“This Week in Teen Culture”

February 23, 2022

Three Things This Week

1

Uncharted

What it is: Tom Holland, the Gen Z Spiderman, stars with Mark Wahlberg in a movie adaptation of the popular Uncharted video game franchise.

Why it might flop: Uncharted is a series of video games based around an epic treasure hunt for ancient artifacts. The themes of these games, and now the film, are similar to those you would find in a movie like *National Treasure*. Mark Wahlberg was originally attached to play Nathan Drake, this film’s main protagonist, but he grew too old to play the part while the movie hit a series of production delays. Early reviews note that while Holland and Wahlberg are good in their roles, both seem to be playing versions of characters we’ve seen them in already. (To paraphrase one astute YouTube comment, it’s just Spidey in a different shirt). Gen Z doesn’t have too many theatrical-only options these days, which might be the biggest thing the movie has going for it. The film is likely coming out way past what would have been it’s prime moment — the trailer only has 12 million views which, compared with 44 million for the recent trailer for *Jurassic Park: Dominion*, is a harbinger of box office doom.

2

Is Deconstruction the Enemy?

What it is: At Desiring God, Jon Bloom breaks down the term “deconstruction,” which has come to be used on social media as a synonym for “deconversion” from evangelical Christianity.

Why it’s worth taking time to understand: “Deconstruction” has become associated with a movement that sees evangelicalism as a force for harm in the world. But, as this article explains, that’s only one definition for a word that has become quite complicated. “Deconstruction,” in the academic sense, comes from Jacque Derrida’s critical theories of language and meaning. To deconstruct one’s faith might be to dismantle and discard the meaning it once held for you personally, but it also can refer to having a crisis of faith that gives you a new understanding of God. Bloom’s article is especially helpful because it doesn’t condemn people who identify as being in the midst of “deconstruction.” As young people gravitate toward using “deconstruction” to describe their faith experience, it’s important to understand that uncertainty and doubt are not always an enemy of faith, but can be instead the shadow as we walk further toward light.

3

Remote Reiki

What it is: An alternative health practice called Reiki is trending on TikTok, with over 700 million views on #reiki.

Why teens are watching: Reiki claims it can tap into a universal energy source and divert that energy into power or healing. In-person Reiki came to America from Japan in the 1920s as a way to reduce stress and anxiety through physical touch. TikTokers specializing in Reiki practice hold up their hands to the camera while reciting mantras or empowerment phrases. Crystals and sage-burning sometimes figure into the practice, and soothing or punchy songs are often playing in the background. These posts make provocative claims about what they can do for those watching, promising to make you irresistible to your crush, help you lose weight, or give you clear skin. Any case for so-called "distance Reiki" actually working is paper-thin, which even #reiki viewers seem to know; the #asmr tag indicates that videos are meant to soothe and comfort, not necessarily facilitate some sort of magic. But when someone falls down the New Age rabbit hole, the idea of a powerful energy that can be controlled by people and not guided by God becomes easier to buy into.

Slang of the Week

frag: refers to successfully killing another player in a video game (Ex: "He tried to sneak-attack me with a grenade but I threw it right back." "Nice frag.")

Translation: Remote Reiki

In Matthew 10:8, Jesus sends out his disciples with the following instructions: "Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received; freely give." While Jesus is known to have facilitated remote healing on occasion, the first disciples lived with the expectation that healing would happen to people through prayer and the laying on of hands. Some Reiki practitioners seem to be operating under both concepts—that of healing in-person, and that of healing from a physical distance.

That's not to imply that Reiki is simply Christian healing in disguise. In fact, at the time of their "attunement" many Reiki practitioners talk about receiving a "spirit guide" whose task involves helping them reach a "meditative state, maintaining a clear channel for the Universal Life Force energy, and guiding our hands to the best positions for the needs of the client." In Christianity, whatever healing we experience comes from the Father through Jesus—the source of all life and goodness, who is decidedly distinct from everything dark and unholy in our universe—and not from a catch-all Universal Life Force.

There are complicated conversations to have about why prayers for healing aren't always answered today, especially in the cultural West. (There are also numerous stories of "medical anomalies"

which Elijah Stevens explores in his new documentary *Send Proof*.) But the prevalence of Reiki on TikTok seems to suggest a hunger for a more experiential spirituality in the rising generation—one where healing can be tangibly experienced in this life and not just relegated to the next one. This is hope that the gospel offers us—even if it doesn't always look the way we think it will. As Jesus said in Matthew 11:28, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest."

Here are some questions we hope might spark conversation about this with the teens in your world:

- Have you ever heard a story of someone being healed?
- If not, do you believe miraculous healing is possible today? Why or why not?
- If so, how has that story shaped your faith?

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8 PREMIUM INSIGHTS

A broader look at the world that teens inhabit.
Skim our summary or click the links to read more.
Engage your teens in conversation about their world.

They said it best:

When we honestly ask ourselves which person in our lives means the most to us, we often find that it is those who, instead of giving advice, solutions, or cures, have chosen rather to share our pain and touch our wounds with a warm and tender hand." – Henri Nouwen

Pop Culture

Film/TV/Streaming

1. MoviePass is relaunching with a new dystopian model: eye-tracking on advertisements. In the past, MoviePass allowed users to watch unlimited movies by paying a small subscription fee each month. Now, movies will be earned with "credits," and you can collect them by watching ads on your phone. The catch is that your eyeballs will be tracked to make sure that you didn't just put on the ad

and walk away. It's possible that younger film-lovers may shrug and surrender their eyeballs, or they may pass on MoviePass altogether.

2. In an open letter to fans, Matt and Ross Duffer announced that *Stranger Things'* fourth season will be released in two parts. The first part of the season will stream on Netflix on May 27, while the second volume will drop on July 1. The Duffers also confirmed that next season, the show's fifth, will mark the end of the *Stranger Things* story arc, though it will likely set the stage for spinoff shows. Due to pandemic filming hangups, it's been quite awhile since *Stranger Things* content hit screens, so it'll be interesting to see if teens are still curious about what happens next with Eleven & Co.

Sports

3. You probably noticed that ads for cryptocurrency dominated the Superbowl. Coinbase, FTX, and eToro all presented their best pitches for why would-be investors should turn to crypto as the investment, and currency, of the future. Celebrities got in on the action, with Larry David penning and starring in one commercial while LeBron James featured in another. Advertising execs seem to feel like the Venn diagram of people interested in football, crypto, and sports betting is just a single, flat circle of men in the 18 to 30 demographic.

Trending/Memes

4. TikTok #missedconnections is pairing people up. #Missedconnections, #findher and #findhim posts feature video snippets where a user opines over meet-cutes that never were, trusting the FYP algorithm to push the post to the person they're hoping to find. It works sort of like a newspaper or Craigslist missed connection used to, except the odds of it working are much better. That means TikTok's algorithm is so effective that it can push your post into the feed of a stranger you might never otherwise meet.

Music

5. This year's Superbowl Halftime show got the most positive attention the show has seen in recent memory. Heroes of a hip-hop age gone by, including Dr. Dre, Snoop Dogg, Eminem, Mary J. Blige, and 50 Cent remixed their hits against a backdrop made to look like a throwback to Compton, California. While older millennials and Gen Xers might have felt nostalgic watching the performance, teens were googling things like "Who is the white rapper at the halftime show?" (Eminem. It was Eminem). Sunday's performers have already seen a boost in their Spotify numbers as young people discover them for the first time.

Fashion/Beauty/Appearance

6. The *New York Times* reports that a TikTok trend called "slugging" is meant to refresh your skin and create a cheap fix for dryness and redness. The secret is slathering your entire face with good old petroleum jelly. That's right, Vaseline, which never really went away, is making a skincare comeback amongst the younger set. Contrary to popular belief, Vaseline is non-comedogenic, not linked to cancer, and won't make you grow hair on your face. Just keep in mind that if someone is prone to breakouts, there are better redness remedies out there.

Education

7. Sociologists have discovered a strong link between religiosity and academic performance. A new book called *God, Grades, and Graduation* points to a devout faith as the source of habits that can lead to higher GPAs and better academic outcomes. The book's author argues in Religion News Service that traits like conscientiousness, cooperation, and respect for authority can be bred in religious settings and translate well to academic ones. The same research suggests that teens who feel they can please God with their grades and good behavior may do well in school, but are actually less likely to choose highly selective colleges, citing parenthood and family life as their ultimate goals.

Conversation Starter:

8. Are we living in the most distracted time in human history? A conversation at *Vox* points out how the lightning-speed "attention economy" may be robbing us of the ability to reach some of our individual goals. This problem isn't limited to the technology we use, but to everything we do; deep, focused attention seems to be getting more and more impossible to attain. For older folks who grew up without spending a lot of time online, it might simply feel like the natural effects of aging. But younger folks are losing their abilities to focus and think deeply, too. What could it mean for the future, and how do we reverse it?

Conversation starters:

- When was the last time something really sustained your attention for three hours or more? Are there specific things that are interesting enough to really captivate you?
- Do you feel like your family is one where deep, loving attention is given to each member? How can you better practice loving one another with quality time and attention?
- How does this lack of attentiveness challenge our spiritual life and connection with God? What are some spiritual practices that can help build our attention endurance?