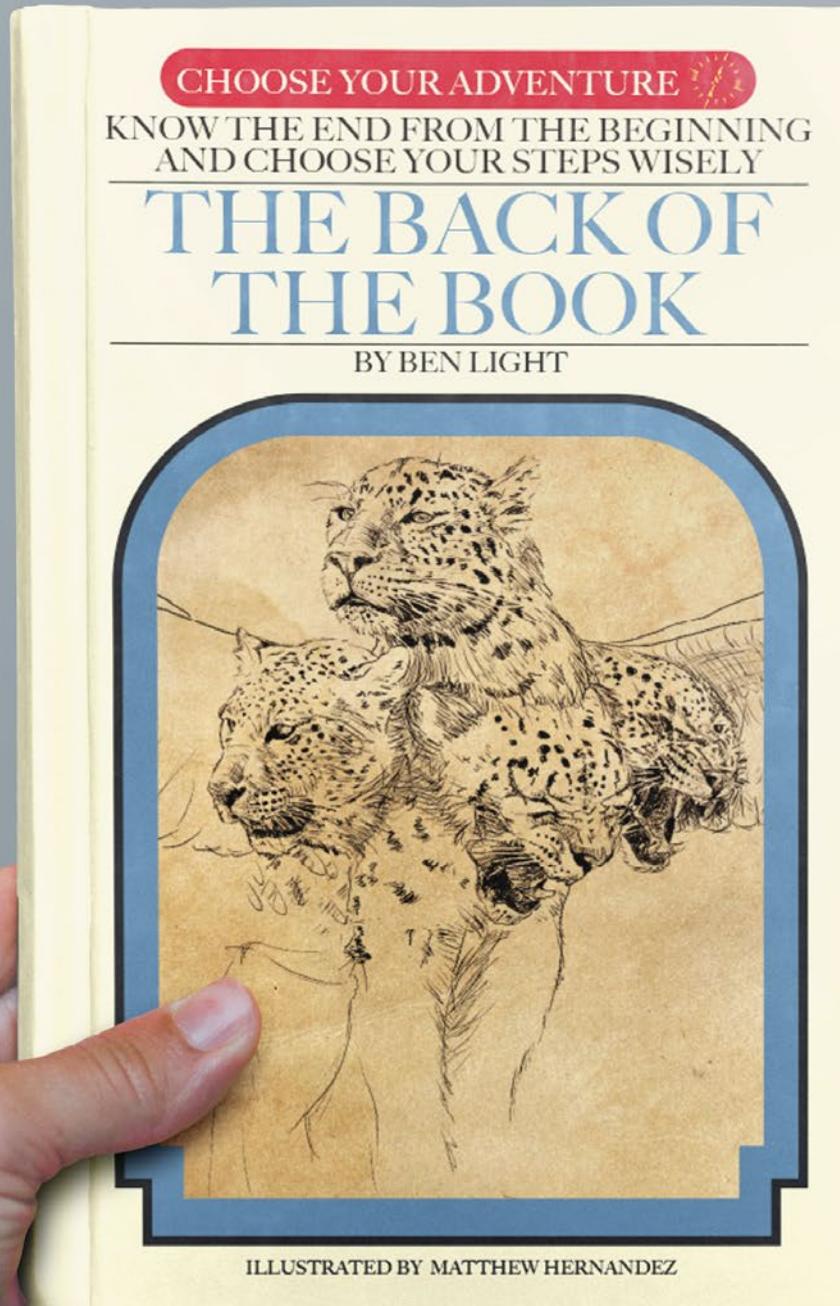




# COMPASS CHECK

Helping you point your spiritual compass toward God



| Overcoming Shyness

| How to Stop Worrying About  
the End of the World

| Build a Habit  
of Health

| Video Games  
Hobby or Habit?

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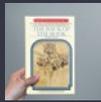
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# COMPASS CORNER



## I saw the future of the Church...

*Dear Compass Checkers,*

Last summer I had the joy of visiting Camp Hye Sierra, California, one of the five summer United Youth Camps venues. What did I observe there? Naturally, I met dozens of wonderful campers who were enjoying the Zone during their camp week. And I also talked with many of the hard-working staff who were devoting so much of their time and energy to the campers.

Many of us also visited Sequoia National Park, which is close to camp. Giant sequoias are the world's largest single trees and largest living thing by volume (average height is 164-279 ft. and 20-26 ft. in diameter). God made these mighty sequoia trees to naturally resist fire and insects, and as a result, some of them date back to the time of Jesus Christ! In fact, some of this species frequently exceed 3,000 years, and larger trees may exceed 3,500 years in age.

Standing next to one of these behemoths makes any human look mighty small.

But what else did I see at Camp Hye Sierra? The future of the Church!

I literally saw the future of the United Church of God at camp—you campers and young adult staff. As a camper now (from ages 12 to 19) you

## COMPASS CHECK

*Compass Check* is a biblically based magazine for young people of the United Church of God, an International Association (UCGIA) aged 12-19. Our name, *Compass Check*, describes youth pointing their spiritual compass toward God.

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The goal of *Compass Check* is to inspire Church youth, ages 12-19, to respond to the gospel message.

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already are a very important part of God’s plan, since He calls youth as 1 Corinthians 7:14 describes: “For the unbelieving husband has been sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife has been sanctified through her believing husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy” (New International Version).

And in not too many more years (if not already), you will hopefully be baptized, receive God’s Holy Spirit, and fully become a member of the Body of Jesus Christ. This means you will be even more involved in serving in your local congregation and, yes, at United Youth Camps as well. Think about that. You, as a teen now, are literally part of the bright future of God’s Church. God the Father and Jesus Christ are offering you now the blessing of being a part of eternity in the Kingdom of God. You can read this in Revelation 5:10: “And have made us kings and priests to our God; and

we shall reign on the earth.”

God will share His plan with all of humanity, and this is the exciting theme of this pre-Feast *Compass Check* issue. Don’t miss reading about your future in the article “The Back of the Book” by Ben Light.

God has a wonderful future for each of you, and I saw part of that future at Hye Sierra last summer. I wish all of you a very encouraging upcoming festival season.

*Until next time, your camp friend,*



Steve Nutzman, Editor | [compasscheck@ucg.org](mailto:compasscheck@ucg.org)

## Dear Readers



Recently my job as a digital marketer has been pushing me past my comfort zone. With the agency I work for taking on new clients and adding projects that start simultaneously, along with a few staffing changes, I've needed to quickly step up and take on more responsibility. Instead of just editing and writing, I am taking on project management and more leadership. This means starting tasks that I've never done before, within projects where there's a lot of money at stake. It can get overwhelming.

That fuzzy feeling of starting something new and feeling unsure, with no experience to ground me, is sometimes crippling. One thing that helps me in those situations is a tip from Daniel Coyle's *The Little Book of Talent*: "Practice should require you to operate at the edge of your abilities." Or said another way, you can't keep doing the same thing repetitively and expect to move forward. My childhood piano lessons showed me this. It's easy and fun to keep playing the songs you already know, but it won't make you a better piano player. So when I feel like I'm floundering at work, I also know that what I'm feeling is like growing pains—uncomfortable, but necessary.

I think this applies spiritually as well. I can't just stay in the same small box spiritually and expect to become more spiritually mature. It takes effort and sometimes pain to move forward. Paul wrote in 1 Timothy 4: "Train yourself to be godly . . . give your complete attention to these matters. Throw yourself into your tasks so that everyone will see your progress" (verses 7 and 15, New Living Translation).

Progress is scary and uncomfortable and hard. But that's what it takes. And if you're feeling this way, you can be sure you're not the only one who feels like a clumsy newborn animal with too-long limbs. We're all ungainly at the edges of our abilities.

This issue of *Compass Check* is pointed to the upcoming Holy Days. Having the long vision of God's plan can make the day-to-day difficulties seem a little smaller. And with this vision, I hope you



feel heartened about taking life head on. The articles in this issue offer advice about working through hard things to get to where we need to be, overcoming fears and habits that distract us and hold us back—with hope and courage.

So when life pushes you out on the thin branches of your ability, just remember that soon you'll be seeing some new growth.

Your friend,

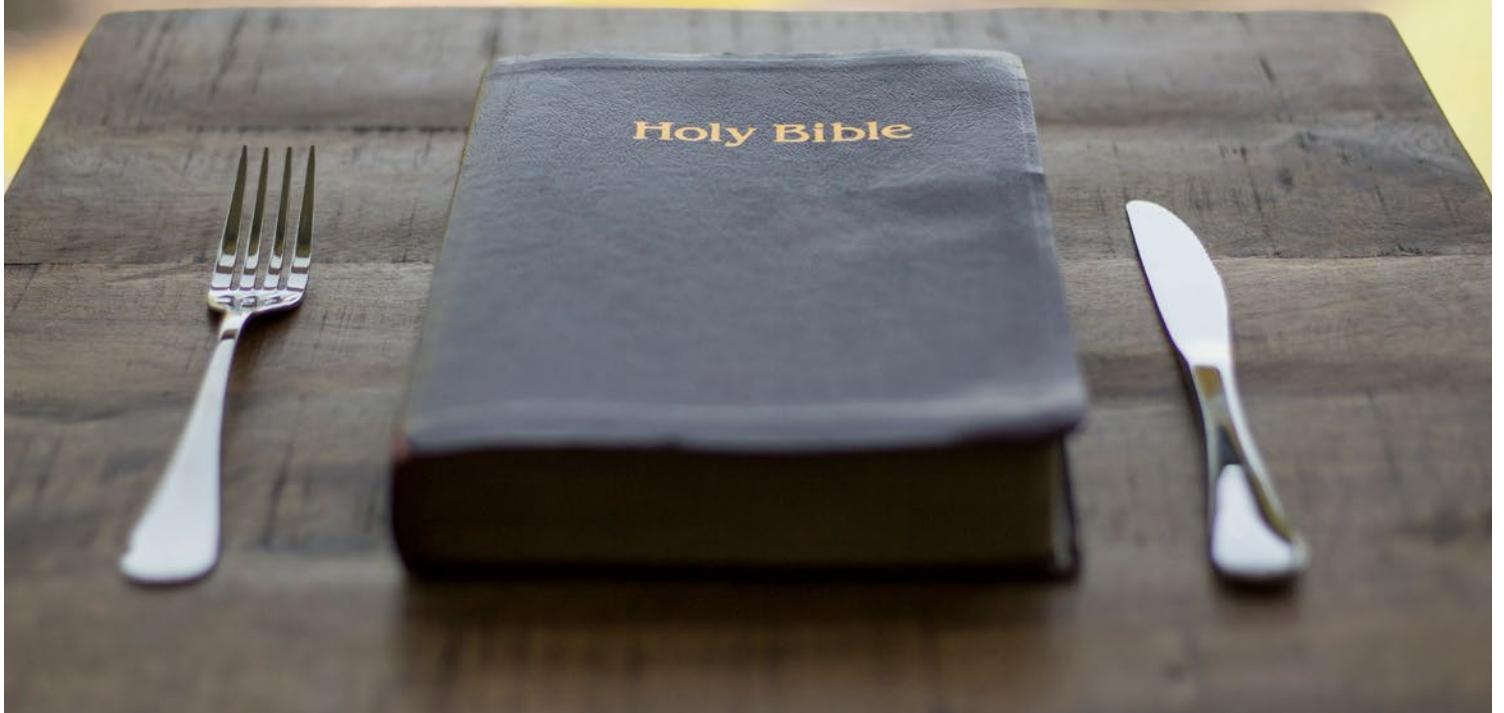


*Kourtney Kovanis*

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# DIG IN

## THE FAST **5** OF FASTING



# *I must admit*

*that I do not love fasting. I have been fasting on the Day of Atonement since I was 5 years old. For many years of my life, fasting was just a day that I had to endure—a countdown until sundown when I can finally eat again.*

*I've realized that when I focus only on how much longer until the next meal, I miss the purpose of fasting. God doesn't get any pleasure out of seeing if I can go 24 hours without eating and drinking. It's not a fast track to the Kingdom of God. So what is the purpose of fasting on the Day of Atonement, and what can we learn from fasting?*



One thing that most everyone does each year prior to the Day of Atonement is talk about what they are going to have to eat before they fast. Having a good, balanced meal and a full stomach before fasting makes us feel good. The next day is always easier when we don't feel hungry or weak early in the fast.

The benefits of eating a filling, healthy meal are similar to the benefits of being close to God. We feel good, happy, have fewer problems and are less likely to feel spiritually sick. These all occur when we fill our lives up with God.

We need to eat of His Word (Matthew 4:4) in order to be full and strong to weather the spiritual storms from Satan.



The day before a fast, I like to drink plenty of water. If I am well-hydrated going into a fast, I am less likely to suffer a dehydration headache. That crushing headache resulting from a lack of water makes it impossible to think clearly, concentrate on the sermon at services or even open your eyes.

Throughout the Bible, water is a symbol of God's Holy Spirit (John 7:37-39). When we are not in tune with God's way, or when we have not been listening to God through Bible study, we become spiritually dehydrated. This can lead to similar debilitating side effects such as increased sensitivity to problems, lack of ability to make decisions, feeling tired and lethargic, and the general feeling of being overwhelmed. However, when we are connected to God, He helps us to overcome our problems and make decisions.



Chowing down on fast food, a large pizza or other salty foods before a fast is not a good idea. Eating a meal with a lot of salt tends to make us thirsty, and junk food does not provide the nutritional energy we need in order to last an entire day. If we make the wrong food choices before fasting, we can feel parched, weaker and irritable.

Eating the wrong type of meal is like feasting on worldly things. Violent movies, foul language and TV shows with immoral values leave us estranged from God. When we partake of these things, we are feasting on a meal from Satan's restaurant. Anger, moodiness, irritability and impatience are the result of this type of feast, which can only be changed to patience, peace, joy and gentleness through connection with God (Galatians 5:22).



When fasting, the empty feeling in our stomachs becomes pain that constantly reminds us of our discomfort. This gnawing feeling can be so powerful that it is the only thing we can think of.

Atonement pictures a time at the beginning of God setting up His Kingdom. Satan's influence on the earth will be gone. The world will be in extreme distress with wars, famines and diseases, after which God will take Satan

and lock him up (Revelation 20:2). With him out of the way the Kingdom will be a wonderful time of peace, prosperity and contentment that we all look forward to. Feeding our bellies and ridding them of hunger are like locking Satan up and being in God's Kingdom filled with contentment.

After fasting, we have the joy of eating once again. We may want to eat a 16-ounce steak, a huge baked potato loaded with butter and sour cream, the entire salad bar, a liter of soda and a half gallon of ice cream! But after a few bites, we realize that our stomachs have shrunk. We can't eat everything in sight at the first meal; we need to have moderation and self-control.

Spiritually, we realize after fasting how much Satan has influenced our life in negative ways. We should want to avoid him and any evil that comes with him. To do this, we need to replace the evil with good (Romans 12:21). Good and tasty things include daily

Bible study, prayer, meditating on God's Word and associating with people who have godly character.

Just as eating more food than you expend in energy can cause issues, spending 24 hours a day studying our Bible is unbalanced too. We need to balance Bible study, prayer and Christian fellowship with our other responsibilities at home, church, school and work. As we ingest God's Word, we need to practice godly principles in service to others.



A voluntary fast or fasting on the Day of Atonement is something few people look forward to doing. It's not on most people's bucket list. However, even though fasting can be difficult, there are spiritual lessons that we can learn from it. By filling our minds with God's Word and letting Him guide us with His Spirit, we can spiritually feast in a life that negates Satan's influences, and share a godly life with others.

Fasting should remind us that we need to keep God number one in our lives. If we keep God as our primary focus, we will live a much more rewarding and fulfilling life. **CC**




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# FACE FEAR AND BE BRAVE

“

**E**

verything is safe as long as you don't forget it is dangerous.” That was a saying I learned as a young man in Britain's Royal Navy. In the military I was often in dangerous situations when handling guns and ammunition and as a frogman when I was diving.

But I learned to be brave in the face of danger even younger, when I was 14 years old and attending an unusual school. My school and home for two and a half years was a large cargo sailing ship built in Hamburg, Germany, in 1907. She belonged to the Flying P shipping line and was 377 feet long with four masts; the highest was 170 feet. The *Peking* had sailed herself into history and retirement in the 1930s.

In 1933 she was converted into a boarding school and was renamed *Arethusa*. Anchored in the River Medway, in Upnor, Nr. Rochester, Kent, England, she housed 240 boys, 13-16 years old. The primary purpose was to train them for a life at sea. A basic academic curriculum was taught as well as knots, splicing, sailing, Morse Code, signals and all sorts of nautical information. We all slept in hammocks which were “lashed up and stowed” every morning and “slung” every night.

In our spare time we climbed the bowsprit with bare feet chasing the seagulls. Climbing up the foremast's “ratlings” to the first platform and just hanging out was fun. Crossing the yardarms where brave seamen in the past



furled huge canvas sails was our playground. No one ever said to us you can't do that because you might fall. Going up and down the foremast was normal—well, at least to the first platform and perhaps the second!

One day, I just decided to climb to the top of the mast, a little short of 170 feet high. This was my personal challenge, and I grew more and more scared the higher I climbed. “Don't look down,” I told myself, “don't look down.” On successfully reaching the third platform I took a short break to look above me at the last section to climb. It was a Jacob's ladder that seemed to go upward forever! This section of the ladder was very stiff and close to the mast. Each rung was about 14 inches wide. Each step up was about 12 inches. Gradually, one cautious step at a time, I finally



*The Arethusa*

reached the top and touched the “button.”

Then I looked down at the teak deck below which looked like a large french fry. Wire hawsers, ropes and yardarms crisscrossed the path down. The safety net below me looked like a postage stamp, and I knew I would be killed if I fell. Slowly, I lowered myself down, making sure my bare feet and hands had a secure footing before safely moving down to the upper deck.

This experience taught me a lifelong lesson. Being scared and being brave are two very different things. Fear can stop you from doing a lot—if you let it. On the other hand, being brave is overcoming your fear and challenging yourself to fight against it. It’s making yourself do something that you don’t like or don’t want to do. It is fighting against those scary thoughts that creep into

your mind and say “What if?” It is the imagination of the mind running amuck that holds us back.

Sometimes a little help is needed to learn bravery. In the Royal Navy “boot camp” we 16-year-olds were trained by World War II veterans. They stood no nonsense! Everyone was required to jump off a 10-meter diving board. All of our group did it except one. Everyone was shivering in the cold shouting at him to jump. The officer said, “If I come up there and jump off with you, will you do it?” Of course the answer was a pathetic “Yes!” Up the officer climbed and removed his shirt and pants. Holding the hand of the boy he said, “Are you ready?” “Yes sir.” They stepped to the edge of the platform and a strong arm suddenly pulled the boy forward and let go. Yelling all the way down he splashed safely into the pool. After putting on his clothes the officer climbed down. “Now get back up there and do it by yourself!” he commanded. The lad did.

No one can make you brave, but with the right leadership and encouragement you can learn to be brave. Brave men and women (as well as cowardly men and women) are not born that way; they become that way through their acts.

President F.D. Roosevelt made a famous statement in his inaugural address in 1932 when the nation was in the midst of a great depression: “Let me assert my firm belief that the only thing we have to fear is fear itself—nameless, unreasoning, unjustified terror which paralyzes needed efforts to convert retreat into advance.”

The same encouragement was said by the Lord to Joshua, the leader of Israel when entering the Promised Land. “Have I not commanded you? Be strong and of a good courage; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go” (Joshua 1:9).

We all have some fear. What are you scared of? What are you going to do about it? No one can be brave for you no matter what the problem is. Obeying God and doing what is right and good will help you become brave. **CC**



*Arthur Suckling’s 50 years of teaching, ministering and working with the people who have dedicated their lives to following God’s way have enriched his life greatly. [arthur\\_suckling@ucg.org](mailto:arthur_suckling@ucg.org)*

CHOOSE YOUR ADVENTURE

KNOW THE END FROM THE BEGINNING  
AND CHOOSE YOUR STEPS WISELY

# THE BACK OF THE BOOK

BY BEN LIGHT



ILLUSTRATED BY MATTHEW HERNANDEZ

# WHEN

I was in grade school, I loved reading choose-your-own-adventure novels. They had a way of immersing you into the storyline, because the real-time decisions you made affected the fate of your character on the pages. Make the wrong decision and you could end up at the bottom of a ravine—*or worse*.

Because of how frequently we “died” from making foolish decisions in the novels, my friends and I devised a brilliant strategy for staying alive. We looked forward in the story as far down both roads as we could before we made our decision. OK, we cheated. Well, sort of—we read ahead and hit up the spoilers. We would look at the decisions at the bottom of the page, then skip ahead to those pages and read them, preventing ourselves a premature ending.

We didn’t know this at the time, but we were in good company. A 2011 study<sup>1</sup>, conducted by the University of California San Diego, seems to indicate that people can read the end of a book and still enjoy the story as it progresses. In fact, some might even enjoy it *more*, because they can focus on the story as it unfolds and not use so much brain-power thinking through the resolution of the plot while reading.

The plot line of a story typically consists of a series of events that are crucial to advancing the story’s action. It’s important within the narrative that these plot points follow a specific order, advancing the story—if they jump around the story simply doesn’t make sense.

In Leviticus 23, there are a series of very important plot points that make for an incredible story. In this passage, God records His annual Holy Days for mankind. He provides a detailed explanation of them to Moses and the people of Israel, including what they represent and what the people were required to do for them. These days symbolize very important aspects of God’s plan for mankind. Each of these days is an essential plot point, and you can’t advance the narrative, you can’t tell the story of what God has planned for us, without all of these days and their rich symbolism and meaning.

We’ve gone through the Passover, which represents the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on our behalf and His shed blood for the remission of our sins—the singular event that makes the entire story possible. We’ve celebrated the Days of Unleavened Bread, where we symbolically sought the sin in our lives and put it out, committing to go forward living God’s way. Finally, seven weeks later, we ended the spring Holy Day season with the Day of Pentecost, which represents the pouring out of the Holy Spirit on those who have chosen this way of life. That miracle that occurred on Pentecost in A.D. 31 allows us to work in concert with the Holy Spirit to make godly decisions in our lives today.

And this is the page in the story that we find ourselves on. The Holy Spirit has been poured out; you and I as potential firstfruits of God are working to develop spiritually—learning and growing. We are halfway through the plan on our annual calendar and halfway through the fulfillment of the plan as it has unfolded in human history.

---

*If you choose to finish learning God’s story through the rest of the Holy Days, turn to page 12.*



## THE REST OF THE STORY...

The events the Day of Trumpets represent have not yet occurred. We are now approaching the climax of the story, nearing the resolution of the plot and closing in on the ending.

But for us to understand the rest of the story, the part that hasn't been fulfilled yet, we have to do what grade school me did and flip to the back of the book. We get to skip ahead and take a look at the symbolism and meaning of these final few plot points to appreciate how the story ends.

### The Day of Trumpets

Mankind has failed in its rulership of this world. Even in the United States, where we enjoy a number of freedoms, we fight and war with one another, and our leaders are morally corrupt. At its core, mankind has a disease that we cannot cure ourselves. In Matthew 24, Jesus tells His disciples that it is going to get a lot worse before it gets better, but that ultimately, it *will* get better (verses 26-31).

It will reach a point where God Himself will intervene, sending Jesus Christ back to earth. When that happens, the Kingdom of God will be established. Revelation 11:15 records that at that time the kingdoms of this world become the kingdoms of our God. God will directly intervene in this world's affairs, and will conquer the kingdoms of men. Paul in 1 Corinthians 15 describes this as a time when all who have lived their lives in accordance with God's law, whether alive or dead, will be transformed into spirit beings at the last trumpet, in the first resurrection.

There is a great deal of symbolism in this day, and it represents the climax of our story. It's the point where everything that occurs after is because of what happens here.

### Day of Atonement

Christ's return may be the climax, but it doesn't remove the influence of the adversary. Satan is still alive and well—organizing people to fight Christ when He comes. For all of mankind who remain to learn about God and have a chance to see that His way of life works, Satan's influence has to be put away. Revelation 20:2-3 records this incredible event.

The Day of Atonement represents a time when we are to draw near to God through fasting and humbling ourselves, resisting the adversary and drawing near to God. Removing Satan's influence allows for the next stage in God's plan to come to fruition.

### The Feast of Tabernacles

The Feast of Tabernacles symbolizes the 1,000 years of peace and prosperity that will immediately follow Christ's return and the binding of Satan. Those who are alive at this time will have just lived through the Great Tribulation, and the stark difference between that world and Christ's rule

will be noticeable. Those who are brought up in the first resurrection will be serving in the Millennium as spirit beings—a kingdom of priests.

Isaiah 2 and Isaiah 11 describe this period. For 1,000 years, the world will not have the influence of Satan the Devil. Instead, the crops will be plentiful, there will be no war, and animal nature will be changed. The Millennium will be a vision of what the Kingdom of God will be like—a necessary vision for those who are alive, because at the end of those 1,000 years, Satan has to be released for a short time to do what he does—deceive, lie, mislead, twist and accuse.

God has to know the hearts of those alive at this time. Will they choose life, or will they choose death? After 1,000 years of peace, seeing it work, what will they choose?

### The Eighth Day

The Eighth Day represents the beginning of the rest of eternity. At the end of the 1,000 years, the second resurrection will take place. All of those who have never heard the Word of God will have their opportunity to learn and understand His ways. They will have the chance to make the decision: Will I follow God, or not?

Those who had their chance to decide in this life and chose the alternative, and those who rebelled against Him after the 1,000 years, will be resurrected and put to eternal death in the third resurrection. They will be cast into the lake of fire that the beast and false prophet<sup>2</sup> were thrown into.

The story ends with the Kingdom of God on earth: Jesus Christ as King of Kings, a peaceful and prosperous world, a world with no more death and no more tears. God's people will have the incredible opportunity to be a part of His family, and to serve and worship God forever.

It requires a decision, however, *now*. On one page, there is a way which leads to death; on the other page, a way which leads to life. Go ahead, as this Holy Day season progresses, and flip to the back of the book—see how the story ends. Look down the road, and use what you learn to make the right decisions along the way. **CC**



*Ben Light is an elder serving in the Salem, Eugene, and Roseburg, Oregon, congregations. He is a middle school science teacher in Salem and enjoys hunting, fishing and other outdoor pursuits with his wife and three children.*

<sup>1</sup>[ucsdnews.ucsd.edu/archive/newsrel/soc/2011\\_08spoilers.asp](http://ucsdnews.ucsd.edu/archive/newsrel/soc/2011_08spoilers.asp)

<sup>2</sup>[freebiblestudyguides.org/bible-teachings/prophesy-beast-false-prophet-antichrist.htm](http://freebiblestudyguides.org/bible-teachings/prophesy-beast-false-prophet-antichrist.htm)

# VIDEO GAMES HOBBY OR HABIT?



*by Josh Lamoureux*

# I Love

video games, but I also hate how much time I can spend on them. It is a love-hate relationship. If you play video games, you might normally turn up your nose at articles about video game addiction. Similarly, if you aren't a "gamer," you probably just ignore articles like this one. Let's be honest though: You probably know someone (or are someone) who has been negatively affected by an unhealthy habit of playing video games.

Are video games bad? No! Are all video game players addicted? Certainly not! However, it's important to be aware of the impact video games can have on you and the people you know. In this article, we'll discuss the very real issue of video game addiction: how it happens, why it happens, what issues result from over-playing, how to progress toward a solution and how a Christian can sustain a healthier approach to video games for life.

## What is video game addiction?

Merriam-Webster's Medical Dictionary defines "addiction" as a "compulsive physiological need for and use of a habit-forming substance." A "compulsion" is "an irresistible persistent impulse to perform an act." When looking at these two definitions, it is easy to see how the habitual overuse of video games could be considered an addiction. The American Psychiatric Association even lists "Internet gaming disorder" as an area for further study in the 2013 "Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders," fifth edition.

## Is video game addiction really a problem?

Recently, there has been a lot of research into this topic. Gaming addiction occurs when a person becomes generally obsessed with games or cannot stop playing an individual game, much like a person becomes addicted to taking drugs. However, unlike drugs, gaming addiction does not have a direct chemical effect on the body. Still, the act of playing video games regularly

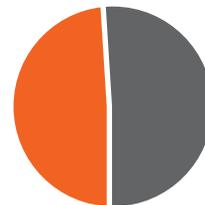
influences our individual mental state, making gaming addiction just as dangerous but harder to recognize (Clark and Scott, 2009).

Internet use and gaming have grown dramatically in the past 30 years. According to the U.S. Census Bureau and the International Telecommunications Union, there has been more than a 444 percent increase in Internet users just in the decade ("World Internet Usage Statistics News and World Population Stats"). Although there are no credible statistics on the current number of video game players, the billions of dollars in revenue that the industry takes in every year reflect their popularity ([gamesindustry.biz/articles/2016-10-24-welcome-to-the-new-era-games-as-media](http://gamesindustry.biz/articles/2016-10-24-welcome-to-the-new-era-games-as-media)).

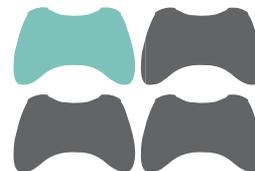
Rehab centers and help groups are being started across the country. Even more startling are the addiction "horror stories" which are appearing in greater number on the news. The loss of jobs, families and friends shows up as consequences of playing video games too much. There are even stories about the death or hospitalization of gamers because of overuse. For instance, in March of 2010, police "arrested a South Korean couple whose toddler starved to death while they were raising a virtual child online" (*Game Over*). The parents had lost their jobs due to their gaming habits and removed themselves from real world responsibilities. These types of stories may seem outlandish to the casual gamer, but they are true.

## What causes video game addiction?

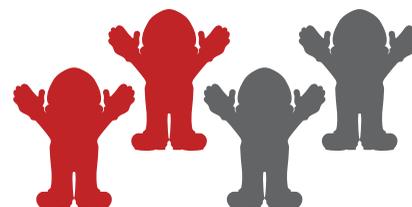
With today's technology, games are becoming increasingly pleasant to our sight and other senses. They are now considered an escape for most people; they can relieve stress and keep your mind off life's daily problems. Essentially, they're a diversion from everything unpleasant, stressful and awkward. Like a drug, it can be easier and more pleasing to play a game than deal with problems in real life. Because this



**49% of American adults play video games**



**26% of adults believe playing most video games is a waste of time**



**half of American adult men play video games**



**48% of American adult women play video games**

pleasurable escape stops when play time is over, the person continues to return to playing the video games to seek peace.

Dr. Kimberly Young, a researcher in Internet addiction, writes that the causes of gaming addiction are a combination of social issues (including self, peers and family), game quality, personal escape, low self-esteem, want of power, trouble communicating and peer pressure (Young, 2009).

### **Video game qualities leading to addiction**

In addition to the personal and mental environments that lead to addiction, games have qualities themselves that designers add to make them addictive. These qualities can be seen prominently in massive multiplayer online role-playing games (MMORPGs). One of the most popular genres of video games, MMORPGs allow millions of people to play together at the same time. Gamers create an “avatar,” or a fake version of themselves, to assume a role in a virtual world.

Here are just a few of the qualities that make an addicting game:

1. “Endlessness”—This describes video game worlds and servers which exist regardless of whether the gamer is interacting with them. These games are continually upgraded and are endless in the sense that they cannot be beat.

2. “Personification and personalization”—Players can customize their avatars to represent themselves or who they want to be using any name and a number of human-like characteristics. This becomes the new self-image. Reality becomes skewed when, through the created avatars, players change and affect the virtual world. Gamers can even personalize their overall experience, adding modifications to make the game look, feel and act exactly the way they want. Each player can create a simulation of the perfect fantasy world to vicariously live in.

3. “Power”—Video games typically provide scores and statistics that compare one player with others. Achieving and succeeding in video games give the same high that a real-life success would. It is natural to want to achieve that feeling again and again, keeping players in a constant search for power and “celebrity

status” (Young, 2009). Gamers must continue playing to rise in standing and to keep their high status. Companies that make video games often host gaming events, which are run like sports competitions. From these, the best players gain recognition.

4. “Social attributes”—In many online and multi-player video games, there are also social communities. A player’s real-life friends might have influenced initial play of the game or continued play, but the game can provide supplemental friends too. For instance, a player can create groups, guilds and even families within a game. This creates a sense of responsibility because the person must keep playing the video game to grow and keep these friendships. In other words, a gamer will not “see” those friends or have that social community if he stops playing.

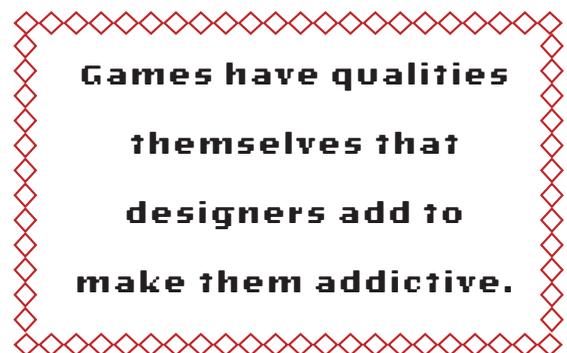
5. “Reward system”—Beyond a game’s psychological rewards, within the actual game there are other rewards, such as virtual money, experience, items, achievements, upgrades and recognition. Since the brain is constantly looking for short- and long-term rewards, and since game rewards are constant and reliable, players are naturally attracted to them (Clark and Scott, 2009). When someone sees a reward coming from a certain action, they are more likely to keep doing it (Kundanis, 2003).

### **Resulting issues from video game addiction for Christians**

The qualities and properties of the video game, such as those found in most MMORPGs, each play a part in persuading gamers to continue playing. They add to

the need and want for the player to return again and again. This is called a “motivational monopoly,” meaning that when a person does something repeatedly for an increasing amount of time, it becomes his priority and greatest pleasure (Clark and Scott, 2009). We know that God is to be our number-one priority (Matthew 6:33; Psalm 16:8), and after Him we are to stress real-life relationships with those around us (Philippians 2:3; Romans 12:10). When we allow video games (or anything else for that matter) to disrupt these priorities, we risk much.

Video game addiction leads to an altered perspective of what is real and important because continuous playing in a fantasy world that we’ve invested in makes it harder to determine reality from fiction. If reality becomes the



virtual world, then it persuades us to prefer to live in that world rather than the real one. It is a type of slumber, where we become unaware of the world around us. This goes against the encouragement in the Bible where God through the apostles Paul and Peter tells us that now is a “high time to awake out of sleep” (Romans 13:11) and to stay sober and vigilant (1 Peter 5:8).

One of the most obvious and common issues resulting from video game addiction is when gamers spend so much time and effort enabling their social lives in the game that they withdraw from relationships in the real world. This is a direct result of the strong social communities that video games offer. The more time we spend with our gaming friends, the less time we are spending with our real-life friends. God tells us not to forsake social life and fellowship with each other (Hebrews 10:25). How else can we help those in need, pray with those in troubling situations or develop the bonds that mimic the family relationship between God, Jesus and the Church?

### How to spot video game addiction in yourself or others

Like any addiction, people who overuse video games usually don't want to admit it. I never wanted to admit it myself, but there was a time when I might have classified myself in this category.

Here's a mental checklist you can use as a guide:

- Procrastinating on deadlines or activities to play video games?
- Choosing to play video games over previous commitments?
- Preferring to spend time with online friends rather than real-life friends?
- Constantly thinking about the game while doing other things?
- Unable to go multiple days in a row without playing?
- Bringing the video game along on trips, outings or vacations?
- Having a video game be the main topic of discussion among friends?

If the answer is “yes” to any or all of these, it's time to recognize and admit that you may have a video game addiction. Non-substance addictions, like pornography, pleasure addictions, gambling and addiction to video games can be difficult to overcome without effort and help.

### Overcoming the addiction

When confronting an addiction, there are certain steps that a Christian should take:

1. Become dependent on prayer: We are told to be praying always (Ephesians 6:18) and that everything should be brought to God in prayer (Philippians 4:6). Prayer should be our addiction (“a compulsive physiological need for and use of”) and our compulsion (an “irresistible and persistent impulse). There are many situations in life that only God can release us from, and that we can overcome only through Him (2 Corinthians 12:9). If we truly want to be delivered from a video game addiction, or any other type of addiction,

we should be praying about it.

2. Remove stumbling blocks: Have you seen the Christian movie *Fireproof*, where the main character is addicted to pornography? In the movie, he realizes that he must take drastic measures to remove the addiction from his life, so he smashes his computer with a baseball bat before throwing it in the trash. As extreme as this portrayal might seem, God tells us to do similarly in Matthew 5:30, Matthew 18:8 and Mark 9:43. Whatever is causing us to be addicted: the computer, the PlayStation or the Xbox, God says to cut it off from you! If we are wrestling with a video

**155**  
million

**Americans play games regularly (3+ hrs/wk)**



**4 of 5 households own a video game console**



**non-digital video game sales (2015)**

**35**

**years old**

**is the average age of gamers in America, who have been gaming, on average, for**

**13**

**years**

Source: Big Fish Games - 2/8/16



*Saturate your life with other positive things, like social gatherings, books, service projects, outdoor activities, Bible study and other hobbies.*

game addiction, it's time to remove the key component that leads us into our struggle. Also, we should take a look at our environment, considering where, when and with whom you play video games. Change or eliminate those situations.

3. Get a real-life accountability buddy: If we are still struggling to overcome an addiction, we should open up communication with a friend who can understand our struggle and become an accountability buddy. This person should check up on us to make sure we are staying strong and focused, be available to encourage us if we resort back to our old ways and freely discuss our addiction with us.

4. Saturate with replacements: Finally, we must replace bad behavior with good (Romans 12:21). If we were addicted to video games and have since quit, there is going to be a void left in its place. We will suddenly have free time, energy and possibly more money. These things, if not channeled in the right direction, could lead us back into the chains of addiction. We should saturate our life with other positive things, like social gatherings, books, service projects, outreach, outdoor activities, Bible study, exercise and other hobbies (Philippians 4:8).

### **An addiction-free Christian lifestyle**

If you or someone you know struggles with this type of addiction, there is hope.

If we understand the causes of video game addiction, we can not only stop it before it happens, but also help those who are already trapped in overcoming.

Video game addiction is often seen as inconsequential, even among Christians. We cannot view it as such. Instead, we need to recognize the issues that can arise because of it. A healthy Christian living a godly lifestyle is someone who is addiction-free. Be it drugs, alcohol, sex, pornography, gambling, video games or any other vice, we are told to remove ourselves from these things (1 Peter 4:3).

Let's recognize video game addiction for what it is, and help ourselves and others out of it. **CC**



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Sources: Clark, Neils, Scott, P. Shavaun. Game Addiction: The Experience and the Effects. Jefferson, NC: MacFarland & Company, Inc., 2009.

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# HOW TO STOP WORRYING ABOUT THE END OF THE WORLD

Ever since the world began, people have been wondering about its end.

Literature throughout the ages explores what the end of the world might be like. Blockbuster movies paint pictures of destruction from earthquakes, alien invasions, nuclear warfare and asteroid collisions. While there might be much to say about it, the end of the world is an unknown quantity to many people.

In God's Church, we are blessed with significant and uncommon understanding of what "the end of the world" will actually be like. The Bible even comments on the end of the age

within its opening pages, a passage we will turn to shortly.

Biblical prophecies about the end times do speak of dire and horrifying events in the future. In Leviticus 26:16, God vows He will bring "sudden terror, wasting diseases and fever" to the nation which does not obey Him (New International Version). As another example, God discusses a soon-coming beast power in Revelation 13. It will have vast control over the world's economies and brutally murder those who oppose or refuse to worship it, especially the Church of God (verses 15-18).

These and other end-time events are disturbing and troubling to many. What can you do to grow in courage and not be so afraid? How can you stop worrying about the end of the world?

Perhaps the most important thing to remember

regarding the end times and prophecy in general is that God is sovereign and in control of all things. God inspired the words of the Bible, and prophecies are only going to be fulfilled as part of *His* schedule and *His* plan.

“Lord, the God of our ancestors, are you not the God who is in heaven? You rule over all the kingdoms of the nations. Power and might are in your hand, and no one can withstand you” (2 Chronicles 20:6; NIV). Ultimately, God reigns over all the nations we see today. Nothing happens without Him either (1) making it happen or (2) allowing it to happen. Even in humanity’s darkest hours, God is working behind the scenes.

“God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore, we will not fear, even though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; though its waters roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with its swelling” (Psalm 46:1-3). When intense natural disasters strike, like those in the end times, God is a sure protector and source of strength.

Our sovereign God is guaranteed to win and, incredibly, He is inviting you and me to join Him. We can be confident of the fact that Jesus Christ will return and that God’s faithful will get to be like Him as He is (1 John 1:1-3). As astounding as it sounds, this was God’s plan from the very beginning!

On the Bible’s opening pages, God says this about Satan and foretells an end to his worldwide deception: “I will put enmity between you [speaking to Satan] and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel” (Genesis 3:15).

That “Seed” is Jesus Christ. He is returning to stamp out Satan’s evil from the earth and establish truth and justice. The Messiah will put an end to the violence, destruction and suffering of the end times and usher in an age of joy and peace. “Then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: ‘Death is swallowed up in victory’” (1 Corinthians 15:54). This present, evil age will be replaced by the glorious Kingdom of God (Galatians 1:3-5). We can be absolutely sure that this *will* happen because this is God’s plan, and He is in control.

You and I also have a role to play in this. God expects us to persevere in His truth to the end, no matter what. Note what God says about those who do so in Revelation 3:10: “I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world.” God, who is in control of everything, is certainly able to protect His Church in a time of crisis. He extends an offer of end-time protection to those who faithfully and wholeheartedly follow Him (Zephaniah 2:3).

We should take action as a result of our belief that God is in control. Let’s look at just two important ways that you can take action and strengthen yourself as you persevere to the end.

Pray to develop a trusting relationship with God (1 Thessalonians 5:17). Prayer is one way that you can get to know God and more deeply understand His Will for your life. Navigating life’s ups and downs can be difficult. Turn to Him on both the good days and the bad, talking to Him both when it’s easy and when it’s hard.

“Do not despise prophecies” (1 Thessalonians 5:20). Another important action we can take is to not neglect but instead become familiar with the prophetic insight God provides. Prophecies of historical events demonstrate God’s control and influence over human affairs, which can really help build our faith. Likewise, we can look to the Bible’s end-time prophecies with comfort and confidence that they will proceed just as God has planned because He is in control. Furnishing a good understanding of prophecies about “the end of the world” can help stop you from worrying or being afraid of it. If you aren’t sure where to begin or what to look for, the United Church of God has many different resources to help guide your studies. God wants us to live by His every word, and prophecy is no exception (Matthew 4:4).

The end of this age is coming; the Bible leaves no doubt about that. But God does not want us to worry about this treacherous time. He wants us to remember that in the good times and the bad, He is still in control. God is willing to protect and comfort His people, even in the despair of the end times. We must draw near to Him in spite of these trying circumstances, with prayer and with confidence in His Word, looking forward to the time when God will establish a new age of goodness, peace and joy on earth. In that day, the entire world will recognize God’s sovereignty and take comfort in the fact that He is in control.

“So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own” (Matthew 6:31-34, NIV). **CC**



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# build a habit of health

**I WOKE** up with a sore throat. I noticed I had pressure in my head and was developing a headache. Sore muscles and fatigue started to set in. I was getting sick.

How did this happen? My family had been sick, and although I was in close proximity to them, I washed my hands. I had not shared utensils or drinks. I kept my distance. Still, I caught the virus.

Was there anything more I could have done? How about my daily habits? Could they have played a role in whether I fought off or contracted the cold?

Well, come to think of it, I hadn't been drinking enough water, and I had really been enjoying some sweets over the past few days. I had also been staying up late on Facebook and surfing the Internet. I started to see a trend of actions leading to lowered immune function as I recalled the past week's actions. I then set out to fight back against this cold. Lemon water, vitamin C powder, tea with honey, lots of water, chicken soup and going to bed early every night were my weapons.

After I started to get sick, I decided I needed to pick up my healthy habits that I had let slip. By committing to restarting my good health habits and taking control of my actions, I could better take care of my health in the future.

What should you do to take care of *your* health? Where do you start? Why should you care?

Many times our actions (or lack of action) lead to future consequences. The same is true when it comes to health. Although much focus should be given to our lack of spiritual character or diligence, this spiritual void may show up in our physical lives.

We must diligently observe our actions when we're young to analyze whether a change of behavior is needed.

If we continue with bad habits, they become instilled in our nature and much harder to stop. The same can be said of good habits—once they are established, they can become part of godly character that will help us through life.

## Treating your body as a holy temple

The apostle Paul spoke to the Corinthian church about taking care of our physical bodies, because that is where God places His Holy Spirit after baptism. “Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s” (1 Corinthians 6:19-20).

Not only are we showing love to God through taking care of our bodies as the creation He made, we show concern for others by not wanting to be the reason they contract an illness or fall into bad habits of health.

The book of Proverbs contains some words of wisdom about how to control bad habits: “Whoever has no rule over his own spirit is like a city broken down, without walls” (Proverbs 25:28). If we recognize behaviors in our lives that seem to have more control over us than we have over them, we are made vulnerable to more bad choices. Heartfelt prayer and repentance coupled with wise counsel from parents or ministers can help us to overcome areas of weakness.

## Making your health a priority

First, pray for guidance from God and the ability to see the need to change your habits. Many times our bad habits are ones that are already ingrained. We need God's Holy Spirit to convict us and show us what we need to change.

Second, analyze the way you are spending time. Keep a journal or write down notes of what you do each day and for how long. Do a quick Google search. Many time management tools, apps and time sheets are available online. These can help you prioritize your time each day.



Ask yourself, after analyzing your time usage, “Are my habits helping or hindering my health?”

Third, what are you putting into your body? Our bodies need fuel they can easily use. Fruits, vegetables, whole grains, good quality protein and water are a few of these ([hopkinsmedicine.org/healthlibrary/conditions/pediatrics/healthy\\_eating\\_during\\_adolescence\\_90,PO1610](http://hopkinsmedicine.org/healthlibrary/conditions/pediatrics/healthy_eating_during_adolescence_90,PO1610)).

Lastly, pay attention to the amount of sleep and exercise you engage in. These are both keys to good health. The National Sleep Foundation has a lot to say about the importance of sleep. “Sleep is vital to your well-being, as important as the air you breathe, the water you drink and the food you eat. It can even help you to eat better and manage the stress of being a teen” ([sleepfoundation.org/sleep-topics/teens-and-sleep](http://sleepfoundation.org/sleep-topics/teens-and-sleep)).

### Practical ways to start building a habit of health

If you want to eat better, pick one thing to eliminate and one thing to add to your diet. Changing habits consists of replacing bad actions with beneficial actions. Keep a journal listing what food and drink you consume, and how you feel before and after consuming them. Look for patterns.

If you want to get more sleep each night, consider your habits. Staying up late is a common factor, but you also may not be getting enough exercise ([choices.scholastic.com/blog/physical-activity-may-improve-teen-sleep-habits](http://choices.scholastic.com/blog/physical-activity-may-improve-teen-sleep-habits)).

Additionally, using electronics before bed can make it difficult to fall asleep. Try drinking non-caffeinated hot tea before bed, reading a book or getting your school work done earlier in the day, and set a consistent bed time. Using an alarm clock or timer can remind you to get to bed by a certain time and help you wake up more refreshed.

If you have a goal to exercise more, consider what type of exercise you enjoy. Set a time of day to exercise, and

choose how many days per week you will focus on this goal. Keep a journal of your workouts, and try to find a workout buddy. “One of the biggest reasons people drop an exercise program is lack of interest: If what you’re doing isn’t fun, it’s hard to keep it up” ([kidshealth.org/en/teens/exercise-wise.html](http://kidshealth.org/en/teens/exercise-wise.html)).

Even physically fit athletes can find it hard to stay active during the off-season. If the coach does not require mandatory practice, muscle atrophy and lack of discipline may seep in. By making a plan to change up your exercise routine to keep things interesting during break, your strength will easily return and even be increased by the support you have given your body throughout the year.

Look for accountability. Talk to your parents. Tell them your plans and goals. They will be proud of your commitment to taking care of your body, and may have advice to help with your specific challenges.

### Spiritual nourishment is an essential part of our health

In the book of Matthew, Satan used Jesus’ physical weakness after 40 days and nights of fasting as an opportunity to tempt Him to create bread to satiate His hunger, but Jesus answered, “It is written: ‘Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God’” (Matthew 4:4, New International Version).

Pray to God. Lay out the plans you have made in prayer. Ask Him to provide people and resources to support you. “The heart of man plans his way, but the Lord establishes his steps” (Proverbs 16:9, English Standard Version).

Share your goals with your friends. Support each other in positive self-improvement. Talk about things that each of you would like to change in your lives, and help each other stay committed to the goal.

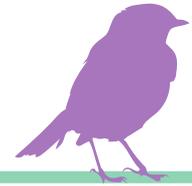
Sticking to your goals to maintain your health may prove difficult during times of transition. Take time to assess your goals again each month, and as the stages of your life change, i.e., during summer break, family sickness, church camp, when preparing to go to college.

Taking care of your health may seem unimportant right now, but creating a habit of health will help you develop the discipline and self-control to grow spiritually. If God has given you the blessing of good health, don’t take it for granted. Set yourself up for a physical body able to serve others, and to enjoy each healthful day. **CC**



*Kristin Corsi lives in Bethpage, Tennessee, with her husband and homeschools their two young boys. She attends the Nashville congregation, was baptized at 19, and currently serves in the choir and Sabbath school.*

# OVERCOMING



## SHYNESSES

**I**T was my first year at summer camp, and I was 13 and shy. Sure, my counselor was nice, and I made a few friends during initial activities, but lunchtime was hard. After lunch, everyone else was talking, and I didn't know what to do with myself. I didn't know how to join their circles. So I went to the bathroom. I just stayed in there for the rest of the free time! I felt terrible.

No one wants to hide in the bathroom, but it can be hard to know what to do around new people. It's important to remember that the most significant things you will accomplish, and your most memorable life experiences, will likely come out of the relationships you will build with people you haven't even met yet! So if you *do* want to overcome shyness, here are some tips.

### 1. Remember you are loved

Shyness usually results from some kind of fear. At camp, I was so afraid of what other people would think of me that I hid. Fear was a crippling force in my life, and it was caused by being overly focused on myself. My desire for acceptance had actually become a kind of pride—I was too proud to let anyone see me fail. God desires so much more for us than a life of stunted pride. He wants us to be confident and secure in His love for us, so that we can go out and love other people! First John 4:19 says, “We love because He first loved us.” If we are too scared to be friendly toward other people, we are failing to use the blessings God has given us. He loves us so that we can, in turn, share His love with others.

### 2. Don't stress

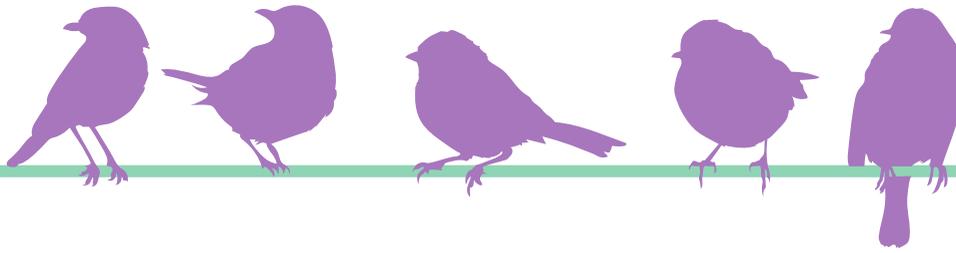
I tend to overthink things and wonder whether a person will like me. Keep in mind that other people are just that—people. Some of them will be kind. A few of them won't be. But the chances that someone will hate you just for introducing yourself is very slim. Most people are not going to be offended if you ask to sit in the empty seat next to them. Most people are actually very nice if you give them the benefit of the doubt. Proverbs 18:24 reminds us that “a man who has friends must himself be friendly.”

### 3. Focus on the other person

Ask about their hobbies, sports or family. Go into every conversation with the goal of learning something new. Be warm and smile! At first, this can be really hard. You may feel quite scared to talk to a new person, but if you go into the conversation with the goal of learning something you don't know about their life or the things that are important to them, it will be less scary. The other person may even consider you a great conversationalist.

### 4. Laugh at yourself

Are you afraid of saying something dumb? The truth is, you probably will, so you might as well accept it! Your best moments with people are on the other side of those mishaps. If you are a perfectionist like me, you might prefer to never get into a situation where you look ridiculous. But that may leave you alone in a bathroom! So you might as well



get out there, talk to people, and laugh at yourself when you drop your soda on the floor. Everyone has moments like that. If you can laugh it off, people will love you for it.

### 5. Know your worth comes from God, not from people

Not everyone is going to like you. There, I said it! As a recovering people-pleaser, I've found this hard to accept. I often wonder: Why can't I make everyone like me? But the truth is that we don't get our value from what other people think of us, but from what God thinks of us. God wants us to rely on Him, not on other people! Accepting this can help you to be more willing to take chances and build relationships with others. God is still your Rock, no matter what people do. He loves you, and He has chosen you to understand His truth and to serve Him. Take time to pray to Him. Tell Him how you feel, and ask Him to help you overcome your shyness. Sometimes you just have to be kind, but be okay with the fact that not everyone is your best friend. God is never going to give up on you, and that's what really matters.

### 6. Turn your shyness into service

The world is full of shy people. If you are one of them, you have the unique ability to truly understand how another shy person feels. God wants

us to use our experiences to help other people. You can make a difference in someone's life just by going up and talking to them, saving them a seat or sending them a text. You can be a blessing to other shy people!

I once heard a story about a young man who went to an entire two-week church camp and came home having only really gotten to know two people. The next year, he decided to try to learn the first and last name of everyone in the entire camp. Not only did he make a ton of friends, he proved to himself that

when he reached outside his comfort zone, he could do seemingly impossible things with God's help. Soon you may be in a situation where you will be meeting many new people, like the Feast, Winter Camp or a Winter Family Weekend.

Maybe this year is your year. Are you ready to break out of your shyness? You *can* do it, with God's help! **CC**



Joy Porter attends the Cincinnati East, Ohio, congregation. She has been blessed to be married to Clint for 13 years. They have a busy and loud household with two boys and two girls. Joy loves writing, long-distance running and chocolate. She also is a 2004 graduate of the University of Tennessee with bachelor of science in early childhood education.

# COMPASS CHECK

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