“This Week in Teen Culture”

May 18, 2022

1

Isn’t It Romantic?

What it is: The phrase “romanticize your life” is being used to encourage naming and celebrating life’s small pleasures.

Why it’s resonating: The idea of the relaxing, sun-drenched, quiet-moving life is appealing and, some would say, countercultural to a generation that’s grown up with lightning-speed technology. To sit and watch the sunset, to appreciate the scents coming from your morning shower, and to drink tea from fancy little cups can seem curious and quaint. But “romanticizing a life” means, put simply, falling in love with the moments you’re given, and maybe even dressing those moments up a bit. It might also be about finding daily rituals that are specific to you, and extending a big aesthetic (#cottagecore) to microhabits that are distinctly individual. Making an effort to be as present and engaged as possible also gives us opportunities to better steward and appreciate the natural world—the thing that declares God’s handiwork.

2

A Scriptural Shoutout

What it is: The most recent State of the Bible report compiled by the American Bible Society showed that trends in curiosity about the Bible came to an abrupt end in the last 12 months.

Why it's striking: Since 2018, when the American Bible Society started collecting data on Bible use, Bible users have accounted for 47 to 49 percent of US adults. Since April 2021, that number sank down to 39 percent. Based on that statistic, the ABS says that nearly 26 million Americans reduced or stopped interacting with the Bible within the past year. Even people who typically read the Bible regularly decreased their Scripture interaction, the survey indicates. If you have found yourself relying less on the Bible in the last few months, you’re not alone, and a course correction will work best if it’s done in community with an accountability partner, a church group, or as a family activity.

3

It Takes a Dataset

What it is: A tool called the Opportunity Atlas shows that choosing where your children will grow up might be one of the most important indicators of their earning potential and stability.

Why it's worth looking at: As parents, we spend a lot of time thinking about how all of our decisions may impact the people that our children grow up to be. We don't want to limit their opportunities or keep them from realizing their full potential. By breaking down large swathes of IRS and US Census data, the Opportunity Atlas project was able to identify how individual neighborhoods have a huge influence on the long-term stability and success of children. Said another way, the neighborhood you are raised in, and the *people you grow up around*, are a strong indicator of adult outcomes. Given these findings, we can also expand our thinking to the "village" of people we include in our children's upbringings, including church and Christian life settings. The people we choose to raise our kids alongside will be a central factor in who our kids grow up to believe they can, and should, be.

Slang of the Week

Buy the Dip: A term used by crypto enthusiasts and in-app daytraders to mean "buy when the market gets low," now being used sarcastically to refer to something that's going down and probably not going to come back up; the joke is that since everyone's assets are tanked, nobody can buy the dip. (Ex: "Robin: I can't believe this, my entire savings just crashed now that Dogecoin is worth nothing." "Little John: Well, you know what they say — buy the dip!")

Translation: Isn't It Romantic?

There's a lot to appreciate about the "romanticize your life" trend, and we pray that it continues to grow. The trend is essentially about cultivating and practicing gratitude for the little things in our lives, instead of only pining away for the expensive, elaborate occasions. Near the end of 1 Thessalonians 5, the Apostle Paul writes, "give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." Although the number of consistent Bible readers may be dwindling (as per thing 2), this trend of "romanticizing our lives" could be evidence of God continuing to work in ways we might not be expecting… stirring up gratitude and appreciation for the world he's created, even

among those who may not know him (yet).

As Christians, we believe that whatever God commands is something that will ultimately work out for our good. And in fact, when it comes to gratitude, psychologists are beginning to understand how "giving thanks in all circumstances" can have a significant positive impact on our mental health. Ann Voskamp writes about how journaling just three things we're grateful for each day can help reduce depression, apathy, and other intrusive thoughts like suicidal ideation. As Jerusha Clark put it in her Axis Whiteboard session, "Gratitude and anxiety are mutually exclusive neural pathways. You physiologically cannot be grateful and anxious at the same time."

Though some will approach "romanticizing your life" as if it's a new concept, in reality it's only a repackaging of a biblical idea. The Bible Project summarizes the wisdom of Ecclesiastes in this way: "Since you can't control your life, you should stop trying. Learn to hold things with an open hand because you really only have control over one thing, and that's your attitude towards the present moment. Stop worrying… and choose to enjoy a good conversation with a friend, or the sun on your face, or a good meal with people that you care about."

Life can be hard, and the world can be crazy, but we can always find things to appreciate and be thankful for. Here are some questions we hope might spark conversation about that with your teens:

- What does the idea of gratefulness mean to you?
- Have you ever thought about keeping a gratitude journal?
- Do you think practicing gratitude means ignoring the hard parts of life?

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 people say, "I know God forgives me, but I can't forgive myself," they mean that they have failed an idol, whose approval is more important than God's.” — Tim Keller

Pop Culture

Film/TV/Streaming

1. Netflix is considering running commercials. After taking a walloping in their subscription numbers over the last quarter, the streaming giant needs a way to replace that lost revenue. Netflix is in talks to launch ads as soon as late 2022. Subscribers who are frustrated with the content that Netflix offers are flocking to competitors, such as Disney+ and Hulu, and it’s likely that this move will just mean even more subscribers will jump ship to ad-free options.

2. *Dune Part II* is a go after the critical and commercial success of the first film. The Denis Villaneuve-directed epic will continue to star Gen Z fave Timothee Chalamet as Paul Atreides. The second installment of *Dune* won’t premiere until late 2023, but the buzz around the movie is already building as Christopher Walken has signed on to the cast. If it remains true to its source material, the second film will likely feature more Zendaya as well as more vague ecospiritualism.

Social Media

3. The YouTubers are not okay, as reported by Vox. YouTuber burnout has been a real thing for the last several years, with many popular content creators quitting the platform only to return again afterward. Often, this can be because of controversy over past actions and the threat of “cancelation.” But as this article points out, YouTube is unique in that it gives creators a ton of information about their audience. These metrics can make YouTubers feel empowered and give them an outsized idea of their own

influence. It can also make them feel rejected, exhausted, and like no content they create is good enough. The high rate of burnout amongst this type of influencer might be different than creators who spend most of their time on other platforms.

Music

4. A new song (*language)* by Future that features Drake displaced Harry Styles as the #1 song this week. The video for "Wait 4 U," which features Future decked out as a feudal-era "toxic king" and Drake swordfighting, has racked up over 8 million views on YouTube since its May 5 debut. The song seems to hint at chivalry in its many promises to wait loyally for a love interest, but also refers to taking pills, drinking, and promiscuity.

Fashion/Beauty/Appearance

5. Vox also says that trends are dead, pointing to how many things are trending concurrently on TikTok these days. If everything is a trend, this piece asks, is anything? As Terry Nguyen writes, "No one is sure exactly what a trend is anymore or if it's just an unfounded observation gone viral. The distinction doesn't seem to matter, since TikTok—and the consumer market—demands novelty." The piece describes a "chaotic" consumer landscape in which even the most viral moment seems to be instantly disposable, and suggests that the only reason TikTok trends are even named by media sources is to make them commodifiable.

Teen Culture

Latest Statistics

6. Research published by the Barna group suggests that working moms are facing unique, significant challenges. This could be because two years after the pandemic hit, more mothers than fathers are still working from home. Thirty percent of working mothers wish for more quiet time to gain perspective, and 36 percent said they feel overwhelmed, according to their survey. One in five Christian working moms who participated said that they are not attending church right now. The sample size of this survey was small, but Pew Research Center has reported similar findings. Further research will hopefully continue to illuminate what working moms are going through.

Gaming/Esports

7. *Apex Legends* is coming to mobile on May 17. It will be a battle-royale style game, just like the game console and PC versions. And similar to its previous iterations, the game will be free, with in-app purchases that impact the cosmetic appearance of a player's avatar (similar to Fortnite skins). However, players who are using the game on a mobile device won't be able to play against others who are on other gaming platforms. Common Sense Media published a parent's guide for the regular version of *Apex Legends* back in 2020, if you need to understand the basics of what the game entails.

Conversation Starter:

8. In a YPulse poll of where Gen Z turns for guidance and support, religion didn't even crack the top ten. Instead, young people said that they were most likely to draw inspiration from their favorite musicians. Seventeen percent of survey participants even said that they didn't have a person or community outside of friends and family that they would turn to for advice. Influencers and comedians were also sources of guidance that young people in the survey named. Lots of the 1450 young people who participated also named their therapist as their go-to source of guidance in life outside of their friends or family. Maybe we shouldn't read *too* far into this data point—after all, it is a relatively small survey conducted by a marketing firm. But it's worth understanding who, exactly, is speaking into our kids' lives as they navigate big decisions.

Conversation starters:

- Who would you say is your go-to friend when it comes to getting advice? Why do you trust their advice so much?
- Is there any person or institution that you admire in terms of achievement? Would you ask them for advice?
- What are some red flags that show us a person should *not* be a source of inspiration or advice?