***The Dangers of Cell Phones and Texting***

***Cell Phones:***

Technology plays a very important part in all of our lives, including the ministry. We live in a fast paced world with so many demands, thus some pastors have told us that they are so busy they do not know if they are coming or going. Cell phones have greatly influenced and changed our lives, making us more mobile but yet more vulnerable.

Pastors have adapted well to this new technology without realizing additional dangers that could affect their personal and ministry life. We believe pastors are vulnerable due to their overwhelming desire to please and take care of their flock. As a caregiver, we must understand that we are here to help others when needs arise and to eventually teach them to be self-reliant in the things of God.

A pastor’s life can also be very demanding and stressful. Most pastors have learned the importance of balancing their personal and ministry lives, while others have not. Cell phones bring added convenience to most of our lives but they can also violate our boundaries and add additional wear and stress to our daily lives.

As the leading ministry for pastors, Pastoral Care, Inc. receives calls everyday from pastors and their families who are worn out, tired, ready to give up, due to the demands of the ministry. During our assessment, we often find ministers who seemed to be “married” to their phone. While this seems humorous, many of our pastors cannot even eat a meal or spend time with their families without having to answer the phone. This impulsive disorder seems overwhelming, and causes additional frustration, stress, and imbalance to their personal and ministry lives.

One way we have prevented stress and burnout for a pastor and his/her family is to send them for a safe place of rest. One of our goals is to provide a safe environment where pastors can have time to pray, meditate, and avoid some of the demands and complexities associated with the ministry.

Another goal is to place ministers at a location where cell phones do not work. Many of our pastors have told us later that they have experienced withdrawals, similar to those associated with other types of addictions. They were constantly tempted to check their phone for messages or calls. Their obsession caused them to be unable to enjoy their surroundings or get the rest and relaxation they needed. Pastors have told us they really did not realize how much a cell phone controls their thinking or actions until they were separated from their phones.

While the cell phone can bring convenience, it can also be a detriment to our lives, family, and ministry. Being on call 24/7 brings on a whole new meaning. When a pastor feels the urgency to immediately respond to every phone call or text, this creates *“un-forced” expectations* for yourself and members. If you create a policy of answering your calls immediately, people will expect this every time. When you do not answer your messages immediately, others may believe something is wrong. Pastors will complain of not having enough time during the day but they create a policy that ties them down more. This is a dysfunctional policy.

Listed below are some safeguards to help pastors who may be struggling with bringing balance to their cell phone use.

* Monitor the number of calls daily. Many pastors are unaware of just how many calls they receive each day; most are not emergencies. We are not suggesting that you ignore calls but excessive calls or creating an atmosphere where people do not respect your personal or professional time is not a healthy environment.
* Do not allow calls to interfere with tasks you know are important. \*\*The devil would like nothing better than to keep you so busy or be interrupted from doing earthly or spiritual good!!!
* Do not interrupt your meal or family time for a call, unless you know it is an emergency. Apologize to your family for the interruption if you take the call!
* Allow your church secretary to handle most of your messages and calls. One way to easily explain this is to either announce to the congregation or place something in the church bulletin that due to the pastor’s busy schedule, he/she would like for all messages to come to the church office. A pastor can also announce this and simply state that you love everyone but you cannot get many things done due to the number of calls you receive each day. Your office personnel may be able to answer some of their questions without involving you. Tell them you love them and you will return their call. You may have to change your cell phone number to eliminate excessive calls!
* Leave your cell phone at home during family time or vacations. If an emergency occurs, you can always use your spouse’s phone. Have the church office to call your spouse’s phone if emergencies occur.
* Give permission to yourself to allow others to leave you a message. You can check your messages when you have spare time, not while you are studying, praying, performing your daily tasks, or when you have personal time.
* Check and return your messages daily at a time that is less stressful.
* Watch your texting!!!!!!!!!!! This is another tool to snare your time. It can also lead to personal and moral failure. Words can be taken wrong from both directions. Many people in the church tell others that they love them but when it is in text, it can bring on a whole new meaning.
* Texting can be lengthy, cause accidents while driving, and be very addictive. There are new studies out from the American Psychiatric Association who is trying to bring another diagnosis to meet this ever-growing addiction. *(Please refer to the next article)*

***Texting***:

When texting first started it was primarily used by teenagers, spending their evening texting and communicating with their friends. Some teenagers have run up mom and dad’s cell phone bill to enormous limits. Since then, most phones are more user friendly and have unlimited texting as a part of their phone service.

Many pastors have adapted well to texting. It often allows a pastor to give a church member a short answer rather than calling them. Most pastors thought it would eliminate lengthy conversations, but in reality, most texts will go back and forth several times in order to get everything stated.

Besides the dangers that we have previously presented regarding cell phones, texting invites further dependence on its usage. It creates the possibility of increasing a pastor’s load and could lead to moral and psychological problems.

The American Psychological Association has determined that texting can be addictive. The addiction of texting is growing at alarming rates!!! Unlike other addictions, this is a silent addiction that is not readily visible to most people. Ministers can perform other duties without their members understanding how addicted they are to texting or how they are contributing to the pastor’s addiction. And as with other types of addictions, there are denial factors. Many pastors have stated to us that they can easily handle it and deny that they are hooked on texting.

 As with any addiction, it will lead a person down a path of destruction, doing things they never expected that they would do, and costing them everything! At Pastoral Care, Inc., we receive calls and inquiries about these addictions. We hear and see firsthand from ministers at denominational meetings, churches, and in their personal lives how dependent they are with the use of their phone. Many of these pastors are unaware of how “hooked” they are to this type of usage.

It seems as if everyday we either receive a call or hear of a pastor who has “fallen” due to inappropriate texting. Listed below are dangers that every minister should avoid. Just like other addictions, not everyone who tries something new is addicted. That does not mean that we should ignore any warning signs!

 The dangers of texting can include:

* Stealing valuable time needed to devote to other daily activities.
* Consuming thoughts and avoidance of developing personal or family relationships.
* Not remembering words can be a matter of record. Other people can misinterpret meanings from words you use.
* Texting can cause one to experiment with personal fantasies that can lead to moral failure.
* Ministers sometimes have revealed “secret” thoughts and fantasies that are presumed to be in secret and confidential.
* Again, texting can be addictive!!!

One way to determine whether you are addicted is to have someone, such as your partner to check your daily messages to monitor how many texts you receive daily, the time that is spent on texting, and to protect you from misinterpretation. When you analyze the amount of time spent texting, you may realize that you could have completed an important project or activity which could have made your life easier or improved the church setting.

Do not allow the little foxes to spoil the vine. Monitor, be accountable to others on your phone and texting usage, balance your time with the church and family, and do not become a slave to something of this world! Again, there is nothing wrong with having a phone or texting, it is the excessive usage or overwhelming desire to “have to” do it.

Listed below are 12 steps and principles for Internet and Technology Addiction Anonymous:

**Honesty.** Admit you are powerless to overcome your addictions and that your life has become unmanageable.

**Hope.** Come to believe that the power greater than ourselves (our Lord) can and will restore you to health.

**Trust.** Decide to turn your will and your life over to the care to our Lord.

**Truth.** Make a searching and fearless written moral inventory of yourself.

**Integrity.** Admit to yourself, to God, and another human being the exact nature of your wrongs.

**Change of Heart.** Become entirely ready to have God remove all your character defects.

**Humility.** Humbly ask God to remove your shortcomings.

**Brotherly Love.** Make a written list of all persons you have harmed and become willing to make restitution to them.

**Restitution and Reconciliation.** Whenever possible, make direct restitution to all persons you have harmed, except when to do so would injure them or others.

**Accountability.** Continue to take personal inventory, and when you are wrong promptly admit it.

**Perseverance.** Listen (and continue to listen) to your heart. Earnestly seek to understand God, in whatever may be going on that day. Continue to give yourself credit for earnest effort, however imperfect.

**Service and Spirituality.** Having a closer walk with God. Due to the result of these steps, share this message with others who excessively use technology and practice these principles in all you do.

***When Does Infidelity in Texting Start?***

Many people have asked us this question. Infidelity starts with an idea and is nourished with more personal involvement. Ideas or thoughts are in themselves not a sin, but nourishing that thought to the point of action, being consumed by one’s actions and thoughts during the day is definitely sin and infidelity.

Please never text any inappropriate thoughts or feelings. Remember that texting can be easily retrieved and is a matter of record. Inappropriate texting can destroy your family, church, and community.

Do not allow obsessive behavior to hinder or destroy your calling. If you need further help with this type of addiction, please give us a call. Pastoral Care, Inc. is here to help and encourage you in any way. We believe you are very important to the Kingdom of God, make no mistake about that! And we desire to help you in any way. Be careful of your texts and how you may feel about others outside of your spouse.

God Bless,

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