media in a pandemic world



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**“OUR LIVES ARE UNIQUE STONES IN
THE MOSAIC OF HUMAN EXISTENCE –
PRICELESS AND IRREPLACEABLE.”**

– HENRI NOUWEN



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The Salvation Army is a Christian movement dedicated to sharing the love of Jesus by:

- Caring for people
- Creating faith pathways
- Building healthy communities
- Working for justice

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Speaking from experience

What really matters

Over the past few years, the world has seen some life-changing events – the COVID-19 pandemic, Russia's invasion of Ukraine, natural disasters and huge rises in social issues such as domestic violence and mental health struggles.

How do we find hope and stability in an unstable and often overwhelming world?

This edition offers some perspectives to consider. Major Jo-anne Brown writes about finding authentic joy in tough times, focusing on the difference between real happiness and toxic positivity. Jo-anne also shares ways to do this, and the importance of finding a genuine source of joy – which for her, is God.

Major Phil Inglis also writes about finding joy, meaning and what really matters in life. He emphasises the need to spend time on developing strong foundations and assures readers that the bedrock – God – is there for the finding.

The search for connection is a common thread here, and young people are no exception. Anthony Castle writes about this with a focus on the impact of social media.

We all crave connection. And God is there for us all, regardless of the state of our world.

Simone Worthing **Assistant Editor**

Real joy or toxic positivity?

Finding authentic happiness in times of pain and sorrow

WORDS Jo-anne Brown

I've been reading about Julian of Norwich, a woman who lived over 650 years ago during a time of seemingly endless and terrifying pandemic. During her lifetime, beginning when she was seven, the Black Death (Bubonic Plague) swept through Europe in waves, reportedly killing up to one in two people in the United Kingdom.

Possibly half the people Julian cared about may have died. I can't imagine the sorrow or horror of that – or the constant fear people would have felt. There was no understanding of what caused this, no scientific research and no vaccination program. There was simply fear and death.

Yet Julian, who lived most of her life in permanent seclusion in a tiny room attached to a church, continually wrote about joy and goodness. How could she, amid such unimaginable suffering, think about, let alone be so responsive to joy? How could she experience joy in a meaningful way when so many around her were suffering, dying or blaming anything and everything they could?

STAYING GENUINELY POSITIVE

We see all sorts of responses to what we face today: denial, avoidance, blame, anger, putting our heads in the sand, believing 'things will soon get back to normal'. What we don't see a lot of is pure, genuine joy. Or, to put it another way, a real ability to maintain a positive outlook.

Now, I'm not talking about extreme positivity or fake or 'toxic positivity'. That's another way of describing the 'head-in-the-sand syndrome'. Such positivity is not truly about a positive outlook – it's more about denying

what is happening, ignoring negative experiences, and being excessively optimistic to the detriment of reality and well-being.

We experience toxic positivity in two ways. When we cannot deal with negative emotions or experiences healthily, we push them down and pretend that everything is okay. We may have been brought up believing we 'should not' feel angry or sad and may feel intense guilt when acknowledging such feelings. The feelings, however, are still there; they are real and valid, and if we don't find a way to deal well with them, they may end up making us sick emotionally and/or physically.

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Toxic positivity wants everything to be okay, even if only on the surface.

”

We may also experience toxic positivity from others who feel entirely unable to deal with our feelings of anger, sorrow or shame. People might say to us, "Cheer up!", when what we really need is to honestly grieve and acknowledge our pain. When people say, "It could be worse", or "Everything happens for a reason", they minimise our experiences and emotions and belittle our response. It is far easier to offer such 'positive' responses than to deeply and authentically share in another person's suffering.



Toxic positivity wants everything to be okay, even if only on the surface. Yet, the reality is things are often not okay. Only when painful emotions and experiences are honestly acknowledged and named can they be dealt with in a healthy and healing way. And this is true for all of us. Whether we are a 'glass-half-full' person or a 'glass-half-empty' person, the truth remains: life can be difficult, complicated and traumatic, and only by being real can we find a way through such experiences.

LIFE IS BITTERSWEET

And so, we return to Julian, who lived so long ago during a very dark period of history. What can we learn today from her wisdom and experience?

Julian recognised that life is both tragic and joyful, good and not-so-good – and all that's in between. She had an innate belief that no matter how overpowering the negative and distressing experiences were, there was still deep goodness held within humanity and in the created world.

Real joy is experienced when we recognise and hold on to this awareness of goodness when we encounter genuinely kind and compassionate people who can walk the difficult road with us. In distressing times, glimpses of light might be few and far between, but when we slow down and look beyond the now, we might just see a glimmer of that light. Having others share that journey can help us discover goodness and joy.

True joy is a choice, just as toxic positivity is, although toxic positivity may have become so ingrained in society that we don't even notice it. We need to become aware of such patterns in us to choose differently.

Joy looks beyond pain and sorrow without denying their existence or trying to dismiss them. Joy seeks to discover the inner goodness and love contained within humanity and chooses to celebrate that while holding and recognising sadness and suffering. Joy can walk with someone during difficult times because a positive outlook also realises there is more than just struggle or hardship.

Julian suggests we can tap into joy by choosing to be grateful for the good we do see, loving ourselves, and learning to be non-violent toward ourselves and others.

Another, more contemporary author echoes these thoughts by saying that the antidote to toxic positivity is true love, or unconditional acceptance, of ourselves and others. As hard as it is, we don't need to cover up real feelings of pain and suffering. We can acknowledge those feelings and choose goodness and love, tapping into the source of joy.



Scan here for more on finding meaning.

The desire for better connection

Teens struggling to navigate social media in a pandemic world

WORDS Anthony Castle

"I need a better connection!" You've probably heard this cry from many young people. For better or worse, today's youth are more connected than any previous generation. Research shows that 91 per cent of Australian teens use a smartphone and spend more time than ever on social media.

For many, the significant increase in time spent online is a direct result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Lockdowns and enforced social-distancing requirements have impacted friends, family, work and study. Young people especially have spent more time online, with one survey finding that 40 per cent also reported severe levels of anxiety and depression. Young people have never been online more and have never been more unhappy.

“

Young people are forming their identities in a constant state of assessment.

”

"COVID-19 highlighted what was already happening," explains Sarah Green, Ministry Assistant at the Salvos Rev Church in Adelaide. Sarah works with dozens of kids, tweens and teens and has seen the impact social media can have. "Young people are finding their identities and projecting that through online platforms that, until school hours, have no off switch."

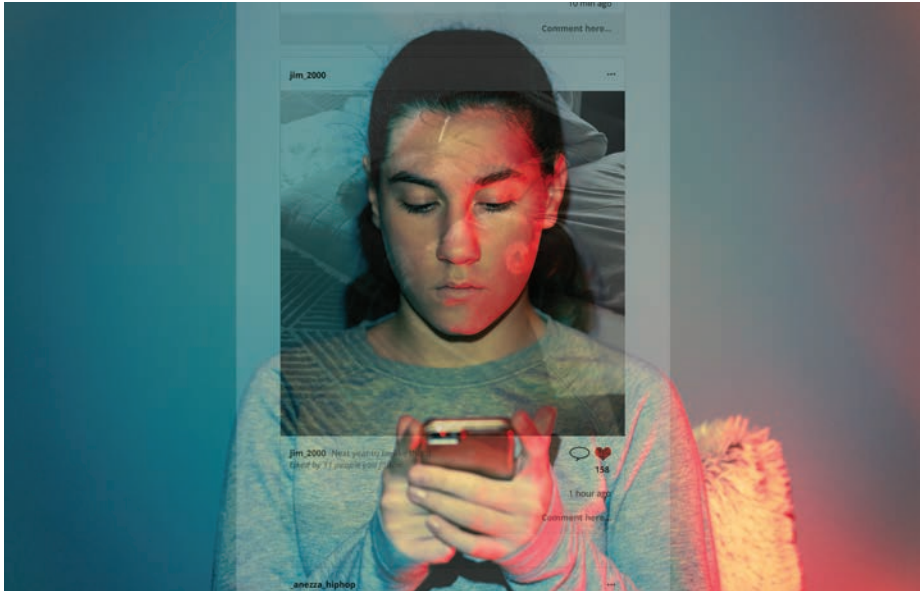
A national mental health survey found that the majority of young people believe their mental health is getting worse and cite social media as the main reason.

"Online is just an extension of their real world," Sarah says. "There's no distinction between the two, but the rules in the different areas are different. Young people – and a lot of adults too – are ill-equipped to play safely."

CULTURE OF COMPARISON

Social media abuse often brings to mind threats of online predators or cyberbullying, but it may not be 'stranger danger' or 'bullying' that's presenting the biggest challenge, but a culture of comparison.





“They [young people] have to constantly curate their image,” Sarah explains. “They respond to others, control the narrative of their lives, all while comparing themselves and being compared to billions of other humans.”

“

Social media ... when used constructively, can be used to drive connection.

”

Studies reflect the harm caused by social media’s culture of comparison. Technology-based social comparison can be linked to depressive symptoms in young people. Social media platforms prompt young people to build an image of themselves that seeks approval with likes and shares, creating a literal rating system for their sense of identity.

“It’s a recipe for mental health concern,” Sarah explains.

“[Since the start of COVID-19] there’s been a rise in children aged 10-12 being admitted to hospital with eating disorders. Health services and researchers now see them regularly. They didn’t two years ago.”

While these implications are frightening, many of the fears often expressed regarding social media have a familiar ring, having once been applied to older forms of media and telecommunication.

Social media didn’t invent the culture of comparison. A teenager’s world is already one where they find themselves constantly assessed in school, in the expectations of peer groups and their families, and in programs that chart their performance. Young people are forming their identities in a constant state of assessment. It isn’t just the online world that can create a culture of comparison, but rather the world they already live in. ▶



“Young people are amazing and resourceful,” Sarah explains. “I regularly see them starting small businesses, promoting awareness and fundraising for social justice efforts and more.”

Young people don’t decide how the world works, whether analogue or digital, but they can engage in it constructively. Radio, television and mobile phones have all been considered harmful in the lives of young people, but, in hindsight, they also became new ways to build community to grow connection.

ADULT EXAMPLE

“Just like many other things, social media is a tool,” Sarah says. “When used constructively, it can be used to drive connection. We use it heavily in our local youth ministry, and we would be very disconnected from young people without it.”

Research has shown that the influence of parents can lessen the negative effects of social media, and adults can start with the actions they take.

“I think as adults, we can do much more to set better examples of healthy approaches to social media,” Sarah explains. “We can demonstrate a better balance. At the end of the day, young people are just using the tools that previous generations built for them.”

All young people are looking for is a better connection. Adults built social media (and adults struggle with its challenges too). For better or worse, social media is here to stay. The key may be in the example adults set; to resist a culture of comparison and to instead grow patterns of connection.

Anthony Castle is a program writer with the Salvos Youth and Young Adults team.



Scan here for more on mental health.

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Inspecting your life's foundations

Spending time to discover what really matters

WORDS Phil Inglis

One hundred years ago, the builders of my parents' home thought that they were building with strong foundations – large sandstone blocks sitting on hard clay.

What they didn't know was that the 'hard' clay expands greatly in wet weather and then shrinks again in drought. It wasn't long before cracks started to appear in the brickwork.

One year, after a particularly wet season, my parents discovered that the foundation underneath a section of our house was no longer supporting the wall properly, and the wall was in danger of collapse. Engineers and builders were called in to place piers under the wall, making the foundation solid.



WORLD-CHANGING EVENTS

A similar process is often required in our thought life. Sometimes what we thought was solid ground just isn't. The world shifts and changes in unexpected ways, and we find our walls cracking and coming apart. Sometimes these world-shifting events are things that happen to us, a terrible medical diagnosis or the death of someone we know and love.

Sometimes, world-shifting events happen to other people – we see political upheaval, war and violence, and it unsettles us. At times like this, whether it is war, pandemic or personal upheaval, it is important to examine the foundational beliefs of our lives – foundations that may have been put in place many years ago.

These foundational beliefs underpin what we believe to be true about ourselves, the world and God, but are they truly built on the rock or on some hard clay that looks like rock?

In more recent years, as people buy land in my parents' neighbourhood, they begin the building process by spending a huge amount of money excavating all the clay. This allows them to put their foundations on firmer ground – not to mention the benefit of ending up with a large underground car park. Digging out the clay is a huge expense and a lot of effort, but the result is a house that doesn't shift and crack after rain or drought.

FOUNDATIONAL BELIEFS

From time to time, it becomes important to inspect the foundational beliefs of our lives. The basic assertions that underpin what we believe to be true about ourselves, the world and God.



As time marches on, as storms come and go, as dry seasons come and go, we can find that parts of our foundational belief structure are not as secure as we once thought. Beliefs we have not questioned for years are starting to show cracks, and we have to unlearn some of our most basic assumptions. As a Salvos officer (pastor), it has been my privilege to sit with people as they re-examine some of the things they thought were important and watch them 'dig out the clay'.

“

I want to assure you that, spiritually, the bedrock is there.

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In modern church speak, this kind of process is called deconstructing, and it's a fantastic exercise. The only problem is that, like

digging through clay, it's a difficult process, it is time-consuming, energy-sapping, and many people find themselves giving up before they find the bedrock. Some think that maybe the rock isn't there. Some maybe think it just isn't worth it.

I want to assure you that, spiritually, the bedrock is there, even if it seems you may have a lot of clay and crud to remove. Perhaps you might consider contacting a trusted local faith leader and discuss faith and any questions you might have and maybe even follow it up by spending some time reading or learning to pray. The truth is, if you spend the time required, 'digging out the clay' will set you on a firm foundation.

Major Phil Inglis is a Salvation Army officer (pastor) in Victoria.



Scan here for more on finding meaning.

Speaking from experience

After escaping domestic violence with the help of the Salvos, Sepideh* now delights in working with the fragile and vulnerable

WORDS Sepideh

I grew up in Shiraz, Iran, a very beautiful city. I was living with my parents and working as an English teacher. My family, including my two brothers, have always been supportive, and we are all close.

After teaching for several years, I decided to get my international English teaching certificate. I went to Tbilisi, Georgia, in 2017 for this course and was offered work at the British Council in Georgia, so ended up staying there for two years.

During this time, Ehsan*, my mother's cousin, who lived in Australia, told me he had been in love with me for years and proposed. He came to Tbilisi for a visit so we could spend time together. He wanted to get married in Iran, but I wanted to go to Australia and get to know him better first.

I returned to Iran in July 2019 and soon received a visa to Australia. I would stay with Ehsan in his big house and have my own room. I wanted to find a job and be independent, but he insisted I stay at home. He said he didn't trust me and didn't want me working.

I started talking to my mum more and more, and Ehsan said I could only talk to her and my friends when he was around. When I told him he couldn't control my relationships, he took my phone and threw it at the wall.

VIOLENCE INCREASES

I'll never forget the night he raped me. Afterwards I went to the bathroom, crying loudly, but he didn't come to help me. I had some bleeding and didn't know what to do.

I called my mum – she was crying and told me to book into a hotel, but I didn't have money or a job and there was no one to help me.

Ehsan became more and more aggressive, and I called his brother's wife telling her what I was experiencing. When she and Ehsan's brother came there were insulting words and a physical fight. I called the police, and when I told them the police were on their way they ran out of the house. Two or three days later Rebecca from Police Victim Services called and asked me if I wanted to leave.



Fleeing domestic violence is not always simple or an easy process for victim-survivors.

ACCESSING HELP

Soon afterwards, when Ehsan left for work, I took an Uber with all my luggage, telling the driver that I was running away. I called Rebecca and she told me that I could go to



During the COVID-19 lockdowns, women like Sepideh, who lost her job, had to find other ways of making an income.

The Salvation Army for emergency accommodation. I went to Samaritan House and my first case manager, Siobhan, talked to me. We met with the police, and I gained an AVO so I would not be threatened again.

I then met with a solicitor named Anna, who gave me good advice, and I got my permanent residency visa. I got a job as an admin assistant in community services, where I worked for six months, before losing the job due to the COVID-19 lockdown.

I was on Centrelink payments for a long time, but my case manager, Tara, found a transitional place and set up an apartment for me. During this time, I had many hours of consultation with a psychologist from victim services. The Salvos helped coordinate all this, and I am so grateful to them.

When I lost my job, I made cakes and pastries and sold them on Instagram. My little business was good for my mental and physical health. Later I again started looking for a job and got a three-month contract as an admin accountant, and then a short-term casework job.

I preferred to have a longer contract to feel more secure and started at a Sydney multicultural community service. I studied at TAFE for a diploma of community services and got a job with Saint Vincent de Paul as a case manager.

When I lived for 10 months in a Salvation Army refuge, I saw domestic violence from so many different perspectives involving people from so many countries. I very much wanted to work for the Salvos so I could help those who are fragile and vulnerable.

Now my clients know that I have been there too, and they are grateful that I can help them overcome their problems. My job is so rewarding – after my traumatic experiences, helping and supporting people in similar situations is what I love to do.

**Names have been changed.*



Scan here for more information on Salvation Army Family and Domestic Violence Services.

Apple crumble



PHOTO BY DIDI MIAM ON UNSPLASH

Ingredients

½ cup plain flour, ⅓ cup caster sugar, ⅓ cup oats, 60g butter (chopped), 400g can sliced dessert apples, ice cream or cream to serve.

Method

- Preheat oven to 160°C.
- To make crumble, combine flour, sugar, oats and butter in a bowl. Rub butter into the mixture until it resembles breadcrumbs.
- Place apples into an oven-proof dish and top with crumble mixture.
- Bake in oven for 20-25 minutes until golden.
- Serve warm with ice cream or cream (or both!).

HAVE A LAUGH



What is Captain Hook's least favourite social media?
TikTok.

I was going to make a social media joke, but I'm sure you've already Reddit.

What do you call an English teacher who is addicted to social media?
An Instagrammar.

SIGNING IN



PHOTO: STOCK / GETTY IMAGES

Sudoku

Fill in the grid so that every row, every column and every 3x3 box contains the digits 1 to 9.

	8		7					2
1	9					6		
		5			8			
7			5			9	3	
				4		8		5
5			2			7		
9		6	8	3				
		4	9			1		
		1	4	6	2			

Tum-Tum

On which page of this week's *Salvos Magazine* is Tum-Tum hiding?



Bible byte

"Careless words stab like a sword, but wise words bring healing."
 Proverbs chapter 12, verses 18
New Century Version

Quiz answers: 1. SixDegrees.com 2. LinkedIn 3. MySpace 4. Twitter 5. TikTok
Tum-Tum: is hiding in the wall on page 10.



Quick quiz

PHOTO: STOCK / GETTY IMAGES

1. Launching in 1997, what is widely considered to be the first social networking site?
2. What is the name of the first business-focused social media platform?
3. What platform started in 2004, the same year as Facebook, and was initially more successful?
4. 'Tweets' are messages used in which social networking platform?
5. What is the short-form video hosting service, originating in China, that became available worldwide in 2016?

DID YOU KNOW?

Social Media Day was launched on 30 June 2010 to recognise its impact on global communication.

Analysis from strategic marketing company Kepios shows there were 4.65 billion social media users in April 2022, 58.7 per cent of the world's population.

Networking on social media for your pet is called 'social networking'.

8	9	2	9	7	1	8	7	3
9	1	7	0	7	8	9	2	6
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7	9	2	1	5	8	9	6	4
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5	4	6	2	3	7	1	6	8
3	8	7	2	7	1	0	7	8
5	2	6	6	6	6	6	6	6
7	1	2	5	6	4	3	7	8
4	2	5	6	4	3	7	8	9
1	4	2	5	6	4	3	7	8
6	8	1	2	5	6	4	3	7

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SCAN ME



Eva Burrows
College



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