

A Parent-Child Discipleship Guide
When Your Kid Wants a Phone

– **Dynamite**

– **in your**

– **hands**

By Andy Huetten & Jil Stauter

A Word to Parents

How to Use This Resource

Phone ownership has become a modern rite of passage that provides an opportunity for parents to instruct their children in the way of the Lord. To best utilize this resource, we recommend:

Schedule It.

Block out time and space to discuss the material in each lesson. A weekly rhythm at a set time and place for six weeks is ideal. Put the responsibility on the shoulders of your child to complete each lesson prior to meeting, and then discuss the material and questions together.

Don't Promise a Phone.

These lessons are not a hoop to jump through for your child to earn a phone. Many parents likely will proceed to get a phone for a child upon completing the lessons in this book, but it would not be healthy for the child to view a phone as an entitlement.

Embrace the Rabbit Trails.

This book can be a great connection point for parents to talk with kids about all kinds of aspects of life. Parents should be encouraged to get kids talking freely and not miss the primary point of relationship and discipleship with their child, even if that means the discussion veers from the lesson at hand.

Share Your Child's Excitement.

Your child is excited to get a phone. Don't rain on the parade with stern lectures about phone ownership. There are plenty of warnings in this book about the dangers of a phone that will provide for meaningful discussion, but don't let the warnings cloud out the joy that you can have in walking with your child as he or she steps into this new phase of life.

Look in the Mirror.

This is a great time for parents to examine their own phone habits. While there may likely need to be different standards of phone use for parents and children in the home, parents should be cautious not to communicate "Do as I say, not as I do." If, for instance, you expect your child to dock their phone at night, this is a good moment for you to consider doing the same.

Don't Travel Alone.

Parents who are intentional with their child's phone usage are anomalies in today's world. Your children, therefore, may see all of this discussion and training as "over the top." Consider sharing this resource with other parents in your church, family, or neighborhood so that your parental involvement in your kids' phone habits is "normal parenting" among your friends and their children. Common expectations and language with your peers around phone usage and habits will be helpful reinforcement and encouragement as you swim upstream.

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L E S S O N O N E



TWO WAYS TO LIVE



LESSON ONE

Two Ways to Live

You're not a little kid anymore. When you were a little kid, somebody spoon-fed you strange baby foods like mashed squash and whipped peas. They'd wipe your messy face, clean up your food-encrusted highchair, and eventually change your very-unpleasant diaper. But you're done with that stage. You're growing up and a really fun part about growing up is that you get to choose who you want to be and what you want to do with your life. You can be an archaeologist, a circus clown, or a computer programmer. You can be a farmer, a baker, a candlestick maker, a preacher, a teacher, a goer-to-the-beacher, a drummer in a band, or a hauler of sand, a military leader or a gambling cheater, a writer who rhymes or a writer who doesn't rhyme.

You can save up and buy a big ol' mansion, or you can live off the grid in a camper-van. You can climb Mt. Everest or be a deep-sea diver. You can get married or not, have a family or not, run a marathon or not. Who knows? You may even get to go into outer space. You have an endless number of possibilities before you about how you can choose to live your life.

What would like to do with your life when you become an adult? What would you like to try, accomplish, or become?

Response:

In one sense, you have thousands of options as to how you want to live your life and about who you will be. But in another sense, there are really only two ways to live. Regardless of what you do with your life, you will be on one of two paths. There are not 40 paths or 4,000 paths. Just two. You could be in any one of thousands of different careers, or living in thousands of different locations, but ultimately your life will be on one path or the other. There are two—just two—ways to live.

READ Matthew 7:13-14. What are the two different paths that Jesus mentions? Describe the characteristics of each path.

Response:

The broad path is the way of the world. It's the way of living however you want and it leads to destruction. The narrow way is the way of following Jesus. It's difficult, but it leads to life. As you become an adult, you will choose which path you will follow in your life. Will Jesus be in charge of your life, or will you live for yourself? And that decision—which path you will walk—will influence everything else. How you spend your time, how you use money, how you treat others, and even how you use your phone will all be determined by which path you travel.



So before we talk about phones, we gotta talk about the two paths. Matthew 7:13-14 gives us a few details about the two paths, but when we zoom out and look at Matthew's gospel as a whole, we get a better understanding of three distinct traits of each path.

Who's In Charge?

The first difference between the broad road and the narrow way is a difference of authority. An authority is someone who gives commands. As a result, an authority can be a wonderful gift or a miserable master. Stoplights are an example of good authority. Governing authorities install stoplights to give visual commands, and to help traffic flow efficiently and to prevent accidents. Stoplights are just one example among thousands of how authority is all around us and makes our lives better. Yet, authority can also be misused for harm. Some of the most powerful rulers in world history have been called *authoritarian* because they wield their power for selfish gain and mistreat those under their rule.

The Bible is a story of authority. In the beginning, God is in charge and His authority is unchallenged. Since He authored life itself, He is the lone authority over all creation and He gives commands and instructions for the good of His creation. Early in the story of Scripture, however, mankind resists His authority. In Gen. 2:16-17, God gives one command to Adam and Eve: *"And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, 'You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.'"* There are thousands of trees and plants for Adam and Eve to enjoy, but only one limitation for their protection. It's as though God put stoplights all over creation and all of them are green lights with only one, single, solitary red light. Yet Adam and Eve don't want to stop at the only red light in the garden.

They do not submit to God's authority and instead, drive right through the red light, acting as their own authority. After eating from tree God forbid them to eat from, they reap the consequences of their actions. From that moment on, they are destined to die. The path of resisting God's authority leads to death.

From these opening chapters of the Bible onward, the story of Scripture is a story of authority. When people submit to God's authority and obey His Word there is blessing and peace. However, people often resist His authority, which leads to short term pleasure (like tasting a forbidden fruit) and long-term chaos.

Imagine a classroom full of twenty preschool students. The room is brightly decorated, has numerous toys, and an abundance of paint, glue and other art supplies. What would happen if the teachers stepped out of the room and left the students alone? It wouldn't take long before the students begin to do whatever they want. Without an authority in the room, some students may argue over toys and fight with one another. Other students may find it more entertaining to paint the walls or floor rather than within the lines of their paper. One child may find the snack cupboard and begin doling out snacks for all. A few other students may venture outside the building altogether. The room will quickly become disorganized, unpleasant, and unsafe because each student is doing whatever he or she feels like. Despite the short-term fun of preschool without rules, many students would eventually want their teacher to return and bring order to the chaos.

Similarly, this is what happens after Adam and Eve reject God's authority. The story of Scripture follows the family of Israel and there are moments when leaders like Moses, Joshua, and David exercise godly authority and point people to obey God's commands. There are other moments, however, like the days of the Judges, when there's no presence of godly authority and society is more chaotic than a room full of preschoolers with no teacher.



LESSON ONE

Two Ways to Live

READ Judges 17:6 and 21:25. What problems might arise in a society where everyone does what is right in their own eyes?

Response:

What is one way that you or people your age tend to do what is right in their own eyes instead of following the commands of God?

Response:

The book of Judges ends not merely with the statement that there was no king in Israel, but with the assumption that a godly king is what Israel needs. As the story of Scripture continues, there are glimmers of hope as a few righteous kings exercise wise authority. Yet the peace and joy of their leadership is short-lived. The Old Testament ends with a need, a longing for a righteous King who's wise reign and rule will never end.

Matthew's gospel begins with numerous hints that a baby born in Bethlehem, Jesus, may be the King to whom the Old Testament Scriptures were pointing. Once Jesus grows up and begins his ministry, he identifies himself as the Messiah—the Anointed King—and regularly teaches about the Kingdom of God. By the end of the Gospel accounts it is clear, that Jesus is the Son of God—the authority of God—in the flesh. To follow Jesus, is to submit oneself to God's authority.

The first difference between the broad road and the narrow way is the difference of authority. Those who are on the broad road are doing what is "right in their own eyes." Those who are on the narrow way have repented, turning from self-rule, to make Jesus the King of their life. In Jesus' first recorded public message in Matthew, Jesus preaches, "*Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand*" (Mt. 4:17). He calls people enter His kingdom through repentance.

READ 1 Kings 8:46-50 and Acts 26:19-20. How would you define the word "repent"?

Response:



LESSON ONE

Two Ways to Live

Those who are on the broad road that leads to destruction are living as their own authority. They make decisions in life according to what is right in their own eyes. If you are going to walk the narrow road that leads to life, you must repent of your sins, and pledge your life to follow Jesus. King Jesus must be your authority.

Building on the Rock

Shortly after Jesus describes the broad road and the narrow way, He uses a parable—a short fictional story to illustrate a point—to once again show us that there are two ways to live.

Read Matthew 7:24-27. Describe three differences between the two builders and their houses.

Response:

Both the wise and the foolish builders heard the teachings of Jesus. Both builders knew what it takes to build a house. Both builders read the blueprint. The key difference is not in what they heard and knew, but in how they acted. The wise builder acted upon Jesus' words and the foolish builder did not. In a word, the difference between the wise man and the fool was *obedience*. To obey is to not only to hear a command from an authority, but to act in accordance with the command. Action is central to obedience. Those who walk on the narrow way not only hear the words of Jesus, but do them.

This is where things get tough. A lot of people go to church and know about the teachings of Jesus, but knowing is not the same as obeying. The narrow way is more than church attendance and Bible knowledge. Walking the narrow way is *doing* Jesus' commands. The narrow way is a way of obedience every day in all aspects of life. If Jesus is king of your heart, then He is also king of your phone.

The way you use your phone is a way to obey Jesus. Your phone is a tool to serve your king. Jesus calls his followers to humility, purity, generosity, and sacrificial love. If you go to church and sing songs about Jesus being your king, but use your phone to slander others, exalt yourself, flirt with impurity, pursue worldly gain, and isolate yourself from those Christ calls you to love, then you are acting like the foolish builder who build his house on the sand.

Remember: The foolish builder heard the commands of Jesus, but he did not put them into practice. King Jesus calls us to obedience in all areas of life, including our phone habits.

To be fair, no one other than Jesus, is perfectly obedient to God's commands. We all mess up. Even when Jesus is king of our heart and we are seeking to obey him, we still fail at times. Our best obedience is imperfect obedience. This is why repentance and obedience are not a one-time decision. You don't sign up for the narrow way once and forget about it for the rest of your life. Walking the narrow way is a daily choice to make the word of King Jesus the authority in your life and to seek to act according to His true and good commands. When you veer off the path and find yourself in the ditch of sin, you can confess your sin to the king, recommit to obedience, and continue walking on the narrow way. Obedience is not flawless perfection but sincere commitment to be someone who not only hears His Word, but puts His truth into practice.



LESSON ONE

Two Ways to Live

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The Many and the Few

If you follow Jesus, you are going to be different from others around you. There's no way around it, if Jesus is your king and you obey Him, you are going to be different. Being different is a good thing, but it's not easy. Imagine you're in a stadium where thousands of people are decked out in red cheering for the home team with red jerseys, but you're one of the few people wearing a blue shirt cheering for the away team in blue. You're different. You stick out. You're noticeable. And all the red-shirted fans aren't going to like you and might even have some negative words for you.

A word that the Bible uses that means "different" is the word *holy*. To be holy means to be set apart from what is most common.

In the Bible, holiness often refers to being set apart from the common, sinful patterns of the world because of a life godly obedience. Holiness is the third difference between the broad path and the narrow way. Jesus says that many people travel the broad path, but only a few are different and travel the narrow way. When all the kids around you at school are using foul language and you refrain, that's holiness. When others boast and brag about their accomplishments and you are humble, that's holiness. When you go the extra mile to serve someone in need, that's holiness. When you make Jesus your authority, and obey his Word, your life will be different—or holy—from the normal pattern of those around you who are not following Christ.

Read Romans 12:1-2. What does the word "conformed" mean? What is one way that following Jesus might make you different from some of your peers?

Response:

As Romans 12 says, holiness is the good and acceptable will of God, but be forewarned: holiness can be a bit lonely. Jesus says in Matthew 7 that many enter the wide gate and travel the broad road, but only a few enter by the narrow gate and walk the narrow way of obedience. When it seems like everyone is living a way that appears to be easy and fun, and you're seeking to deny yourself to serve Christ, it's hard. Being different means that sometimes you will be left out. Sometimes you may be teased and sometimes you might be embarrassed to not be going along with the crowd. So here's what you need to remember: *The narrow way leads to life!*



LESSON ONE

Two Ways to Live

Throughout this workbook, you're going to be challenged to use your phone as a tool to honor Jesus on the narrow way. It might even seem weird to think about a phone being a tool that you use to honor your king. But remember, holiness means we're different. Being different—even weird at times—is sometimes exactly what Jesus calls us to do on the narrow way. It's going to be hard and it might be lonely, but through it all, do not forget the destination. The broad road, Jesus says, leads to destruction, but the narrow way leads to life. There is blessing in obedience that you'll experience in this life, and most of all, following Christ gives the hope of eternal life. In John 5:24 Jesus says, *"Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life."* The broad road leads to destruction because it separates you from Christ. The narrow road leads to eternal life because Jesus, the One who saves fully and forever, is your king.

There thousands of choices you get to make in your life, but there ultimately only two ways to live. One way is easy and one is hard. One has many travelers, the other has few. One leads to destruction and the other leads to life. Before you know how to use your phone wisely, you first need to decide which path you will travel.

Have you ever committed to walk the narrow path by committing your life to Jesus Christ in repentance, faith, and obedience? What have you done or do you need to do to commit to give your life in faith to Jesus?

Response:





THE GUARD-EN OF EDEN

L E S S O N T W O



LESSON TWO

The Guard-en of Eden

As a young man, Alfred Nobel was fascinated with science, especially the science of blowing stuff up. He got a job working with a chemist, and after much tinkering in the lab, Nobel had figured out how to safely detonate nitroglycerin to create large, yet controlled, explosions. At first, Nobel was going to name his invention “Nobel’s Safety Powder,” because he had created a safe way to utilize explosives. Eventually, he opted to name his newly formed explosive *dynamite*, from the Greek word for “power.” Since dynamite was predictable and safe, Nobel’s invention helped build the world. Railroad tunnels were soon blasted through mountains and the foundations of skyscrapers were set deep in the earth with the help of Nobel’s powerful new invention.

As dynamite production increased, however, Nobel’s good invention was perversely used for evil purposes. Dynamite was used for landmines in war and became an instrument of death. When Nobel’s brother died in 1888, a newspaper mistakenly published the line, “Dr. Alfred Nobel, who became rich by finding ways to kill more people faster than ever before, died yesterday.”¹ Nobel was distraught when he saw the dreaded legacy the newspaper had mistakenly attributed to him. In response, Nobel took his family fortune and began funding the Nobel Peace Prize which has become a prestigious award given to exemplary individuals who promote world peace to this day.

The invention of dynamite shows us good things become bad things when they’re used in the wrong way. Just like dynamite, a phone is a good tool, but it can be used for bad purposes.

In the Beginning...

In the opening chapter of the Bible, as God created the universe, he repeatedly declared “It is good!” He created colors to explode through the clouds in majestic sunsets, emotions to put us on the edge of our seat in suspenseful movies, and tastebuds so that we can enjoy devouring our favorite desserts. He made family and friends, mountains and oceans, galaxies and molecules, gravity and rocket fuel, and millions of other glorious intricacies in creation to express His creative beauty and power.

List three aspects of God’s creation that you think are exceptionally good, beautiful, and delightful.

In the beginning, when God spoke creation into existence, there were no cell phones. Yet, every single component for even the most advanced phone on the market today was present in God’s initial creation. Silicon for computer chips, metal for circuitry, sand for the glass, and all else that is needed to program and manufacture a phone was sitting right there in the raw materials of the Garden of Eden.

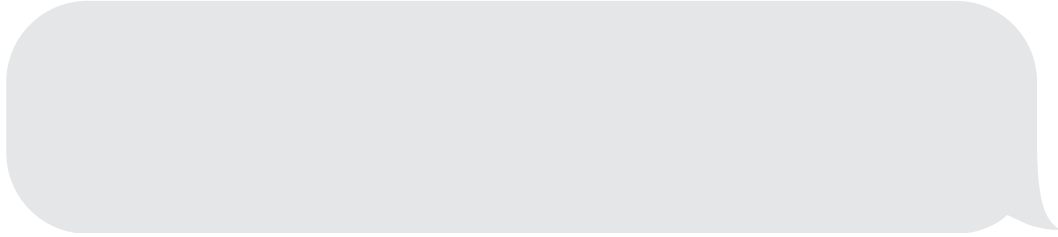
¹ Frederic Golden, “The Worst and the Brightest,” Time, October 16, 2000, accessed February 13, 2022, <http://content.time.com/time/subscriber/article/0,33009,998209,00.html>.



LESSON TWO

The Guard-en of Eden

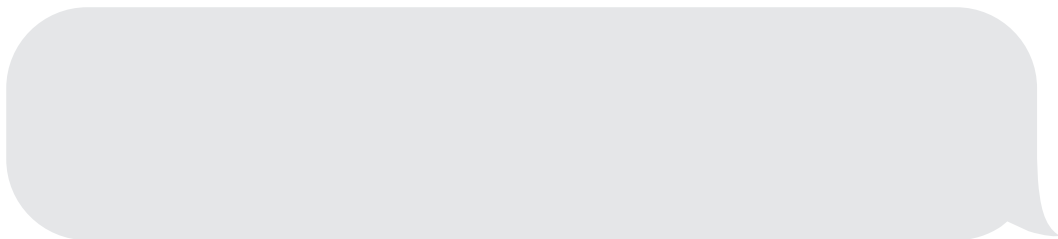
READ: Genesis 1:26-28. What do you think it means “subdue” the earth and “have dominion” over creation?



Genesis 1:26 makes clear through repetition that God designed humanity “in his image.” That is, we are created to mimic God’s attributes. There are numerous attributes of God that we are to imitate, but pretend for a moment, that you’re starting at the beginning of the Bible and all that you know about God is what you’ve read Genesis 1. For 25 verses you read about how God powerfully creates and orders the beauty of creation. Then in verse 26, it says that man is made in God’s image. If that was all that you had read about God, what would you conclude is one of the primary ways that humans will bear his image and be like him? It’s simple: God is the Creator, and we are to be mini-creators. We’re not nearly as powerful or wise as He is, but because we’re made in his likeness, we have the job of taking what He has designed in creation and bringing further order, beauty, and design from what he has made.

To exercise dominion and subdue the earth is God’s calling for humans to use the raw materials of earth to create and bring forth the potential for greater good in the world. We exercise dominion by making tools, building homes, planting gardens, writing books, and by designing satellites, computer chips, and cell phones. When God commanded mankind to “subdue the earth” and “have dominion”, He was saying “Make stuff!”, “Explore!”, “Create!” God loaded goodness all throughout his creation and He also made the world with *potential* goodness. For instance, not only is milk good, but milk has the potential to become ice cream (a greater goodness!) as mankind subdues the earth and exercises the creative abilities God hardwired in us.

What are some of the ways that phones have made life better and have shown the goodness of God’s creation in the world?





LESSON TWO

The Guard-en of Eden

Creation is truly good, but there's a catch. Creation is not safe. God's good world is jam-packed with risk. Gravity is a good part of creation, but the goodness of gravity is not safe when climbing a tall tree or walking near the edge of cliff. As humanity exercised dominion and created tools such as knives and hammers to make building easier, those same tools could accidentally cut flesh or smash a thumb. The goodness of creation is loaded with risk and with every new creation man designs there are also new risks.

What new risks (potential for harm) has the invention of phones brought into our lives?

In Genesis 2:15, we read, "*The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it.*" In this verse, the Hebrew word used for "work" (*avad*) is a word that can mean to till or cultivate soil in order to bring about growth and flourishing. The verb "to keep" (*shamar*) means "to guard,"² and has the sense of protecting from risk inherent in creation. Another word to describe the calling of cultivating and guarding the Garden of Eden is the word *stewardship*. Adam and Eve were stewards or guardians of the beautiful Garden the Lord had created. With all the privileges they enjoyed in the Garden such as eating delicious fruit, swimming in crystal clear waters, and exploring God's rugged world, they also had to exercise responsibility as stewards to cultivate and guard what God had given them.

² Gordon J. Wenham, *Word Biblical Commentary, Genesis 1-15*, Vol. 1. David A. Hubbard and Glenn W. Barker, eds. (Word Books: Waco, TX), 1987, 67.



L E S S O N T W O

The Guard-en of Eden

To Whom Much Is Given...

Just as Adam and Eve were called to steward (cultivate and guard) the Garden of Eden, in order to enjoy it's goodness, so also anyone who uses a phone is called to faithful stewardship. If you desire to walk on the narrow way of honoring God with the way use your phone, you absolutely must understand these two words: *privilege* and *responsibility*. In this world, responsibilities and privileges go hand in hand, but so often we want to take the privileges of this world, without also acting responsibility.

Think about all the ways that we want to take privileges while avoiding responsibility:



Most kids love to eat sugary treats (privilege), but groan when it comes time to brush their teeth (responsibility).



It's fun to play sports on a winning team (privilege), but it's hard to spend hours practicing (responsibility).



Going on vacation is exciting (privilege), but packing the suitcases is a chore (responsibility).

Good stewardship means that when we receive a privilege, we also take responsibility to guard and protect against the risks that can come from that privilege. When people get privileges but aren't ready for responsibility, painful consequences are sure to follow. This is why there are entire TV shows about how winning the lottery so often ruins the winners' lives. They instantly got the privilege of all kinds of money, but were not ready for the responsibility that comes from stewarding so much money. When privileges are separated from responsibility, trouble follows.

Therefore, to earn the privilege of having a phone, you must first demonstrate that you can handle the responsibility. This is generally how the world works. You swim in the shallow end until you prove you can handle the deep end of the pool. You ride a bike with training wheels until you prove you can stay up on two wheels. It's very common to require some level of competency or responsibility before new privileges are awarded.

When you get ownership of "your" phone, you will be holding a good object that has potential for both good and bad purposes. Privilege is the fun part, but every privilege comes with additional responsibility.



L E S S O N T W O

The Guard-en of Eden

What are some ways that you can responsibly guard against some of the risks that come with owning a phone?

In Luke chapter 12, Jesus tells a story in which some servants are given the privilege of overseeing a large amount of wealth. Sadly, while their master is away, the servants are irresponsible and spend their time partying. When the master returns and finds that his servants have been unfaithful, he's very displeased. The point Jesus makes from this parable is that *"to whom much is given, much will be demanded"* (Lk 12:48). The more privilege you have, the more responsibility you also have to use your privilege to honor God. The day is coming when we will give an account to our heavenly Master, God himself, for how we have lived and used the many good gifts he's entrusted to us. Our time, abilities, money, possessions and even our phones are gifts God has given to us to use to live in a way that pleases Him and serves others. We all will have mistakes, sins, and failures, which is why we all need to trust in the forgiveness that Jesus offers us. And yet, with God's help, we can live in a way that honors Him by responsibly handling the privileges he gives us.

READ: Matthew 25:14-30. What does this story teach you about being a good steward (being responsible) with what God (the Master) has given you?

This parable of three servants (stewards), shows how two of them were responsible with what their master gave them, and one of them was not. The "wicked, lazy servant" did not use his masters possessions in a way that pleased his master.



LESSON TWO

The Guard-en of Eden

What are some ways to demonstrate that you are ready for the responsibility of owning a phone?

Getting a phone is a major privilege and a significant step toward becoming an independent adult. Now is the time to take seriously the responsibility that comes along with this new privilege, not only to have a healthier life, but most importantly so that you can live in such a way that pleases God. At the end of your life, you want the Lord to say to you, *“Well done, good and faithful servant!”* (Mt. 25:21) God delights to give us good gifts, and he wants to rejoice with us when we find joy in the privileges he gives us by acting responsibly.



L E S S O N T H R E E



COMMUNICATION
OR
ISOLATION?

LESSON THREE

Communication or Isolation?

It only took 74.85 seconds for Tim Emery to achieve perfection. Besting the previous Guinness World record of 86.9 seconds, Emery ran from lane-to-lane bowling twelve strikes in a row for a perfect 300 game.¹ Perfection is the absence of any mistake or flaw, which is what makes perfection is so difficult to achieve. In gymnastics, a perfect score is so rare, that when Nadia Comăneci scored the first-ever perfect score in the 1976 Olympics, the scoreboard wasn't even designed with the capability to display her score because no one had thought it possible.

God is perfect. He is without flaw in every conceivable manner. When God first created the world, however, His creation was very good, but it wasn't *perfect*. There was one aspect that was incomplete. To be sure, God did not make a mistake. He makes no mistakes. But when he created, there was one tiny aspect of creation that he intentionally left unfinished and imperfect to teach us a lesson about His good purposes in His creation.

Read Genesis 2:18-25. This is the first time God says, "It is not good." Why do you think it is not good for man to be alone?

Adam saw that the bunnies had buddies, the fish had friends, and the armadillos had amigos, but when he looked for other humans, he realized he was all alone. Completely, utterly...alone. No one to talk to, no one to laugh with, no one to help him build a house, no one with whom to play tic-tac-toe. Adam was all by himself and the Lord sympathized with Adam's loneliness declaring it "not good" for man to be alone.

This imperfection in creation was a God-intended lesson to explain to Adam and to us, what it means to be human. In Gen. 1:26 it says, "Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.'" Notice: God refers to himself as an "us." God speaks of himself in plural form. God uses "us" and "our" to describe his nature because God exists eternally in three persons: The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God exists in one eternal essence as a relational community of three persons. He—at the core of his nature—is relational. Since we are made in his likeness, we too are made for relationships with others. When we are isolated and lonely from others, we're missing out on who God created us to be. We need relationships with other humans to have joyful, healthy, God-honoring lives.

When Alexander Graham Bell invented the telephone in 1876, his purpose was to enhance communication. The phone was created as a relational tool. The very existence of the phone testifies to the reality that human beings are created to connect. We're made to relate to others. Today, we can use our phones to shop online, take photos, and livestream events, but ultimately Bell's telephone was invented as a communication device. Phones exist to help us combat Adam's initial problem: being alone.

Sadly, the very devices that were invented to help us communicate and connect with others sometimes cause us to isolate and disconnect from people around us. Instead of speaking to one another, we're often glued to the screen in our palm. Instead of carrying on meaningful conversation, we frequently interrupt face-to-face interactions to check notifications buzzing in our pocket.

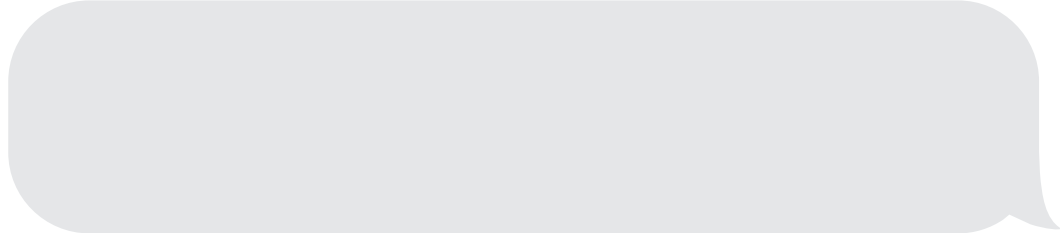
¹ Kevin Skiver, "Tim Emery Bowls 74.85 Second Perfect Game, Breaks World Record," June 10, 2017, accessed November 14, 2022, <https://www.cbssports.com/general/news/look-tim-emery-bowls-74-85-second-perfect-game-breaks-world-record/>.



LESSON THREE

Communication or Isolation?

What are some ways that phone usage can cause people to disconnect and isolate from others?



Lonely with "Many Friends"

Massachusetts Institute of Technology Professor and psychologist Sherry Turkle has devoted much of her career to studying the way that technology affects human relationships. In a New York Times article entitled "The Flight from Conversation," she writes, "We've become accustomed to a new way of being 'alone together.' Technology-enabled, we are able to be with one another, and also elsewhere, connected to wherever we want to be."² She's quite right: Whether it's an airport, office, or school cafeteria, we are often physically together with others, but mentally far apart because of our devices. In doing so, we're substituting real-life conversation for mere digital connection.

As a result, an increasing number of young people report that though they have many online friends, followers, and acquaintances, they're actually very lonely. One study surveyed over a million teenagers since the year 2000 and found that, "Before 2012, loneliness and depression had been unchanged or down for years or decades. But in the early 2010s, loneliness, depression and self-harm among teens sharply increased in the United States, Canada and the United Kingdom."³ The same study noted "By 2012, most of the countries in the study had reached a point where at least half of teens had access to smartphones, and that is when teen loneliness levels began to rise."

Since this study surveyed so many individuals over such a substantial length of time and the jump in loneliness and depression *doubled* in the very years that smartphones were broadly adopted by teens, the researchers conclude that "smartphones and social media [are] major contributors."⁴

Evidently, the very devices that were created to help us connect are making us more disconnected and isolated. Surface-level digital communications cannot satisfy our God-designed need for human relationships. Research on smartphone and loneliness only confirms what Adam felt and God spoke in Genesis 2: "It is not good for man to be alone."

² Sherry Turkle, "The Flight from Conversation," New York Times, April 21, 2012, accessed October 26, 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/2012/04/22/opinion/sunday/the-flight-from-conversation.html>.

³ Tara Bahrapour, "Teens Around the World are Lonelier Than a Decade Before. Smartphone May Be to Blame," Washington Post, July 20, 2021, accessed October 26, 2022, https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/social-issues/teens-loneliness-smart-phones/2021/07/20/cde8c866-e84e-11eb-8950-d73b3e93ff7f_story.html.

⁴ Jonathan Haidt and Jean Twenge, "Now Is Our Chance to Pull Teenagers Out of the Smartphone Trap", New York Times, July 12, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/07/31/opinion/smartphone-iphone-social-media-isolation.html>. Accessed Oct. 26, 2022.



LESSON THREE

Communication or Isolation?

Let's consider a few of the common ways that phones can *disconnect* and *isolate* us from one another:



Eyes Down

In a series of photos entitled, “Removed,” photographer Erik Pickersgill snapped photos of people in natural, unposed settings such as friends standing around a grill, a family hanging out in the kitchen, and a couple sitting next to each other. There was really nothing special about the photos, except for one unique aspect: Pickersgill edited out the phones and tablets in each photo, leaving a montage of people staring at blank space between their slightly opened hands.⁵ The effect is provocative because it reveals how common it is in today's world for us to ignore people right next to us. With our eyes down, and mind elsewhere, our phones have become commonplace distractions from human interaction. When we add headphones into the equation, it becomes very easy to be in the same physical space, while being completely isolated from those nearby. One social researcher bluntly stated that many now use headphones to “avoid the dreadful possibility of having to talk to a fellow human being.”⁶ It's easier than ever to isolate ourselves from others nearby.



Texting

There are many ways we can communicate, but the farther away we get from face-to-face communication, the more limited we are in what we can express. For instance, a lighthouse communicates information to ships far away, but a lighthouse cannot share very detailed messages. In the same way, texting is a really convenient way to communicate, but texting is limited in what it can accomplish. God designed us to communicate not merely with words, but with body language, voice inflection, and other nonverbals. The richest, most detailed form of communication and relationship is spending time with others face-to-face.

In fact, Scripture shows us that face-to-face relationship is far superior to text. In the Old Testament, God revealed his nature to the people of Israel in a text—the written Scriptures. As wonderful as having the Scriptures were, they were a distant second-best to God's plan for face-to-face communication. In John 1, the Apostle John describes the arrival of Jesus in this world when he writes, “*The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father.*” John goes on to say “*No one has ever seen God; the only God. He who is at the Father's side, he has made him known.*” Jesus was and is the Word (the nonphysical nature of God that was revealed in the Old Testament text) and when Jesus came in the flesh, the glory of God was revealed in way that had never happened before. As Jesus walked this earth in the flesh, people could see his gracious nature, his teaching of truth, and his power in miracles. They could observe his way of life and be invited into a relationship of faith. Jesus—God in the flesh—is God's richest, most expressive face-to-face communication with mankind.

If we over-rely on texts, we're going to end up isolated from the face-to-face relationships we're meant to have. Texting is a great helper in communicating with others, but a poor substitute for deep relationships.

⁵ Steve Mollman, “Photographer Removes Our Smartphones to Show Our Strange and Lonely New World,” Quartz, August 28, 2019, accessed November 14, 2022, <https://qz.com/523746/a-photographer-edits-out-our-smartphones-to-show-our-strange-and-lonely-new-world/>.

⁶ “Headphones Are the New Do Not Disturb Sign,” KTRH News Radio, July 19, 2019, accessed November 14, 2022, <https://ktrh.heart.com/content/2019-07-18-headphones-are-the-new-do-not-disturb-sign/>.



LESSON THREE

Communication or Isolation?

List some scenarios in which it would be better to talk by phone or in person than to text.

Empty speech bubble for student response.



Social Media

A third way that our phones can lead us to isolation rather than conversation, is through social media. If you're getting a phone for the first time, it's likely that you will not have social media initially. Nevertheless, the isolating effects of social media are something that you will surely encounter at some point.

The name 'social media' leads us to believe that engaging on a social media platform would be social, by nature. However, the word 'social' implies a relationship and often, social media use is done behind an invisible wall where comments can be typed without much thought about the impact to the other person. Much of social media use is not 'social' at all, but rather used in isolation and separated from the personhood of those with whom we interact online. Without having to see the heartbreak, the hurt feelings, the vulnerability on someone's face, we can often forget that we are interacting with real people. Social media can certainly be a place to meet people, develop friendships, and socialize, but we must take care to remember that people matter more than opinions.

Even if we attempt to be gracious and loving in our social media interactions, there are other ways we can end up feeling isolated. It's been said that social media is a highlight reel. What we see online is heavily filtered content that others choose to share. Often, scrolling a social media feed can cause us to compare our boring moment on the couch to someone else's best moments. We may feel we are the only ones just sitting at home in our pajamas watching TV, and we may convince ourselves that we are left out, lonely, or unworthy. An important aspect of healthy social media use is limiting your time spent scrolling and prioritizing in person interactions. People don't usually post their personal struggles online for the whole world to see. It takes in person social interactions to experience the full breadth of what it means to be human and remind us that we are not alone.



LESSON THREE

Communication or Isolation?

Flaming Darts & Deadly Arrows

It's clear that digital friendships are no replacement for relationships in real life, but we still need to think about how to communicate with kindness in a digital world. The Bible has a ton to say about how we use words, and many of the words that we "speak" are now tapped out with our thumbs rather than verbalized with our tongue. Consider the following four Scriptures as you think about how to communicate in a way that shows the love of Christ to others:

READ Ephesians 4:29. How can you use your phone to "give grace" and "build up" others?

Words have the ability to tear a person down or build them up. Ephesians 4 shows us that God's desire for our words (and our texts) is to build people up. That's not to say that every text has to be super-over-the-top-encouraging. A lot of your texts will be about normal, everyday things like, "See ya soon," or "Running five minutes late." In many instances, simple texts like that are what most "fits the occasion" as Ephesians 4 says. But consider how you can use texting to send encouragements to friends and family to "build them up" and to show them your love.

READ Proverbs 26:18-19. Can you think of a time when words someone else said, or words you said, hurt someone's feelings?

This Proverb teaches that our words can do damage that we cannot take back. Simply saying "I was joking!" or texting a laughing emoji doesn't take away the sting of an insult. Texting can even make hurtful words even more hurtful because, unlike spoken words, it's easier for recipients to look at back at exactly what was said again and again and think the worst about what you meant. The point? Be careful where you point your arrows.



LESSON THREE

Communication or Isolation?

Read James 1:19-20. What is a way you could put these verses into practice with the way you communicate on your phone?

Ask almost any adult, and they can tell you that they've made the mistake of sending out an email or text that they regret because they sent it in anger. There are many reasons this happens: we may not know the whole story, we may misunderstand, we may disagree, or we may just feel angry. The foolish move in those moments is to reply quickly. In our anger, we don't make good choices. The wise move, is not only to wait, but often it is to pick a different way of communication that increases understanding. When this happens to you, consider calling or talking in person so others can see your face and hear your voice. Texting, posting, or emailing in anger almost never turns out good and it certainly doesn't bring honor to Christ.

READ Proverbs 11:9, 11:13, 16:28, 17:9, 18:8, 18:21, and 26:20. Write down two truths from these verses.

There are many proverbs about gossip and they all show us that where there is gossip, there is *DRAMA*. Gossip breeds conflict, not peace, and phones are one of the primary tools that people now use to spread gossip. Remember, anything you type can be shown to another person. If you gossip or slander about someone, it's pretty easy—even months later—for someone to scroll back through their texts and screenshot that message to pass along to someone else. Imagine if anything you send to someone is later read out loud to everyone in the cafeteria, because that could very well happen.



LESSON THREE

Communication or Isolation?

As you think about how to use your spoken and written words to build up, rather than tear down, there's one final bit of bad news you need to know. Temptation to sin with your words increases when using a phone. Psychologists call this the "online disinhibition effect,"⁷ which is just a fancy term meaning that when you're communicating from behind a screen, you're more likely to be mean. One author explained, "People are more aggressive, rude and forthright online because they're anonymous and can act as unpleasantly as they like without immediate consequence."⁸ Communicating from behind a screen gives us a sense of safety to say things that we'd never say to a person while looking them in the eyes. Like a soldier who throws a grenade from the safety of a bunker, we can lob out some words that might explode in another person's life, but we don't even see the wreckage. Beware that you will be tempted to be unkind and rude with your words from behind the false safety of a screen.

We are not made to be alone. We're made to be like our Creator and to have loving relationships with others. Like dynamite, our phones can be used for good communication or they can breed isolation and strife. Remember, there are two ways to live. There is a broad path of self-seeking that leads to broken relationships, hurt, and disconnection from others. But there's also a narrow way of that leads to life, peace, and loving relationships. Each time you use your phone (or choose to set it down), you can walk the narrow way of communicating and connecting with others in a way that images and honors God.

⁷ Lauren Farrar, "Is the Internet Making You Meaner?", PBS KQED, Aug. 5 2019, accessed Feb 28, 2022, <https://www.kqed.org/education/532334/is-the-internet-making-you-meaner>.

⁸ Alan Martin, "Online Disinhibition Effect and the Psychology of Trolling," Wired Magazine, May 30, 2013, accessed Feb. 28, 2022, <https://www.wired.co.uk/article/online-aggression>.





HOOKED ON "LIKES"

L E S S O N F O U R



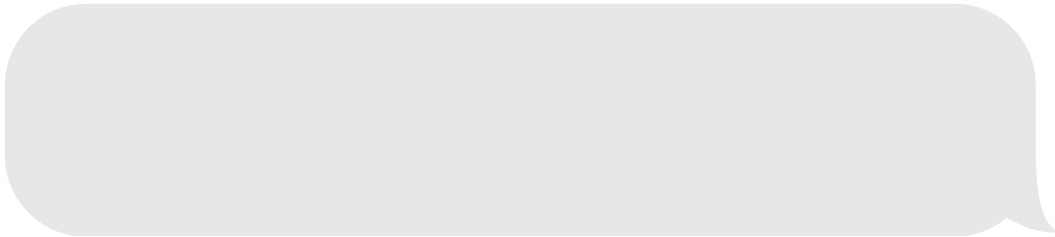
LESSON FOUR

Hooked on "Likes"

Wouldn't you love to be able to eat the salty goodness of french fries, savor the juicy splendor of a double cheeseburger, and drink the sugary sweetness of your favorite soda as much as you want? In the documentary movie, *Super-Size Me*, Morgan Spurlock did exactly that. For one month, Spurlock conducted a small experiment in which he ate only at McDonald's for three meals a day. In just thirty days, Spurlock gained a whopping 25 pounds (which took him 14 months to shed through exercise), experienced heart palpitations, vomiting, and significant decrease in energy. According to the three doctors monitoring him during this experiment, the results of his "McDiet" were exceedingly worse than they had imagined. Spurlock's experiment is evidence that too much of a good thing, can quickly become harmful and unhealthy.

Sometimes people become addicted by consuming too much of a good thing, like eating too much junk food. Other times, addiction can come from going down a path of consuming something that is well-known to be harmful, like using illegal drugs or gambling. Either way, we often do not realize we're heading down a path of addiction until it is far too late.

In your own words, what does the word "addiction" mean?



If you go to a casino in Las Vegas, there's one thing you will not see: a clock on the wall. The goal of a casino is to get gamblers inside for as long as possible, because the longer they are in the casino, the more money they will likely spend. Casinos have a whole bag of tricks they use to keep people pumping money into their machines. They offer free food and drinks, free hotel rooms connected to the casino, and even arrange the gaming tables in a maze to make it difficult to find an exit.

In the same way, your phone is designed to make you spend as much time as possible on it. Very few technology companies will say so outright, but don't be fooled. The more we use our phones, the more data technology companies collect from us, which enables them to make more money. It is in the best financial interest of app developers and technology companies to get us addicted to using our phones. One Silicon Valley app developer stated that behind many well-known apps there are "literally a thousand engineers that have worked on this thing to make it maximally addicting." He added "in order to get [tech companies'] stock price up, the amount of time people spend on your app has to go up" so companies "invent new ways of getting people to stay hooked."¹ Even though phone addiction is harmful to our mental health, billions of dollars are spent every year researching, redesigning, and implementing ways for us to use our phones even more, because there's so much money at stake.

¹ Hilary Anderson, "Social Media Apps are 'Deliberately' Addictive to Users," BBC News, July 4, 2018, accessed March 7, 2022, <https://www.bbc.com/news/technology-44640959>.



LESSON FOUR

Hooked on "Likes"

What are some symptoms or behaviors that someone who is addicted to their phone might do?

Digital Obesity

If you eat too many french fries, you gain weight. Too many pain killers could end your life. Too much gambling will probably leave you broke. But what happens if you're on your phone too much? Is it really that big of a deal?

1) Phone Addiction Blinds You to Foolish Decisions.

When people are addicted to something, they often describe their addiction in terms of slavery. Drug addicts, for example, may want to be free, but their craving for drugs controls their daily life. Rather than being in control of their day, they are controlled by the desire to use drugs. Addiction is enslaving. Addiction is when we are mastered by something outside of ourselves and do not have the strength or ability to resist.

Two thousand years ago, people didn't have phones, but they did have desires that could lead to addictions. The city of Corinth was known as a "party town." Corinth was like the Las Vegas of the Roman empire so the Christians in Corinth were struggling with how to live in a city with so many temptations and to still be committed followers of Jesus. Their pastor, the Apostle Paul, writes them about how to live wisely in a word full of enticements.

Read 1 Corinthians 6:12. What do you think this verse means?

Notice that in 1 Corinthians 6:12, the first part of the verse is in quotation marks. Paul is quoting a common saying in the church, "All things are permissible for me," but then he critiques this line of thinking when he says, "but not all things are beneficial." In other words, just because something isn't wrong, doesn't mean that it is wise. He continues this thought at the end of verse 12 writing, "I will not be dominated by anything."



LESSON FOUR

Hooked on "Likes"

The word dominated is also translated as “mastered” in some versions. To be mastered or dominated is to be controlled by someone or something. Paul’s point is that many things in life which are acceptable still have the ability to master us and enslave us, if we’re not careful. Anyone who follows Jesus, should have one master—the Lord Jesus Christ. If we find that we’re being controlled by something other than Jesus—even if it is something that’s not inherently sinful—then we need to remove that false master from our lives so we can be free to obey Jesus.

When a person is enslaved to drugs or alcohol, they often make foolish decisions in “obedience” to their master. A drug addict may steal money to pay for his habit, an alcoholic may drive a car when intoxicated putting many people at risk. It’s not that addicts want to make such poor decisions, it’s that they are enslaved and don’t even realize their poor choices in the moment. In the same way, those who are addicted to their phones, are enslaved to a degree that they don’t realize how foolish their choices are. Consider some of the foolish choices people make when addicted to their phone:



The star basketball player stays up late scrolling on his phone and ends up only getting a few hours of sleep. That night at the game he is exhausted, can’t focus, and blows the game.



A teenage girl can’t put her phone away while driving and accidentally causes an accident while texting and driving. She injures or kills another driver and goes to jail for manslaughter.



A new graduate gets a job at a bank, but can’t put her phone down during work hours. Her boss notices that she’s distracted and ignoring customers and she loses her new job.



A married couple gets in the bad habit of zoning out to their phones every night instead of talking and showing interest in one another. Their love grows cold.

2) Phone Addiction Robs Your Ability to Think Deeply.

Another reason addiction to our phones is a problem is because too much time on our phones can change our brains for the worse. Just like too many french fries makes a body flabby, our brains become less fit for deep, purposeful thinking when we’re not in control of our screen time.

Here’s a scientific term that will help you understand why your phone affects your brain: neuroplasticity. “Neuro” simply means “brain” and “plasticity” means “moldable.” It’s a big word that basically means that our brains are moldable, like Play-Doh. And just like Play-Doh is most moldable when it first comes out of the container, but hardens over time, so too our brains are most plastic, or moldable, when we are younger.

The prevailing view of neuroplasticity today is summarized in what is known as Hebb’s rule: “Cells that fire together, wire together.” Our brains are like a system of roads made of cells. The more a pathway is used, the stronger it becomes, kind of like an Interstate highway. The less a pathway is used, the weaker it becomes making travel difficult, like on a gravel road. When we get used to taking in data from our phones in quick, bite-sized amounts of social media, texts, or tweets, the paths in our brain that become the strongest are those that are dedicated to simple, shallow thinking. The parts of our brain that are needed for deep, complex, intelligent problem solving then go unused and can become like hard-to-travel country backroads.²

² Carr, Nicholas. *The Shallows: What the Internet Is Doing to Our Brains* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co, 2010), 23.



LESSON FOUR

Hooked on "Likes"

If we are addicted to the constant interruptions of our phones, the “Play-Doh” of our brain highways gets molded in a way that craves distraction and finds it very difficult to focus. Author Philip Yancey, who has written over thirty books, saw how the problem of screen addiction was affecting his own life. He writes:

"I used to read three books a week. I am reading many fewer these days. The internet and social media have trained my brain to read a paragraph or two, and then to start looking around. Soon I'm reading the latest tweets, or perhaps checking tomorrow's weather."³

Yancey's predicament is common. The more we all become accustomed to the mental sugar-rush of our phones, the less our brains are able to focus and think deeply.

Why does the ability to concentrate and think deeply matter?

3) Phone Addiction Changes What You Love.

Read Psalm 1:1-6. How would you define the word “meditate”? In your own words, what is the effect of meditating on the “law of the Lord” (God’s Word)?

The word meditate might make you think of someone sitting cross-legged with their eyes shut murmuring soothing noises. But meditation is actually what our minds do every day. To meditate is to think repeatedly and consistently about a given topic. If you've ever had a crush on someone, your mind repeatedly thinks about them. If you've been anxious about a big test or excited for a big game, your mind will meditate on that upcoming event. Meditation is thinking over and over and over about the same thing.

³ Yancey, Philip. “The Death of Reading Is Threatening the Soul.” The Washington Post, September 12, 2019.



LESSON FOUR

Hooked on "Likes"

Psalm 1, and many other Scriptures, encourage us to meditate—think often and repeatedly—about the truth of the Lord. As we do so, his Word will shape not only what our mind thinks about but also what our heart cares about. To meditate, is to “*delight in the law of the LORD.*” Meditation on God’s Word and truth cultivates love for him in our hearts. In the same way, when we meditate on other things, our souls will begin to love and care about those other things.

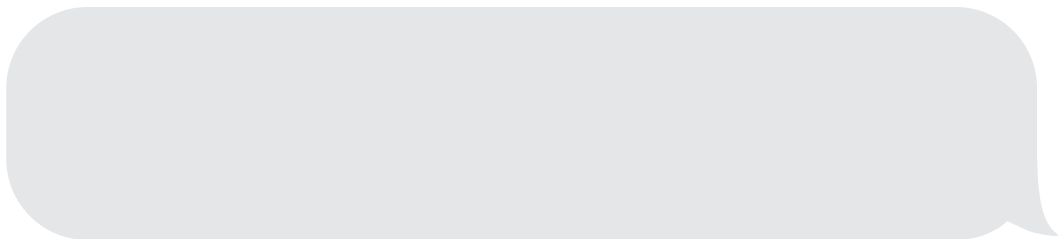
This is bit gross, but do you know how cows eat? Cows digest their food by a process called “chewing the cud,” which means that they chew their food, swallow it, vomit it back into their mouth, chew it some more, and keep this process going until their food is mushy and digestible. The way a cow repeatedly chews the same piece of food is a vivid—and disgusting—illustration for how we meditate on our phones. Approximately once every three minutes of the waking hours in the day, Americans pick up their phones to chew on digital content.⁴ This repetitious consumption of digital content is mental meditation, which has the power to change what the soul loves.

4) Phone Addiction Can Affect Your Mental Health.

Just like bad eating habits make us physically unhealthy, bad phone habits can also makes us mentally miserable. Social media is often a highlight reel of the best events in the lives of those you follow. Every time you scroll through, you see friends smiling together and people posing with their latest award or achievement. Considering that, it’s not surprising that people walk away from social media feeling inadequate or even feeling the sense that they are missing out. It’s easy to be discouraged and discontent with your average Tuesday night on the couch doing homework when you’re constantly seeing pictures of how amazing everyone else’s life appears to be.

Have you ever looked at someone’s Instagram account and seen nothing but squares upon squares of selfies? Selfies aren’t inherently evil, but the name itself reflects a focus on “self”. As self-focus grows, it can choke out our ability to focus on other things in life—namely friends, family, community, and most importantly: God. Waiting for people to “like” our selfies can contribute to compulsively checking our phone. We think that posting that selfie reflects pride in the way we look or what we’ve done, when it actually can create a vicious cycle of checking to see what everyone else thinks about us. When we do this, it’s tough to remember that our ultimate worth comes from belonging to God by faith in Jesus Christ.

Read 2 Corinthians 5:14-15 and 2 Timothy 3:1-5.
How can you fight against the temptation to glorify self with your phone and/or social media?



⁴ Trevor Wheelwright, “2022 Cell Phone Usage Statistics: How Obsessed Are We?,” January 24, 2022, accessed March 7, 2022, <https://www.reviews.org/mobile/cell-phone-addiction/>.



LESSON FOUR

Hooked on "Likes"

Checking to see what your friends are up to seems harmless. Posting selfies on social media seems harmless. However, if you develop an addiction to your phone and can't get away from always knowing what your friends are up to and posting selfies *every day*, the results will show up in how you feel. We aren't meant to live in a world where we know what everyone else is doing every second of the day—that will breed anxiety in your heart. We aren't meant to focus on ourselves—that will breed vanity and insecurity. We are meant to be in relationship with God and with others, finding our worth and joy from who God says that we are.

Prepare for Battle

Billions of dollars are spent every year to get you addicted to your phone. If you aren't serious about protecting your mind against the threat of addiction, it will sneak up on you before you realize it. In 1 Peter 1, Peter encouraged followers of Christ to be diligent in protecting their minds, as they sought to live as followers of Jesus in a world that didn't follow Him. He writes, "*Prepare your minds for action and be sober minded.*" Literally, the Greek word Peter used for "prepare" was a military term which meant to put on armor. The Christian must take extra efforts to guard our minds, much like when soldiers take extra efforts to put on armor to guard their bodies in battle. As Romans 12 says, "*Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.*" We saw in previous chapters, phones are great tools to have, but we must be aware of how they can affect our minds and take practical steps to guard our minds from addiction.

What are some practical ways that you can guard your mind from becoming addicted to your phone?

Soldiers form habits through training to help them survive in battle. You also will need to form good habits to win the battle against the addictive screen in your hand. Here are some practical suggestions to help you win the battle against phone addiction:



Dock It

Put a charging cord or dock in a common space in your house and regularly dock your phone in that space. If your phone is always in your pocket, then you're always going to be a second away from picking it up. Create some distance between you and your phone and put it on the dock and treat it like an old-school phone connected to the wall by a cord. It's there and if it rings you answer it, but you don't have to be dominated by it everywhere you go.



Just Say No to Notifications

Notifications can be extremely useful when they infrequently alert you to important information. But many notifications are unimportant and too frequent. If you leave notifications switched "on", your phone will blow up with an incessant stream of attention-grabbing distraction. Unless there's a really, really, good reason to have a notification turned on, turn it off and give your brain some peace and quiet. Remember, every time your brain meditates on shallow info, it's being rewired to make deep thinking more difficult.



LESSON FOUR

Hooked on "Likes"



Take a Phone Holiday

The word "holiday" means "holy," or "set apart," day. It's a day where you do something different, like eat a turkey or watch fireworks. In the Bible, the Sabbath is a weekly holy-day for rest and worship. It's a day to do something different from the normal routine. Consider taking regular phone holy days, maybe even weekly, where you have set amounts of time that you don't use your phone. Give your mind some space to live in the real world and to be free from distraction.



Deep Work

There are certain tasks requiring sustained mental concentration, which have recently been dubbed "Deep Work."⁵ Reading, homework, writing, and creating are just a few examples of deep work that are inhibited by a buzzing phone nearby. When you have deep work to do, power off your phone or leave it in a different location.

Addiction is not inevitable. You can win this battle, but it will take intentionality. We are all weaker and more prone to addiction than we'd like to think, so humbly take steps to win the battle against distraction and have a mind that is healthy, focused, and ready to serve the Lord.

⁵ See Cal Newport, *Deep Work: Rules for Focused Success in a Distracted World* (New York: Grand Central Publishing, 2016).



L E S S O N F I V E



PORN IN
YOUR POCKET



LESSON FIVE

Porn in Your Pocket

With one tap on your phone screen, your entire life can drastically change. In 23 states, sexting—texting a sexually explicit photo—by individuals under 18 years old, is considered child pornography, which is punishable by up to twenty years in prison as well as mandatory registration as a sex offender.¹ Perhaps more common than jailtime, however, is what has occurred in too many schools to number: A photo that a student thought would be private, gets distributed to many others or even used as blackmail against that person in the future.

In addition to sexting, pornography use (viewing any sexually explicit photo or video) among teens has risen to such high levels that in 2016 the State of Utah declared porn use a public health crisis, and since that time numerous other states have followed suit.² Actual statistics vary, but almost all research on pornography use points to the same conclusion: It's everywhere.

Christian author Francis Chan explains

*Things are different nowadays. Sin is much more accessible and acceptable...When I was a kid, a guy had to let everyone in the store know he was a pervert when he walked to the counter to buy a [pornographic] magazine. These days, people can look endlessly at pornography on the privacy of their own phones. And many don't even consider it that perverted.*³

Sexual immorality is as old as the human race, but Chan is right. Never before has sexual immorality been more easily accessible. If you haven't already viewed—whether accidentally or intentionally—explicit images, it's only a matter of time before you are going to need to make a choice to flee from sin and seek purity. This lesson aims to prepare you to live a pure life in a world of impurity.

Do you think that pornography/sexting is common at your school or with kids your age? If so, why?

¹ Carroll, Linda. "In Some States, Sexting Could Land Teens in Jail for a Long Time." Reuters News, April. 16, 2019, accessed Feb. 2, 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-teens-sexting/in-some-states-sexting-could-land-teens-in-jail-for-a-long-time-idUSKCN1RS2BT>.

² Kimberly M. Nelson and Emily F. Rothman, "Should Public Health Officials Consider Pornography a Public Health Crisis?" American Journal of Public Health 110, no. 2 (February 2020): 151-53, accessed March 7, 2022, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6951382/>.

³ Francis and Lisa Chan. *You and Me Forever: Marriage in Light of God's Glory* (San Francisco: Claire Love Publishing, 2014), 27-28.



Why Purity Matters

In his book *The Purity Principle*, author Randy Alcorn writes, “Suppose I offered you a cookie, saying “A few mouse droppings fell into the batter, but for the most part it’s a great cookie—you won’t even notice.”⁴ Would you want to eat that cookie?

Often, the thought of being sexually pure is viewed as being too strict or too difficult in today’s world, but sexual purity—like pure ingredients in a cookie—is for our good. When God made the world, he made male and female as sexual beings with unique body parts and upon creating human beings he pronounced his creation “very good.” It was God’s idea to design us with sexual desires, and His Word also gives clear boundaries for sexuality that protect us and lead to our health and flourishing. God’s design that begins in Genesis and is reiterated throughout the Bible is for a sexual relationship to occur exclusively in a marriage covenant between a man and woman for life. Through sexual union, a husband and wife may have children, reaffirm their commitment to one another, and enjoy one of God’s good gifts of creation.

When sexual activity occurs outside of a marriage relationship, it is called “adultery” in the Bible. The seventh of the Ten Commandments says plainly, “*You shall not commit adultery*” (Ex. 20:14). Since God’s love does not waver in his commitment to us, a marriage relationship is instructed to be faithful and pure to imitate the love of God.

You are likely a decade or more away from marriage, so you may be wondering what all this information about sexuality and marriage has to do with you owning a phone. In Matthew chapter 5, Jesus takes God’s commands about adultery from the Old Testament and ups the stakes. He says, “*You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart.*” Jesus teaches that even if we don’t physically commit sexual immorality, we can still be impure and adulterous when we lust after a person’s body in our hearts. *Lust* is a word that’s kind of hard to define, but Jesus makes it clear that it’s a dangerous sin so let’s try to get a better idea of what it means.

Lust is desire. However, since God gave us sexual desires, lust is more than just desire. If, for instance, a boy sees an attractive girl, he may think, “Wow, she’s really pretty!” He may even desire to get to know her better, to date her, or to marry her. Such desire is not automatically *lust*. It’s not wrong to be attracted to someone or even to desire to pursue a relationship with someone. In fact, at some point in your life, it may be that God wants you to pursue your desire to love someone until death do you part through marriage.

Lust is when you cross a line in your mind from God-given desire of attraction to when you mentally treat someone else’s body as an object for your own enjoyment. To lust is to stare at and think about body parts instead of to appreciate someone as a human. Jesus teaches us that lust is where adultery begins. It’s using someone else’s body in a sexual way inside our own mind and heart. When we lust, we’re committing adultery in the heart, which means we’re sexually impure.

Sexual photos or videos on the screen of a phone (whether explicit pornography or simply through provocative advertisements or social media posts) breed lust, not godly love. Since sexuality is only and exclusively to be shared between a husband and a wife, viewing someone’s body outside of a marriage is committing adultery in one’s heart. That person’s body simply doesn’t belong to the viewer. Additionally, viewing images of someone else’s body on a screen means that the person’s body has become an object to be used rather than a person to be cared for. This is lust, and because sexual desires are so strong, such images are hard to get out of one’s mind once they have been viewed. Viewing images with a lustful mind effectively imprints those images on the “video screen” of one’s mind. Sexual images do not stay imprinted forever, but they are not easy to remove.

⁴ Randy Alcorn, *The Purity Principle: God’s Guardrails on Life’s Dangerous Roads* (Colorado Springs: Multnomah, 2003), 62-63.



LESSON FIVE

Porn in Your Pocket

With an internet accessible phone, the temptation of sexual lust is often only a few taps away. As with any sin, there are numerous negative consequences that can pile up if you do not guard your heart against lust. If you look lustfully at pornography on your phone, here are a few of the negative effects you should expect:



People Become Objects

You will begin to view other people as sexual objects instead of as humans to love, serve and care for. If you consistently train your mind to look at the bodies of people online, when you interact with real-life people, your mind will be trained to view them the same way.



False Expectations for Marriage

It's on-demand, and it's completely about the viewer getting what he or she wants. God designed marriage to be a loving relationship and, if you get married, your spouse is not an on-demand object. Not only that, but no real person looks the same as the perfectly photoshopped and enhanced false body images that are displayed online.



Guilt & Shame Instead of Freedom

If you view pornography or send sexually explicit photos, your soul will have to live with a secret. You will likely seek to cover up your tracks online, but the reality is that you will still know who you are and what you've done and you will likely feel guilt and shame. In Psalm 32, King David talks about how when he hid his sin, it felt like his "bones were wasting away." The guilt he had for sexual sin was always upon him. In contrast, if you're free from using your phone for sexual sin, there is peace from knowing that anyone can use your phone anytime and you have nothing to worry about and no tracks to cover up.



A Barrier to Seeing & Knowing God

Prior to Jesus' teaching about lust in Matthew 5, he teaches, "*Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.*" Having an impure heart, makes connecting with God difficult. Thankfully, he forgives our sins when we confess to him, but living with a regular habit sexual immorality makes the practices of worship and prayer very difficult. If you want to be close to God, to see his beauty and find joy in him, seek to have a pure heart.



At Your Fingertips

Impurity has always been available to us in this fallen world, but the internet has put it at our fingertips. Because of this, it's easier than ever for anyone with a phone to access pornography or other sexual content from the internet, apps, or personal photos from people you know.

Have you ever had someone walk up to you on the street and ask you to take your clothes off? You may have just laughed in response to that question. It's ridiculous, right? Of course not. But, people asking for "nudes", or nude photographs, from other people is happening constantly online. It's happening at such a rate that it almost seems there are no consequences for asking. Legal consequences are a definite possibility, if you get caught, but the social consequences are far less online than they would be in person. If someone approached you in a sexual way in person, they would have the fear of rejection. You might laugh at them or scrunch up your face in disgust. There is a social cost to making a sexual advance in person. Online, that social cost is seemingly non-existent because the person can't see you and they can just move on to the next person in a matter of seconds. Impurity is at your fingertips online because people will be bolder online than they would be in person. Because of this, you will also have to be bold to clearly say no to online sexual requests and take bold steps to keep this boundary for yourself. If someone sends you a nude, asks for a nude, or sends or requests other sexual content from you, block them immediately. It is a clear message that you are not interested. You do not owe them an explanation.

If You Mess Up

Let's say you're eating chocolate chip cookies, and all of a sudden a friend tells you that the cookies you're eating are from a batch that had mouse droppings in them. Surely, you'd spit out the partially chewed cookie and throw the rest in the garbage can. The last thing you'd do is take the cookies to your room and continue to eat them secretly.

When it comes sexual purity on your phone, you may make a mistake. You may even sin intentionally. But when you do that, what should you do?

If you see sexually explicit material on your phone (or any screen), you should treat it just as you would rotten cookies. Don't hide it, but instead take decisive action to be pure. Here are three Biblical steps you can remember if your phone becomes a source of sexual immorality.



LESSON FIVE

Porn in Your Pocket

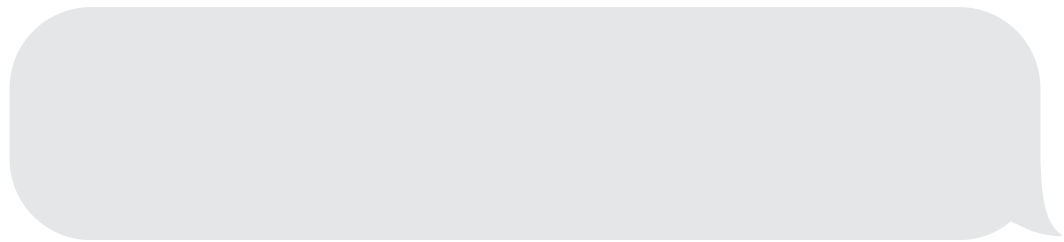


Confess

Confession is acknowledging your sin, by saying out loud what you have done. It's owning up—with perfect honesty—what you've done. The opposite of confession is *concealing*, which is when you hide something and cover it up. The Bible describes confession in terms of walking in the light and concealing as walking in the darkness. To be in the darkness is to live a lie through hiding who you are and what you do. In the very first sin, Adam and Eve immediately tried to hide themselves from the Lord and one of the most basic human instincts in all of us still is to hide our failures and sins from others. If you sin sexually, you'll be tempted to hide it. You may try to delete your browser history, delete an app, or swipe away any sort of evidence that could reveal your sin to others. If you ever find yourself deleting your online history, it's an indicator that you might be walking in darkness, concealing sin instead of confessing it.

Instead of concealing your sin, confess it. Bring your sin into the light. First, pray to God and acknowledge your sin as you ask him for forgiveness. Additionally, find a trusted Christian friend, youth leader, or another trusted adult who you can confess to and who can encourage you as you seek to live a life of integrity. While it's not typically wise to go around blabbing your sin to anyone and everyone, it is a part of spiritual growth to confess sin to those in your life who are rooting for you to grow in godliness.

Read James 5:16. What does this Scripture instruct us to do? Why do you think it's natural for us to try to conceal, or cover up, our sin?



It's hard to confess our sins to others, but doing so allows for honest prayer and ongoing encouragement from fellow believers as we seek to walk in the light.



LESSON FIVE

Porn in Your Pocket



Believe

In confessing our sin, we must also believe the good news of the gospel, that Jesus forgives us when we repent of our sin and trust in Him. The letter of First John was written largely to encourage believers to walk in the light of God's truth. At the outset of the letter, John writes, *"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."* When we sin, we feel guilty and ashamed. As a result, we don't feel worthy of God's love or accepted by Him.

Sometimes we want to ignore God in our sinful moments because we are ashamed. In truth, we're never fully worthy of his love, but he gives us his love and forgiveness because he is gracious. We must believe the truth of 1 John 1:9, as well as other Scriptures declaring that we are forgiven, so that we are willing to confess our sins. It's the promise of God's forgiveness that frees us to honestly confess our sins to Him and to others.



Act

All throughout the Bible, genuine faith results in action. Those who really believe God's promises, back up their talk with action. The word the Bible uses to describe the action of confession is *repentance*. To repent is to turn away from sin by acting in a new way.

Once, in the book of Acts, an entire group of people who had been practicing witchcraft realize that they have been sinning against God. They confess their sin, believe in Jesus, and they act. They start a big bonfire and they burn all their witchcraft books, even though those books were worth thousands of dollars. Action is what proves one's belief to be authentic.

Who is someone (or multiple people) in your life you would trust to confess your sin and ask for prayer and help?



Pluck Out Your Eyeballs

Right after Jesus says that lust is committing adultery in the heart, he makes a shocking statement.

Read Matthew 5:29. In your own words, what do you think this verse means?

Almost all Bible scholars agree that Jesus is speaking here in hyperbole, which means that he's using exaggeration to make a point. Jesus doesn't actually want us to pluck out our eyeballs or chop off our hands. His point is that sin is so dangerous and so serious that we should be willing to take drastic, inconvenient measures to fight against sin. If we don't fight against sin with drastic measures, we can soon be enslaved by it with a hard, unrepentant heart.

Don't miss this: If your phone is a source of sexual sin and sexual addiction, you must get rid of it. You probably don't want to hear that, so let's repeat: If your phone is a source of sexual sin, you must get rid of it. Seriously.

Jesus said we must go to aggressive and extreme measures to fight sin, so if you can't handle having a phone without it being a platform for sin, get rid of it and go to a standard "dumbphone." People have lived for hundreds of years without smartphones, and numerous followers of Christ struggling with sexual sin have made the difficult choice to use a non-internet phone. Will it be inconvenient? Yep. But not as inconvenient as gouging out your eye. Resolve right now, before you ever get a phone, that if your phone is a source of sin in your life, that you will get rid of it at least for a season of growth, repentance, and faith.

It is also wise to take preventative measures to prepare yourself to navigate an online world of much sexual immorality. Here are few ideas:



LESSON FIVE

Porn in Your Pocket



Consider Beginning with a Non-Internet Accessible Phone

Someday as you grow up it may make sense for you to utilize a smartphone to make best use of your time or capabilities to do your job or connect with others. But if you have a basic phone that can talk and text, that's probably a great place to start to build responsibility. It's wise to make sure you can swim in the shallow end of the pool, before you jump in the deep in.



Use an Internet Accountability Software

There are several good internet accountability software programs available that will help your browsing be open and in the light to others you trust like parents or Christian friends. No software is perfect, but these can provide a helpful fence that protects your soul from some of the filth out there.



Put Your Phone to Bed At Night

Instead of taking your phone to your room in isolation, when it's late and you are tired. Put your phone on a charging station in your kitchen or other family area, to avoid temptation.



Report Shady Characters

If you ever get asked for inappropriate photos or texts, report them immediately to your parents. Even if it's someone you know at school, report them. The stakes are too high, to even mess around with sexting. You can either not reply or simply screenshot the request and send it to your parents immediately.



Never Take a Nude Photo

There is no reason, ever, for you to take a nude or sexual photo of yourself. God made your sexuality to be a gift for a spouse and no one else's eyes. Any photo you take on your phone is forever on a server of an internet company somewhere, and worse, could end up in the hands of someone you know. Make a hard line in your life to never even take such a photo in the first place.



Flee From Temptation

Believers, throughout the Bible, are encouraged to "Flee sexual immorality" (1 Cor. 6:18). Don't hang around near it. Don't cuddle up to sin. Just run. If there's an app that is sexually tempting, delete it. If there's a person that is overly flirtatious, block them. Do whatever you need to do to fight against the sneakiness of sexual temptation.



LESSON FIVE

Porn in Your Pocket

What do you think of these practical ideas for remaining safe and pure with your phone? Do you have any other practical ideas that would be good to implement?



L E S S O N S I X



DON'T DO
DUMB STUFF



LESSON SIX

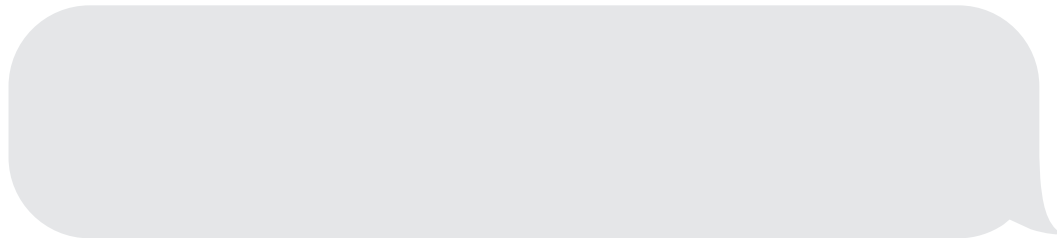
Don't Do Dumb Stuff

After some off-the-field legal trouble, The Tennessee Titans were ready to give Adrian Peterson, one of the NFL's all-time leading rushers, another chance to play football. When Peterson reported to practice, his new coach had a succinct message for him: "Play with great effort and don't do dumb stuff."¹

As we've seen in lessons one through five, there are many things in life that are flat out wrong to do. Gossip, cheating, stealing, and sexual immorality are all sinful and wrong. But many things in life are not necessarily *wrong*, they're just not smart.

- Eating cereal with a fork is not wrong, but it's not very smart.
- Wearing sandals in the snow is not morally wrong, but it's a quick way to get frostbite.
- Forgetting to put on deodorant before a date is not wrong, but go ahead and keep your relationship status set on "single."

Read Proverbs 26:17. What is this main lesson of this Proverb?



Grabbing a dog by the ears is not sinful, it's just not smart. In the same way, when you get involved in someone else's quarrel, even if your intentions are good, it's not a very intelligent move because it's probably going to come back to bite you. It's just not smart.

Fifteen times in the book of Proverbs, the author refers to a group of people known as "the simple." In some instances, the simple person in Proverbs is referring to a child who hasn't lived long enough to gain wisdom through life experience. We all start out as simple-minded infants and have to learn about the world around us as we get older. The simple person hasn't yet learned that stray dogs bite or that smelly armpits cause people to keep their distance. Being simple is not morally wrong, but those who are simple-minded need to humbly listen to instruction so that they go grow in wisdom and avoid foolish mistakes. Proverbs 9:6 proclaims, "Leave your simple ways, and live, and walk in the way of insight."

The purpose of this final lesson is to give you some practical insight about how to use your smartphone in a smart way.

¹ Ryan Glasspiegel, "Mike Vrabel's Instructions to Adrian Peterson: 'Don't Do Dumb Stuff', The New York Post, November 4, 2021, accessed March 9, 2022, <https://nypost.com/2021/11/04/adrian-petersons-titans-instructions-dont-do-dumb-stuff/>.



Insight #1: Digital Footprint

There's a brilliant invention banks use to help catch robbers: dye packs. If a bank robber shows up wielding a gun and demanding a teller hand over thousands of dollars, the teller can fill the robber's bag with cash from a predetermined safe containing a dye pack. When the robber exits the building, a sensor on the door triggers a countdown and within seconds, a package of bright red dye explodes in the bag, ruining the money, and painting the robbers clothing in red dye.

The purpose of a dye pack is *traceability*. Robbers may think they get away in the clear, but they are marked in red and can be more easily tracked. Even if they get away from the scene and go to all the work of bleaching the cash, the bills still retain microscopic evidence of being marked by dye. Dye packs, help law enforcement trace and track down criminals.

In a similar manner, nearly every time you go online, you're being traced. Your activities are marked out so that others can follow you. You may think that you visited a website and left with no trace, but more often than not, your activity has left a permanent, traceable mark. The trail of online activity you leave behind is called a "digital footprint."

To be fair, googling something for your homework, checking a sports score, or using a GPS map is a lot different than robbing a bank. If someone traces you and learns your favorite baseball team or what your history essay is about, it's not that big of a deal. In the digital world we live in, we all have digital footprints, there's no avoiding it. But we must not be simple-minded about the fact that our online activities are perpetually traced. The wise person considers the implications of having a digital footprint.

1) Your information is sold.

First, understand that "free" services like search engines and apps have to make money somehow and the way they do that is by obtaining information about you and selling it to marketers. If you google "Nike" a few times, you're going to be targeted with Nike ads, or possibly their competitors, to get you to spend money. There's nothing wrong with looking at shoes online, but just know that as you do that, companies are aiming their ads at your wallet.

2) Your information is used to create a "confirmation bias."

Let's say there's a presidential election, and you really like a candidate named Buzz Lightyear. As you look up information about Buzz Lightyear and follow his speeches, tweets, and activities, your digital footprint is telling algorithms "This person is really interested in Buzz Lightyear."

What then happens is that articles about Buzz Lightyear are suggested to you to follow, including other articles which may not be true against Lightyear's opponent in the election, so that you'll keep clicking on links and seeing more advertising. Over time, the suggestions made to you are only in favor of Buzz Lightyear and your opinions about Buzz Lightyear are only confirmed, instead of challenged. When this happens, it's called "confirmation bias" because we only hear the side of the story we want to hear. Confirmation bias is fed by our digital footprint.



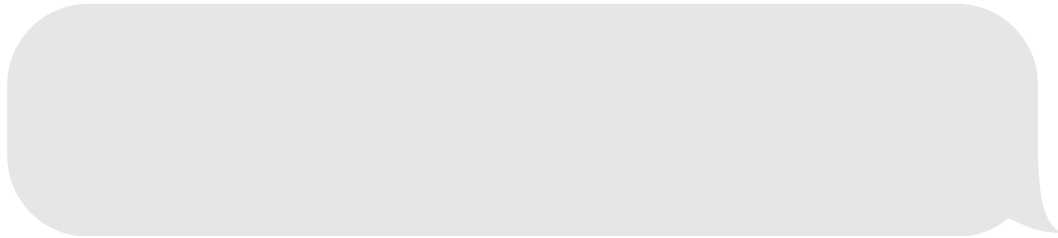
LESSON SIX

Don't Do Dumb Stuff

3) Your information will be judged by future employers.

In the not-so-distant future you'll likely fill out an application to get a job, to get into college, or perhaps for a scholarship. You're inviting people to evaluate you, and in today's world that most certainly means they'll check your online presence. In 2020 a major business magazine reported that over half of employers have decided to not hire a candidate based on their social media presence.² What you post today, even if as a joke, may be what costs you a job tomorrow.

If we could search your digital footprint right now, what do you think we'd learn about you?



² Melanie Curtin, "54 Percent of Employers Have Eliminated a Candidate Based on Social Media. Time to Clean Up Your Posts (and Tags)", Inc., January 9, 2020, accessed March 15, 2022, <https://www.inc.com/melanie-curtin/54-percent-of-employers-have-eliminated-a-candidate-based-on-social-media-time-to-clean-up-your-feed-and-tags.html>.



Insight #2: Phone Etiquette

Every culture has customs, which are patterns of behavior that are considered normal and expected. Different cultures have different customs. For instance, in France it's very common to greet friends with a kiss on both cheeks. In Japan, it's common for people to make slurping sounds while eating noodles as a way of complementing the chef. However, in the United States, if you show up to a friend's house for dinner and give them kisses on the cheek and slurp your food, you'd be a bit of a weirdo. You might be considered rude.

When we are unaware of our social behavior, we can unintentionally act rudely toward others, which is unloving (1 Cor. 13:5). Though social customs change over time, it's helpful to consider some common ways you can use your phone—and not use your phone—in a way that is polite and considerate to others. These phone “manners” are called etiquette.

1) Eye Contact

It's pretty annoying when you're talking with someone and they look at their phone and start texting in the middle of your sentence. If a person verbally butted into the conversation, it'd be a rude interruption, but for some reason we easily allow texts to interrupt in-person conversations. Though there are some exceptions, show people you care about what they are saying by giving them your attention and your eye contact.

2) Put Down the Megaphone

When you're in public, don't be a loud talker on the phone. The strangers next to you don't want to hear your conversation. If you need to take or make a call, find a space where you can talk without bothering others. Especially if you are video chatting, the person on your screen may not be aware how many people can hear their voice. Out of courtesy to others, turn down the volume and step to a more private location to chat.

3) Don't Be an Over-texter

Sometimes group threads are clearly a time where friends are chatting for fun. But often group threads convey information to a group and don't require a response, nor a discussion. If you're on a group thread, the 17 other people on the thread don't want their phone blowing up with a conversation between you and one other person. Similarly, if it's not a group thread, and the person you've texted doesn't answer. Don't send them 84 texts asking them where they are. Chillax. Be patient. Don't be an annoyance.

4) Get Consent

Do not share photos or videos of other people without their consent. This is especially important if the person doesn't know you took the photo or video or if it is unflattering in any way. This is a great time to employ The Golden Rule. Ask yourself, would I want someone to share this photo or video if it was me? Be a good friend and always ask first.

Can you think of a time when someone was not using good phone etiquette? Which of the situations listed above will be hardest for you?



Insight #3: Digital Pacifiers

Babies are simple-minded. When they're hungry, they cry. When they're tired, they cry. When they want something, they cry. That's why the inventor of the pacifier should be considered a national hero. Pacifiers have the ability to soothe and comfort a disgruntled infant. As a child grows, however, there comes a time for them to learn how to cope with discomfort and give up the pacifier. It'd be pretty strange to see a 24 year old walking around with a pacifier in her mouth. Part of maturity is learning how to cope with discomfort.

A lot of adults treat their phone like a pacifier. Anytime they are bored, they look at their phone. Anytime they don't feel like engaging with others: phone time. Irritable and cranky? Scroll on the phone. Thirty seconds at a stoplight? Pass the time on the phone. The phone has become an adult pacifier. Adults turn to it for a sense of soothing and comfort in almost any spare moment.

1) Enjoy Your Surroundings

The world God made is full of glorious intricacies in creation. If your eyes are glued to a four inch screen all the time, you're going to miss out. Down time walking, waiting in line, or sitting in an airport gives you time to observe what God has made. Enjoy it. He made this world to be enjoyed. You don't need to capture every moment on video, either. Watch fireworks, enjoy a game, marvel at a sunset. A video won't do the moment justice anyway.

2) Be the Difference

If you're at a lunch table, riding in a vehicle, or hanging out with friends where everyone is on their phone, you can be the difference. Don't be the "phone police", but you can put your phone away, and you can start a conversation in real life. You'll enjoy the time a lot more if you put down the digital pacifier, and you actually talk to each other.

Name some things you'll miss out on in life, if you reach for your phone almost every time you have a spare moment?



Insight #4: Your Parents Are On Your Team

Former Indiana Hoosiers coach Bobby Knight was one of the most infamous basketball coaches of all time. Knight regularly screamed at his players as he stomped up and down the sidelines during games. In one instance, he got so fed up with the referees that he threw a chair across the court (before being promptly ejected from the game). Sometimes coaches are just plain mean.

But not all yelling is mean. Coaches coach, and sometimes they need to shout, "Play defense!" so they can be heard through a roaring gymnasium. When their players are lollygagging at practice, sometimes the best thing they can do is blow their whistle and shout, "Time to run sprints!" Why do good coaches sometimes make their players' lives difficult? Because they care about their players' success. Parents are just like good coaches. When they are hard on their children, it's because they care about their success.

Parents, this doesn't mean that you can yell at your kids. It does mean that you can and should coach them. And kids, this means that your parent is on your team. Their involvement in your phone usage is aimed at your success.

1) Be Transparent

Since God can see your phone anytime, and He is the one that we are ultimately seeking to please, the goal is that anyone, anytime can look through your phone and you're not ashamed of what they'd find. Your parents will have the right to look through your phone at anytime, and this is good. It's not that your parents want to be super nosy, rather, it's that they are responsible for coaching you in godliness and integrity. Don't be surprised when your parent looks at your phone. It's a gift to have parents who do that and eventually they'll trust you enough that such oversight will become less frequent.

Read Proverbs 10:9. What does the word "integrity" mean? What does it mean that a person who has integrity can "walk securely"?

2) Own Your Mistakes

It is not a matter of "if" but "when" you make a mistake with your phone. You are learning and you are interacting with a bunch of other kids who are also learning. Mistakes will happen. Hiding those mistakes from your parents will only make you feel more shame and only make your parents lose trust in you. When you sin, confess quickly. When you make a mistake, your parents will give you consequences. You'll probably lose phone privileges for awhile, but remember those consequences are training you to be a mature, responsible, godly adult. Remember: a phone is like dynamite in your hands. Consequences hurt in the short-term, but they are protecting you from an explosion with devastating life consequences later.



LESSON SIX

Don't Do Dumb Stuff

3) Talk to Your Parents about "House Rules"

You'll want to set some basic expectations—some 'house rules'—for phone usage so that you're not having arguments everyday about your phone. Agree to a phone "curfew". Come up with an agreed time that your phone gets docked every night. This will allow you to unplug, be present with your family, and get the quality sleep you need to grow and develop. Consider if there are certain times, spaces, or places where you should not be on your phone. Discuss whether or not you'll be responsible for paying for a phone, for damages, and/or the monthly payment.

Spend some time together discussing and listing some 'House Rules' for your phone (such rules may apply outside of the house too).

There are two ways to live. The narrow way of following Jesus is not easy. At times, the walking the narrow way will require you to make choices that are different from the flow of the crowd around you. You will be different from others. You will have to make choices that are inconvenient and might even make you feel lonely. Your phone is a tool that can either help or hinder you on the narrow way, but never forget: the narrow way leads to life! What Jesus commands is for His glory, the good of others and our joy.



DO AS I DO (AND AS I SAY)

A F I N A L W O R D
T O P A R E N T S



W O R D T O P A R E N T S

Do As I Do (and As I Say)

It's easy for us parents to pick on "kids these days" who are glued to their phones, walking around like glassy-eyed zombies with faces aglow from the screen in their palm. But let's be honest: Many parents are no different.

If we want to see children not conform to the pattern of this world and use a phone as a helpful tool in God-honoring life, then we need to set the example for them. It's often said that much of what we learn is "caught, not taught." The rhythms and patterns of our lives will shape our children much more than the mini-sermons we give (or even the workbook we did with them before they got their first phone).

There are numerous instances in Scripture of the truth that our actions are meant to teach others. Jesus taught that *"a student will be like his teacher"* (Lk. 6:40). In 1 Corinthians Paul sent Timothy to remind the church of "his ways in Christ" (1 Cor. 4:17) and later says, *"Imitate me, as I imitate Christ"* (1 Cor. 11:1). Likewise, the author of Hebrews points not merely to the teaching of the church's leaders, but also to their lifestyle as a source of instruction when he writes, *"Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith"* (Heb 13:7). The point is clear: Our lives teach.

You may have thought you were doing this workbook for your child, but we hope that this is a transformational moment for you as well. Now is the time to consider what your life is teaching to your child, especially in the way in which you use your phone. This is not to say that you should have the same standard as your child. You are the authority in the home and you have many more responsibilities, some of which will require use of your phone. Nevertheless, we urge you to take the example you're setting for your child seriously. Your example will be the most powerful teacher—for better or worse—your child receives in how to use a phone.

There are two ways to live. We hope that Jesus' words of the broad and narrow paths will become commonplace in your home, not only as it relates to phones, but to all of life. This resource has been designed to equip you and your child for a more peaceful transition to the modern milestone of phone ownership, but more than anything, we hope that it's an occasion for eternal conversations about which road you and your child are traveling. It's our prayer, that as you encounter Christ in his word, that you will be moved to joyfully travel the narrow road that leads to life.