



DIGITAL

DARK AGES

*Just one more video, just one more level...
then I'll be happy, right?*

Name Withheld

I refer to my middle school years as the Dark Ages because of my personal trial during that time.

My parents thought they had a strict electronics policy, but they were unaware that their online filters only worked on the computers and not on other electronic devices.

I got hooked on YouTube and games on my smartphone and tablet. I would think of bizarre questions and just look them up. I let my curiosity control me. Inevitably, I even ran into pornography.

I wasted hours upon hours staying up late at night watching pranks and funny videos. I thought it was making me happy. But deep down I knew it was destroying me. I also spent hours upon hours playing games. I downloaded new ones when I got bored of the old ones. I “earned” points and “bought” things to “benefit” my “character.” I leveled up and leveled up. And for what?

Nothing.

It all boiled down to colorful, pointless pixels that wasted countless hours of valuable time. Distraction—it’s one of Satan’s biggest and most effective tools.

During the Dark Ages, I drew away from my family, finding sneaky ways to be on my electronic devices without my parents’ knowing. I was constantly on edge, worrying that my problem would be discovered.

During the Dark Ages, I began to develop awful ideas. I doubted my beliefs. I had unclean thoughts and unrighteous plans for my future. I was desensitized. I let my electronics control me.

One day, my parents found out I had the Internet on my device and asked to see it for inspection. I could’ve easily covered up my tracks; I’d done it before.

My mom and I sat on the end of her bed. She assured me that I’d get my phone back the next day and explained what she and my dad were doing.

I felt the strongest impression to confess. I got hit in the head with the brick I’d been dodging for so long; I knew *I needed to change*. I was afraid, but the Lord gave me the strength I needed to confess.

When I told my parents, they were disappointed but understanding. I lost their trust for a while after that. My electronics went into my parents’ custody, and I chose to go to the bishop to help me repent. It would be months before I touched my electronics again.

I hadn’t fully realized the extent of my problem until I quit. For years, I’d been relying on it for a false sense of comfort and security. Whenever I still had a bad day, I’d think, “Well, I’ll just watch some funny videos and play some games.” But then I’d realize that those days were gone. My main source of pleasure was now gone. I felt

confused and lost. What was I supposed to do now?

Gradually I lost my attachment to my electronics and discovered new ways to find joy. Over time, I realized how badly I'd been destroying myself.

I wish I could say it was over after that. I've fallen into the habit again a few times since then. But every time it happens, I can feel the companionship of the Spirit leave as I get sucked into the distractions of the world.

Whenever that happens, I force myself to delete all the games on my phone and disconnect with the Wi-Fi. I have to do this in one brief moment, as soon as the realization comes. Otherwise, if I procrastinate, I allow myself to rationalize.

Each time I'm reminded of the Dark Ages, I see how far I've come since then. I don't want to go backward or wayward; I want to go forward. The Lord, my family and friends, my future children—all of them need me to press forward.



Going anywhere but forward is selfish and prideful. Satan feeds off of it. He knows that his hold is firm on the selfish and proud. If people think their decisions affect only themselves, then they'll choose to do whatever they want at the moment.

I've also learned to use media and entertainment sparingly. I enjoy watching movies, because movies end. When I was on the Internet so much, I just kept going and going like it would never end.

I use social media only occasionally.

Even then, I can get distracted and waste time. I have to be careful.

Often when I tell other teenagers of the blessings of limiting their technology use, they get defensive. But trust me, life is so much better this way.

I'm closer to my family. I realize what has real value in my mortal and eternal life, and I cling to it. I can experience true joy as I draw closer to the Lord in righteous thoughts and actions.

Yes, it will be hard, but it is *so* worth it. **NE**

▶ Using Technology

Check out a clip from Elder Ian S. Ardern of the Seventy about tuning in to the Lord in a world full of technology at lds.org/go/technologyNE916.

