

Cellular Catastrophes

by Caleb Detweiler

MATERIALS AND ADVANCE PREPARATION:

Copies of the story for the following readers:

- Narrator (the written parts for Jeff)
- Jeff (the spoken parts)
- Dad
- Mom

GOAL:

To portray cell phones as a useful tool, but they shouldn't take priority over personal relationships.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

- 1 What was important to the father?
—talking to his son in the car
- 2 Why did he get angry with Jeff in the car? How did Jeff's actions make him feel?
—Jeff kept talking to his friends, which interrupted the dad and son's conversation.
—His dad felt neglected or that their conversation was unimportant.
- 3 Did Jeff think he was doing anything wrong?
—no, he was just using his cell phone
- 4 What was bad about Jeff having a cell phone? Good?
—Bad—it made him think talking to his friends was more important than talking to his dad.
—Good—it allowed him to call 911 during the accident.
- 5 Besides giving his dad the phone, what could Jeff have done to prevent his dad from getting angry?
—he could have told his friends he would talk to them later.
- 6 Obviously cell phones are useful, but what steps can we take to prevent it from becoming our main concern?
—if the phone rings during a conversation, ignore the phone call and call the person back later.
—Many people feel like they can't go anywhere without their phone, maybe deliberately leave it behind sometimes so it feels less important.

Read the following editorial by Carol Duerksen from the winter issue of With.

I've had a cell phone for years, but I just learned to text message a few days ago. I was sitting in IHOP, enjoying a goodbye breakfast with Theresia, an exchange student we hosted five years ago who'd come back to visit us. She showed me how to text message, and I was like a kid with a new toy. I found a message someone had sent me a week ago, and quickly responded. She wrote back, and I was so excited!

We went to the airport, and soon it was time for Theresia to leave. We gave each other a goodbye hug, and she joined the line of people waiting to go through security. I watched for awhile, and then checked to see if I had any new text messages. I messed around with the phone a bit, wrote a message, and when I looked up ... Theresia was gone. Disappeared around the corner.

No goodbye wave. No last personal connection. I felt terrible. I imagined her looking back at me for one more smile and wave, and I was buried in my phone.

Excuse my English, but "that ain't right." Within the wonders of technology we find the potential to increase or decrease our connections with each other. Jesus called us to be "salt and light" in the world. What does it mean to be salt and light in a world of Halo, iPods, text messaging, and facebook?

DISCUSS:

- 1 What role does your cell phone play in your life?
- 2 What does it mean to be salt and light in a world of Halo, iPods, text messaging, and facebook?

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“CELLULAR CATASTROPHES”

By Caleb Detweiler

It was my freshmen year of high school and I was filled with an array of emotions. Excitement, curiosity, fear and anxiety swam through my head. However, this was a move I had been anticipating for the past eight years and it was finally here; it was 8:15, time to start the first day of class. My dad rolled the Jeep to a stop and I climbed out of the passenger seat.

“Have a good day at school, see you at 10,” he said with a smirk on his face.

“Funny, Dad.” I rolled my eyes, slammed the door shut and walked to the front door.

My dad was the Math teacher at the high school and I had the “privilege” of taking Geometry from him. Don’t get me wrong, my dad and I have a great relationship. I enjoyed our talks on the way to school. I was extremely busy and it was our rare opportunity to have quality alone time together. However, I just wasn’t too excited about having him in class. He would probably make some kind of stupid comment and try to crack jokes that were funny to him, but not to the rest of the class. Yet, despite my worries, having my dad as a teacher wasn’t a big problem. The real problem began mid-way through the first semester.

The majority of my friends all had cell phones since a lot of them drove to school and had their own car. Yet, my parents didn’t think it was necessary for me to have a school permit since my dad could drive me back and forth from school. Therefore he didn’t think I needed a cell phone since I wasn’t traveling around by myself. But, that night at supper I decided to ask my parents for a cell phone anyway.

“All my friends have cell phones, Dad, why can’t I have one? Then you wouldn’t have to wait around until I was done with soccer practice. I could call you and then you would know when to pick me up,” I argued.

“That’s a good point and it would save me some time,” he stated calmly. “How about you use Tommy’s cell phone to call me when practice is over? He’s your friend—he shouldn’t mind.”

“What, I can’t use my friend’s cell phone,” I complained. “I’ll waste his minutes and plus it would be easier for me to have my own,” I stammered.

“Jeff, listen. Your father and I don’t think it is appropriate for you to have a cell phone yet. You don’t need one. Once you start driving we’ll get you one,” my mother calmly stated.

“Fine!” I yelled and then stood up from the table, went to my room and slammed the door.

For the next couple of weeks I kept bringing up the subject and I tried to explain how it would benefit the whole family, but my parents didn’t seem to buy my argument. Therefore, I decided to give up. I would just have to wait until I turned sixteen.

Christmas rolled around and I was tempted to ask my parents for a cell phone, but I decided my efforts wouldn’t sway the situation in my favor. So, that Christmas morning I opened my presents, expecting the usual clothes, socks, money and a variety of stocking stuffers. I opened my first present and sure enough, it was a new shirt from Aunt Ida. I opened up the rest of my presents and then lined them all up so Mom could take a picture. She raised the camera and was about to push the button when dad interrupted.

“Shouldn’t he have all his presents in the picture?”

“You’re right, how could I forget?” my mom said, smiling.

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My dad then pulled out my last present. I ripped off the green wrapping paper and in my hands was an LG Sprint phone box. I opened the box and reached in to pull out the phone.

"What?" I looked up at my parents in confusion. The phone wasn't in the box. Then I realized—this was probably one of my dad's "funny" jokes.

"Good one, Dad," I muttered and tossed the box under the Christmas tree.

My dad started to laugh and then tossed me the phone which he had previously taken out of the box.

"Just kidding, Jeff. Merry Christmas."

After Christmas break classes were back in session and my dad and I resumed our morning conversations in the Jeep. That morning we were having a rather deep conversation when my phone rang. Excited about using my phone, I quickly answered it and for the remainder of the trip I talked to my friend Tyson. We arrived at the school and I climbed out of the parked Jeep and headed towards the doors, the phone was still pressed to my ear.

"Thanks for the talk, Jeff," my dad said. He sounded disappointed.

The next morning business resumed as usual and we soon found ourselves talking about the same topic as the previous morning. Then my phone rang again, and I answered. When we arrived at the school, I jumped out of the Jeep and walked inside.

"I guess we'll finish our talk tonight," my dad yelled towards my back.

I turned around and gave him a thumbs up and continued my conversation on the phone.

The next morning my dad insisted we continue the conversation since soccer practice went late last night and we were unable to finish our conversation. I was fine with this and listened as my dad began to talk. However, within five minutes of the drive, my phone went off again and I reached to answer it.

"Jeff, please put the phone down," my dad said.

"This is important, Dad. I need to talk to Rachel about our project."

"No, for the last two mornings I have put up with these interruptions. I am trying to tell you something important and I need you to listen."

"Dad, we can talk about it later, come on. I really need to answer this call."

"Jeff, give me the phone!"

"No, it's my phone."

"Jeff!" He reached over to grab the phone from my hands.

"Dad! Look out!" I yelled.

My dad swerved to miss the deer and our Jeep went sliding down the ditch and crashed into a telephone pole. Dad's side of the Jeep was pushed in, and he lay slumped against the steering wheel.

"Dad? Are you all right?" I reached over to try and wake him, but he didn't respond.

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"Dad!" I screamed, tears running down my face. I grabbed my cell phone and with fingers shaking, I dialed 911.

The moments after the phone call were a blur. Time seemed to pass in slow motion as the ambulance pulled up and took my dad and me to the hospital.

I sat next to my dad in the hospital room the next day waiting for him to respond. I didn't suffer any serious injuries—just a bump on my head and a couple of bruises. But my dad was still unconscious. So I sat there with thoughts about the previous day racing through my head. I just wanted to reverse time and put my cell phone down. Why did I have to argue with my dad about that? It was a stupid cell phone! I laid my head down on the bed next to my dad and started to cry.

"Jeff," my dad whispered.

I raised my head and I cried even harder as I reached out to give my dad a hug.

"Easy," he groaned.

"Sorry," I quickly let go. I started to explain how sorry I was and that he could take my cell phone away.

"Jeff," he interrupted.

"Yes?"

"I love you, son."

That made me cry even more.

"I love you too, Dad."

After my dad was released from the hospital and he returned to his job teaching at the school, we resumed our normal conversations in the car.

I didn't lose my cell phone, but from that day on, I was always conscious about when I answered my cell phone and made sure I didn't interrupt the people I was talking to in person.