

# Sheridan Lutheran Church

# 7<sup>th</sup> Grade Stepping Stone: Digital Identity

## WELCOME

Thank you for taking part in this stepping stone – new for 2022! **You get to be the first group to participate in this stepping stone class and help expanded our stepping stones ministry to our middle and high school youth! Woohoo!**

More importantly, I want to thank you **parents/guardians**, for helping **fulfill the promises you made at your child's baptism** to pass down the gift of faith to them. And **youth**, you are also **fulfilling these promises made** on your behalf at your baptism to continue growing in faith. You will soon affirm them for yourself at your confirmation in 8<sup>th</sup> grade.

**Supplies you will need for completing the 7<sup>th</sup> Grade Faith Stepping Stone:** This resource, a blindfold, a larger open space and random assortment of supplies (for the Minefield Activity obstacles) such as toys, shoes, books, furniture, kitchen utensils, and masking tape for start and finish line, scissors and the Screen Safe Pledge Conversation sheet at the end of this lesson, and paper and craft supplies to create the password booklet.

## OVERVIEW

In this stepping stone, parents/guardians and youth will explore together how we as Christians live into our identity in the digital world while also staying safe and using our time wisely. This class focuses on three main themes: Integrity, Transparency, and Balance. You'll spend most of your time in conversation using guided questions that will provide you and your youth an opportunity to learn from each other, discuss expectations for online and social media use, deepen relationships, and share experiences. Together, you will create a screen safe covenant and youth will have the opportunity to make a password keeper booklet.

**PARENTS/GUARDIANS:** We want to emphasize to you that you aren't alone. There are a lot of things to process as kids enter the social media world and no one, you me, or anyone else has everything together. Never have we lived in a time with this much REACH and EXPOSURE. But I believe we're better together. So this time of learning is about encouragement and connection with each other and other families who are dealing with the same thing as you. This is a time to intentionally think about and work with your kids.

**YOUTH:** Let me remind you that this is not just a time for parents. Don't let them do all the thinking and all the talking. During this stepping stone, you're going to be asked to share and think together. So be prepared to be honest, thoughtful and a full participant in the discussion.

- Ian Hartfield, Youth Ministry Coordinator

## OPENING PRAYER: *Youth*

Good and gracious God,

Thank you for the good gift of the internet and social media through which we can create, communicate, learn, and ultimately glorify you. Thank you for the ways you have blessed our world and made lives easier because of technology. We praise you for giving us these good gifts of creativity and work, and that we can reflect your image online.

We pray that you would help each of us to have INTEGRITY, practice TRANSPARENCY, and find BALANCE when using technology. Help us to stay safe, be honest, and share messages that are truthful and respectful, while

also following the commitments that we make to our family to not misuse or overuse social media, our devices, or the internet.

May our speech build others up and point them to you. May our relationships strengthened and created through technology communicate the deep love and care you have for us. May our stewardship of resources point to you, the maker of all things, and show your wise and generous heart. May our time on the internet and social media cause us to have a deeper connection to you and a deeper love for others. May every message, tweet, snap, and post reflect your goodness and hope in the world and be an example of your kindness and compassion to all. Amen.

### **SCRIPTURE READING: *Parents/Guardians***

Luke 3:21-22

Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

### **REFLECTION: *Youth***

Jesus is a 30-year-old man, and he is about to begin his public ministry. He is about to begin doing all the things he would become famous for: teaching in ways no one had ever heard and would never forget, healing the sick, casting out demons, and so much more. But before he set out to do any of that, he came to be baptized, and in that moment, his identity as God's beloved son was affirmed. Before he went out into the world to do what he was sent to do, God made sure he knew who he was. You and I are children of God, too, you know.

### **DISCUSSION: *Youth and Parents/Guardians***

Who are you? Where do you come from? What makes you you?  
What would others say about who you are?

### **SCRIPTURE READING: *Youth***

1 John 3:1

See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are. The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him.

### **REFLECTION: *Parents/Guardians***

Our identity is declared at our baptism just as it was for Jesus at his baptism. Whenever someone is baptized here at Sheridan, the pastor says, "Your Name, child of God, you are sealed by the Holy Spirit and marked with the cross of Christ forever."

This is important to remember before we start talking about our digital lives today. Our identity ultimately isn't something we craft or come up with on our own. Our identity is known and given to us by God. God says who we are, and God says we are God's beloved children. Our challenge and adventure as Christians following our baptisms is to live into that identity – to strive to be, in every aspect of our lives, who God says we are. Which must include who we are on Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter, TikTok, and Facebook. Which must include who we are when we text. So we're not talking today about what we must do with our passwords and phones and all that in order to please God. We're talking about what it looks like to be who God says we are – people who belong to God and who are dearly loved – in every aspect of who we are.

### **DISCUSSION: *Youth and Parents/Guardians***

What do you want your digital identity to be? What should your digital identity be?

What does it mean to you that you are a child of God? What should we do with that promise and gift?

- **Parents/Guardians** - text to child: "Name, child of God, you are sealed by the Holy Spirit and marked with the cross of Christ forever.
- **Youth** - text to Parents/Guardians: "Name, child of God, you are sealed by the Holy Spirit and marked with the cross of Christ forever.

Parents/Guardians, if your child doesn't yet have a phone, find a creative way for each of you to share this statement so that you both can hold on to it and be reminded anytime that God claims you as his own!

### **ACTIVITY: *Minefield***

Supplies to gather ahead of time: blindfold, random assortment of supplies (this is for the mine field obstacles) such as toys, shoes, books, furniture, kitchen utensils, and masking tape for start and finish line.

Instructions:

- Have some silly fun together! Prior to the start of the activity, determine a start and finish line, approximately 12 feet or use any open space you have around your home. Have another family member scatter the random assortment of materials around the room, between the start and finish lines. \*Note: While you can use any materials for this, make sure they are small enough to step over or around to ensure a safe environment. Try not to avoid seeing the layout of the space ahead of time.
- Parents/Guardians and youth, you will take turns guiding each other through the mine field of obstacles on the floor. One partner will need to be blindfolded or their eyes closed and will not be allowed to talk. The other partner is allowed to see and talk, but is not allowed to touch the other person.
- Explain that the goal is for each blindfolded person to get from one side of the space to the other. They must safely avoid touching the scattered materials by carefully listening to the verbal guidance of their partner. If someone touches an item, they have to start over.
- Have the blindfolded person enter the area with the scattered materials. Remember, the blindfolded person can't talk; they must just listen and walk. The guider can't touch their partner but can speak to them. After the first person successfully reaches the other side, swap roles and repeat the process.

### **REFLECTION: *Youth and Parents/Guardians***

Just like our minefield, when we start having conversations about social media there are a lot of worries, fear and challenges that we don't even know about. We know that there are dangers hiding in the maze that we can't see. We've never had the reach or exposure that we have now, and we don't know all the dangers. That means that the decisions we make regarding technology and social media, should be made together. We need to work together to keep everyone safe and to navigate the maze of our digital encounters. Like the minefield, one of the main strategies to achieve this is trial and error. We will make mistakes, but hopefully we'll learn from them as we work together. Similar to the minefield, we need support from others who have seen the dangers and can help us know where the danger is and show us how to get through it.

### **DISCUSSION: *Youth and Parents/Guardians***

Share about what this experience was like. What were you feeling during it?

What roles do trust and communication play in this activity?

What makes you worried about social media? What makes you excited about social media?

In what ways does social media help you connect with others?

Discuss some ways you think parents/guardians and youth can work together to safely use social media.

## **LESSON: Youth and Parents/Guardians take turns reading**

### **Digital Identity Guidelines**

#### **Integrity**

Our first guideline is INTEGRITY and it means being the same in every situation. There is a real temptation for any user of social media to not have high integrity (to say or do things that they would never do in person). This is an especially hard guideline for young people, because as youth grow up, they will naturally try out different identities. Teenagers are in the act of deciding which me they want to be, and social media seems to give them an endless playground to experiment with. We leave digital footprints everywhere, and our actions, while they may seem anonymous, are a reflection of who you are... and who your parents/guardians are... and who your God is. And your actions and words online can't always be deleted.

*EXAMPLE: I (Ian H.) work with a lot of teenagers and I can't tell you the number of times I receive a distress call from a student late at night who is trying to figure out what went wrong. Often times it started with a text or a message that was really supposed to be harmless or even helpful. But after it got passed on, or misinterpreted it spiraled out of control and then a friendship is ruined, or someone is bullied, or someone is taken advantage of. The bottom line is that your words matter. Some people live by this motto that if you wouldn't say it to their face, don't say it on your screen. So it is so important for you to have the highest integrity you can: be your best self in all these situations.*

#### **DISCUSSION: Youth and Parents/Guardians**

Is it sometimes hard to have integrity as a young person/adult around your peers? How so?

Can you think of an example of something someone might text or post, but wouldn't say in person?

What are some ways we can have integrity when online or using social media?

How can our words and actions online and on social media reflect who our God is?

#### **Transparency**

Our second guideline is TRANSPARENCY. It means acting in a way that others can see what you are doing. Youth, as you grow up, there will be more and more choices that you'll make on your own. This growing independence is healthy. But your digital identity is too important to keep secret from your parents. If something is going on that you don't want your parents to know or see... it probably shouldn't be going on... that's what transparency is. Transparency means allowing your parents to hold you accountable to what you say and do. It will keep you protected from your own actions and allow your parents to help you solve problems when they show up.

Parents/Guardians, this means that your primary role should be to act with grace and forgiveness. You probably don't have to think very hard to remember being a teenager and getting caught doing something you shouldn't have been. Your role with transparency is to be understanding, gracious, forgiving, but always curious about your kids.

Transparency builds strong relationships and it will help you be the best person that you can be.

#### **DISCUSSION: Youth and Parents/Guardians**

Share about a time when you made a mistake and got caught. How did you feel? How could you have been more transparent in that situation?

What are some positive ways we can hold each other accountable when we make mistakes?

How can we best practice being transparent online or when using social media?

## Balance

The third guideline is BALANCE. You are going to juggle a lot of activities, responsibilities, and expectations as you grow up. Many of us have learned through trial and error when things get out of balance in our lives. We get overly stressed out, or we ignore a friendship, or we forget to complete a project in time because we didn't prioritize the right things. Balance is about prioritizing what is important. With technology, finding a balance is really important, but it can be difficult. Technology can sometimes be an entertainment that is fulfilling for us, that recharges our batteries, or a good stress reliever... but sometimes technology can be a distraction that consumes our time and takes the place of important things, or allows us to avoid what we need to be doing.

People of all ages have a lot of things to do and many keep track of those things on their devices. But when it comes to getting work done, like homework or projects for a job, social media can become a huge distraction that sometimes causes us to lose focus or to stay up too late in order to get the work done. We have to remember that social media and app companies hire experts to design ways for us to interact with technology. Their motivation is for us to interact and consume more and more, not for us to be healthy or have healthy experiences. The app developer wants you to love their app and never put it down... so we have to be aware of what we want, the addictive quality of these devices, and who God tells us to be in the world.

Every family needs to determine what works best for their needs in terms of finding the right balance for using devices, social media, and technology. And it needs to be something that both parents and youth agree to as much as possible. Maybe for your family it means creating a technology free day or technology free zone, like the kitchen table, or it might be setting downtime and screen time limits. Or it could be setting up a chart where youth can earn extra time on their devices for good behavior or doing chores. The reality is that God calls us to be conscious of our choices and not a slave to anything, including the demands of our technology. It is good for our body, mind, and spirit to put our devices away and intentionally unplug.

## **DISCUSSION: Youth and Parents/Guardians**

What are some of your favorite things to do together as a family? Is technology a part of those things or not? When is a good time to unplug and take a break from your devices and social media?

Share an example of when you have spent too much time using your devices/social media/technology.

How can you hold each other accountable in keeping a good balance for using technology?

## **ACTIVITY: Screen Safe Pledge**

Supplies: Cut Screen Safe Pledge Discussion Topics into small strips and place in a jar, hat, or other container

One valuable tool that we think is important in cultivating a positive digital identity is developing a contract or covenant between parents/guardians and youth. For this next activity, we are sharing a sample covenant with you (included at the end of this lesson). Take turns drawing a slip of paper, read aloud, then answer...

- Why is this important?
- Youth answer: Will this be easy or hard to do, why or why not?
- Parents/Guardians: Affirm any good behavior they've seen with this statement.

Take turns drawing between parents/guardians and youth.

Use this conversation and the Screen Safe Pledge Sheet to develop your family's expectations for using technology, mobile devices, and social media. Determine together when these expectations will begin – when a child receives a phone, gets an Instagram page or other social media app, or turns a certain age, for example.

## **ACTIVITY: Password Booklet**

Supplies: paper and craft supplies to create your own password booklet.

As a way to wrap up this Faith Stepping Stone, we want every family to create a password booklet to keep your children's usernames and passwords listed in. You may already have this information saved in a digital format, but because INTEGRITY, TRANSPARENCY, and BALANCE are key to our digital identity, the password book can be a tool to help your family make the right choices and be more aware of your digital interactions. It has been shown that families benefit greatly when Parents/Guardians monitor the behavior of their children with technology, guide them when they make mistakes, set reasonable limits as children grow, and use it as a way to positively interact with their children.

Be creative! Take time to work on this project together and create a password booklet that can become a family keepsake of sorts.

Once, you have created your book, start filling it up with a list of your online and app accounts and passwords. For example, you could write a different account on each page, include the website/app name, followed by user name, followed by password.

## **DISCUSSION AND WRAP UP: *Youth and Parents/Guardians***

- What is the purpose of a book like this?
- How might a book like this be helpful for you and your parents?
- Brainstorm how many things you could write in this book...
- Decide where should this book be kept?
- Share your screen safe pledge and password booklet on social media and tag Sheridan: sheridanluthlnk and sheridan\_youth
- Make plans to attend the 7<sup>th</sup> Grade Faith Stepping Stone Blessing in worship on Wednesday, October 19, 2022 at 6pm

**Sheridan Lutheran Church**

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**Screen Safe Pledge Conversation**

*Use the following statements to begin the conversation about expectations and boundaries in your family.  
Don't assume that everyone knows what the expectations are until they are said out loud.*

I will never give out personal information such as my last name, address, phone number, or photos without my family's permission.

I will not share my passwords with anyone other than my family.

I will help my family set media time limits that make sense and then I will follow them.

I will allow my parents/guardians to check into my media history whenever they think it is necessary.

I will only have online interactions with people I know in real life.

I will tell my parents/guardians right away if anything I see makes me uncomfortable or if anyone makes me feel pressure or acts inappropriately online.

I will not stay on or click on a page that says, "for over 18 years only."

I will not download any pictures or files unless a parent/guardian is supervising me.

I will not say anything online that I wouldn't say in person, I will not bully, humiliate, or upset anyone and I will stand up to those who do.

I will always answer calls from my parents/guardians.

I will not post anything online or share anything with my phone that might harm my reputation or the reputation of others.

I will be mindful of how much time I spend in front of screens and I will continue to enjoy the other activities and people in my life.

Add your own: \_\_\_\_\_