

1.

REALIZE THAT MOST BAD DECISIONS BEGAN FIVE CHOICES AGO.

STOP FLIRTING WITH DISASTER.

It usually starts with something small: a small lie, a seemingly insignificant decision to go to a friend's house when his parents aren't home, or a click on a website that is known to have inappropriate content. It doesn't seem like a big deal at the time, but with each choice, we take one step closer to temptation.

The small lie works, but a few days later you're questioned about it, and you cover it up with a bigger lie. That lie gives birth to others, and before you know it, you're waist deep in deception and you're wondering how you got there.

It all started five choices ago, with a small lie.

Your friend texts you and invites you to his house on Friday night, even though his parents won't be home. *No big deal*, you tell yourself. When you arrive, your friends are drinking. You don't want to be snobby and leave, so you decide to just "hang" and hope they don't offer you anything. Before long, your friend pours you a drink. You don't want to make a scene, so you thank him and just hold the glass. It doesn't work. Within five minutes your friend notices and asks you point-blank, "Aren't you gonna try it?" Everyone is staring at you. How do you say no? It's so difficult when you're in that situation!

Was it as difficult five choices ago when you first received the text?

You're working on some homework and you take your laptop computer into your bedroom and close the door. After an hour of homework, you take a break and check your friends' status on your favorite sites. You see a link that reads "hilarious," but it has a picture of a girl in some revealing clothes. It's not nudity, so you click on the site and watch the video. Sure enough, it is really funny. . .and a little bit racy. Now you're thinking about the girl in the video. The site provides plenty of links, including one that is sure to take you to more videos with girls like the one you just saw. A few links later, you're looking at full nudity. You don't even know how you got there. . .but it seemed nearly impossible to stop or turn back.

Was it impossible to resist when you decided to take your computer into your room and shut the door?

Small choices open doors to bigger decisions. We may think it's no big deal

to tell a little fib or go to a friend's house when his parents are gone or go behind closed doors with a computer. But often we're just fooling ourselves and inviting temptation.

Stop flirting with disaster.

Don't get me wrong. It's impossible to avoid every temptation in life. We can't hide ourselves in the basement and never go outside. (Don't try it; it's not fun.) Temptations will always surface. But when you run across something tempting, steer clear of it. Don't walk toward it. The closer you get, the more you're playing with fire.

The apostle Paul gives us some good advice:

No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it. (1 Corinthians 10:13 NIV)

That's just it; God always provides a way of escape. But let's be honest: sometimes, instead of looking for a way to escape, we try to see how close we can get to the temptation without giving in. Then we wonder, *Why was that so difficult to resist?*

We probably should have fixed our eyes on the escape route five choices ago!


GO AHEAD, ANSWER. . .

- + In the examples above, what were some ways of early escape?
- + Why don't people use these escape routes while it's still easy?
- + What are some situations where you have seen small decisions lead to bigger choices?
- + What escape routes could you have taken?
- + Why didn't you?



FINAL THOUGHTS

As we spend time getting to know God and trusting Him in everyday decisions, we'll begin to rely on Him to help us look for escape routes early. Don't flirt with danger. Look for the ways out that God provides.





2.

TURN OFF YOUR SMARTPHONE BEFORE YOU CRAWL INTO BED.

WHEN IT'S BEDTIME, PUT YOUR IPHONE TO BED AS WELL.

Give it a good-night kiss on the screen if you'd like, but then put it away. You don't need it on during the night.

Start a new habit if you must. As you brush your teeth, post your status one last time and then power down for the night. Your friends don't need to be able to get ahold of you. You don't need to be "connected" during the wee hours of the night. Human beings have been sleeping without technology for thousands of years. You can swing it.

Researchers have discovered that teenagers need anywhere from 8.5 to 9.25 hours of sleep per night to recharge mentally and physically for the next day. Most teens, however, average 6.5 to 7.5 hours of sleep per night due to self-imposed demanding schedules, too much caffeine, and . . .yes. . .an overindulgence of technology.¹ In other words, a busy schedule, a can of Red Bull, and your smartphone are costing you a good night's sleep!

These research findings are pretty scary. The physical consequences of a lack of sleep include diabetes, depression, decreased self-control, and falling asleep at the wheel. (Drowsy driving causes more than 100,000 accidents and 1,500 deaths a year.) Lack of sleep also affects brain circuitry and hormone regulation.

Our brains need rest. According to the experts, students usually have a better chance of doing well on a test if they've gotten a good night's sleep, rather than sacrificing sleep to cram in some last-minute studying. (Of course, if the student had simply put down the game controller after school and studied then, he would have been ready for the test *and* gotten enough sleep!)

So how do our smartphones contribute to our lack of sleep?

1. The phones wake us up after we've fallen asleep. Even if we go to bed on time, our friends may not be on the same schedule. In the most recent Sleep in America poll, almost 1 in 5 teens admitted to being woken up one or more times per night from a text and sometimes even a call.²

2. Our phones keep us from relaxing and unwinding. Let's face it: today's phones are much more than just phones. They are technological Swiss Army knives—a phone, computer, calendar, GPS, YouTube, Google, games, camera. . .the list goes on. Many of these activities get us wired or amped up so we can't go to sleep. Games can boost adrenaline, and bright screens can actually suppress the secretion of melatonin, the hormone that induces sleepiness. On top of all that, a text from Chris informing us what Ashley said might make us mad! It's impossible to sleep when our hearts are racing.

I know. It's not fun to have to turn off such a cool gadget. But it's also not fun flunking a math quiz, getting suspended for losing your cool and fighting, or falling asleep on the drive home, all because you felt the need to stay up half the night texting Chris and Amanda about what a pain Ashley is!

GO AHEAD, ANSWER. . .

- + What are some of your favorite features or apps on your phone?
- + How might these become a distraction to you, day or night?
- + Do you keep your phone on at night? If so, how often does it disturb your sleep? Be honest.
- + How is your phone most likely to wake you at night?
- + Given what all the doctors and other experts recommend, what do you think is the wise thing to do?
- + How can you start this habit this week?



FINAL THOUGHTS

Your sleep is more important than Ashley. (Who is this Ashley anyway? Do we need to have a talk? . . .) Turn off your phone at night. The consequences of leaving it on are pretty straightforward, and let's be real: you aren't going to miss much if it's off. Do yourself a favor and power down when you brush your teeth.

