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Jacob's Dream
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Jacob had a ladder. Theres a ladder for you too.

I expect you like to do what you want to do, and you dont appreciate anyones telling you that you cant do this and you cant do that. But I also expect there are times when you wish there were someone you could turn to for counsel.

Jacob was at this point. Normally quite sure of himself, right now he was in one awful mess. He had lied to his father; and he had gotten his brother, Esau, so angry with him that Esau had vowed to kill him as soon as their ailing father died. Their mother had told him to go visit her relatives till things at home cooled down, if they ever would.

Now, late on the second day of his very long journey (his relatives lived hundreds of miles away, and the only way to reach them was to walk), Jacobs life looked very, very dark. He couldnt go back home, and he had no idea how his relatives would receive him. As sunlight faded he cleared away a few rocks and arranged a stone for a pillow and lay down and slept. He dreamed of that ladder weve all heard about, that stretched from earth to heaven, with angels ascending and descending upon it. At the top was Jesus, and Jacob heard Him say, "I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land" (Genesis 28:15 NKJV). What good news!

We call that ladder Jacobs ladder, as if Jacob were the only person God gave such a ladder to. But Jesus told Nathaniel that angels ascend and descend on the Son of man (John 1:51). The ladder in the dream was, indeed, Jacobs ladder. But there is a ladder for everyone, one for me, and one for you too. Your ladder is right beside you. In the darkness of the night, if you feel depressed and worried, know that your ladder is beside your bed, in your dormitory room or in your bedroom at home. Jesus is at the top looking down upon you, and angels are ascending and descending, taking your requests to Jesus and returning with answers and blessings. Be everlastingly encouraged.

God also uses friends to guide His people, faulty and awkward as we are, and the editors and authors of ADVENTISTS AFFIRM hope that this issue will be especially helpful to the youth and young adults of our church. We asked Jesus to commission the angels to bring us good counsel to pass along, and we believe they did.

If you think the Adventist dress code is desperately legalistic, be sure to read the article by Staci Osterman. We guarantee that when you find what Staci discovered, you will look at the whole dress question differently.

If your school bills are too high and you are thinking of joining the Army to get free tuition, there are three articles for you. Jan Doward tells several thrilling stories of young Adventists who remained faithful to the Sabbath and to the principle of noncombatancy in World War II. Ask yourself whether you are willing to endure what those young men went through. Ekkehardt Mueller in "Noncombatancy" tells us why noncombatancy is so important. And
Harriet Clark tells how to find a less expensive Adventist institution to study in.

Are the martial arts good for self-defense and exercise? Before you get involved, let Pastor Bayani Pastrana give you an insiders view. He taught martial arts for many years and says there is more in them than meets the eye.

Are you dating? Or hoping to be? You must read Mr. and Mrs. Schafers account of their courtship. Its delightful.

Are you sick and tired of always following other people? Robert Neall believes everyone can become a leader and his article will help you. He writes as a teacher of academy students. Dr. Sam Koranteng-Pipim writes from his experience counseling Adventist students at the University of Michigan. The Ellen White selections include some of her most popular quotations.

I could go on. There is still more in this issue! It is our prayer that as you read, those angels going up and down your ladder will help you to AFFIRM in your life that you are one of Gods true and faithful ADVENTISTS.
When people look at me, what do they see? It is a question I often ask myself. What first attracts them? Is it my hair color, my hairstyle, my clothing? Or is it the radiant glow on my face? Is it something on the outside or something shining from within?

Our world puts great emphasis on a woman's outward beauty. Constantly we are invited to wear the latest fashions, style our hair in the hottest new looks, and display the most darling adornments. We are tempted to feel that if we don’t, we will never feel good about ourselves. We will never be noticed. We will never find the true love and admiration we desire— and deserve.

The Scriptures, however, tell us that it is not the make-up, the adornment, or the stylish dress that God longs to see. He is not so much concerned about what attracts superficial admiration as He is to see “the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price” (1 Pet 3:3, 4). It is the authentic beauty of modesty and virtue that He values.

Beauty within. As a young girl I was quite preoccupied with my looks. I wanted to look pretty. I wanted my hair to be just right and my clothing to be like my friends’. So much of my self-worth stemmed from my perception of how I would be seen! Did I look like the others? Did I fit in? I remember the day I told my mother I didn’t want to dress the way she had been dressing me anymore. I wanted to wear the cute clothing all the other girls wore. I praise God for a very wise mother who said to me, “Staci, before making any important decisions we need to ask God what He thinks. I want you to study this topic on your own and then come tell me what God showed you.”

Surprise! When I began my study of the Bible and Spirit of Prophecy on the dress topic, I wasn’t convinced that God was all that concerned about how I dressed. But as I read more and more, I began to realize that He was very specific about which dress styles were appropriate for me as a Christian young lady and which were not. I was surprised by the amount of counsel given. More than anything, though, I began to recognize that the dress issue was really an issue of my heart. My focus had been on the externals while Jesus was concerned about the inside—my personal relationship with Him. I remember the struggle I went through as I talked to God about my clothing and whether or not it pleased Him. As I prayed He began to fill my heart with a longing to be truly beautiful by allowing Him to give me beauty within.

Clothing in the Bible. Since the time of the Garden of Eden, a person’s dress has been a symbol of something much deeper than just cloth covering skin. Adam and Eve in their pre-sin state were clothed with a garment of soft, white light. “This robe of light was a symbol of their spiritual garments of heavenly innocence. Had they remained true to God it would ever have continued to enshroud them. But when sin entered, they severed their connection with God, and the light that had encircled them departed. Naked and ashamed, they tried to supply the place of the heavenly garments by sewing together fig leaves for a covering” (Christ’s Object Lessons, p. 311). These fig-leaf aprons were symbolic of their self-righteousness. “The fig-leaves represent the arguments used to cover disobedience” (Review and Herald, Nov 15, 1898).

God knew that these immodest garments were inadequate for clothing so He fashioned for
the guilty pair coats of skin (Gen 3:21). Because a lamb had to die in the process, these coats symbolized the righteousness that could be theirs through faith in the Savior.

**Mandatory blue ribbon.** During the time of the Exodus, the clothing worn by the Israelites had special symbolic meaning. Moses was commanded to tell the people to “make them fringes in the borders of their garments throughout their generations, and that they put upon the fringe of the borders a ribband of blue: … that ye may look upon it, and remember all the commandments of the Lord, and do them” (Num15:38, 39). The blue ribbon symbolized the people’s commitment to be obedient to God.

God gave remarkably detailed instructions regarding the garments worn by Aaron, the high priest. “God specified every detail concerning the garments of those who ministered before Him. Thus we are taught that He has a preference in regard to the dress of those who serve Him. Very specific were the directions given in regard to Aaron’s robes, for his dress was symbolic” (Testimonies for the Church, 6:96). His garments declared to everyone that he had been set apart and consecrated for a holy work.

Finally, the book of Revelation depicts two women, a virgin and a harlot, representing two systems of worship, one true and one false. John describes them by their apparel for it symbolizes their doctrine.

### A SYMBOL

**The Bible calls us** “a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people” (1 Pet 2:9). As such our dress is symbolic. Speaking of the symbolic nature of Aaron’s garments, Ellen White writes, “So the dress of Christ’s followers should be symbolic. In all things we are to be representatives of Him. Our appearance in every respect should be characterized by neatness, modesty, and purity” (Ibid., emphasis added).

What does our clothing symbolize? First of all, it symbolizes the condition of our heart. If pride, vanity, or rebellion is in the heart it will be revealed in gaudy or immodest clothing. On the other hand, a heart that is humble and surrendered will choose a modest, simple, appropriate style of dress. “Dress is an index of the mind and heart. That which is hung upon the outside is the sign of what is within” (Mind, Character, and Personality, 1:289). I found that when I allowed God to examine my clothing, I really had invited Him to search my heart and see if there was any wicked way therein (Ps 139:23, 24). “When the heart is converted, everything that is out of harmony with the Word of God will drop off” (Evangelism, p. 272).

Our dress is also symbolic of God’s Lordship in our lives. Just as the blue-hemmed garments of the Israelites announced to all who saw them that the Israelites were a commandment-keeping people, so our clothing may announce to the world that we are God’s obedient children, following His standard and not the world’s. One of the major ways the world should recognize us as God’s remnant people and be drawn to the Christ living within us is by the way we dress. This, I believe, is why God has given us so much counsel on the subject!

“The dress reform is treated by some with great indifference and by others with contempt, because there is a cross attached to it. For this cross I thank God. It is just what we need to distinguish and separate God’s commandment-keeping people from the world. The dress reform answers to us as did the ribbon of blue to ancient Israel” (Testimonies for the Church, 3:171).

“The children of Israel, after they were brought out of Egypt, were commanded to have a simple ribbon of blue in the border of their garments, to distinguish them from the nations around them, and to signify that they were God’s peculiar people. The people of God are not now required to have a special mark placed upon their garments. But in the New Testament we are often referred to ancient Israel for examples. *If God gave such definite directions to His ancient people in regard to their dress, will not the dress of His people in this age come under His notice? Should there not be in their dress a distinction from that of the world? Should not the people of God, who are His peculiar treasure, seek even in their dress to glorify God?”* (Ellen G. White in Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary, 1:1114, emphasis added).

**Pure in heart.** When we realize that our dress symbolizes whether or not we have submitted our heart to the Lordship of Christ, we begin to view other issues, like modesty, differently. We see modesty in clothing as a way to express our love for Christ and our brethren.

### A NICE COMPLIMENT
Not long ago I met a friend of mine in the Andrews University library. After our usual greeting, he asked if he could pay me a compliment. I blushed a little and said, “OK.” He said, “Staci, I just wanted to thank you for the way you dress. It is so refreshing to see a young lady dressed modestly. This afternoon in the cafeteria I had to avoid looking at several young ladies seated at my table because their clothing was so revealing. I don’t have to do that when I am around you, and I want you to know how much I appreciate it.” His words surprised me a little, but they also made my heart glow with joy. They reconfirmed in my mind a principle the Lord had shown me several years before—that I am the keeper of my brother’s heart.

We live in a society where various degrees of nudity are accepted. Most clothing, especially summer wear, leaves little to the imagination. I am not a man, but I have talked with enough male friends to realize that the sight of a woman’s body affects a man much differently than it does a female. While God created women to be aroused by touch and tenderness, men often need only a visual stimulus.

Let us help the boys! Recently I had an enlightening conversation on this topic with one of my close male friends. My heart ached as he explained to me the struggle he and other godly men face as they see professing Christian ladies dressed in provocative ways. Unfortunately, they can’t talk to anyone about the problem because they fear they’ll be perceived as having perverted minds. “It is not that way at all,” he told me. “I pray constantly for Christ to help me keep a pure heart. It is just that when I am talking with a young lady with a gaping neckline or a tight shirt, I feel terribly uncomfortable. I am the one that feels exploited! I don’t think she has any idea how hard it is for me to see her.” Having heard his pleading cry to God to save him from the temptation of lust, I told myself that never again would I argue for my right to dress as I please!

The Psalmist asked an important question. “Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord? or who shall stand in his holy place? He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart” (Ps 24:3, 4). It is only the pure in heart that will see God (Mat 5:8).

Young ladies, we have a responsibility to help our brothers keep their hearts pure. We should never wear anything that would be enticing, for if by our clothing we lead a brother to sin, even in his thoughts, we are held at least partially responsible! (See Mat 5:27, 28.) “What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body” (1 Cor6:19, 20). We do not glorify God by exposing our body or even certain parts of it to the eyes of others.

Modesty in dress is a reflection of modesty in the heart. The woman who is trying to gain a man’s attention will flaunt her sexuality by her clothing, or lack of it. A virtuous woman, however, will expose her body to only one man—the one God leads her to marry. Purity in her heart will be seen in purity in her dress and actions. I constantly pray that God will help me to dress in a way that honors my future husband and also protects the men that God brings into my life in the meantime. It is my privilege to help them keep a pure heart. This, I believe, is included in Christ’s command to “love thy neighbour as thyself” (Mat 22:39).

Disappointment. Unfortunately, today’s fashion-design business is not based on love for others, but on self-love. The book Fashion and the Unconscious reveals some startling facts about the four principles influencing today’s clothing design. The first is the utility principle, the activity for which the clothing is intended, such as sportswear or uniforms. Next is the hierarchical principle, an appeal to human pride, enabling the wearer to feel proud and haughty. The autonomy principle is intended to give the wearer a sense of total self-expression. Finally, there is the seduction principle, or sex appeal, which is used particularly in the design of women’s clothing.

This book further states that many of today’s prominent male fashion designers are homosexuals who design “punishment fashions” for women. The motive for this is that the designer is either afraid of women or hates women and intentionally designs for her clothing that is uncomfortable or so provocative that she falls victim to sex crimes. Years ago God warned us about these fashions. “Satan is constantly devising some new style of dress that shall prove an injury to physical and moral health; and he exults when he sees professed Christians eagerly accept the fashions that he has invented” (Testimonies for the Church,
Ladies, if we dress according to the common fashions of our day we are not dressing modestly. These fashions are specifically designed to arouse sexuality, whether that is our intention or not. Anything that accentuates our form or leaves us partially naked has no place in the dress of a woman professing godliness. This would seem to eliminate short dresses, low necklines, sleeveless blouses, sheer or tight clothing, to say nothing of bikini bathing suits. We must do right even if the world does differently. It may seem like nothing to us, but if we cause a weaker brother to sin we cannot plead innocence!

**Nakedness.** Because our senses have been desensitized by the age of nakedness in which we live, how do we determine what is and what is not modest? We need to make the Bible our standard and not the trends of an ever-changing society. In the Bible, nakedness is always a sign of sin and degradation. After Adam and Eve sinned, they realized they were naked, stripped of the robe of light that had completely clothed them. In Isaiah 47:1-3 God describes the virgin daughter of Babylon as being in a state of nakedness and shame. Her legs are bare and her thighs uncovered.

Nakedness is the result of sin and rebellion towards God, but once a person is converted the result is a full clothing of the body. As soon as the demoniac met Christ and the devils departed from him, he sat “at the feet of Jesus, clothed, and in his right mind” (Luk 8:35). We are each counseled to buy of the Lord “white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear” (Rev 3:18). This is the robe of Christ’s righteousness, which covers us completely from our sins. We see here again the symbolic nature of our dress. A godly man or woman will not want to wear anything that reveals nakedness, but rather clothing that appropriately covers the body, symbolizing the spiritual covering they have received in Christ.

**Distinction between the sexes.** Modest clothing, however, does more than just cover our nakedness. It is also an affirmation of the differences God made between male and female when He created us. In the beginning God gave men and women distinctive roles that would be complementary to each other’s, allowing the two to serve God in beautiful harmony. However, Satan hates God’s plan and has done his best to blur the distinctions between the sexes by creating fashions and hairstyles that are almost identical to each other. He has led men and women to look upon their distinct roles in disdain and to adopt the fashions he has designed.

“There is an increasing tendency to have women in their dress and appearance as near like the other sex as possible and to fashion their dress very much like that of men, but God pronounces it abomination.” “God designed that there should be a plain distinction between the dress of men and women, and has considered the matter of sufficient importance to give explicit directions in regard to it; for the same dress worn by both sexes would cause confusion and great increase of crime” (*Testimonies for the Church*, 1:457, 460). Could the rise in homosexuality and sexual perversion be linked to this loss of distinction between men’s and women’s clothing?

**The American costume.** God spoke against one dress style popularized in the 1850s because it blurred this sexual distinction. When Elizabeth Smith Miller launched the dress reform movement to free women from the tyrant of unhealthful dress, she put on a short skirt over pants, a style later known as the American costume. Her outfit created quite a stir in Seneca Falls, NY, where her cousin Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and a neighbor, Amelia Jenks Bloomer, joined her in the movement. What started as a reform for the improved health of women soon became a women’s rights issue and part of the growing feminist movement. Though it received a lot of opposition at first, this dress style became more popular over time, and eventually the skirt was eliminated, leaving only the pants.

“Dress reform was much more than a change in fashion. It was an organized social movement that attacked one of the fundamental structures of society, that of clothing as a key indicator of both gender and social position. … Dress reform was clearly a transgression of true womanhood because woman’s clothing, from which her femininity emanated, was being attacked. In addition, the new style proposed that women wear trousers, a proposition that met with widespread and vehement disapproval.”

While the American costume was healthier than the fashionable dress of the day, God objected to it for two main reasons: it was immodest, and it was patterned after the clothing of men. Ellen White wrote, “I saw that God’s order has been reversed, and His special directions disregarded, by those who adopt the American costume. I was referred to Deuteronomy 22:5:
'The woman shall not wear that which pertaineth unto a man, neither shall a man put on a woman’s garment: for all that do so are abomination unto the Lord thy God.' God would not have His people adopt the so-called reform dress. It is immodest apparel, wholly unfitted for the humble followers of Christ” (Testimonies for the Church, 1:421). Instead, God gave His people a dress style that was both healthful and modest, while not resembling the clothing worn by men.\[\text{[ii]}\]

One of the warnings God gave about the American costume was the spirit that was associated with it. “With the so-called dress reform there goes a spirit of levity and boldness just in keeping with the dress. Modesty and reserve seem to depart from many as they adopt that style of dress” (Ibid., 422).

**Summer camp girls.** I experienced this first-hand when I worked several summers as a camp counselor. The camp guidelines included modest skirts or dresses for the girls. I repeatedly noticed that when sassy, bold, and flirtatious girls came to the camp in their tight jeans, and changed into camp clothing their attitudes immediately shifted. They began to act like young ladies and to manifest more reserve around the young men. When I saw it I marveled at how God had spoken of this over a century before! His dress for women affirms their femininity and leads them to act with grace and dignity.

In a world where fashion trends take precedence over Biblical counsel, God calls for a people who have purity of heart exemplified in a modest, simple, appropriate style of dress. He knows that our clothing symbolizes our heart condition, and this is why He asks each of us, “My son, [my daughter,] give me thine heart, and let thine eyes observe my ways” (Prov 23:26). When I see myself as His beautiful princess, a daughter of the king, I consider it a joy and honor to glorify Him in my dress.

“Many dress like the world in order to have an influence over unbelievers, but here they make a sad mistake. If they would have a true and saving influence, let them live out their profession, show their faith by their righteous works, and make the distinction plain between the Christian and the worldling. The words, the dress, the actions, should tell for God. Then a holy influence will be shed upon all around them, and even unbelievers will take knowledge of them that they have been with Jesus” (Testimonies for the Church, 4:633).

**I am still asking myself** the question: When people look at me, what do they see? I pray that my dress will in no way distract from the peace and joy radiating from my face—a reflection of the living Christ who has captured my heart.

\[\text{NOTES}\]


\[\text{[ii]}\] For a description of this style of dress read Testimonies for the Church, vol. 1, 456-466, and vol. 4, p. 640.
A Different Kind of Dating
His Side/Her side

Kirk and Rahel Schafer

From the beginning, Rahel and Kirk agreed their courtship would be different from their friends’.

KIRK’S SIDE:

What a Relief!

Upon first discussing our feelings for each other and our intention to pursue a deeper friendship, Rahel and I agreed that we wanted to keep any deep or involved physical intimacy for after our wedding, whether we eventually married each other or someone else. This was something God had put on Rahel’s heart from a Bible class in academy, and a concept which I had read about and appreciated from the book I Kissed Dating Goodbye by Josh Harris. In fact, it was quite a relief to each of us to know that this had been a desire in our individual lives before we decided on it corporately. We decided the best and easiest boundary line would be drawn at the level of kissing, and so we agreed that we would postpone kissing and any other type of sensual touch for post-wedded celebration.

We had several reasons for wanting to keep our physical relationship free of sexual or even sensual content. First and foremost, we had a desire to honor God through all aspects of our relationship, and physically, we knew God would be pleased if we protected the gift of purity He had given us. Instead of focusing on all the things we were determined not to do physically, we sought out ways to celebrate and enjoy physical and sexual purity. We noticed that often in the society around us, and in the relationships of friends and acquaintances, sexuality seemed like a struggle, like more of a curse than a blessing. We wanted to ensure that this beautiful gift from God was something cherished for marriage.

Additionally, we wanted not only to protect our own purity, but to practice the utmost respect for the purity and boundaries of each other. We believed that abstaining from any type of sexuality in dating was a positive way to demonstrate the high regard we held for each other. By not pushing or overstepping her boundaries, I also hoped to practice the type of responsible behavior which would let Rahel know that I was serious about getting to know her, respect her and love her.

Implications for the future. Protecting our sexuality also had important implications for the future of our relationship. Neither of us was interested in “playing around” or in trite dating practices. We were attracted to each other based on the qualities we desired in a potential marriage mate, and we desired a relationship that would prepare us for marriage. By celebrating purity and refusing to pursue sexuality, I was demonstrating to Rahel that I could be trusted in the present, and that sexuality outside of marriage would never be an option for me in the future.
Although we realized that these decisions did not solve all the problems we would face throughout our relationship, I am convinced that they laid a foundation that allowed us to enjoy dating on a deep and wholesome level, and that they gave us a unity and sense of purpose that made any problem or issue conquerable. In addition, we have been able to give glory to God by explaining our relationship to many curious friends and acquaintances, thus fulfilling our most important priority: to honor the God who has given us so much.

RAHEL’S SIDE:

An Incredible Alternative

When Kirk and I first talked about liking each other and wanting to pursue a relationship, I had very strong feelings about not dating the way so many around us were. I honestly thought I would never find a guy that felt the way I did, but God led me to Kirk. In fact, for several months we didn’t even say we were dating. We called each other “glorified friends,” a concoction of mine that Kirk kindly put up with. We decided that we were not dating just to have fun or because the other person was attractive, although both of these were true. Instead, from the very beginning, we pursued a courtship in which we had talked about the fact that we might marry some day. This was important to me, because I feel that finding one’s life partner is a serious matter that deserves much prayer and careful thought.

Early difficulties. At first it was difficult to define exactly how we would date differently, but God led us to many fun ideas and activities. We both felt that it was important not to waste money and/or our health on many dinners out, and that movies today are full of garbage, so we found alternatives to the traditional dinner-movie date. I found out that neither of us knew how to Rollerblade well, so we learned that together, along with other new things, like birding and lap-swimming. We both love our families and found that there were many things we could do with them, such as concerts, tennis, backpacking, visiting beautiful parks and gardens, walking on the beach, and sledding. In fact, as much as we love being alone, we found that our relationship was enhanced as we included friends and family members in our activities. I was able to see how Kirk interacted with a variety of people, and I got to know his family much better than I would have otherwise.

Probably the most beneficial activity for our relationship was service together. Many Sabbath afternoons found us in Benton Harbor helping with the kids’ ministries there, or singing at a nursing home and visiting with the residents. Each of us worked at youth camps during the summer. Although the camps were far apart, we were able to share our experiences of helping to teach kids about Jesus. I am part of a Pathfinder club, and Kirk would come on campouts with us and help where needed. I enjoy so much serving others with Kirk and feel that our relationship was used by God to minister to others.

Sometimes alone. When we did have time together alone we focused on sharing our goals and dreams and the things we had learned that day in our classes. Every evening we would pray together, a practice that did more than anything else to focus our relationship on God. Some people may think ours was not a normal dating relationship, but we would not trade it for anything; and we hope we may persuade others to consider this incredible alternative in which God led us. Rahel

JOINT STATEMENT:

Did we marry. Oh, yes, we certainly did!
Did we save our first kiss for the wedding? Yes, indeed!
Was it worth waiting for? You’d better believe it!
Are we happy? Supremely so. We just wish everybody else’s marriage could be as happy as ours.
Online Opportunities and Pitfalls for Young Christians

Darryl Hosford

“Seek ye first the Kingdom of God, and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you” (Matthew 6:33).

The Internet and its many related technologies have presented us all with a new set of opportunities and pitfalls.

The Internet is changing, growing and maturing. We see new kinds of media presentation and a convergence, or blending, of older kinds of media, such as audio, video and text, combined together, with the user able to direct the flow of information. One thing is sure, the Internet is not declining or going away any time soon.

Neilson ratings for September 2003, show that 125,846,143 individuals in the United States have access to the Internet, and that each person in this group on average accessed the Internet 31 sessions in the month. On average, 26+ hours are spent online each month. [footnote reference: http://www.cyberatlas.internet.com/big_picture/traffic_patterns/article/0,,5931_3096031,00.html] This means that a lot of people are accessing the Internet on a regular basis. Which also means that you, the reader, likely have access to the Internet in some way as well.

With so many of us spending time online, it is well to consider what content we are accessing. Violence portrayed in a movie theater is commonly thought of as inappropriate for Christian minds. Is the same violence more acceptable to watch on a home television set? How about watching it on a computer monitor via the Internet? When dealing with sensory input, we need always to evaluate what we are watching against the principles Paul presented in Philippians 4:8:

"Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things."

I would like to present the idea that the Internet, at its core, is an information delivery system, and that Christians must take the responsibility to "filter" the content we allow into our minds, no matter whether that information comes from audio, video or text. We need to keep Philippians 4:8 in mind, and bring it up often as part of our filter criteria. Unlike with television, where choices are more of an "on or off" response to the one-direction information flow, the Internet allows us to take a detour or refine our search in another direction. With the Internet, we can more easily and actively participate in the filtering process.

Internet Pitfalls. The number one money-making industry using the Internet is related to pornography. Discreet home use can be a mask that allows easy access to inappropriate content. Some psychologists have suggested that males are more prone to visual temptations, and Satan has readily used the Internet as a way to ensnare boys and men alike in this way.

Unsolicited pornography. Realize that e-mail containing pornographic images can come to our screens displaying temptations without any solicitation from us. Satan will present us with this content even though we do not search for it. How we act on it will be
played out in one of two scenarios: we delete the e-mail, or we delete our Christian experience. This may sound extreme. But remember that if Eve had not hung around the forbidden tree gazing at its fruit, we'd probably all be in Eden today.

For families with children, I suggest that the Internet access point be in a family room or other area where parents can readily see what the children are watching. For families with teens, the dangers of pornography need to be specifically discussed as a family group.

It is beyond the scope of this article clearly to explain the dangers of pornography, but the dangers are real. There is a special issue of the Adventist Review on this topic that can provide some additional resources. [ reference: http://www.adventistreview.org/2001-1540/story2.html ] I often tell young people, "Decide in your mind in advance how you will make your choice on this issue, and ask God to empower your conscience when you are presented with this kind of inappropriate material."

**Excess time.** Another area that could be a pitfall is the total amount of time spent online, especially if this time is spent seeking virtual relationships at the expense of live interpersonal contact.

Having spent time thinking about some of the pitfalls of the Internet, let's acknowledge that this is not an Internet-only phenomenon. Satan will always use the current forms of communication to access people's minds. Knowing how many people are spending time on the Internet, we should not be surprised that Satan has gained a foothold here. But, does God have a place in cyber space as well?

**Internet Opportunities**

**Instant prayer.** I received an e-mail today asking for prayer from a missionary family working in Laos. The missionary wife had contracted malaria and was having severe medical complications. As a prayer supporter, I had the opportunity to lift this family in prayer at the time of their need. Without e-mail, I would not have known about their specific need till long after the situation was resolved. This is an example of the power of the Internet to provide global blessing.

How can you use the Internet for Jesus? How can you encourage others to a closer walk with Him? Local churches that use the Internet to communicate among their members show marked and praiseworthy results. One study focused on how Internet and e-mail helped congregations and found: [reference: http://www.pewinternet.org/reports/pdfs/PIP_Religion_Report.pdf ]

1. 83% of those responding say that their use of the Internet has helped congregational life B 25% say it has helped a great deal.
2. 81% say the use of e-mail by ministers, staffs, and congregation members has helped the spiritual life of the congregation to some extent B 35% say it has helped a great deal.
3. 91% say e-mail has helped congregation members and members of the staff stay more in touch with each other B 51% say it has helped a great deal.
4. 63% say the Internet has helped the congregation connect at least a bit more to the surrounding community B 17% say it has helped a lot.

**Bible studies** via the Internet are becoming more and more popular. It Is Written Television has an active online Bible study program, with live instructors assisting students in their Bible questions. Amazing Facts and most other outreach ministries have Bible Study tools and online lessons. Perhaps you would like to prepare a Bible study series aimed at a specific target audience. The opportunities are truly endless, and young people can be directly involved in this kind of outreach. [footnote: The goal of technology is to make Internet authoring easier. Tools such as www.SimpleUpdates.com now makes it simple for a church or ministry to easily keep a website active and updated.]

**Conclusion**

In conclusion. The amount of information now available on the Internet far exceeds what previous generations had available in their home or even in their city’s public library. With this expanded offering, we need always to be aware of the need to filter the content
we allow into our minds. We can each have a part in shaping our sphere of influence on the Internet into an experience where the presence of God is felt. Perhaps that is through an e-mail of encouragement to another person, or by some other means God suggests as a way for you to share.

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