

# Technology and the Good News

by Carol Duerksen

## MATERIALS AND ADVANCE PREPARATION:

- 1 Copies of Winter 07/08 *With Magazine* or the story at the end of the session for each student.
- 2 Bibles for each student
- 3 A donkey—stuffed, ceramic, plastic, live—whatever you want to bring.
- 4 Arrange a display in the center of the room with a Bible, cell phone, laptop, iPod or MP3 player, and the donkey.
- 5 Paper and markers is using the illustration option in Reflect.

## SESSION OUTLINE

### FOCUS

Invite students to study the display and to create a story that involves all of the elements in the display. The story should have some sort of moral or lesson at the end. Depending on the size and creativity of your group, they can do this as individuals or divide them into small groups.

Share the stories and talk about them. Affirm students for their creativity!

Transition comment: Let's look at a story from the Bible about a donkey, and see what it has to do with technology.

### CONNECT TO THE BIBLE STORY

Hand out copies of the story or *With Magazine* (the story begins on page 4.)

Read the story together, but DO NOT READ THE POSTSCRIPT at this time. Ask students to turn to Numbers 22:22-35 and read the Biblical account of the talking donkey.

Discuss: What do you think this story has to do with technology? (Don't accept any "I don't know's." Strongly encourage students to think about it and come up with some ideas.)

Read the Postscript together. Discuss how the writer of this article tied technology in with the donkey story. What is her main point?

## REFLECT

Discuss: How has technology enhanced the spreading of God's word? How has it hindered it? How has it helped your relationship with God? How has it hindered it? How do you personally use it to share God's love with other people? How could you use it more?

Options: Rather than discussing the questions above, pose them to the students and ask them to create skits or illustrations to show their answers, then share those responses with the group.

## RESPOND

So what now? Ask students to come up with one thing they will try to do for the next week that uses technology to share God's love with someone else. For example, they will send a text message or use Facebook to share their faith with someone else, or send a Bible verse that will help someone through a tough time. If students are willing to share what they will do, and be accountable to report back to the group next week, that would be great.

## "WHAT TO DO WHEN THE SERVER IS DOWN"

by Leola Floren Gee

I'm a prophet. Ask around. I have more street cred than anybody within a hundred miles. That's why people—important people—come to me when they have problems.

So there I was, sneaking a peek into the future, thinking I could use an infusion of cash in my wallet, when out of nowhere came a posse from Balak, the king of Moab. "He whom you bless is blessed," they said, "and he whom you curse is cursed." For a bunch of goons, they had very good grammar skills.

I appreciated the endorsement. However, I know better than to take action before I check things out with God. When I ran it by him, God asked what the men from Moab wanted.

"Balak, the Moab king, has it in for a crowd that came up out of Egypt. He's afraid there are so many members in this Israelite gang, they pose a threat. He's offering me wads of cash if I travel to Moab and curse them."

"Don't go with these men," God told me. "You are not to curse the people, for they are blessed."

That was disappointing. The next morning I sent Balak's posse back home empty-handed. "God won't let me do it," I told them.

I figured I'd have to find another way to generate some cash. Magazine sales, maybe. Mow a few lawns. Dog sit.

But wouldn't you know? Within a short time, more men from Balak showed up in my front yard,

begging me to curse those irritating runaways from Egypt. Rumor had it they'd gotten into some trouble with Pharaoh. I wondered why God was looking out for them.

Meanwhile, Balak had sweetened the deal: "I will honor you richly, and I will do whatever you say," was the message. Wow. A blank check. Think of all the good I could do with that! Add a rec room with a big-screen TV... maybe a nicely tiled swimming pool ... triple garage ... good stuff.

But no. "If Balak were to give me all the silver and gold in his house, I still couldn't disobey God," I told the men. To myself I thought, Huh. I wonder just how much silver and gold is stashed away in that big ol' mansion of his.

And then it occurred to me: Maybe with some encouragement, God would change his mind.

"Spend the night!" I said to my visitors. "I'll check with God one more time just to make sure I heard the message correctly."

Sure enough! After I'd asked him for about the 47th time, God finally spoke to me during the night and told me I could go with the men. He also said something about speaking only what he told me to, but I figured I could sort out the details later. I was on my way! Who wants to be a millionaire? Me, baby!

The next morning I saddled my donkey, threw a few snacks into a backpack, and off we went. I could almost hear Balak's gold and silver jingling in my pockets. First thing I'd do ... add a little bling and swap the old donkey for a nice, slick camel. Or maybe even a turbo-charged chariot. Something befitting a prophet.

There I was, bouncing along on the road to riches, when my stupid, mangy donkey veered off the path and into a field. I whacked her a couple of times with a stick, but she shivered, and it was all I could do to steer her back in the right direction.

She was okay for a while, but a bit later she seemed to freak out, and this time she crushed my foot against a wall. I decided to knock some sense into her, and we traveled on. Finally, with her ears laid back, she snorted and dropped on the spot, refusing to budge. I guess you could say my server was down, roughly 3,400 years before the invention of the Internet. I beat the daylights out of that dumb beast, and just as I was aiming for a raw spot on her sorry rump, she turned around and spoke.

And no, I wasn't on meds of any kind. I tell you, the donkey talked.

"What have I done to you," she said, "that you've hit me three different times?"

"I hit you because you're mocking me! And if I had had a sword instead of a stick, you'd be dead now!"

"Hay!" said the donkey. Or maybe it was, "Hey!" I was a little rattled. After all, I'm a prophet, not Doctor Dolittle. "Have I ever failed you? Haven't I been a good donkey for as long as you can remember?"

She had me there.

Even more important, he had me. God, I mean. At that moment, he opened my eyes, and I saw an angel of the Lord standing directly in front of us with a drawn sword.

“Why have you struck your donkey three times?” asked the angel. “She saw me and turned aside three times. If she hadn’t, I would have killed you and let her live.”

I got the point. I offered to turn back, but the angel said I could go with the men. However, I was to speak only what God told me to say.

It was then I realized—there wasn’t going to be any big-screen TV for me. No silver, no gold, no swimming pool. No way was God going to let me curse Israel. At least my donkey didn’t say, “I told you so.”

### **POSTSCRIPT**

The prophet Balaam’s story is found in Numbers 22–23, and you probably won’t be surprised to learn that Balaam winds up blessing Israel three times, much to the dismay of Balak, the Moab king. In fact, the king unwittingly pays for the sacrifices that lead up to each blessing of his enemy. You know how the sad “had a bad day” song plays when a contestant gets bounced from American Idol? You can pretty much imagine that tune in the background while Balak stamps his foot.

Some things don’t change. Even today, powerful people like Balak think they can get whatever they want. And people like Balaam are tempted to use their gifts for monetary gain, even when it means hurting others. Although Balaam rationalized his decision to go along with Balak’s men, the angel who stopped his donkey in her tracks knew better. Balaam was planning to do the wrong thing, but God sent a message: Stop!

God’s messages to us aren’t always as dramatic. They may arrive during regular worship or Bible study time, or as a result of prayer or counseling from a godly friend or mentor. They may come through books, music, and even the Internet.

After all, technology is cool. The more we discover about God’s creation, the more we find ways to use those discoveries to serve God. As you read these words, the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ is being spread across the globe via chat rooms, Podcasts, and text messages. As believers, it’s exciting to be part of that. You can punch a few numbers into a cell phone, and someone on the other side of the Earth can hear your voice. You can type into your laptop and swap thoughts with folks in Beijing, Bangkok, Buenos Aires, Berlin, and Buffalo. Never in history has it been so easy for us to communicate with each other. Technology can be a terrific tool when it comes to sharing God’s Word with a world desperately in need of that blessing.

Nevertheless, as you’re charging up your phone, your iPod, and your laptop, remember the lesson that Balaam learned the hard way: When God wants to send a message, he doesn’t need technology. A donkey will do.