



A weekly resource to spark biblically-centered conversations with your kids about the issues they face in today's youth culture.

BeReal **BY: Claire Harris**, CPYU Research Fellow and Youth Director at Christ Community Covenant Church, Arvada, CO

Most social media platforms today encourage their members to play with filters, editing, faceturning and retouching. Users can find themselves in competition with other users to get the most views, comments or likes, and to present themselves perfectly whenever they post. Obviously, we should encourage our students to resist the cultural pressure to re-package themselves in order to gain praise and attention, but what if what they're being encouraged to post is ordinary and authentic? What happens when a new platform is created, where users are encouraged to post every single day with no editing, no filters, no retouching and no notice?



What is Happening?

- BeReal is a French photo-sharing social media platform that only allows its users to post on one random time each day prompted by its notifications. The app describes itself as being, “not another social network” and is designed with the goal of having its users post “real” unedited content at a spontaneously prompted time.
- Each user is given a two-minute window in order to post their photos (one selfie and one rear facing photo) when they are notified randomly each day that it is time to “Be Real.” Any post made outside of that two minute window is shared with the disclaimer of being a “late” post which is visible to everyone on the feed. You are also not able to see anyone else’s photo for the day unless you post your own, and each post is only visible to your viewers for one day. If you try and screenshot someone else’s post, that person is then notified that you’ve taken a screenshot. There are no “likes” on BeReal but you can share a reactionary emoji on your friends’ posts, featuring your own face and picture. All of the features of BeReal are designed to promote transparency and authenticity. Nothing is hidden, nothing is secret, nothing is fake, and nothing is planned.
- BeReal sends a notification to make a post at a randomly selected time each day, and because the app lets other users know if your picture was posted late, there are strong incentives to post whatever you’re doing, wherever you are, when the notification sounds. However, many users are bumping up against BeReal’s call for an authentic online presence when the notification sounds and they’re not doing anything exciting or their hair is a mess. Some users are facing the temptation to wait to post until they have an exciting moment or when they can get better lighting, which exposes our human nature and also stands in contrast to what BeReal is trying to promote.
- The app was released in 2020 and has gained lots of popularity amongst junior high, high school, and college aged students. While it’s reported that the apps active daily users have more than halved since their peak in October of 2022, there are still an active average of 6 million users committed to “being real” each day.



WORD

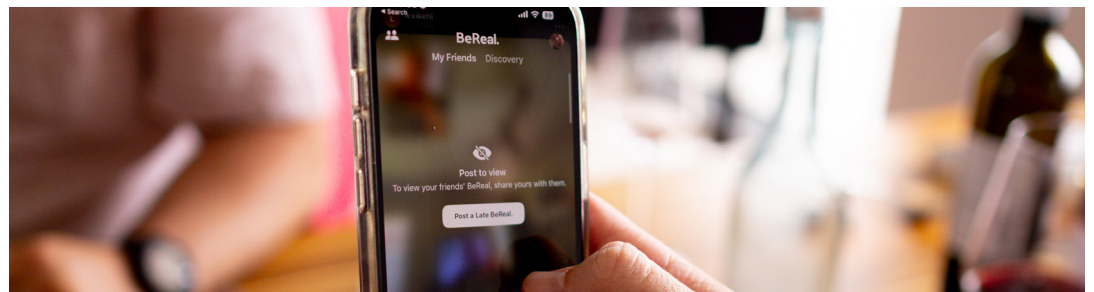
What Does God's Word Say?

We're not called to covet what others have (Exodus 20:17) and to live by the fruit of the spirit, not of grumbling and complaining. Many people are discontinuing their usage of BeReal because they don't like to see the monotony of their daily lives each and every day. Instead, they'd rather scroll through picture-perfect TikTok and Instagram, day dreaming of what it would be like to have that person's fit body, magical vacation, or dream house. What if instead of coveting other people's lives, we made changes to our own? BeReal might be exposing how fake things are on other apps, and the ruts we might find ourselves in our own daily lives, but if we think deleting the app is the only change to make, we're missing the opportunity to make real, lasting change in the ways that matter.

Additionally, we're called to be in the world, but not of the world (John 17:14-15) and to be imitations of God, our creator, not of whatever celebrity/influencer is trending lately. We should resist the urge to represent ourselves as anything other than who we really are. Inevitably, when that human urge bubbles up in us, we should bring it to the Lord, not allow it to influence what we share on Instagram. "Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God" (Ephesians 5:1-2).

Lastly, repeatedly in Scripture, from the 10 Commandments all the way through the New Testament, God commands His people to be truthful and honest. We're taught to value things of God, not things of this world and to place our identity in Him instead of any other idol. So whether we're choosing to be active on BeReal or not, I think these words from Paul in Philippians stand as great framework for any content we contemplate posting anywhere. Before we post we should ask ourselves, is it true? Is it honorable? Is it pure? "Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you" (Philippians 4:8-9).

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(Ephesians 5:1-2)*





WALK

Conversation Starters and Questions:

Before beginning a discussion with your student about BeReal, take a look at your own social media consumption. Are you using social media today? What platforms are you using? What kinds of things do you enjoy posting or looking at? What is it you're hoping to gain out of your time spent on social media? *In order for us to engage in a healthy conversation with our teens, we must first be honest with ourselves. Don't be scared to share a bit of your own humanity! By appropriately communicating that it can be tempting for you to edit everything you post until it's perfect or that it can be hard to stop mindlessly scrolling after a long work day, you can be more approachable with your teen. Share with them what you enjoy about social media, what its challenges are, and why as a Christian living in today's world you want to use it differently!*

- Begin by asking your student to share with you what social media most of their friends use, and what they use as well. Which app is their favorite, and why? What kinds of things do they like to watch or look at? Pay careful attention to what they share—they might be revealing a lot about how and why they spend their time on these apps!
- Ask your student if BeReal is popular amongst their friends. If so, ask them about what kinds of things they see their friends posting on that app. Ask them if they see any differences between what their friends post on BeReal verses SnapChat, Instagram, TikTok etc. (The goal is to highlight for students the gap between what is “real” on one app and what is polished and perfect on others.)
- Ask your teen why they think people are comfortable posting some content on BeReal, but not on other apps? Is that something they can relate to?
- Talk to them about if they ever feel any pressure to show up on apps or to have a digital self? Whether it's BeReal or another app, is social media fulfilling for them, or just another place to try and control other people's impressions of them? Is it entertaining or exhausting or both? Why?
- Remember that conversations about something as broad and significant as social media don't all have to be done in one sitting! In fact, it can be best to really sit back and reflect on something your teen shares, pray about it and then bring it up another time. There's a lot of power in saying, “You know I've been thinking a lot about our last conversation and...” because it communicates to your teen that you really care about them and pay attention to what they have to say.

For further reflection: BeReal invites us to rethink what our true motivations for social media are, what real life looks like and whether or not we're actually interested in what is real. By requiring its users to “be real” by posting the everyday, ordinary and even mundane content of our lives, it forces all of us to really examine ourselves. If we're comfortable posting pictures of our piles of laundry, daily errands, or makeup-free selfies on BeReal, then what makes us feel like we can't post those same photos on Instagram? Is reality really enough for us, or is the unedited content of BeReal boring and we really prefer to see and produce edited, beautiful, “perfect” content? And even scarier, if we are “being real” on BeReal, then what are we doing everywhere else?



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