

Technology and Religion

Lesson 6: iPhone Unplugged

3.12.2023

Objectives: Explore technology's encompassing effect on our lives by "unplugging" and monitoring use.

Materials: Flipchart, lesson attachments (2 copies of pledge per student).

Time allotments: Suggested for 50 minute class, followed by 20 minute closing service (end class around 9:50/11:50 to begin chapel 9:55/11:55).

1. Nametags and Graffiti Wall (5 minutes before class begins)

- Make nametags using blank paper, markers, and holders. Youth can create their own unique but LEGIBLE nametag. Make it a regular practice to wear nametags.
- "Graffiti Wall" questions: Write the following on whiteboard. Invite youth as they arrive to grab a marker and weigh in with their responses:
 - ▶ In your opinion, what is something humans should refrain from or go without, that would better the world?
 - ▶ What's one habit you would love to break?
- Teachers complete attendance sheets.

2. Silly Fun: "One Minute, Please!" (5 minutes max)

Pair youth up randomly. Each taking turns, the aim of the game is to talk for one minute straight on a given subject. **Youth must try to speak non-stop for the full duration of their minute!** Teacher announces the topic, and first person begins speaking for one minute on that topic. Teacher calls time, and announces new topic for the second person to speak. Continue alternating as time permits.

Choose subjects to stimulate the imagination and which may be amusing. Topics might include: Whether a hotdog is a sandwich or a taco... Which animals would be rudest if they could talk... 10 things you can do with marshmallows... How many chickens it would take to take down an elephant... 10 things that everyone looks silly doing..... Fads or trends you would eliminate from existence if you could... If all the States in the USA were represented by food, what food each state would be.

3. **Chalice Lighting:** Light the chalice, saying these words together: “We light this chalice as a symbol of our faith, the light of truth and the warmth of love.”

Teacher reads: (from Katie McDonough and Lizzie Skurnick)

“A recent study by the University of Maryland’s International Center for Media & the Public Agenda found that smartphone users exhibit actual withdrawal symptoms when forced to abstain from using their devices. The study also found that many subjects felt physical discomfort after not checking their phone for extended periods of time. They got ‘fidgital,’ [a tendency to] excessively check one’s devices.”

4. **Survey Says:** (10 minutes)

The Pew Research Center’s “Internet & American Life Project” (2012 survey) revealed some interesting facts about our mobile technology use. Listed below is a sampling from that survey.

Teacher reads each survey question one at a time, and ask youth to position themselves on a line (stretching from 0% – 100%) with their best guess at what the survey revealed. Invite youth to briefly explain their guess before revealing the answer:

- What percent of mobile device owners check their device for messages, alerts, or calls – even when they don’t notice their device ringing or vibrating. [Answer: 67%]
- What percentage of mobile device owners actually check their devices as frequently as every 6.5 minutes? [Answer: 18%]
 - Side question: What activity has some researchers begun to label as “the new yawn” because of its socially contagious nature? [Answer: mobile device checking]
- What percent of mobile phone owners say that others have complained to them about not responding promptly to calls or text messages. [Answer: 39%]
- What percent of U.S. consumers use mobile devices as a second screen even while watching television. [Answer: 88%]
- What percent of smartphone owners have slept with their phone next to their bed because they wanted to make sure they did not miss any calls. [Answer: 50%]
- What percent of mobile device users claim they could **not go a single day** without their device? [Answer: 84%]

5. **Inventory: Could you go without a computer?** (5 minutes)

Hand out inventory for youth to complete.

- Did the results surprise you or not? Were results spread out or clustered?
- What could you go without? Briefly discuss.

6. Questions for Discussion: (15 minutes)

(*Note: Not everyone may have seen the film *Disconnected* last Sunday, so please use discretion to facilitate questions to focus both on the film itself and also expand to general thoughts about unplugging from technology use.)

- In the film, what was the point of doing this experiment? So much of these students' lives was dependent on computer technology (e.g. communicating with others, reading, writing, drawing artwork, journaling, logging employment hours, finding earthquakes, sorting music for radio show, socializing, entertaining, de-stressing). Why would they inconvenience themselves by giving up their computers?
- When so much of life happens through the computer, what **is** a computer?
- Rather than being merely a **tool** we can pick up and put down, how is a computer really an experience of a technological **culture**, a way of life that manages us?
- Cultures have unique sense of time, space, language, among many other elements.
 - What happened to students' sense of time when they disconnected? (*Think about greater time they discovered, both as positive gift and difficult challenge.*)
 - What happened to students' sense of space? (*Think about real interpersonal space versus virtual space, of their experiment in hosting a live, in-person version of Facebook with face-to-face chat rooms.*)
 - What happened to students' sense of language and communicating? (*Think about of verbalizing how you feel versus texting someone, or hand-writing an actual note versus sending email.*)
- Just as you may (desperately) want to speak English when you're abroad in a non-English speaking culture, or eat something culturally familiar after trying strange new foods, what do you make of students' cheating (e.g. using a phone to play games rather than computer, or having others check emails for them)?
- People who have lived abroad in another culture, or studied another language, often come to understand their own culture better. How might stepping outside of your technology use offer a different vantage point from which to see our culture of technology differently? Or, how might taking a break, a Sabbath, or otherwise disconnecting from our usual habits offer a new perspective?

7. Unplugging from technology: (15 minutes)

Review the handout with suggestions for unplugging.

Either as a whole group or in smaller groups, ask youth to identify a specific aspect of technology use from which they can "unplug." Teachers should help identify something that is *both challenging and feasible* for the experiment.

Youth should complete 2 copies of the pledge, one to turn in and one to keep as a reminder during this experiment.

8. Extinguish the chalice, saying together:

“May the light of truth and the warmth of love go with us in our hearts.”

9. Help clean up classroom before leaving: Please keep regular practice of readying classroom for the next class.

- leave lesson plan and all materials organized
- wipe the whiteboard clean
- tables and chairs neatly returned
- nametags collected in Ziploc bag
- leave any comments for RE staff on attendance sheets