

Goals

The underlying message in all of these lessons is that God is with us no matter what problems or issues we may have in life. Sometimes we may think that we are alone in dealing with our problems, and we try to seek out ways to deal with them ourselves. But the Lord promised us that He will always be with us, guiding our every way, if we but only turn to Him.

Students will be asked to take a hard look at their lives, to see if there are any areas that they may be sinning against the Lord. They will be prompted to think about their daily actions and what they can do to serve and glorify the Lord instead. They will be guided towards ways in which they can walk with God on a deeper level and to knit their hearts with Him.

unit
3**Teacher Devotional**

When it comes down to it, have you truly handed over your life issues to the Lord? Have you laid all at His feet and given over your worries and burdens to Him? The Lord commands us to go to Him and to cast all our burdens at His feet (1 Pet 5:7). This is easier said than done. Of course, we believe in the Lord, and most certainly, we do cast our anxieties upon Him. However, we often hold a little back for ourselves to deal with. We don't truly cast all our cares onto Him because we don't have complete trust or faith in Him. We need to learn to let go and let God deal with the issues that are dearest to our hearts. Only by completely letting go of our burdens will we be able to enjoy the blessings and joy the Lord has in store for us.

Let Go and Let God take care of you

"Cast your burden on the Lord, and He shall sustain you; He shall never permit the righteous to be moved." (Ps 55:22)

Lesson 8

Internet Addiction

Listed Scriptures

Jas 1:13–15; 1 Pet 5:8; 1:15f; 1 Cor 10:13; Mt 5:27–30; Ps 119:11

Lesson Aim

- 1) To understand that the images we see and conversations we have online do impact our thinking and life in subtle ways.
- 2) To understand that many images and conversations we engage in online are not real.
- 3) To do a self-check and gauge our level of addiction.
- 4) To use the Internet to serve our Lord Jesus Christ.

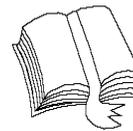
Memory Verse

"If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell."
(Mt 5:29)

Bible Reading For This Week (for students and teachers)

Hosea 10–12

B I B L E B A C K G R O U N D



James 1:14f says, "But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death." Satan is the one who tries to tempt us. Once we sin we fall into his control and we are judged. In 1 Peter 5:8 it reminds us to "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour." Satan is indeed very cunning. He does not devour us physically, but tempts us. If we look at the case of Adam and Eve, we can see this quite evidently. Satan did not devour them. He tempted them and they sinned. They were afraid to face God because they would have to face the judgment of God. Likewise, when we sin against God, we will

have to face His judgment. Satan himself cannot kill us but he will tempt us to sin and God will judge us.

We are tempted when we are drawn away from the right path, away from God, by our own desires. Sometimes our desires will tempt us. Desire itself can be neutral. But when the desire crosses the boundary of truth, it becomes lust and that lust will tempt us. When we go on the Internet and surf we are free to visit any website we wish. However, we may be tempted by the spam messages we get to visit inappropriate sites, such as pornographic ones. When we click on such sites to view them, we are crossing the boundary of truth. This becomes lust which grows in our hearts and begins a plan of action. If we don't abort it, it will cause us to sin. Be very watchful! Satan tempts us through our own lusts. We have to therefore control the lust of the flesh and learn to abide in God because God will hold us accountable for everything we do (Mt 12:36f).

W A R M U P



Read this to your students and ask them to think about it:

Hi! My name's Gordon and I'm a Netaholic. It's been 5 minutes since my last Internet fix. Even though I know there's nothing really worth searching for on the Internet, I still feel the desire to be online. I crave the Internet, especially the chat rooms. I get such a high from talking to my friends on the net. And even if my friends aren't on it, I'll find other people to talk to. Usually, I come straight home from school, grab a quick bite and start surfing while chatting to my friends online. Sometimes I don't go to bed till 1 or 2 am. My mom thinks I'm doing my homework. Well, I am, sort of. I do it while chatting online. Hey, who said you can't multi-task?

What do you think of Gordon's story? Could this happen? Could someone actually become addicted to the Internet? Why?

According to a study, as many as eleven million people are addicted to the Internet. It has become one of the fastest growing addictions in today's society and is ranked alongside other addictions such as smoking, drinking, and gambling. Today, we'll be looking into the causes of Internet addiction and how it can affect our spiritual lives.

B I B L E S T U D Y



Part 1

Internet Addiction: The Facts



A. What is Addiction?

"Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day; teach him to use the Net ... and he won't bother you for weeks."

An addiction is defined as a behavior that:

- provides a feeling of an intoxicating "high" or "rush"
- escalates and becomes habitual
- requires increasing quantities for satisfaction
- continues even in the face of great personal consequences
- displays symptoms of withdrawal when attempting to stop

Is the Internet really a credible form of addiction? According to research, yes it is. Professionals have now termed those who spend hours online or who show characteristics of withdrawal symptoms as having Internet Addiction Disorder (IAD).



B. What Causes Internet Addiction?

The roots of addiction can usually be traced to a wish to suppress or avoid some kind of emotional pain. Addiction is a way to escape from reality, from something that is either too full of sadness or too devoid of joy, which is evident among alcohol and drug addicts. Internet addiction offers a fantasy world where the addict comes into denial and believes that the people he or she meets online as more real than his or her actual friends.



C. What Are They Addicted To?

Research has shown that over 10 percent of students have an Internet dependency problem. Unfortunately, many are usually unaware of this until it becomes serious. In actuality there are many different areas of the Internet that people become addicted to ranging from online multi-user games to online chat rooms. The four main categories of activities that people become hooked on are:

a. Sex

This ranges from pornographic sites to cybersex and encourages such things as flirting to masturbation. Easy access, anonymity, and affordability have all made Internet porn more attractive and seemingly less dangerous. This addiction becomes very dangerous as it could lead to actual meetings with online contacts for in-person sex.

b. Money

Gambling, online auctions, day trading and shopping all fall under this category. Such addictions can cause conflict in families when the addict loses or spends a significant portion of the family income.

c. Chat Rooms

This also includes instant messaging and is a problem in its own right. Unlike e-mail, chat servers allow for "real-time" interaction. In addition to keeping in touch with loved ones, such technologies allow the user to "meet" and make friends with people from all over the world. They can take on an anonymous new identity and forge new friendships. In some cases these computer-based interactions take the place of real physical human contact, thus leading the person to live in a virtual world.

d. Surfing

This is perhaps the only form of Internet addiction whereby the addict can truly be said to be addicted, with the exception of online chatting. Surfing addicts or "Internet vampires" (because they surf all night) thrive on seeing what's out there. They waste a lot of precious time trying to find if there's anything interesting. Their quest is not finding specific bits of information but about finding any information, about anything, anywhere.



D. What Are the Effects of Internet Addiction?

Like most other addictions, Internet addiction disrupts relationships with family and friends and has a tendency to replace school and other positive activities. When students get hooked and stay up late every night online, they lose sleep, fail at school, withdraw socially, and lie to their parents about what's happening. In the most extreme of cases, Internet addiction, particularly pornography, could lead to rape or sexual abuse. Most broadly, pornography has been demonstrated to shape attitudes, and its harms can range from damaged relationships to the increasingly common incidences of date rape, compulsive behavior, and "acting out" in dangerous ways.



Part 2

What Are the Signs of Internet Addiction?



A. Are We An Internet Addict?

How do we know if we're addicted to the Internet? Some people spend 20 hours on the Internet per week and say that they are fine, while others spend 10 or 15 hours and yet become hooked. What is important in differentiating normal from problem Internet use is the experience of compulsion to use the net. Normal users, no matter how heavy their usage, do not need to get online and do not neglect their duties or their relationship with family and friends to get online. Let's take a test to see if you are addicted! For each question, put a check in the box that you feel relates to you the best. Then add the numbers you selected for each response to obtain a final score.

Question	Rarely (1)	Sometimes (2)	Frequently (3)	Often (4)	Always (5)
1. How often do you find that you stay online longer than you intended?					
2. How often do you neglect your work to spend more time online?					
3. How often do you form new relationships with fellow online users?					
4. How often do others in your life complain to you about the amount of time you spend online?					
5. How often do your grades or school work suffer because of the amount of time you spend online?					
6. How often do you check your email before something else that you need to do?					

Question	Rarely (1)	Sometimes (2)	Frequently (3)	Often (4)	Always (5)
7. How often do you become defensive or secretive when anyone asks you what you do online?					
8. How often do you find yourself seeking more stimulating material on the Internet and have experienced guilt or shame about your relationship with God?					
9. How often do you snap, yell, or act annoyed if someone bothers you while you are online?					
10. How often do you lose sleep due to late-night log-ins?					
11. How often do you feel preoccupied with the Internet when offline, or fantasize about being online?					
12. How often do you try to cut down the amount of time you spend online and fail?					
13. How often do you try to hide how long you've been online?					
15. How often do you feel depressed, moody, or nervous when you are offline, which goes away once you are back online?					

The higher your score, the greater your level of addiction and the problems your Internet usage causes. Here's a general scale to help measure your score:

Total Score	Level of Addiction
15–34 points	You are an average online user. You may surf the Web a bit too long at times, but you have control over your usage. Try to cut down a bit on your usage.
35–54 points	You are experiencing occasional or frequent problems because of the Internet. You should consider its full impact on your life. You also need to cut down on your usage and try to find other things to fill your life instead.
55–75 points	Your Internet usage is causing significant problems in your life. You should evaluate the impact of the Internet on your life and address the problems directly caused by your Internet usage. You need help. Talk to someone you can trust about your problem.

Adapted from "The Internet Addiction Survey," Dr. Kimberly Young



B. Signs of Internet Addiction

Here are some signs of an Internet addict. Are you one of them? Is the amount of time you spend on the Internet having a negative effect on your social, personal, and school life, and possibly your relationship with God?

1. You can't stop logging on to the Internet on a regular and daily basis.
2. You spend an excessive amount of time in chat rooms.
3. You spend more time online than with friends and loved ones.
4. You are dishonest about the amount of time you spend online.
5. You become defensive and secretive when people ask you what you do online.
6. You are over-dependent on the computer. You spend a lot of time online, often overtaking other things in your life like school and God.
7. You're using the Internet as a way of escaping your problems.
8. Your loved ones are concerned about your absence because of the time you spend on the Internet.
9. You demonstrate a loss of control when trying to stop or limit the amount of time on the computer.
10. You feel restless, irritable, depressed, or anxious when someone or something

shortens your time or interrupts your plans to use the computer.

11. You find yourself seeking more stimulating material on the Internet and you have experienced guilt or shame about your relationship with God.
12. You find yourself using the computer at times when you are feeling uncomfortable, irritated, or sad about something happening in your life.
13. You find yourself preoccupied with the computer when you are not using the computer.
14. You lose sleep due to staying up late frequently to be online.
15. Your grades and school work are suffering because of the amount of time you spend online.



Part 3

Overcoming Addiction

“No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.” (1 Cor 10:13)

So, what do we do if we find out that we’re addicted? The key is to first acknowledge that we have a problem. Then follow these steps to make changes in our lives. If we have a focus or a goal in our lives, we will not fall easily. The ability to stand strong depends not on our own strength, but on God’s provision of a way out. The key is to focus on God’s ability to deliver us from temptation.



A. Repent and Confess to God (Ps 51:17)

Often, our prayers cannot reach God because our sin separates us from Him. We are unable to reach Him because of our iniquities (Is 59:2; Jer 5:25). The only way for us to reach Him is to first cleanse ourselves from all evil, for the Lord is holy and those who worship Him must also be holy in their conduct (1 Pet 1:15f). We need to therefore restore our broken relationship with the Lord and acknowledge our sin (Ps 32:5; 40:12). After repentance and confession, we must make a determination to be pure and never repeat the same offense again. Let’s do what Job did and make a covenant with our eyes never to sin again (Job 31:1).



B. Seek Spiritual Support (Jas 5:16)

We need a spiritual support group so that we won’t relapse into our addictions. A lack of accountability will allow the problem to resurface, but telling others offers the potential for support. The more we use the Internet, the more isolated we become. The more isolated we become, the greater the likelihood that we will continue to engage in the addictive pattern due to guilt and shame. Isolation can lead to depression. Don’t isolate yourselves! Thus, we need to seek help from trustworthy brothers and sisters, counselors, and ministers who can maintain confidentiality, have a good level of spirituality, pray for us, advise us with the words of God and hold us accountable.



C. Practice Self-Discipline (Gal 5:22f)

We need to have a plan to keep ourselves away from the lure of online images. The plan must address all our physical, mental, social and spiritual needs. The lure of lust is powerful. To avoid its snare, we must be wise in protecting every possible area of temptation. In Matthew 5:29 it says, “If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell.” We need to remove anything from our lives that could potentially cause us to relapse into sin. That could mean obtaining filters for our Internet service, block out certain services that are a problem for us like chat rooms, or even eliminating it completely until we feel that we’ve established control over the problem. We can also place a maximum limit on how much time we spend online. Force ourselves to do other activities while we’re away from our computer so that we can develop other healthy habits and hobbies.

To give up excessive surfing we must want to do it—and we must believe we’ll succeed. We may find our addiction gives us an escape route from some other problem in our life. Think about the reasons behind our addiction carefully. We need to tackle these problems—escaping to the Internet won’t make them go away.

Sometimes though, we may need to stop using the computer altogether. Perhaps we can start by designating one day per week that we will not turn on the computer or log onto the Internet. Train ourselves so that we can tolerate a day or evening without it. Resolve to spend less time online. We need to act now, don’t delay!



D. Establish Intimacy with God (1 Thess 4:3f)

Many go online to find intimacy. The Internet offers plenty of sex but fails to offer the depth and long-term satisfaction of face-to-face intimacy with a real person in a committed relationship. In order to overcome our lusts and desires, we need to develop intimacy with God. Only God's spirit can free us or bring us to our senses. Spending time in communion with God through prayer in the spirit will satisfy our souls, and we will not need to find other ways to fill the void in our lives. If we spend our time and energy walking in the spirit and trying to produce its fruit, we will not be susceptible to sinful desires (Gal 5:25; Col 1:10-12).

Another integral part of maintaining our relationship with God is doing good and serving Him (Mt 7:12, 21). If we focus on maintaining a close communion with the Lord and put our efforts in serving Him, we will not be tempted to fill our lives with empty pursuits or vain gratification. We need to keep this goal in mind. Pray fervently. Resist with the words of God. Leave no space for Satan. "Delight yourself also in the Lord, and He shall give you the desires of your heart" (Ps 37:4).



E. Renew Our Mind (Rom 12:1f)

We must change our thought patterns in order to overcome our addictions. If our minds are idle, it is highly likely that we will lose the battle. However, an active mind that invests in pure, true and good thoughts will win. To overcome our bad habits, we must renew our minds by ingesting the word of God. Not only that, but we must also memorize the words of God. Hiding His word in our heart will give us victory over, and be a defensive weapon against, sin (Ps 119:11).

F. Find Other Interests

Find something that will interest us, preferably something that has nothing to do with computers or the Internet. Try a new activity or hobby. Take up some form of exercise. Exercise is fun, can improve our health and improve our energy levels. Research has also shown the efficacy of exercise in improving psychological well being and treating addiction problems.

"Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praisewor-

thy—meditate on these things" (Phil 4:8). The things that produce purity, those things that are right and proper are the interests we should seek as they produce positive results. "This being so, I myself always strive to have a conscience without offense toward God and men" (Acts 24:16).

CHECK FOR UNDERSTANDING



There are no questions for this lesson. Please see the questions found in the Life Application section.

LIFE APPLICATION



Part A: Case Studies

Study the following case studies carefully and answer the questions that follow.

Case 1

As a junior in high school, I got hooked on the Internet. It started out just as chatting in the chat rooms. Slowly, I became addicted to these chat rooms. I even developed a few on-line pen-pal relationships. It was harmless, or so I thought. When I think back now, I think I was just fooling myself. There was an appeal to it, somehow. Later, I even met people I came to know from the chat rooms. Some were only a little over four hours away from where I lived. Sometimes, we would get together with each other and hang out. Some days I stayed on the Internet for over twenty hours. Right after class, I would head home and log on. I started failing school, and my relationships with my family members were horrible. It took me over two years to get back to reality again.

Questions to think about:

1. What do you think got this person hooked on the Internet in the first place?
2. What do you think was the appeal in chat rooms?
3. How do you think this person got back to reality?

Case 2

Tony, a 14 year old, rushes home every night to go online to play games, most of which are violent. "By day, I look as if I'm a mild mannered guy, and a hard-working student. People at church think that I'm a good kid," Tony said. "But by night,

with a click of the button, I turn into the most aggressive person that you could imagine. And no one knows it's me doing this. It's scary. I need help with it."

Questions to think about:

1. What do you think causes this aggressiveness in Tony?
2. How can you help him with his addiction?

Case 3

Stacy gained Internet access as part of her job as an administrative assistant in a busy real estate office. But instead of streamlining her work communication, she cruised the singles ads of cyberspace and met a guy she liked. They typed love messages back and forth throughout the work day. When Stacy's boss caught on, he cut off her Internet privileges at work and gave her an official warning. "So I begged a friend at work to let me borrow her Internet account," she confessed. "When my boss found out, he fired me on the spot."

Questions to think about:

1. What do you think Stacy's problem is?
2. What does she need to do to stop her from getting into more trouble?

Case 4

I was once addicted to the Internet so much at times I barely even slept. I hardly ever ate, and subsequently lost many, many pounds. It was a blessing and curse all rolled into one. I am thankful that the words of God pulled me back out of the chat rooms and made me realize how sinful my mind can be. I have to give thanks to the Spiritual Convocation that I went to. Yes, the Internet is very addictive. Be very alert that God is watching every single thing that you do. I vowed to never enter chat rooms anymore. It can lure you into doing many things that are against God's will, especially sexual sins.

Questions to think about:

1. Do you think it was only the words of God that helped pull this person back? What else helped?
2. Why do people still go and do things they shouldn't do, knowing that "God is watching every single thing that you do"?

Case 5

Let me describe my tragic story to you. When my parents bought a computer for me, I learned quickly that I could meet friends online. I realized that it didn't matter to my cyberfriends that I was overweight and insecure. The chat room was a

place of promise and acceptance. This was a place where I could be myself without being physically seen. Life began to take on more excitement and promise. I spent so many hours online that I didn't even mind if I lost some sleep. What got me more excited was that what started out as friendly chat room conversation soon became cybersex. Cybersex is consensual sex practiced by typing descriptions of sexual acts and exchanging in verbal dialogue via e-mail or instant messaging. Cybersex contains a lot of fantasy and I was thrilled by it. It was soon followed by telephone sex. From there, it didn't take very long to reach the inevitable hotel meeting for "real-time" sex. I was so crazy to meet this woman that it didn't even matter that she was a stranger, except for the time we spent "together" online. Because of my curiosity, I found myself meeting her in the hotel room many times after that. Six months later, I found that I had contracted HIV. It had a shocking impact and it caused so much pain physically and emotionally that it brought me back to reality. I had become addicted to the Internet without realizing it and the disease I tragically contracted was far from virtual.

Questions to think about:

1. Do you think that such a situation could happen in the church? Why or why not?
2. What could have been done to prevent this from happening? When should the person have realized his problem?

Part B: Internet Ministry

Society today is filled with good and evil. The Internet is a reflection of that, offering a wealth of resources, some of which are good and some of which are evil. As Christians, the Lord commanded us to "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven" (Mt 5:16). We need to go out and shine our light on the Internet. We need to use the Internet as a medium for presenting the good news of Jesus Christ and as a tool for ministering to today's youth.

In groups of three or four, think of some ways you could use the Internet to serve God. For example you could set up a prayer network over the Internet. You could build your own website and have a prayer form where people can enter prayer requests which will be delivered to you by email. Or you could set up a web log (blog) and post your favorite verses or share your thoughts with other Christians. An excellent web site for this is from some brothers and sisters of our church. The website is www.renewed.nu. Another good website where brothers and sisters can share their thoughts, testimonies, questions or ideas is <http://forum.tjc.ca/po->

tal.php. Before you do this though, keep the following blog from www.renewed.nu, in mind:

May 17, 2002

For the record, this is written in all sincerity and love. In no way do I want to come off seeming unconstructively critical.

I was awakened this morning with pain in my teeth—I had attempted to wear the retainers I haven't worn for about a year. So six o'clock in the morning I'm lying in bed and, being a thinker/dreamer, something came to mind:

The Internet presents the wonderful opportunity to publish anything you want. You are your own publishing company. With recent user-friendly content management (journal) systems, such as blogger, livejournal, xanga, publishing one's own ideas is even easier. However all of us must realize the very fact that publishing means making public. Hence, the same word root "pub." As followers of Christ we cannot merely follow what everyone else is doing, posting all of our feelings and actions without any concern for our readership. Who is our readership? The PUBLIC, meaning anyone, including your next door neighbor, our school mates, some stranger searching the Internet, your little sister, mother, pastor, or perhaps younger believers in Christ who cannot discern yet what is right or wrong. The latter is my main concern.

An owner of a blog must question the purpose of his/her blog. What's its point? A place to encourage, exhort, edify? To entertain, to vent, rant, and rave? Or just a place to let folks know what's going on?

My main point is, if you have a blog, or are planning on creating a weblog, consider your readership and the point of your blog. I believe most intend their readership to be other TJC friends. In that case, please watch what you write—there are younger ones (physically or spiritually) that will not benefit from certain types of posts. Those go in your own personal journal, not on the Internet. If we are going to be a generation that simply follows trends without foresight, we are in some deep trouble. We ought to use technology to our advantage.

I am happy to say that the guest writers on this site have exemplified this, and in fact, at times, write too little! If we could only have more of their learning experiences and acquired wisdom! Our guest writers, including myself, go through the same deal most people go through—fun, laughter, sadness, spirituality struggles, and personal problems. But a PUBLIC blog, especially from a TJC believer, should

follow the teachings of Ephesians 4:29, "Let no corrupt word proceed out of your [fingers], but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the [readers]." Therefore, blog in moderation with nothing excessive, avoid unnecessary posts, and privatize in your own handwritten journal.

Remember: you must critically examine your motive and the way you use the Internet. "Test all things; hold fast what is good. Abstain from every form of evil" (1 Thess 5:21f).

Teaching Tips

If there is time photocopy "The Darkness of Cyberporn," Manna, Issue 34 Jan- Mar 2001 for your students to read and discuss. It is a very good article about pornography on the Internet and the effects it can have on those who take part in it.

REFLECTION & PRAYER



Sing hymn 177: Yield Not to Temptation.

Very often we fall into temptation because we are yielding to our own desires and lusts. But this hymn reminds us that we have to fight off our desires and subdue every passion by looking to the Lord Jesus. He will carry us through. We need God's power and spirit to dwell within us so that we have the strength to shun all evil. Even though we are weak at times, ask the Lord to help us and use our faith to conquer our passions. May the Lord help us and keep us in Him in our daily struggles against temptation.