

Salt and Light Online

During the pandemic, I was honored to be asked to address a student leadership conference for a Christian school in the Philippines via Zoom. Looking over my notes, there isn't much here that doesn't apply to ALL of us with any kind of online connection.

In order to follow Jesus' call to be salt and light, and applying it to online life, I'd like to take a look at several dangers of the dark side of online life, as well as suggest ways to be wise in the use of this technology.

The Comparison Trap

I don't think anything has fueled the temptation to compare ourselves to others as much as social media. There is a wise saying that "Comparison is the thief of joy."

This is where our feelings go when we're caught in the comparison trap: to envy. To depression and anxiety.

A tranquil heart gives life to the flesh, but envy makes the bones rot. (Proverbs 14:30)

Anxiety in a man's heart weighs him down, but a good word makes him glad. (Proverbs 12:25)

The opposite of comparing is choosing contentment.

Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." (Hebrews 13:5)

Now there is great gain in godliness with contentment, for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world. But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content. (1 Timothy 6:6-8)

And one of the best ways to choose contentment is to train yourself to practice gratitude. Give thanks for what the Lord has allowed for you.

Whatever happens, give thanks, because it is God's will in Christ Jesus that you do this. (1 Thessalonians 5:18)

Dangers of Social Media Apps

One of the worst is Tiktok.

A 17 year old girl wrote: "The only thing worse that happened to me besides Tiktok was my family members dying I would spend countless hours crying in my bedroom repeatedly watching Tiktok, telling myself I wasn't good enough."

Another girl told of starving herself to look like the people Tiktok decides are acceptable.

Tiktok destroys people's self-esteem. Millions of kids try to learn the dances to fit in or feel accepted.

There is a strong pro-anorexia and pro-bulimia presence, causing lots of girls to develop eating disorders because adolescents are particularly vulnerable to peer pressure.

The message on so many of the apps for girls is: If you want to be seen, heard, loved—show off your body. No one is valuing you for your heart or your mind or your passions, just your appearance. Just your body.

This is so dangerous! It's a lie that a girl's worth is in how pretty she is or how thin she is or how sexy she is.

A person's worth is set by Jesus, who was willing to pay for each one of us with His life. He says, "I made you in My image, and that makes you infinitely valuable to begin with. Then I died for you, which proves you are infinitely valuable." THAT is true worth. It's set by Jesus Himself.

Many of the apps are also dangerous because sexual predators use them to trick kids and lure them into meeting, where bad things happen. So many victims of sex trafficking are drawn in on social media.

Another way social media is dangerous is because there's where so much cyber-bullying happens.

If you see someone being bullied, ask the Lord for help and be brave. Speak up and say, "That's not okay." There is power in just one voice! And report it-to whatever authorities have to do with how you know the person, such as school, or church, or the neighborhood. Keep inviting Jesus into the situation and ask for supernatural help.

Another problem with Tiktok in particular is a different kind of danger, concerning privacy and security.

One expert said, "Anytime Amazon, major banks, and the Department of Defense ban employees from using an app for security issues, it's time for everyone to uninstall the app."

You need to know that NOTHING you put on social media is private.

Other Emotional Dangers

The more time you spend online, the greater your risk of feeling isolated and taken to a dark place emotionally. Because of the pandemic's lockdown, depression and loneliness are at an all-time high.

Scrolling your social media feeds contributes to feeling left out.

Too much social media leads to disconnection and loneliness, and feelings of social isolation. Too much social media makes us feel inadequate because of the comparison thing.

A 2018 study published in the Journal of Social and Clinical

Psychology revealed that those who limited their social media exposure to 30 minutes a day, reported that their depression lifted and their loneliness improved. Social media activist [Collin Karchner](#), founder of the "Save the Kids" movement, kept hearing from U.S. students that they reported feeling better immediately after deleting their social media apps!

Another aspect of spending too much time online is that it can cause difficulty engaging in conversations in real life. Which of course fuels the loneliness further.

Purity

Probably the MAJOR pitfall of the Internet is pornography.

The fastest growing consumer of porn is girls 15-30. I found one statistic that 70% of guys and 50% of girls struggle with a porn problem. I think it's higher than that.

I understand that when apologist and speaker Josh McDowell offered a one-month discipleship program for Christian student leader, he learned that 100% of both guys and girls confessed to problems with porn.

Brain chemicals are released when viewing pornography and during sexual experiences. These brain chemicals are intended to bond husband and wife like emotional superglue, but when people use porn, they bond to the porn instead of an actual person.

This is a matter of spiritual warfare. The enemy of our souls is taking captive millions of Christians through pornography, then beating them up with shame and guilt.

I plead with you, install a filter or an accountability program on your phone to help you stand against this attack on your purity.

And please, don't take pictures of your bodies. And most certainly do not send any pictures of body parts to other

people!

You were bought at a price. Therefore glorify God in your body. (1 Corinthians 6:20)

The wife does not have authority over her own body but yields it to her husband. In the same way, the husband does not have authority over his own body but yields it to his wife. (1 Corinthians 7:4)

Your body was bought by Jesus and it belongs to Him. It's not okay to give it away, even in pictures, to anyone except the person you have married.

What would being WISE look like, then?

First, recognize that this is a huge issue, especially in the Philippines. People in your country spend more time online than any other country in the world-almost 11 hours a day. You also spend more time on social media, over four hours, than any other country-twice the worldwide average.

It would be wise to choose to unplug yourselves so you can replenish your mental, emotional, and spiritual resources.

Jesus said in Matthew 16:24, "If anyone wants to come after Me, he must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow Me."

There has to be a choice to deny ourselves and say NO to the phone as a way of saying YES to Jesus.

Think about all the ways you stay tethered to your phone so it controls you.

Get a real alarm clock and watch so you're not dependent on your phone to tell you what time it is.

At night, recharge your phone in another room so your sleep won't be disturbed by the sound and light of incoming messages and notifications.

Don't post on social media when you're emotional. Don't treat social media like a diary. Then you won't regret emotional posting that embarrasses you later.

If you're already feeling down, don't scroll social media. It will make you feel even worse.

To be emotionally healthy, let yourself feel your feelings instead of distracting yourself by scrolling.

Put your phone down and be 100% mindful of what's happening in your life at that moment.

The blue light from screens decreases your melatonin levels, which leads to sleep problems. Turn off your screen an hour before bed to help yourself sleep better.

Love One Another

Before you post anything, ask:

- Is it true?
- Is it helpful?
- Is it kind?
- Will it cause drama?
- Am I posting this for the right reason?
- Would my grandmother want to see this?
- Is it mine to share?
- Would I say this or share this in real life?
- Does this glorify God?

Can you see how passing your post through the filter of these insightful questions would be loving?

The Big Picture

There are two verses that strike me as especially appropriate to this issue:

Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather,

in humility value others above yourselves. (Philippians 2:3)

So then, whether you eat or drink OR WHATEVER YOU DO, do it all to the glory of God. (1 Corinthians 10:31)

If that is the question we ask: “Will this bring glory to God?” we will find ourselves being loving, kind, respectful Christ-followers who are bringing salt and light into the dark and corrupt world of the internet.

And we will earn the Lord’s accolade: “Well done, good and faithful servant.”

This blog post originally appeared at blogs.bible.org/salt-and-light-online/ on May 17, 2022.

“How Can Computers Be Used to Share the Gospel?”

I teach technology in a private Christian school. I am putting together a list of How Computers Can Be Used To Share the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Any help or insights you might have would be greatly appreciated.

Since we are really an apologetics ministry and not evangelistic, we’re not really in that loop a whole lot. I would suggest you go to Google.com and type in the keywords “internet evangelism” and follow some of those links.

One thing that does come to mind is the fact that almost 100% of young people are online, and they are looking for relationships, even cyber-relationships, and looking for spirituality. So sharing the gospel in the context of developing online friendships in chat rooms (although one has

to be waaaay careful there), online discussion groups, and blogging sites (weblogs. . . sort of personal diaries: see xanga.com) is a good strategy for sharing the gospel online.

I turned to our great friend of Probe, Keith Seabourn, Chief Technology Officer of Campus Crusade for Christ, for help in answering this question.

I have been using computers and the internet to share Jesus for over 10 years. We in Campus Crusade have found it to be extremely effective. I have several suggestions.

1. Visit Tony Whitaker's excellent Online Evangelism guide at www.web-evangelism.com/

2. For stories and statistics over several years, visit my personal website at www.seabourn.org. Specifically, visit my newsletter archives on that site. Many newsletters tell stories. For compilations of responses and statistics, see the End of Year Reports for 1999 or 2001.

3. For a broad overview of what Campus Crusade is doing to use the Passion of the Christ movie for online evangelism, see www.seabourn.org/newsletters/0401/thepassion.html.

These are some initial ways for you to explore. There are many, many more.

Hope you find this helpful.

Sue Bohlin

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Online Affairs – A Christian Look at a Major Problem

Kerby Anderson highlights online affairs, the sin of adultery with an “electronic” relationship on the Internet.



This article is also available in [Spanish](#).

The Allure of Cyber-Relationships

The Internet is becoming a breeding ground for adultery, so say many experts who track the pattern of extramarital affairs. So we will discuss the phenomenon of online affairs.

Peggy Vaughn is the author of *The Monogamy Myth* and also serves as an expert for America Online on problems caused by infidelity. She predicts that one “role of the Internet in the future will be as a source of affairs.” She is writing a second book on the subject of adultery and says she could base half of it just on the letters she receives from people who started an affair online.[\[1\]](#)

An online affair (or cyberaffair) is an intimate or sexually explicit communication between a married person and someone other than their spouse that takes place on the Internet. Usually this communication takes place through an online service such as America Online or CompuServe. Participants usually visit a chat room to begin a group conversation and then often move into a one-to-one mode of communication. Chat room categories range from “single and liking it” to “married and flirting” to “naked on the keyboard.”

Women in a chat room are often surprised at what develops in a fairly short period of time. At first the conversation is stimulating, though flirtatious. Quickly, however, women are often confronted with increasingly sexual questions and

comments. Even if the comments don't turn personal, women find themselves quickly sharing intimate information about themselves and their relationships that they would never share with someone in person. Peggy Vaughn says, "Stay-at-home moms in chat rooms are sharing all this personal stuff they are hiding from their partners." She finds that the intensity of women's online relationships can "quickly escalate into thinking they have found a soulmate."

Online affairs differ from physical world affairs in some ways, but are similar in others. Cyberaffairs are based upon written communication where a person may feel more free to express herself anonymously than in person. Frequently the communication becomes sexually graphic and kinky in ways that probably would not occur if a real person were hearing these comments and could act on them. Participants in an online affair will often tell their life stories and their innermost secrets. They will also create a new persona, become sexually adventurous, and pretend to be different than they really are.

Pretending is a major theme in cyberaffairs. Men claim to be professionals (doctors, lawyers) who work out every day in the gym. And they universally claim that if their wives met their needs, they wouldn't be sex shopping on the Internet. Women claim to be slim, sexy, and adventurous. The anonymity of the Internet allows them to divulge (or even create) their wildest fantasies. In fact, their frank talk and flirtation pays great dividends in the number of men in a chat room who want to talk to them and get together with them.

Just as the Internet has become a new source of pornography for many, so it seems that it has also become a new source for affairs. Relationships online frequently go over the line leaving pain, heartbreak, and even divorce in their wake. Even though these online affairs don't involve sex, they can be very intense and threaten a marriage just the same.

Current Statistics on Adultery

In a [previous article](#), I talked about some of the statistics concerning adultery. Before we continue, let me update some of those numbers with a multitude of studies all coming to similar conclusions.

One conclusion is that adultery is becoming more common, and researchers are finding that women are as likely as men to have an affair. A 1983 study found that 29 percent of married people under 25 had had an affair with no statistical difference between the number of men and women who chose to be unfaithful to their spouses early in life.^{2} By comparison, only 9 percent of spouses in the 1950s under the age of 25 had been involved in extramarital sex. Another study concluded that by age 40 about 50 to 65 percent of husbands and 45 to 55 percent of wives become involved in an extramarital affair.^{3}

Affairs are usually more than a one-time event. A 1987 study surveyed 200 men and women and found that their affairs lasted an average of two years.^{4} In fact, affairs go through transitions over time. They may begin as romantic, sexual, or emotional relationships and may become intimate friendships. Affairs that become friendships can last decades or a lifetime.

Online affairs differ from other affairs in that they may not involve a physical component, but the emotional attachment is still there. Online affairs develop because of the dual attraction of attention and anonymity. Someone who has been ignored by a spouse (or at least perceives that he or she is ignored) suddenly becomes the center of attention in a chat room or a one-on-one e-mail exchange. A woman finds it exciting, even intoxicating, that all these men want to talk to her. And they are eager to hear what she says and needs.

Anonymity feeds this intoxication because the person on the other end of this cyberaffair is unknown. He or she can be as

beautiful and intelligent as your dreams can imagine. The fantasy is fueled by the lack of information and the anonymity. No one in cyberland has bad breath, a bald head, love handles, or a bad temper. The sex is the best you can imagine. Men are warm, sensitive, caring, and communicative. Women are daring, sensual, and erotic.

Is it all too good to be true? Of course it is. Cyberaffairs are only make-believe. Usually when cyberlovers meet, there is a major letdown. No real person can compete with a dream lover. No marriage can compete with a cyberaffair. But then an online affair can't really compete with a real relationship that provides true friendship and marital intimacy.

Nevertheless, online affairs are seductive. An Internet addict calls out to a spouse "one more minute" just as an alcoholic justifies "one more drink." Cyberaffairs provide an opportunity to become another person and chat with distant and invisible neighbors in the high-tech limbo of cyberspace. Social and emotional needs are met, flirting is allowed and even encouraged, and an illusion of intimacy feeds the addiction that has caught so many unsuspecting Internet surfers.

Motivations for Affairs

Affairs usually develop because the relationship meets various social and psychological needs. Self-esteem needs are often at the top of the list. Self-esteem needs are met through knowing, understanding, and acceptance. Psychologists say that those needs are enhanced through talking intimately about feelings, thoughts, and needs. This can take place in person or take place through the Internet.

Even though online affairs may not involve a physical component, the emotional attachment can be just as strong and even overwhelming. And when they end, this strong attachment usually leaves participants in emotional pain.

Women report feeling thrilled by their lover's interest in them physically, emotionally, and intellectually. They are also excited about the chance to know a different man (how he thinks and feels). They also feel intimate with their lovers because they can talk about their feelings openly. However, when the affair ends, they feel a great deal of guilt with regard to their husband and children. They also regret the deceit that accompanied the affair.

Men report feeling excited about the sexual experience of the affair. They try to control their feelings in the affair and do not compete with their feelings for their wife. Often they limit the emotional involvement with their lover. Men also feel guilt and regret over deceit when an affair ends, but less so than most women.

Men and women have affairs for different reasons. Research has shown that women seek affairs in order to be loved, have a friend, and feel needed. Men seek affairs for sexual fulfillment, friendship, and fun.[{5}](#)

It appears that the percentage of women who have extramarital sex has increased the last few decades. In 1953 Alfred Kinsey found that 29 percent of married women admitted to at least one affair.[{6}](#) A *Psychology Today* survey in 1970 reported that 36 percent of their female readers had extramarital sex.[{7}](#) One study in 1987 found that 70 percent of women surveyed had been involved in an affair.[{8}](#)

It also appears that women who are employed full-time outside of the home are more likely to have an affair than full-time homemakers. Several studies come to this same conclusion. One study found that 47 percent of wives who were employed full-time and 27 percent of full-time homemakers had been involved in an affair before they were 40 years old.[{9}](#) And *New Woman* magazine found that 57 percent of employed wives who had an affair met their lover at work.[{10}](#)

Contrary to conventional wisdom, an affair will not help your marriage. In 1975, Linda Wolfe published *Playing Around* after she studied twenty-one women who were having affairs to keep their marriages intact.[\[11\]](#) The reasoning for many of these women was that if they could meet their own needs, their marriages would be more successful. Many said they were desperately lonely. Others were afraid, believing their husbands did not love them or were not committed to their marriage. Five years after the initial study, only three of the twenty-one women were still married.

Adultery can destroy a marriage, whether a physical affair or an online affair.

Preventing an Affair

The general outline for some of these ideas comes from family therapist Frank Pittman, author of *Private Lies: Infidelity and the Betrayal of Intimacy*, although I have added additional material. He has counseled 10,000 couples over the last forty years, and about 7,000 have experienced infidelity. He has nineteen specific suggestions for couples on how to avoid affairs.[\[12\]](#) Let's look at a few of them.

First, accept the possibility of being sexually attracted to another and of having sexual fantasies. Frank Pittman believes we should acknowledge that such thoughts can develop so that you don't scare them into hiding. But he also says you shouldn't act on them.

Second, we should hang out with monogamous people. He says, "They make a good support system." To state it negatively, "Do not be deceived: Bad company corrupts good morals" (1 Cor. 15:33).

Third, work on your marriage. He says to keep your marriage sexy and work to be intimate with your spouse. He also says to make marriage an important part of your identity. "Carry your

marriage with you wherever you go.”

Fourth, be realistic about your marriage. Pittman says, “Don’t expect your marriage to make you happy. See your partner as a source of comfort rather than a cause of unhappiness.” Accept the reality of marriage; it isn’t always beautiful. Also accept that you are both imperfect.

Fifth, keep the marriage equal. Share parenting duties. “If not, one partner will become the full-time parent, and the other will become a full-time child” without responsibilities, who seeks to be taken care of. And keep the relationships equal. Pittman says, “The more equal it is, the more both partners will respect and value it.”

Sixth, if you aren’t already married, be careful in your choice of a marriage partner. For example, marry someone who believes in, and has a family history of, monogamy. Frank Pittman says, “It is a bad idea to become the fifth husband of a woman who has been unfaithful to her previous four.” Also, marry someone who respects and likes your gender. “They will get over the specialness of you yourself and eventually consider you as part of a gender they dislike.”

Seventh, call home every day you travel. “Otherwise, you begin to have a separate life.” And stay faithful. “If you want your partner to (stay faithful), it is a good idea to stay faithful yourself.” And make sure you are open, honest, and authentic. Lies and deception create a secret life that can allow an affair to occur.

Finally, don’t overreact or exaggerate the consequences of an affair if it occurs. Pittman says, “It doesn’t mean there will be a divorce, murder or suicide. Catch yourself and work your way back into the marriage.”

Affairs can destroy a marriage. Take the time to affair-proof your marriage so you avoid the pain, guilt and regret that inevitably results. And if you have fallen into an affair,

work your way back and rebuild your marriage.

Consequences of Affairs

When God commands, "You shall not commit adultery" (Ex. 20:14), He did so for our own good. There are significant social, psychological, and spiritual consequences to adultery.

A major social cost is divorce. An affair that is discovered does not have to lead to divorce, but often it does. About one-third of couples remain together after the discovery of an adulterous affair, while the other two-thirds usually divorce.

Not surprisingly, the divorce rate is higher among people who have affairs. Annette Lawson (author of *Adultery: An Analysis of Love and Betrayal*) found that spouses who did not have affairs had the lowest rate of divorce. Women who had multiple affairs (especially if they started early in the marriage) had the highest rate of divorce.

A lesser known fact is that those who divorce rarely marry the person with whom they are having the affair. For example, Dr. Jan Halper's study of successful men (executives, entrepreneurs, professionals) found that very few men who have affairs divorce their wife and marry their lovers. Only 3 percent of the 4,100 successful men surveyed eventually married their lovers.^{13}

Frank Pittman has found that the divorce rate among those who married their lovers was 75 percent.^{14} The reasons for the high divorce rate include: intervention of reality, guilt, expectations, a general distrust of marriage, and a distrust of the affairer.

The psychological consequences are also significant, even if they are sometimes more difficult to discern. People who pursue an affair often do so for self-esteem needs, but often further erode those feelings by violating trust, intimacy, and

stability in a marriage relationship. Affairs do not stabilize a marriage, they upset it.

Affairs destroy trust. It's not surprising that marriages formed after an affair and a divorce have such a high divorce rate. If your new spouse cheated before, what guarantee do you have that this person won't begin to cheat on you? Distrust of marriage and distrust of the affairer are significant issues.

Finally, there are spiritual consequences to affairs. We grieve the Lord by our actions. We disgrace the Lord as we become one more statistic of moral failure within the body of Christ. We threaten the sacred marriage bond between us and our spouse. We bring guilt into our lives and shame into our marriage and family. Affairs extract a tremendous price in our lives and the lives of those we love and hold dear.

And let's not forget the long-term consequences. Affairs, for example, can lead to unwanted pregnancies. According to one report, "Studies of blood typing show that as many as 1 out of every 10 babies born in North America is not the offspring of the mother's husband."^[15] Affairs can also result in sexually transmitted diseases like syphilis, chlamydia, herpes, or even AIDS. Many of these diseases are not curable and will last for a lifetime.

Adultery is dangerous, and so are online affairs. The popularity of the recent movie *You've Got Mail* has helped feed the fantasy that you are writing to Tom Hanks or Meg Ryan. In nearly every case, nothing could be further from the truth. An online affair could happen to you, and the plot might be more like *Fatal Attraction*.

Notes

1. Karen Peterson, "Spouses Browse Infidelity Online," *USA Today*, 6 July 1999, 1D.
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3. Maggie Scarf, *Intimate Partners* (New York: Ballantine, 1996).
4. Trish Hall, "Infidelity and Women: Shifting Patterns," *New York Times*, 1 June 1987, B8.
5. Annette Lawson, *Adultery: An Analysis of Love and Betrayal* (New York: Basic Books, 1988).
6. Alfred Kinsey, et. al. *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female* (Philadelphia: W.B. Saunders, 1953).
7. R. Athanasiou, et.al. "Sex: A Report to *Psychology Today* Readers," *Psychology Today*, July 1970, 39-52.
8. Shere Hite, *Women and Love* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1987).
9. Carol Travis and Susan Sadd, *The Redbook Report on Female Sexuality* (New York: Delacorte Press, 1977).
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11. Linda Wolfe, *Playing Around: Women and Extramarital Sex* (New York: William Morrow, 1975).
12. "Reducing the risks of a wandering eye," *USA Today*, 6 July 1999, 10D.
13. Jan Halper, *Quiet Desperation: The Truth About Successful Men* (New York: Warner Books, 1988).
14. Frank Pittman, *Private Lies: Infidelity and the Betrayal of Intimacy* (New York: Norton, 1989).
15. William Allman, "The Mating Game," *U.S. News and World Report*, 19 July 1993, 57-63.