

# Put the Phone Down

For teens ages 12–14 · about 45–60 minutes · Moral Issues for Teens · Media & Technology · game  
**Free or Hooked?** · built on 1 Corinthians 6:12, Philippians 4:8, and Matthew 6:22–23

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Your students carry a supercomputer in their pocket. Phones can bless — Bible apps, worship music, encouragement across distance, maps, homework help, calling family. They can also hook you — through endless scroll, notification dopamine, mind pollution, sleep theft, and real relationships pushed to the background. Governments worldwide are now restricting teen phone use because experts link overuse to depression, anxiety, loneliness, and attention problems. This session is not anti-phone. It is pro-stewardship: the phone is a tool; you are not its slave.

## **Before you teach anything, pray.**

Some students feel naked without their device; some scroll until 2 a.m. and hate themselves in the morning; some have already seen things on a screen they cannot unsee. Ask the Spirit for honesty without humiliation — wisdom that leads to boundaries, not a confiscation sermon. You are teaching self-control and stewardship, not shaming every student who owns a smartphone.

## **The heart of the lesson**

Phones are designed to capture attention — endless reels, likes, pings, short stimulating clips. That is not accidental; it is engineering. The spiritual issue is mastery: Paul says all things may be lawful, but he will not be enslaved by anything (1 Cor. 6:12). Proverbs 25:28 warns that a person without self-control is like a city broken into and left without walls. The phone itself is neutral; unchecked use trains the heart, fills the eyes, and steals hours meant for prayer, Scripture, family, service, and rest.

*Don't let the phone own you — steward your time and your eyes.*

Symptoms in a 12–14 life: reaching for the phone before prayer, panic when the battery dies, scrolling through garbage without searching for it, ignoring people in the same room, mood crashing after comparison content, and Bible time or church gathering squeezed out by one more video. Jesus says the eye is the lamp of the body — what you look at all day fills your heart (Matt.

6:22–23). Psalm 101:3 refuses to set wicked things before the eyes. Philippians 4:8 sets what the mind should feed on instead.

## *Would Jesus say "enough" — or watch you scroll past midnight?*

### 1 CORINTHIANS 6:12

"All things are lawful for me, but not all things are helpful. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be dominated by anything."

### MATTHEW 6:22–23

"The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light, but if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness."

## How the session flows

- 1 Name the hook.** How phones are built to capture attention. ~8 min
- 2 Teach free vs. hooked.** Mastery, time, eyes, relationships, spiritual life. ~12 min
- 3 Play the game.** "Free or Hooked?" on screen. ~12–15 min
- 4 Quiet honesty.** Reference card, private reflection. ~5 min
- 5 Worksheet.** In class or take-home practice. ~15 min
- 6 Close with boundaries.** Prayer and one phone habit for the week. ~8 min

Screen for the game, printed cards and worksheets, pens. You do not need to ban smartphones — teach biblical filters and practical habits students can start this week.

## Leading it, part by part

### Name the hook

Ask: how many hours yesterday on your phone? Be honest — no public shaming. Ask: how did you feel afterward — rested, numb, anxious, or guilty? Land this: phones use endless scroll, notifications, and short clips to keep you hooked. That is not your fault, but it is your stewardship. France bans phones in schools for under-15s; other nations limit screen time — because leaders see what parents and pastors see: unchecked phone use wounds mental health and spiritual focus.

### Teach free vs. hooked

Walk through five filters from Scripture. **Mastery:** 1 Cor. 6:12; Prov. 25:28 — refuse to be dominated; self-control is a wall around your soul. **Time:** Eph. 5:15–16; Col. 4:5; Ps. 90:12 — redeem the time; hours on the phone are hours not spent on prayer, Bible study, family, service, reading, or rest. **Eyes and mind:** Phil. 4:8; Ps. 101:3; Matt. 6:22–23 — fill your mind with what is pure; set no wicked thing before your eyes; what you watch trains your heart. **Relationships:** Heb. 10:24–25; Prov. 27:17 — do not neglect gathering; iron sharpens iron; phones at the dinner table weaken real friendship. **Spiritual life:** honest talk about Bible reading, prayer, and church pushed aside by the scroll.

Teach hope: phones can glorify God — Bible apps, worship playlists, encouraging a friend, calling grandma. Set boundaries — screen-time limits, phone-free bed and Bible time, digital Sabbath, turn off non-essential notifications, accountability with parents. The device should serve you, not master you.

### Play the game

Run "Free or Hooked?" twelve to fifteen minutes. Round 1 sorts phone habits; Round 2 anchors Bible principles; Round 3 tackles midnight scrolling, ignoring people, and spiritual neglect; Round 4 drills key verses. Bridge afterward: points are fun; a free heart and redeemed time are the win.

### Quiet honesty

Hand out the reference card. Promise plainly that nobody is collecting it. Give five quiet minutes for students to name one app, habit, or scroll pattern they would change if Jesus saw their screen time report — without saying it aloud to the room. Protect the silence.

### Worksheet

Reinforce 1 Cor. 6:12, Phil. 4:8, and Matt. 6:22–23; T/F on mastery and time; one boundary for the week. Pairs or homework both work.

### **Close with boundaries**

Invite each student to pick one free habit (phone down at meals, Bible before scroll, one weekly fast) and cut one hooked pattern (bed scrolling, notification checking, mindless reels). Pray for students who feel owned by their phone and for parents helping with limits. Offer leaders for compulsive patterns that need more than a pep talk.

## **Take it further**

- What does 1 Corinthians 6:12 warn about becoming mastered by something — even a phone?
- What does Proverbs 25:28 teach about self-control and phone use?
- Why does Ephesians 5:15–16 urge believers to use time wisely?
- How does Philippians 4:8 apply to what fills your mind instead of endless videos?
- What does Psalm 101:3 teach about protecting your eyes and what you watch?
- How can too much phone time hurt real friendships? (Heb. 10:25; Prov. 27:17)
- According to Matthew 6:22–23, how does what you look at affect your whole life?
- How might phone addiction hurt Bible reading, prayer, and church?
- What changes could you make this week to keep phone use under godly control?
- How can you use your phone to glorify God and serve others?

## **A final word**

Teens need their phones less than they think and God's voice more than they know. Give them permission to use technology wisely and courage to put it down when it starts owning them. The goal is not smashing every screen — it is refusing to be hooked. When they learn free vs. hooked, they can still carry a phone — but the phone won't carry them away from Christ.