

Youth Culture Lesson
Finding Teachable Moments in Culture
From *YouthWorker Journal* and YouthWorker.com

The Good News

Positivity Grows, Thanks to Social Networking

By Paul Asay

What Happened:

They say no news is good news, and good news is rarely news at all. That may no longer be true, according to some experts. Positive, upbeat stories are more common than ever before, and observers say social networks such as Facebook are a big reason.

A big facet of outlets such as Facebook and Twitter is their ability to share stories. When people find an article or news clip interesting, they might post it to their profile pages. If their online friends and associates think it's interesting, too, they might like or share it with their friends. This dynamic has made social networking one of the most common ways people learn about the world.

When it comes to posting, liking and sharing stories, people are far more prone to pick positive stories than negative ones. The reasons are pretty obvious. What would you be more likely to share on your Facebook page: a story of a lion who adopted a lamb or one about how a lion ate one?

According to a recent article in *Time*, we're more likely to post a positive story than a negative one. Why? It makes us look better. For the same reason most of us smile when we see someone instead of snarl, we like to present a positive picture of ourselves online. We're more prone to share good news than bad—in our personal lives and the articles we choose to share.

“What we share [or like] is almost like the car we drive or the clothes we wear,” says Jonah Berger, who wrote the book *Contagious: Why Things Catch On*. “It says something about us to other people. So people would rather be seen as a Positive Polly than a Debbie Downer.”

We're also more likely to like or share a story that makes us feel good. Because we all like getting likes on our posts, that encourages us to post more stuff people will like. That doesn't just mean posting cute pictures of cats; some of these positive posts can make a huge difference. When the website Upworthy posted a story about a terminally ill teen this year, it garnered 15 million views and helped raise \$300,000 for cancer research.

This trend has grown so pronounced that two online news outlets, BuzzFeed and Upworthy, cater to folks who are looking for good news stories to share. Eli Pariser, who co-founded Upworthy, knows some people believe the Internet is ruled by snark, but he believes differently.

“You don’t want to be that guy at the party who’s crazy and angry and ranting in the corner,” Pariser says. “It’s the same for Twitter and Facebook. Part of what we’re trying to do with Upworthy is give people the tools to express a conscientious, thoughtful and positive identity in social media.”

Talk About It:

Do you share stories online on Facebook, Twitter or elsewhere? What kinds of stories are you most likely to post? What are you most likely to like or share? What’s the biggest feel-good story you’ve heard recently?

Experts say we tend to post good news because we want to present a positive image of ourselves. How important is that for you? Do you sometimes pretend to be happy when you don’t feel very happy at all? Do you think other people do that? Why?

There’s nothing wrong with trying to present the world a good, positive picture of yourself. Realistically, it’s what we have to do, but that doesn’t mean we have to hide our feelings when we’re angry or upset or heartbroken. When you’re feeling down, do you share your feelings with different people? Fewer people? Do you tend to hide those feelings completely?

When we talk about spreading good news across the Internet, we get some surprising encouragement from the Bible. The word *gospel*, after all, means “good news” or “glad tidings”—and we’re encouraged to spread it as much as possible. How do you try to spread good news? How do you share the gospel with others?

What the Bible Says:

“Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things” (Phil. 4:8).

“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Matt. 28:19-20).

Paul Asay has covered religion for *The Washington Post*, *Christianity Today*, Beliefnet.com, and *The (Colorado Springs) Gazette*. He writes about culture for *Plugged In* and wrote the Batman book, *God on the Streets of Gotham* (Tyndale). He lives in Colorado Springs with wife Wendy and his two children. Follow him on Twitter at @AsayPaul.