Youth Culture Lesson
Finding Teachable Moments in Culture
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For the Love of Phones
Teens Put Away Their Smartphones for a Week…and Survive
By Paul Asay

What Happened
You belong to the first generation never to have known a time without the Internet. You might've been using your parents' smartphones before learning to walk, and most of you probably own your own now. So, what would it be like to do without this device for a week?

For many teens, going without their phones for that long is almost unimaginable. According to the Pew Research Center, about a quarter of U.S. teens say they're online "almost constantly," and another survey in Great Britain found that youth in the United Kingdom spend eight hours every day online.

However, there's now an effort afoot to encourage teens to experience life without the Internet. Erin Cotter is trying to get English schools to buy into her Disconnect Project, which asks teens to do a number of things during the several-week course. First, they have to track their online activities, particularly those on their phones. They also discuss the positives and negatives of online communication and debate issues such as cyberbullying and sexting.

All that discussion culminates in teens trading in their smartphones for old-fashioned talk-and-text only cell phones for a week. They must steer clear of as much online activity as possible, too: They still can use the Internet for homework; but Facebook, gaming and other online activities are forbidden.

While most participating teens dreaded this smartphone-free week, many said afterward that they actually enjoyed it. One boy said he felt "strangely happy." Others said they felt more productive and, ironically, more connected.

"It's cheered me up for some reason; I don't know why," one boy said. "I feel different. I can concentrate more."

All of them were still happy to get back their smartphones at the end of the week, of course. "All the students were back on their phones straight away," Cotter admitted, "but they all said—and I want to believe this—that they'll switch it off once in a while."

Talk About It
Do you have a smartphone? How often do you use it a day? For what purposes do you use it? If you were forced to give up either your phone forever or, say, chocolate, which would you forsake? What about between your phone or television? Your phone or your car? Your phone or your sense of smell?

Do you think you could give up using your phone for a week? What would you miss the most? What do you think you might learn? Have you tried to put away your phone for a while? Have you tried to lay off social networks such as Facebook? What about the Internet as a whole? Do you think it's possible to give up the Internet anymore?

The Internet and all the nifty gizmos attached to it aren't inherently bad; but for some people, they can become distractions in their lives. Sometimes they can become addictions that come between them and God. Do you think that might be a problem for you? Why or why not? If the Internet and smartphones aren't problematic for you, what *could* be?

What the Bible Says
"For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride in possessions—is not from the Father but is from the world" (1 John 2:16).

"'All things are lawful for me,' but not all things are helpful. 'All things are lawful for me,' but I will not be enslaved by anything" (1 Cor. 6:12).

"No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and He will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation He also provides the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it" (1 Cor. 10:13).