

Health Emphasis Week 2024

The Effect of Technology on Mental and Family Health



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SPECIAL MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ, I wish you well!

*It is with great joy and a heart filled with gratitude to our Heavenly Father that I welcome you all to this week-long Health Emphasis program, under the theme “**The Effects of Technology on Mental and Family Health.**” This initiative, organized by the Health Ministries Department of our Division, is timely, as we navigate the complexities of modern life shaped by technological advancements and the challenges they bring.*

As we gather for this important week, we are reminded that our health is a precious gift from God—one that we must nurture physically, mentally, spiritually, and emotionally. Among the pressing issues we will address are the alarming effects of technology on addiction, particularly concerning pornography and masturbation. These silent struggles can lead to feelings of guilt, shame, and disconnection from God and each other, undermining the sanctity of marriage and family life.

We live in a world where technology has become woven into the fabric of our daily existence. While it offers us immense blessings, it also presents new hurdles that can deeply affect our mental well-being, the health of our marriages, and the upbringing of our children. The prevalence of pornography is an issue that threatens not just individuals but families and communities. As followers of Christ, we are called to discern wisely, resisting the temptations that lead to addiction and seeking a path that promotes spiritual and relational health.

I encourage each of you to engage fully in the various sessions, discussions, and activities prepared for this week. Let us open our hearts and minds to the guidance of the Holy Spirit, seeking wisdom from the Word of God and practical insights on how to combat these modern challenges. Together, we can renew our commitment to building healthier families and communities that reflect the love and grace of our Creator.

May the Lord richly bless you during this week of learning, fellowship, and spiritual growth. Remember, there is hope and healing available through Christ as we confront these challenges together.

In His Service,

Prof. Robert Osei-Bonsu

President, West-Central Africa Division of the Seventh-day Adventist Church

SPECIAL GREETINGS FROM THE HEALTH MINISTRIES DIRECTOR

Greetings in the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!

*It is a privilege and honor to introduce this year's Health Emphasis Week, organized under the theme "**The Effects of Technology on Mental and Family Health.**" I extend a warm welcome to each of you participating in this vital program. We live in an age where technology has revolutionized almost every aspect of our lives, bringing countless opportunities along with significant challenges. The impact of technology on our mental health, relationships, and family dynamics has become more apparent than ever. As a church committed to the holistic well-being of our members, we believe it is essential to address these emerging issues from a biblical and spiritual perspective.*

This week-long series of presentations and discussions will delve into the role of technology in our decision-making processes, its effects on intimacy in marriage, and the importance of protecting our children from internet addiction. We will also confront difficult yet necessary topics such as pornography, masturbation, and the rise of modern challenges like hookups and open marriages, all while considering the church's role in supporting individuals and families through these struggles. Each topic has been prayerfully selected and will be guided by expert presenters who will offer not only insight but also practical steps for maintaining a healthy balance in our increasingly digital world. Throughout the week, we will turn to Scripture and the inspired writings of Ellen G. White to deepen our understanding of these complex issues.

I encourage you to fully participate, reflect deeply, and share your experiences as we embark on this journey of health, healing, and spiritual renewal. May this program equip you to make informed, Christ-centered choices for your life and the lives of those you love. May the grace of our Lord be with us all as we seek His guidance and strength.

Yours in Christ's service,

Dr. Paul Amo Kyeremeh

Health Ministries Director, West-Central Africa Division of Seventh-day Adventist Church

FOREWORD

In an era marked by rapid technological advancement, understanding the intersection of technology and mental health has become increasingly critical. This week-long program, "The Effects of Technology on Mental and Family Health," aims to address pressing issues that affecting individuals and families alike. As technology continues to permeate our daily lives, it is essential to examine its impact on mental well-being and familial relationships through a scientific lens.

These week-long lessons are designed to provide participants with a comprehensive understanding of how technology influences behavior, emotional health, and interpersonal dynamics. We will engage in evidence-based discussions and interactive discussions that delve into key topics such as screen addiction, the psychological effects of pornography and masturbation with skills to break loose, and effective strategies for nurturing healthy relationships in our digital age. Each session is crafted not only to inform but also to empower participants, enabling them to make evidence-based decisions about their technology use and promote holistic health within their families and communities.

As we embark on this enlightening journey, I encourage participants to remain open to new insights and empirical findings that can guide our understanding and responses to the challenges posed by technology. By fostering an environment of compassion and critical thinking, we can better navigate these complexities while reflecting our shared commitment to mental health and well-being. Having gone through all seven (7) presentations, I invite you to engage fully in this program; the knowledge and connections formed here have the potential to bring about lasting transformative change in our lives and the lives of those we hold dear.

Mrs. Margaret Osei-Bonsu
Associate Health Ministries Director, West-Central Africa Division of Seventh-day Adventist Church.



SPECIAL ANNOUNCEMENT

#1:

The Special Health Ministries offerings collected during this Health Emphasis Week will be divided as follows in support of the Health Ministries activities:

- Local Churches: 20%
- Conference: 10%
- Union: 10%
- West-Central Africa Division (WAD): 60%

The 60% allocated to WAD will support medical missions in Liberia as part of the “**WAD Impact 2025**” initiative. This will help improve healthcare and wellness in Liberia while also supporting gospel work through service.

#2:

Each Adventist healthcare facility/institution is requested to submit its final WAD Impact 2025 strategies to their respective Union Directors, who will then forward it to WAD Health Ministries.

For more information contact: +234 806 925 2365

#3.

The morning hours of 22nd December are slated for keep-fit and clean-up exercises throughout the Division

LESSON 1:

THE IMPACT OF TECHNOLOGY ON DECISION-MAKING: POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE EFFECTS

"And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God."

Romans 12:2 (NKJV)

Introduction:

In this sophisticated and rapidly advancing world technology influences almost every aspect of our lives; from our communication, work, and access to information to decisions we make, technology plays a major role. This lesson explores how technology can impact our decisions both positively and negatively, through a biblical and spiritual lens, incorporating Ellen G. White's insights on this subject matter.

Key Scripture Reference:

- **Romans 12:2 (NKJV)**

"And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God."

- **Philippians 4:8 (NKJV)**

"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 praiseworthy—meditate on these things."

Ellen G. White References:

- **Ellen G. White, Education, p. 225:**

"Character building is the most important work ever entrusted to human beings; and never before was its diligent study so important as now. Never was any previous generation called to meet issues so momentous; never before were young men and young women confronted by perils so great as confront them today." This reminds us that the decisions we make, influenced by our environments—including technology—shape our character and influence others.

- **Ellen G. White, Messages to Young People, p. 113:**

"Let none imagine that without earnest effort on their part they can obtain the assurance of God's love. When the mind has been long permitted to dwell only on earthly things, it is a difficult matter to change the habits of thought. That which the eye sees, and the ear hears too often attracts the attention and absorbs the interest.

This speaks to the negative impact of overconsumption of media and trivial technology use, which can cloud spiritual growth and decision-making.

Lesson Outline:

1. The Positive Impacts of Technology on Decision-Making:

Technology, when used appropriately, can serve as a tool for good, enhancing decision-making by providing access to information, improving communication, and facilitating connections. Here are some key positive impacts:

- **Access to Information:** Technology allows access to vast resources, such as educational materials, research, and spiritual content, that can guide informed decisions. For example, studying the Bible, Ellen G. White writings, and health and lifestyle articles are just a click away.

Biblical Insight:

Proverbs 18:15 (NIV) – "The heart of the discerning acquires knowledge, for the ears of the wise seek it out."

- **Fostering Relationships and Community:** social media and communication platforms allow individuals to connect with friends, family, and church members globally. It also facilitates online Bible studies and prayer groups, providing spiritual support.

Ellen G. White Insight:

The Ministry of Health and Healing, pg.9 – "The Savior's work was not restricted to any time or place. His compassion knew no limit. His work of healing and teaching was on so large a scale that there was no building in Palestine large enough to receive the multitudes that thronged to Him...Wherever there were hearts ready to receive His message, He comforted them with the assurance that their heavenly Father loved them"

2. The Negative Impacts of Technology on Decision-Making:

While technology can be a force for good, it also has negative implications if used improperly or excessively. These negative impacts affect mental, spiritual, and social well-being.

- **Overload of Information and Misinformation:** Constant exposure to information—especially fake news, misleading content, and false doctrines—can cloud judgment, making it difficult to discern truth from error. Too much information can overwhelm decision-making processes, leading to indecision or wrong choices.

Biblical Warning:

1 Corinthians 14:33 (NKJV) – "For God is not the author of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints."

- **Addiction and Distraction:** Technologies like social media, video games, and entertainment platforms are designed to capture attention and can lead to addiction, which distracts from important decisions and spiritual growth.

According to the Institute for Educational Advancement, technology has several negative aspects, including:

3. **Encouragement of Violent Behavior:** Studies indicate that individuals exposed to simulated violence, such as that found in video games, may become desensitized to violence and more prone to aggressive actions themselves.

4. **Promotion of Social Isolation and Anti-Social Behavior:** Excessive time spent playing video games can lead to social isolation in children. This can result in reduced participation in other activities like reading, sports, homework, and meaningful interactions with family and friends.
5. **Discouragement of Academic Performance:** Research suggests a correlation between the time children spend playing video games and their academic performance. One study found that video game addiction is linked to lower grades and an increase in disruptive behaviors, such as arguing and fighting with parents and teachers.ⁱ

Ellen G. White Insight:

Review and Herald, November 10, 1896, par. 5 – "Satan is constantly working to foster in men worldliness, covetousness, and avarice, that he may ruin their souls and hinder the work of God." Through technology, he is capable of achieving this.

- **Influence on Moral Decisions:** social media, entertainment, and advertisements often promote materialism, instant gratification, and worldly values, influencing individuals—especially young people—to make decisions based on peer pressure, societal trends, and unhealthy desires. This is one of the reasons parents are to be interested in whatever their children are doing with technology.

Biblical Guidance:

1 John 2:15-17 (NKJV) – "Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world."

3. Practical Steps to Use Technology Wisely:

As Christians, we need to balance the use of technology in our daily lives. Here are some practical ways to ensure that technology enhances, rather than hinders, our decision-making:

- i. **Establish Clear Boundaries:** Limit screen time, especially for entertainment purposes. It is not every post one should give attention to on social media or with technology. Set specific times for using technology, especially in relation to work or study, and prioritize quiet, spiritual reflection time.

Biblical Insight:

Ephesians 5:16 (NIV) – "Making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil."

- ii. **Be Careful with the Content:** Be intentional about the types of media consumed. Prioritize uplifting and educational content that supports your values and spiritual growth.
Philippians 4:8 Serves as a guide for filtering content that is true, noble, just, and pure ; "Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things"
- iii. **Utilize Technology for Ministry and Personal Growth:** Engage in online Bible studies, use devotional apps, and participate in virtual prayer groups. Seek out technology that enhances your spiritual and personal development.

Ellen G. White Insight:

Evangelism, p. 70 – "New methods must be introduced. God's people must awaken to the necessities of the time in which they are living."

Conclusion:

Technology is a double-edged sword that can either facilitate or hinder our decision-making. As Christians, we must use technology in ways that honor God and align with His purpose for our lives. By being mindful of its impact on our mental, spiritual, and social well-being, we can make wiser decisions and grow in grace.

Closing Scripture:

Colossians 3:2 (NKJV) – "Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth."

Discussion Questions:

1. What are some personal examples where technology has positively impacted your decisions?
2. Can you identify times when technology negatively influenced your decision-making?
3. How can you better manage your use of technology to align with God's will?

Call to Action:

Encourage members to evaluate their current use of technology and take steps to enhance their decision-making by reducing distractions and prioritizing spiritual growth.

LESSON 2:

CAN TECHNOLOGY AFFECT INTIMACY IN MARRIAGE?

*"For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church. Nevertheless, let each one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband." **Ephesians 5:31-33 (NKJV)***

Introduction:

In today's fast-paced digital world, technology has become an integral part of daily life, impacting how we communicate, work, and even manage relationships. While technology offers numerous benefits, its influence on marital intimacy is an area of growing concern. This lesson explores how technology can affect the emotional, physical, and spiritual connection between married couples, both positively and negatively. We will also seek biblical guidance and insights from the Spirit of Prophecy on nurturing healthy, Christ-centered intimacy in marriage.

Key Scripture References:

- **Ephesians 5:31-33 (NKJV)**
"For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church. Nevertheless, let each one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband."
- **1 Corinthians 7:5 (NKJV)**
"Do not deprive one another except with consent for a time, that you may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again so that Satan does not tempt you because of your lack of self-control."

Ellen G. White References:

- **Ellen G. White, *Adventist Home*, p.95:**
"The spirit that Christ manifests toward His church is the spirit that the husband and wife are to manifest toward each other. If they love God supremely, they will love each other in the Lord, ever treating each other courteously, drawing in even cords. In their mutual self-denial and self-sacrifice they will be a blessing to each other.."
- **Ellen G. White, *Adventist Home*, p. 95:**
"To each other ever be tender and thoughtful, giving up your own wishes and purposes to make each other happy. Day by day you may make advancement in self-knowledge. Day by day you may learn better how to strengthen your weak points of character. The Lord Jesus will be your light, your strength, your crown of rejoicing, because you yield the will to His will..."
This encourages couples to put Christ at the center of their relationship, which is vital for maintaining intimacy despite the distractions of technology.

Lesson Outline:

1. Positive Impacts of Technology on Marital Intimacy:

- i. **Enhanced Communication:** Technology provides various platforms for couples to stay connected, especially during times of physical separation due to work or travel. Messaging apps, video calls, and social media can help maintain emotional closeness.

Example:

Couples can send messages of encouragement or prayer throughout the day, fostering a sense of connection and emotional intimacy. They can communicate at the right or at any given time.

Biblical Insight:

Proverbs 25:11 (NIV) – "Like apples of gold in settings of silver is a word spoken at the right time."

- ii. **Access to Marriage Resources:** Technology grants access to Christian marriage counseling resources, online Bible studies, and relationship-building content. Couples can participate in webinars, read blogs, and listen to podcasts that strengthen their marital bond.

Ellen G. White Insight:

The Adventist Home, p. 21 – "The home should be to the children the most attractive place in the world, and the mother's presence should be its greatest charm."

Technology can assist in creating that "charm" by offering tools for family building and nurturing the marriage relationship.

2. Negative Impacts of Technology on Marital Intimacy:

- i. **Distraction and Emotional Distance:** Overuse of technology, especially smartphones, social media, and entertainment, can lead to emotional disconnect. Couples may spend more time on devices than engaging with each other, reducing meaningful communication and intimacy. The constant distraction can weaken the marital bond over time.

Example:

A husband and wife may spend an evening together physically in the same room but remain emotionally disconnected by scrolling on their phones instead of engaging in meaningful conversation. This disconnection is not from God; rather, it is a strategy employed by Satan to undermine the relationship. He can use this distraction to introduce a third party into the family dynamic, further straining the bond between spouses.

Biblical Warning:

Mark 3:25 (NKJV) – "And if a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand."

- ii. **Pornography and Unhealthy Content:** The easy availability of explicit content online can harm marriages. Pornography distorts one's view of intimacy, leading to unrealistic expectations and dissatisfaction within the marriage. This can result in emotional and physical separation. As children of God, we must understand

that the more addicted we are to pornographic content, the more we are possessed with evil spirits.

Ellen G. White Insight:

Counsels for the Church, p. 137– "The lower passions have their seat in the body and work through it. The words 'flesh' or 'carnal lusts' embrace the lower, corrupt nature; the flesh of itself cannot act contrary to the will of God."

Pornography feeds the "lower passions" and can disrupt the spiritual harmony of marriage.

- iii. **Overdependence on social media:** Excessive use of social media can create a distorted view of relationships. Comparing one's marriage to idealized versions of others' relationships can lead to dissatisfaction and insecurity. Moreover, these social media platforms can lead to temptations, such as reconnecting with past romantic interests, which can undermine marital fidelity and morality.

Biblical Insight:

Proverbs 4:23 (NIV) – "Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it."

3. Steps to Protect and Enhance Marital Intimacy in a Technological World:

- i. **Establish Technology-Free Zones or Times:** Couples should establish boundaries around technology use, particularly during meals, dates, or intimate moments. Creating technology-free times (e.g., during dinner or before bed) allows for focused attention on each other and deeper conversations.

Biblical Insight:

1 Corinthians 7:3-4 (NKJV) – "Let the husband render to his wife the affection due her, and likewise also the wife to her husband."

- ii. **Prioritize Physical Presence:** While technology can connect people over long distances, it can never replace the power of physical presence. Couples should prioritize spending quality, face-to-face time together, engaging in meaningful conversations, physical affection, and shared activities.

Ellen G. White Insight:

Adventist Home, p. 17 – " Make Home Bright and Happy —Never forget that you are to make the home bright and happy for yourselves and your children by cherishing the Savior's attributes"

- iii. **Accountability and Transparency:** Husbands and wives should be transparent about their online activities. Maintaining openness builds trust and helps prevent the pitfalls of secretive behavior. Couples can also use technology to support one another spiritually by sharing devotionals, praying together via video calls, or engaging in family worship through digital platforms. If Christian couples have nothing to hide, why should they conceal their phone passwords from one another?

Biblical Insight:

James 5:16 (NKJV) – "Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed."

4. The Role of Prayer and Spiritual Practices:

Technology should not replace spiritual practices in marriage. Couples should make time for prayer, Bible study, and attending church together, ensuring that Christ remains at the center of their relationship.

- i. **Ephesians 5:25-26 (NKJV)** reminds husbands to love their wives just as Christ loved the church and to lead their families in the ways of the Lord. *“Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word”*
- ii. **Ellen G. White Insight:**
My Journey to Life, Step 14, p.2 – “ God chooses the sacred bond of marriage to illustrate the closeness of the bond between Himself and His people. In Scripture the promise by which married couples are bound together is spoken of as a “covenant”—the term used for the most solemn and binding agreement known in God’s Word. The relationship between husband and wife is to be a pattern of God’s everlasting covenant of love with His people, the church.”

Conclusion:

While technology can enhance marital intimacy, it can also present challenges if not used wisely. Couples must be intentional about balancing technology with meaningful interaction, ensuring that their relationship is built on communication, trust, and Christ-centered values. By setting boundaries, prioritizing quality time, and using technology as a tool for growth, marriage can thrive even in a tech-driven world.

Discussion Questions:

1. How has technology enhanced or hindered intimacy in your marriage?
2. What factors contribute to hiding a phone password from your spouse?
3. What practical steps can you and your spouse take to balance technology use in your relationship and improve your family's mental health?
4. How can you ensure that Christ remains the foundation of your marriage despite the distractions of technology?

Call to Action:

Encourage couples to reflect on their current use of technology and make changes that promote stronger emotional and spiritual intimacy. Focus on incorporating prayer, Bible study, and shared experiences to fortify the marriage bond, this is the spiritual health and food of the soul.

LESSON 3:

STEPS TO RECOVERY FROM MOBILE PHONE AND COMPUTER ADDICTION: IMPROVING THE HEALTH OF THE SOUL

"I have the right to do anything," you say—but not everything is beneficial. "I have the right to do anything"—but I will not be mastered by anything." 1 Corinthians 6:12 (NIV)

Introduction:

Mobile phones and computers are essential tools in today's world, but their misuse can lead to addiction. Many homes and health have been compromised as a result. Excessive use of these devices negatively impacts mental, emotional, spiritual, and physical well-being, often resulting in strained relationships, decreased productivity, spiritual imbalances, and disconnection. This lesson offers a biblical framework and practical steps to help individuals overcome addiction to mobile phones and computers.

Key Scripture References:

- **1 Corinthians 6:12 (NIV)**
"I have the right to do anything," you say—but not everything is beneficial. "I have the right to do anything"—but I will not be mastered by anything."
- **Matthew 6:33 (NKJV)**
"But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you."

Ellen G. White References:

- **Selected Messages, vol. 2, p. 88:**
"Satan is ever seeking to introduce spurious material into the work, in order that he may mar the testimony, and bring discredit upon the truth. He would mingle with it an element that would be a stumbling block in the pathway of God's people."
- **Ellen G. White, Steps to Christ, p. 43:**
"The warfare against self is the greatest battle that was ever fought. The yielding of self, surrendering all to the will of God, requires a struggle; but the soul must submit to God before it can be renewed in holiness."
Overcoming addiction involves a battle of the will and a surrender to God's power to heal and restore.

Lesson Outline:

1. Understanding Mobile Phone and Computer Addiction:

Any bad form of addiction is evil. Addiction to mobile phones and computers manifests through compulsive use of these devices, often at the expense of relationships, work, and spiritual life. The following signs may indicate addiction:

- i. **Compulsive Checking:** Feeling the need to constantly check notifications or updates.

- ii. **Increased Screen Time:** Spending hours on TV, social media, games, or browsing without realizing how much time has passed.
- iii. **Neglecting Responsibilities:** Missing deadlines, neglecting family, or skipping church or devotional time due to excessive device usage.
- iv. **Anxiety or Irritability:** Feeling anxious or irritable when away from your phone or computer.
- v. **Giving More Attention to Phones/Computers Than to Family:** This is a mental health issue stemming from addictive behavior. Often, family needs are sacrificed for unnecessary screen time. We must be wise in the Lord and prioritize our loved ones over digital distractions.

Biblical Warning:

Ephesians 5:15-16 (NIV) – "Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil."

2. The Spiritual Impact of Technology Addiction:

Technology addiction can interfere with spiritual growth and disconnect us from God's presence. Such mental health issues block our attention from the reality of life and our total dependence on God. Technology addiction steals time that could be spent in prayer, Bible study, and personal reflection. Over time, this can lead to spiritual apathy, where worldly distractions drown out the voice of God.

Ellen G. White Insight:

The Great Controversy, p. 519 – "Satan well knows that all whom he can lead to neglect prayer and the searching of the Scriptures, will be overcome by his attacks. Therefore, he invents every possible device to engross the mind."

Addiction to technology also makes it difficult to be present with family, friends, and the church community, leading to weakened relationships and isolation.

3. Practical Steps to Overcome Mobile Phone and Computer Addiction:

- **Step 1: Acknowledge the Problem**

The first step in overcoming addiction is recognizing and admitting that there is a problem. Denial can often prevent individuals from seeking help. Take time to reflect on how much time you spend on your devices and whether it is affecting your life.

Biblical Insight:

Proverbs 28:13 (NIV) – "Whoever conceals their sins does not prosper, but the one who confesses and renounces them finds mercy."

- **Step 2: Commit to a Technology Detox**

Create a plan for a "digital detox" to break the cycle of addiction. Start with small steps like reducing screen time, turning off notifications, or setting aside specific "no phone" periods (e.g., during meals, devotional time, or family time).

Practical Tips:

- Schedule time each day when you will not use your phone or computer.
- Remove apps or games that consume most of your time.

- Use apps that monitor and limit screen time.
- **Step 3: Fill the Void with Meaningful Activities**
When you reduce screen time, it is essential to fill that time with meaningful, spiritually enriching activities. Spend time in prayer, Bible reading, family bonding, outdoor activities, or community service.

Biblical Insight:

Philippians 4:8 (NKJV) – "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 praiseworthy—meditate on these things."

- **Step 4: Seek Accountability and Support**
Share your journey with someone you trust—your spouse, a close friend, or a church leader. They can help keep you accountable and provide support when you feel tempted to return to old habits.

Ellen G. White Insight:

Counsels for the Church, p. 117 – "Satan knows just what elements he has to deal with, and he displays his infernal wisdom in various devices to entrap souls to their ruin. He watches every step that is taken, and makes many suggestions, and often these suggestions are followed rather than the counsel of God's word. This finely woven, dangerous net is skillfully prepared to entangle the young and unwary. It may often be disguised under a covering of light; but those who become its victims pierce themselves through with many sorrows. As the result, we see wrecks of humanity everywhere"

- **Step 5: Develop a Daily Routine with God**
Make God the priority in your daily routine. Set aside time for personal devotion and family worship before turning to your phone or computer. This ensures that spiritual activities are prioritized over digital distractions.

Biblical Insight:

Matthew 6:33 (NKJV) – "But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you."

- **Step 6: Pray for Strength and Deliverance**
Overcoming addiction requires divine strength; none of us can free ourselves from it alone. Countless demonic forces can keep an individual trapped in addictive behavior. Pray daily for the Holy Spirit to grant you the self-control needed to break free. Take positive steps toward recovery while continually seeking God's guidance. Trust in His power to renew your mind and restore balance to your life..

Biblical Insight:

1 Corinthians 10:13 (NKJV) – "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."

4. The Role of the Church in Supporting Recovery:

The church plays a crucial role in helping individuals recover from mobile phone and computer addiction. As a supportive community, the church can provide:

- **Counseling and Prayer Support:** Church leaders can offer counseling services and prayer support for individuals struggling with addiction. Group prayer sessions, Bible studies, and accountability groups can be instrumental in recovery.
- **Workshops and Seminars:** Hosting workshops and seminars on digital health, time management, and spiritual discipline can raise awareness and equip members with the tools to combat addiction.
- **Promoting Digital Literacy:** Teach church members how to use technology wisely, promoting balance between digital engagement and spiritual health.

Conclusion:

Mobile phone and computer addiction is a growing challenge in today's digital age, but through self-discipline, spiritual renewal, and practical steps, recovery is possible. By placing God at the center of our lives and reducing the hold that technology has over us, we can live a balanced and fulfilling life.

Closing Scripture:

Romans 12:2 (NIV) – "Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—His good, pleasing and perfect will."

Discussion Questions:

1. How do you perceive one's inability to recover from mobile phone and computer addiction as a mental health issue, and in what ways has technology impacted your personal or spiritual life?
2. What practical steps can you take today to reduce your dependency on mobile phones and computers?
3. How can you hold yourself accountable for balancing your digital life with spiritual growth?

Call to Action:

Challenge church members to reflect on their technology use over the next week. Encourage them to establish healthy digital boundaries and prioritize their spiritual and family relationships.

LESSON 4:

STEPS TO RECOVER FROM PORNOGRAPHY AND MASTURBATION ADDICTION

"But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart." Matthew 5:28 (NKJV)

Introduction:

Pornography and masturbation are two silent yet pervasive struggles affecting many individuals today. Unfortunately, these issues impact even prominent men and women in society, including some professed Christians, leading to feelings of guilt, shame, and spiritual disconnection. With easy access to explicit online content and peer pressure, the temptation has only intensified. Recovery from these addictive behaviors calls for spiritual strength, self-discipline, and the support of a compassionate community. For those feeling trapped and asking, "Who will save us from this predicament?"—there is hope. This lesson explores practical steps for overcoming addiction and finding healing and renewal through God's grace.

Key Scripture References:

- **Matthew 5:28 (NKJV)**
"But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart."
- **1 Corinthians 6:18-20 (NIV)**
"Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a person commits are outside the body, but whoever sins sexually, sins against their own body. Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies."

Ellen G. White References:

- **Ellen G. White, *Mind, Character, and Personality*, vol. 1, p. 228:**
"The moral dangers to which all, both old and young, are exposed are daily increasing. Moral derangement, which we call depravity, finds ample room to work, and an influence is exerted by men, women, and youth professing to be Christians that is low, sensual, devilish..."
- **Ellen G. White, *Counsels for the Church*, p. 137:**
"The lower passions have their seat in the body and work through it. The words 'flesh' or 'carnal lusts' embrace the lower, corrupt nature; the flesh of itself cannot act contrary to the will of God."

Lesson Outline:

1. Understanding the Nature of Pornography and Masturbation Addiction:

Pornography and masturbation are addictive behaviors that often arise from loneliness, stress, or emotional wounds. They provide temporary pleasure but result in long-term serious consequences, such as distorted views of intimacy, broken relationships, self-isolation, and spiritual disconnection from God.

- i. **The Impact on the Mind and Spirit:**
Pornography alters brain pathways, increasing cravings for more explicit content and often leading to dissatisfaction with real-life relationships. When combined with pornography, masturbation can intensify this cycle, making it difficult to form healthy connections. Those trapped in patterns of pornography or habitual masturbation may struggle to build meaningful relationships. Such addictions can be seen as a spiritual battle, with the forces of temptation and negativity at play.
- ii. **Erosion of Moral Values:**
It is sad to mention that, engaging in these practices can weaken one's moral compass and desensitize the conscience to the dangers of sin.

Biblical Warning:

Romans 6:16 (NIV) – "Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one you obey—whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness?"

2. The Spiritual Consequences:

Pornography and masturbation distance individuals from God and hinder spiritual growth. These behaviors are forms of sexual immorality, which the Bible condemns, and they harm the relationship between the believer and Christ. The growing trend of this behavior is enormous; Masturbation is prevalent in various countries, including Australia, China, Croatia, Denmark, Finland, Germany, the UK, and the USA. According to the 2009 National Survey of Sexual Health and Behavior (NSSHB), a U.S. study involving 5,865 individuals aged 14–94:

- **Men:** In the previous month, 28% of men aged 70 and older, 43% of men aged 14–15 and 60–69, and over 50% of men aged 16–59 reported engaging in solo masturbation.
- **Women:** Across all ages, 20% of women reported solo masturbation in the prior month. Rates were over 40% only for women aged 20–29, while 12% of women over age 70 reported masturbation in the past month.ⁱⁱ

Ellen G. White Insight:

The Adventist Home, p. 135 – "One of the most subtle and dangerous temptations that assails the children and youth in the cities is the love of pleasure...and the whirl of excitement and pleasure attracts them away from the sober duties of life."

Research has shown the following regarding pornography:

1. **Prevalence:** Pornography exists on 12% of all websites and is viewed annually by approximately 69% of American men and 40% of American women.
2. **Support Among Young Adults:** Over recent decades, support and acceptance of pornography have risen among young adults.

3. **Industry Profitability:** The lucrative nature of the industry is a major factor in its production and distribution. In 2023, the Adult & Pornographic Websites industry in the United States generated \$1.15 billion in revenue.
4. **Impact on Relationships:** Pornography use is linked to decreased satisfaction in one's sex life, an increased desire for rough or violent sex, and a higher likelihood of divorce.ⁱⁱⁱ

The pull of lust is strong, but God's call to holiness requires that believers flee from all forms of sexual immorality.

3. Practical Steps to Overcome Pornography and Masturbation Addiction:

- I. **Step 1: Recognize the Problem and Seek Forgiveness:** Acknowledge that pornography and masturbation are sins that damage your relationship with God. Genuine repentance and seeking forgiveness from God are the first steps toward recovery.

Biblical Insight:

1 John 1:9 (NIV) – "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."

- II. **Step 2: Cut Off Access to Temptation:** Drastic measures may be necessary to eliminate sources of temptation. This could mean installing filters on internet devices, limiting screen time, or avoiding certain environments or social media platforms that lead to temptation.

Practical Tips:

- Use accountability software to monitor and block access to inappropriate content.
- Set up boundaries with your devices—no screens in the bedroom or during private times.
- Eliminate secretive or private access to the internet.

Biblical Insight:

Matthew 5:29-30 (NIV) – "If your right eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell."

- III. **Step 3: Replace Lustful Thoughts with Godly Content:** Lustful thoughts need to be replaced with godly, uplifting thoughts. Feed your mind with Scripture, spiritual music, and Christian content to combat temptations when they arise.

Biblical Insight:

Philippians 4:8 (NKJV) – "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 praiseworthy—meditate on these things."

- IV. **Step 4: Practice Self-Control Through the Holy Spirit:** Overcoming these behaviors requires supernatural help. The Holy Spirit empowers believers to exercise self-control and resist the temptation to engage in sinful activities.

Biblical Insight:

Galatians 5:16 (NIV) – "So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh."

- V. **Step 5: Surround Yourself with Accountability:** Isolation feeds addiction. Seek accountability from a trusted friend, mentor, or church leader who can pray for you and support you through the process of recovery. Accountability partners can offer encouragement and check in regularly to help you stay on track.

Biblical Insight:

Ecclesiastes 4:9-10 (NIV) – "Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor: If either of them falls down, one can help the other up."

- VI. **Step 6: Fill Your Time with Positive, Engaging Activities:** Find a work to do. Addiction often arises when people have too much idle time. Replace the time spent on pornography or masturbation with positive activities—join a ministry, take up a new hobby, exercise, or spend more time with family. Keeping your mind and body engaged will help weaken the pull of addictive behavior. If you find yourself with free time, use it for prayer and Bible study to help overcome addictive behaviors.

- VII. **Ellen G. White Insight:**

Ministry of Healing, p. 246 – "The power of the will is not valued as it should be. Let the will be kept awake and rightly directed, and it will impart energy to the whole being, and will be a wonderful aid in the maintenance of health."

- VIII. **Step 7: Daily Surrender to God** Recovery is a daily battle, but victory is possible through constant daily surrendering to God's will. Dedicate time every day to pray for strength, study the Bible, and invite God's presence into your life. Regular communion with God will help renew your mind and transform your desires.

Biblical Insight:

Romans 12:1-2 (NIV) – "Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind."

4. The Role of the Church in Supporting Recovery:

1. The church should serve as a sanctuary for those struggling with pornography and masturbation. We are called to support members struggling with addictive

behaviors by offering lasting solutions. Challenges like pornography and masturbation can feel like spiritual imprisonment—a deep affliction of the soul.

2. Open discussions, counseling, and support groups can help reduce the shame and secrecy surrounding these issues. As a church, we are to create a safe space for healing.

- I. **Counseling Services:**

Church leaders and counselors can provide spiritual guidance and practical advice to help individuals break free from addiction.

- II. **Accountability Groups:**

Small groups or prayer partners can be an effective way to create a support system, allowing individuals to share their struggles and victories openly.

- III. **Educational Workshops:**

Host workshops on sexual purity, digital literacy, and spiritual discipline, equipping members with the knowledge and tools to combat addiction.

Conclusion:

Breaking free from pornography and masturbation addiction is a difficult journey, however, it is an achievable goal through God's grace, self-discipline, and the support of others. By cutting off temptation, renewing the mind with Scripture, and relying on the power of the Holy Spirit, individuals can overcome these behaviors and find healing and restoration.

Closing Scripture:

1 Thessalonians 4:3-4 (NIV) – "It is God's will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; that each of you should learn to control your own body in a way that is holy and honorable."

Discussion Questions:

1. What steps can you take to limit your exposure to pornography or related temptations?
2. How can you build an accountability system that will help you on your journey to recovery?
3. In what ways can the church create a more supportive environment for those struggling with sexual addiction?

Call to Action:

Encourage church members to take the first step toward recovery by reflecting on their struggles and committing to seek accountability and spiritual renewal. Challenge them to create a plan for limiting temptation and replacing negative behaviors with positive, Christ-centered actions.

LESSON 5:

WHY CHILDREN ARE TO BE PROTECTED FROM PHONE AND INTERNET ADDICTION

"Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it." **Proverbs 22:6 (NKJV).**

Introduction:

In today's world, children are growing up in a digital age where phones and the internet have become integral parts of their lives. Some parents have conditioned their children to rely so heavily on phones and other electronic devices that they feel they cannot function without them. While these technologies offer numerous benefits, excessive and unsupervised use can lead to addiction, affecting children's physical, mental, moral, and spiritual well-being. This lesson explores why it is crucial for parents, guardians, and the church to protect children from phone and internet addiction and offers practical steps to foster healthy digital habits.

Key Scripture References:

- **Proverbs 22:6 (NKJV)**
"Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it."
- **Matthew 18:6 (NIV)**
"If anyone causes one of these little ones—those who believe in me—to stumble, it would be better for them to have a large millstone hung around their neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea."

Ellen G. White References:

- **Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home*, p. 469:**
"The parents should not concede to the inclinations of their children but should follow the plain path of duty which God has marked out, restraining them in kindness, denying with firmness and determination, yet with love, their wrong desires, and with earnest, prayerful, persevering effort leading their steps away from the world upward to heaven."
- **Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home*, p. 469:**
"Children should not be left to drift into whatever way they are inclined, and to go into avenues which are open on every side, leading away from the right path."

Lesson Outline:

1. Understanding the Dangers of Phone and Internet Addiction in Children:

Children are particularly vulnerable to phone and internet addiction due to their developing brains and lack of self-control. Overuse of technology can result in numerous negative effects, including:

- I. **Mental and Emotional Consequences:**
Studies show that excessive screen time can lead to anxiety, depression, and poor attention spans. It also affects children's ability to build meaningful social

relationships, making them more reliant on digital interactions than face-to-face communication. [source if possible]

Biblical Insight:

Philippians 4:8 (NKJV) – "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 praiseworthy—meditate on these things."

Children need a healthy mental environment where they focus on good, wholesome things, not the distractions of the internet.

II. **Impact on Physical Health:**

Excessive screen time can lead to sedentary lifestyles, causing physical health problems such as obesity, sleep disorders, and poor posture. Children who are glued to their screens may not get enough exercise or spend time outdoors, crucial for their physical development. Research supports that, "video game encourages aggression and Violent Behavior....due to this addiction, children spend hours playing the game on their devices, which in turn, creates decreased productivity, food, and sleep schedule imbalance, causing various health issues such as obesity, migraines, sleep disturbances, backaches, and poor eyesight."^{iv}

Ellen G. White Insight:

Ministry of Healing, p. 264 – "Outdoor life is the only remedy that many invalids need. It has a wonderful power to heal diseases caused by the excitements and excesses of fashionable life, a life that weakens and destroys the powers of body, mind, and soul"

III. **Spiritual Disconnection:**

Excessive use of the internet and phones or games can drown out spiritual activities such as prayer, Bible study, and family worship. Children may develop an attachment to worldly pleasures, pulling them away from God. Exposing children to screens/phones/games without controlling measures is a seed of rebellion and disaster.

Biblical Insight:

Colossians 3:2 (NIV) – "Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things." The minds of our children should be directed toward spiritual and developmental growth. It should not be dominated by the distractions of the digital world.

2. The Role of Parents in Preventing Digital Addiction:

- I. **Step 1: Establish Digital Boundaries:** Parents should set clear boundaries regarding screen time and the type of content children are allowed to access. Establishing limits on how long and when devices can be used is key to ensuring a balance between screen time and other activities such as homework, chores, family time, and outdoor play.

Practical Tips:

- Set up specific times during the day when children are allowed to use screens (e.g., after school, set number of hours).
- Ensure devices are turned off during meals, family worship, and before bedtime.
- Ensure kids sleep without devices close to their beds or on their beds.
- Avoid giving young children unrestricted access to smartphones or tablets.

Biblical Insight:

1 Corinthians 10:23 (NIV) – "I have the right to do anything," you say—but not everything is beneficial."

- II. **Step 2: Monitor and Guide Their Internet Use:** Parents should actively monitor what their children are doing online. This includes filtering content, ensuring their children access age-appropriate material, and explaining the dangers of inappropriate content such as violence, pornography, and cyberbullying. In addition, guiding children toward educational and spiritually enriching content is important.

Ellen G. White Insight:

Christian Temperance and Bible Hygiene, p. 16 – " I appeal to you, parents, to begin with your children, and give them a right education. Seek to bring them up so that they shall have moral stamina to resist the evil that surrounds them. The lesson of self-control must begin with the child in its mother's arms. It must learn to restrain passionate temper, to bring its will into subjection, and to deny unhealthful cravings.

- III. **Step 3: Encourage Alternative Activities:** Parents should encourage children to engage in activities that promote their mental, emotional, and physical development. Playing outside, reading, participating in sports, or doing crafts can help children develop a well-rounded personality.

Practical Tips:

- Organize family outdoor activities or outings.
- Introduce children to hobbies such as music, drawing, or board games.
- Encourage them to take part in church activities like Pathfinders, youth ministries, or Bible quizzes.
- Let the children understand the consequences of addiction to devices.

Ellen G. White Insight:

The Adventist Home, p. 192 – " Let parents devote the evenings to their families. Lay off care and perplexity with the labors of the day."

3. Teaching Children to Develop Self-Control:

Teaching self-control is crucial in helping children manage their use of phones and the Internet. By teaching them the value of moderation, parents instill a sense of responsibility and discernment that will help children avoid addiction.

- I. **Step 1: Teach Children the Value of Balance:** Help children understand that technology, while useful, should not consume all their time. Introduce them to the concept of balance—time for family, education, recreation, and spiritual growth.

Biblical Insight:

Ecclesiastes 3:1 (NIV) – "There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens."

- II. **Step 2: Foster a Relationship with God:** Encourage children to develop a personal relationship with God through prayer, Bible study, and family worship. Teaching children to prioritize their relationship with God over digital distractions is key to spiritual growth.

Biblical Insight:

Matthew 6:33 (NIV) – "But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well."

4. The Role of the Church in Supporting Families:

I. Church Programs and Seminars

The church can play a pivotal role by organizing seminars or workshops on the healthy use of technology for both parents and children. Topics could include the dangers of internet addiction, digital literacy, and how to balance technology with spiritual growth.

II. Children's Ministries and Digital Detox Programs

Churches can support families by organizing "digital detox" events for children, where they spend a day without technology and engage in outdoor activities, Bible study, and community service.

Ellen G. White Insight:

Child guidance p. 488 – "The youth need more than a casual notice, more than an occasional word of encouragement. They need painstaking, prayerful, careful labor."

5. The Long-Term Consequences of Unaddressed Addiction:

Failure to address phone and internet addiction in children can lead to long-term consequences. Children may grow into adults who lack self-discipline, struggle with forming healthy relationships, and remain spiritually distant from God. By acting early, parents and the church can protect children from these harmful effects. Parents who have lost control over their children should reach out to the church for support and assistance.

Conclusion:

The rapid rise of digital technology presents unique challenges for today's children. While phones and the internet can be powerful tools for education and connection, they can also lead to addiction if not properly managed. Parents, guardians, and the church must work together to protect children from these dangers by setting boundaries, guiding their internet use, and fostering spiritual growth.

Closing Scripture:

Ephesians 6:4 (NIV) – "Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord."

Discussion Questions:

1. How can you establish healthier digital habits in your home?
2. How can parents prevent the act of inducing children with screens to have time for their private issues? What are the possible future consequences?
3. What steps can the church take to support parents in protecting children from digital addiction?
4. How can you help children prioritize their relationship with God over technology?

Call to Action:

Encourage church members to evaluate their children's screen time and internet use. Challenge them to set up clear digital boundaries at home and incorporate more family worship, outdoor activities, and creative hobbies into their children's lives. Emphasize the importance of teaching children to value their relationship with God above all.

LESSON 6:

THE ROLE OF THE CHURCH IN DEALING WITH HOOKUPS, OPEN MARRIAGES, SEX TOYS, SEX AND SWINGERS' CLUBS

"But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people." Ephesians 5:3 (NIV).

²⁶ Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones. ²⁷ In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed shameful acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their error. ²⁸ Furthermore, just as they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, so God gave them over to a depraved mind, so that they do what ought not to be done. ²⁹ They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips. (Romans 1:26-29 NIV).

Introduction:

In today's rapidly changing society, the church faces growing challenges as cultural attitudes toward relationships, sexuality, and marriage shift. Issues such as casual sex (hookups), open marriages, sex clubs, swingers club and the increasing use of sex toys have become normalized in many circles, with some religious leaders even expressing support for these behaviors. While the world and some Christians may encourage such practices, they often conflict with the biblical principles of purity, godliness, fidelity, and the sanctity of marriage as enshrined in the Holy Word of God. As a church, we must actively address these trends with grace, love, and biblical truth. This lesson examines how the church can guide individuals and couples away from harmful practices and toward God's design for sexuality and relationships.

Key Scripture References:

- **Hebrews 13:4 (NIV)**
"Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral."
- **1 Corinthians 6:18-20 (NIV)**
"Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a person commits are outside the body, but whoever sins sexually, sins against their own body. Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit?"

Ellen G. White References:

- **Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home*, p. 331:**
The heart must be garrisoned as was that of Joseph. Then temptations to depart from integrity will be met with decision."
- **Ellen G. White, *Mind, Character, and Personality*, p. 224:**
"Sexual excess will effectually destroy a love for devotional exercises, will take

from the brain the substance needed to nourish the system, and will most effectively exhaust the vitality."

Lesson Outline:

1. Understanding the Cultural Shift:

The modern world promotes sexual freedom and the breaking of traditional marriage norms. Practices such as hookups (casual sexual encounters), open marriages (non-monogamous relationships where partners agree to have sexual relations with others), and the increasing use of sex toys have become more common.

- I. **Hookups** promote a lifestyle of sexual encounters outside the commitment of marriage, often leading to emotional emptiness, a lack of respect for oneself and others, and spiritual disconnect.

Biblical Insight:

1 Thessalonians 4:3-5 (NIV) – "It is God's will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; that each of you should learn to control your own body in a way that is holy and honorable, not in passionate lust like the pagans, who do not know God."

- II. **Open Marriages** directly contradict God's design for marriage as a sacred union between one man and one woman. God intended marriage to be a lifelong commitment marked by love, fidelity, and exclusivity.

Biblical Insight:

Genesis 2:24 (NIV) – "That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh."

The 'one flesh' principle signifies unity, commitment, and faithfulness.

Sex Toys potentially distort God's intended purpose for sex as a bonding experience between a husband and wife, opening the door to self-gratification and undermining the intimacy in marital relationships. Sex toys undermine the deeper affection that God designed for married couples. While they may provide immediate satisfaction, they do not align with God's ideal principles for marriage.

IV. **Sex Clubs** are venues that are open to the public, often allowing free entry or access by invitation. These establishments are designed as safe spaces for individuals to engage in various sexual activities.

V. **Swingers Clubs** cater to individuals in long-term relationships who are open to engaging in sexual encounters with other people. These clubs often feature private or semi-private rooms for such interactions.^v

Biblical Insight:

Ephesians 5:3 (NIV) – "But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual

immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people."

2. The Church's Responsibility to Address These Issues:

- i. **Educating the Congregation** The church has the responsibility to educate its members on God's design for sex, marriage, and purity. Pastors, elders, and leaders should not shy away from discussing difficult topics like hookups, open marriages, sex clubs, swingers clubs, and other forms of sexual immoralities. Biblical teaching on the sanctity of marriage and the dangers of sexual immorality should be part of premarital counseling, marriage seminars, youth, and all health programs. These are serious moral degrading and mental health issues affecting the health of the church. It is only God who can protect us from falling into these temptations, therefore we are to pray for those in such addictive behaviors.

Ellen G. White Insight:

The Adventist Home, p. 331 – "There is no safety for any man, young or old, unless he feels the necessity of seeking God for counsel at every step."

Practical Application:

- Organize regular marriage and family seminars, emphasizing fidelity, communication, and emotional intimacy.
 - Include topics on sexuality from a biblical perspective in youth programs and Pathfinder discussions.
 - Create safe spaces where church members can ask questions and seek guidance on sensitive topics related to relationships and sexuality.
- ii. **Providing Counseling and Spiritual Guidance:** Many individuals who engage in casual sex, open marriages, or use of sex toys are often seeking fulfillment in areas where they feel incomplete. The church must offer compassionate, non-judgmental counseling services that provide spiritual guidance and practical support to those struggling with these issues.

Biblical Insight:

Galatians 6:1-2 (NIV) – "Brothers and sisters, if someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently."

Practical Application:

- Offer confidential counseling sessions for individuals and couples dealing with sexual issues.
- Train church leaders and counselors to handle these sensitive topics with care, grace, and biblical wisdom.
- Encourage individuals to confess their struggles in prayer and seek healing from God's Word.

3. Promoting Healthy Marriages and Relationships:

- i. **Strengthening Marital Bonds:** A key role of the church is to promote healthy, Christ-centered marriages. Hookups, open marriages, and sex toys are often symptoms of deeper issues such as lack of emotional intimacy, dissatisfaction in the marriage, or spiritual neglect. By addressing these underlying causes, the church can help couples strengthen their relationships.

Ellen G. White Insight:

The Adventist Home, p. 99 – "Christ came not to destroy this institution [marriage], but to restore it to its original sanctity and elevation. He came to restore the moral image of God in man, and He began His work by sanctioning the marriage relation."

Practical Application:

- Understand that practices such as hookups, swingers, clubs, etc. are destructive weapons designed by the devil to frustrate and destroy the soul. The first zone of attack by the devil is the mind. For this reason, it cannot be normal for the child of God to practice a such.
 - Conduct healthy marriage enrichment programs that focus on communication, emotional intimacy, and mutual respect.
 - Encourage couples to pray together, study the Bible, and participate in spiritual activities as a means of strengthening their bond.
 - Address the root causes of marital dissatisfaction and offer tools to resolve conflicts healthily.
- ii. **Fostering Accountability and Support within the Church:** The church should be a safe space where individuals can find accountability and support. Many who engage in casual sex, open marriages, sex clubs, swingers clubs, or the use of sex toys feel isolated or ashamed. Again, people who are into such practices are mostly those who have serious issues in their marriages; either they are denied intimacy or lack respect from one another, or are fed up with mental, physical, or verbal abuse. Not that these are also weapons of Satan to enslave the soul. By fostering a sense of community and accountability, the church can help individuals and couples pursue God's ideal for their relationships.

Biblical Insight:

James 5:16 (NIV) – "Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed."

Practical Application:

- Create small groups or accountability groups where individuals and couples can share their struggles and receive encouragement.
- The church should teach that sex toys, hookups, swingers clubs, sex clubs, etc. do not provide godly solutions.
- Encourage openness about sexual challenges in a respectful and supportive environment.

- The church should find a way of dealing with marriages where there is a lack of intimacy, communication, and respect for one another.
- Pray for those struggling with these issues and provide them with resources for spiritual growth and healing.

4. Offering Hope and Redemption through Christ:

- The Gospel of Grace and Transformation:** While the church must address issues like hookups, open marriages, sex clubs, swingers' clubs, and sex toys with biblical clarity, it must also emphasize the message of grace, forgiveness, and transformation. The gospel is the solution to all forms of sin, including sexual immorality. Jesus Christ offers forgiveness, healing, and the power to overcome sin for those who repent and turn to Him.

Biblical Insight:

1 John 1:9 (NIV) – "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."

Ellen G. White Insight:

Steps to Christ, p. 62 – "The condition of eternal life is now just what it always has been—just what it was in Paradise before the fall of our first parents—perfect obedience to the law of God, perfect righteousness."

- Restoring Broken Relationships;** God desires to restore broken marriages and relationships. The church must proclaim that through Christ, it is possible to heal and restore even the most damaged relationships. By embracing God's plan for purity, fidelity, and love, couples can experience renewal in their marriage and sexual relationship.

Practical Application:

- Preach the message of grace and transformation regularly, offering hope to those who feel trapped in sexual sin.
- Encourage those struggling with sexual immorality to seek forgiveness and spiritual renewal through Christ.
- Organize testimonies from individuals and couples who have experienced healing and restoration in their marriages through God's grace.

Conclusion:

The church has a vital role to play in addressing the cultural trends of hookups, open marriages, and the use of sex toys. By standing firm on biblical principles, educating the congregation, providing counseling, and offering grace-filled guidance, the church can help individuals and couples align their lives with God's design for sexuality and relationships. In doing so, the church fulfills its calling to be a light in a morally dark world.

Discussion Questions:

1. How can the church address these sensitive issues without alienating those who are struggling with them?
2. In what ways can the church support married couples to strengthen their relationships?
3. How can we, as individuals, promote biblical standards of purity and fidelity in our relationships?

Call to Action:

Encourage church members to reflect on their own relationships and personal struggles. Challenge them to seek God's guidance in aligning their lives with biblical principles and offer support to others who may be struggling in their marriages or sexual lives. Remind them that God's grace is always available for those who seek His healing and transformation.

LESSON 7:

THE HEART OF HOSEA: HOW TO DEAL WITH WAYWARDNESS IN FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS

"The LORD said to me, 'Go, show your love to your wife again, though she is loved by another man and is an adulteress. Love her as the LORD loves the Israelites, though they turn to other gods.'" Hosea 3:1 (NIV).

Introduction

Abnormal behaviors are often linked to poor mental health, where an individual must first accept deception before being negatively influenced. When a family member strays—whether due to rebellion, addiction, broken trust, or poor choices—the resulting pain and emotional turmoil can be overwhelming. The choice of Goma was the influence of Satan on her life yet God demonstrated his love towards her. The biblical story of Hosea serves as a powerful example of God's enduring love for His wayward people, offering guidance on navigating family struggles. Hosea's unwavering commitment to his unfaithful wife, Gomer, exemplifies the nature of God's persistent love, mercy, and hope in the face of betrayal. Addressing the needs of a wayward individual requires profound love, patience, and understanding; rather than responding with anger or judgment, we are called to cultivate a heart of compassion. Patience is essential, as Hosea's steadfastness reflects the enduring nature of God's love for humanity. Supporting someone who has lost their way can be emotionally taxing, yet consistent love can inspire hope and transformation. Furthermore, prayer is vital for inviting God's guidance into our efforts, creating an environment of love and hope that reflects His unwavering commitment to us all.

This lesson explores how families can navigate these difficult situations with love, patience, and faith, following the example of Hosea and, ultimately, God's unrelenting love for humanity.

Key Scripture References:

- **Hosea 3:1 (NIV)**
"The LORD said to me, 'Go, show your love to your wife again, though she is loved by another man and is an adulteress. Love her as the LORD loves the Israelites, though they turn to other gods.'"
- **Luke 15:20 (NIV)**
"But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him."

Ellen G. White References:

- **Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 470:**
"The strongest argument in favor of the gospel is a loving and lovable Christian. To live such a life, to exert such an influence, costs at every step effort, self-sacrifice, discipline."
- **Ellen G. White, *The Review and Herald*, August 12, 1884, para 10:**
"The path to freedom from sin is through crucifixion of self and conflict with the powers of darkness. Let no one be discouraged in view of the severe trials to be met in the beginning of the Christian life."

Lesson Outline:

1. The Story of Hosea and Gomer:

Hosea was commanded by God to marry Gomer, a woman who would repeatedly be unfaithful. This relationship was a living parable of God's steadfast love toward Israel, a nation that continually turned to idolatry and spiritual infidelity. Despite Gomer's betrayal, Hosea was instructed to love her again, symbolizing God's commitment to His people.

- **Key Lessons from Hosea:**
 - Love is an enduring commitment, not a fleeting emotion.
 - Even in the face of betrayal, God calls us to show grace and forgiveness.
 - God's love is redemptive, and His desire is always for restoration and reconciliation, not destruction.

Biblical Insight:

Hosea 2:19 (NIV) – "I will betroth you to me forever; I will betroth you in righteousness and justice, in love and compassion."

2. Dealing with Waywardness in Family Relationships:

Waywardness can manifest in many ways—disobedience, addiction, broken trust, unfaithfulness, or emotional distance. When a family member strays, it can feel like a betrayal of love and trust. However, the story of Hosea shows us that love can transcend hurt and pain. The key is to balance love, boundaries, and the pursuit of healing.

- i. **Responding with Grace and Patience:** Just as Hosea was called to love Gomer despite her unfaithfulness, family members must respond to waywardness with grace. This does not mean ignoring or excusing harmful behavior, but rather approaching the situation with a heart that seeks redemption rather than punishment.

Ellen G. White Insight:

In Heavenly places, p. 180 – "Kind words, pleasant looks, a cheerful countenance, throw a charm around the Christian that makes his influence almost irresistible."

Practical Application:

- Practice patience, recognizing that change and reconciliation take time.
- Refrain from acting out of anger or bitterness; instead, seek the wisdom and peace of the Holy Spirit.
- Offer unconditional love, while also upholding biblical boundaries and standards.

- ii. **Setting Boundaries for Healing:** Forgiving and loving a wayward family member does not mean accepting or enabling harmful behavior. Healthy boundaries are essential for both the wayward individual and the family, protecting everyone involved from further harm.

Biblical Insight:

Proverbs 22:6 (NIV) – "Start children off on the way they should go, and even when they are old, they will not turn from it."

Practical Application:

- Set clear expectations and boundaries for behavior but communicate them with love and grace.
- Make it clear that while you love the person unconditionally, certain behaviors are unacceptable.
- Provide support for healing, such as counseling, pastoral guidance, or recovery programs, but avoid enabling destructive behavior.
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3. The Power of Prayer in Times of Waywardness:

Prayer is one of the most powerful tools a family can use when dealing with waywardness. Just as Hosea was in constant communication with God regarding his situation, we too must lift our family members in prayer, seeking God's intervention and transformation.

- i. **Intercessory Prayer for the Wayward** The story of the prodigal son in Luke 15 illustrates the power of patience, love, and hope. Just as the father waited eagerly for his son's return, we must pray earnestly for our wayward family members, trusting in God's power to bring them back.

Ellen G. White Insight:

Prayer, p. 4 – "Prayer is the key in the hand of faith to unlock heaven's storehouse, where are treasured the boundless resources of Omnipotence."

Practical Application:

- Pray for the softening of the wayward family member's heart and their return to God.
- Pray for wisdom, patience, and love as you interact with them.
- Involve the church community in praying for healing and reconciliation in your family.

4. Offering Forgiveness and Pursuing Reconciliation:

Forgiveness is a central theme in Hosea's story and in the gospel. Forgiveness, however, does not mean ignoring the hurt or pretending that nothing has happened. It involves releasing bitterness and allowing God's love to flow through us, even when it is difficult.

- i. **Forgiving the Wayward** Forgiveness is not easy, especially when deep wounds have been inflicted. However, we are called to forgive as God has forgiven us. Hosea's willingness to take Gomer back is a striking example of this divine forgiveness.

Biblical Insight:

Colossians 3:13 (NIV) – "Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you."

Practical Application:

- Acknowledge the pain caused by the wayward family member but choose to release resentment and anger.
 - Forgiveness does not mean trust is immediately restored; trust must be rebuilt over time through consistent actions.
 - Seek opportunities for reconciliation but recognize that both parties must be willing to work toward healing.
- ii. **Encouraging Repentance and Accountability** True reconciliation can only occur when there is genuine repentance. While family members must be willing to forgive, the wayward individual must also take responsibility for their actions and seek to change.

Biblical Insight:

Acts 3:19 (NIV) – "Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord."

Practical Application:

- Encourage the wayward family member to repent of their actions and seek spiritual guidance.
- Offer support in helping them take practical steps toward accountability and change.
- Work together to rebuild trust, with a focus on healing and restoring the relationship.

Conclusion:

The story of Hosea and Gomer teaches us about God's unfailing love for His wayward people. This love serves as a powerful example for families dealing with rebellion, broken trust, and hurtful relationships or actions. The heart of Hosea is a heart that is committed to love, even in the face of betrayal. Dealing with waywardness is never easy, the principles of love, forgiveness, patience, and prayer guide families toward healing and reconciliation. Ultimately, God's desire for families is to remain whole and united in love, reflecting the relationship between Christ and His church. Through God's grace, even the most difficult family situations can be redeemed and restored.

Discussion Questions:

1. How can we balance love and grace with the need for boundaries in family relationships?
2. What role does prayer play in dealing with a wayward family member?
3. How can we offer forgiveness when trust has been broken?

Call to Action:

Encourage church members to reflect on any waywardness within their family relationships. Challenge them to commit to praying for healing, setting healthy boundaries, and practicing unconditional love. Remind them that God's heart is always for restoration, and through His grace, families can find hope and reconciliation.

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ⁱⁱ National library of Medicine:

[https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC9794105/#:~:text=Prevalence%20and%20Frequency%20of%20Masturbation&text=Twenty%20percent%20of%20women%20across,et%20al.%2C%202010\).](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC9794105/#:~:text=Prevalence%20and%20Frequency%20of%20Masturbation&text=Twenty%20percent%20of%20women%20across,et%20al.%2C%202010).)

ⁱⁱⁱ Ballard Brief: <https://ballardbrief.byu.edu/issue-briefs/pornography-use-among-young-adults-in-the-united-states>

^{iv} Impact of Games on Children: <https://mpowerminds.com/blog/Impact-of-Gaming-on-Children#:~:text=Due%20to%20this%20addiction%2C%20children,%2C%20backaches%2C%20and%20poor%20eyesight.>

^v 9 of the Most Notorious Sex Clubs Around the World: <https://matadornetwork.com/read/best-sex-clubs-around-world/>