

The issue of youth and technology is one of the most important, and difficult matters facing our world today. I have written and spoken extensively about this topic, and the research related to it, and I encourage parents to check out my articles at www.james-schroeder.com by searching under tag terms such as technology and mobile devices. No matter what decisions that parents make, it is critical that consideration is always given to what is best for youth in the short and long-term. Below, I share a slightly modified letter I recently gave to my oldest daughter (with her permission) regarding our decision to not give her a phone.

My Dearest Daughter,

As your first year of high school closes in on its last quarter, I want to first say how much I love you and how exciting it is to see you grow. It's hard to believe that in a few short years you will be launching out on your own. I just hope what your Mom and I have done, and will do, prepares you for the exciting and challenging world that lies ahead.

As part of our ongoing discussions, I know one of the things that you continue to desire is to have a phone of your own. Of course, with all your friends sporting their devices, and so much happening online, I don't blame you for a second and I appreciate the understanding you have shown us in our decision to not provide you with one.

Of course, we have talked about all the [research related to serious problems](#) with youth and their phones, including the risks with sleep, attention, your emotional state, spirituality, social skills, and many other factors that make myself and others concerned that parents are placing devices in the hands of youth who simply aren't ready for what the technology can provide.

But beyond all this, I want you to know that your mother and I want something even more for you when it comes to this difficult decision. And that is freedom. You might think, "What – wouldn't giving me a phone give me the freedom that I am wanting?" Again, we understand why you might initially think this way. But give me a few minutes, and I will explain the freedom I am talking about.

It is the freedom from unnecessary distractions.

Of course, we are all going to be distracted at times, but what I am describing is the constant buzz and temptation of distractions that so many of your classmates are experiencing every minute of the day. As you and I have talked about these, you know that once a phone is with you, you never leave these distractions. And yet, what concerns me the most is that studies are showing that for many who experience this kind of constant arousal as youth, these distractions never leave them, and for decades to come they struggle to focus and pay attention in ways that are needed the most.

It is the freedom from dependence.

I have spoken to many teens your age, and they all say the same thing. They don't know what they would do if they didn't have their phone. Even in just a few short years, or even months, they admit that they have grown so dependent on this device that they can't imagine how they could function without it. Whether it is finding their way to a new place, communicating with others, or even handling awkward, boring moments, they *need* their phone or otherwise they feel lost.

It is freedom from excessive anxiety.

Just as the phone can create dependence, so it also creates anxiety that is not good for you (and others). I realize that part of this anxiety comes with excitement from what the phone allows you to do. But as you and I both know, your classmates spend so much time worried about how others will respond to their posts and their chats that they sit in class either scrolling through the latest post or text, or worry about what they will find on their phone when the bell rings for class to be dismissed. It just makes it so much harder for them to focus on what they are doing in the moment.

It is the freedom from unhealthy expectations.

Years ago, I was sitting on a panel talking to a few high school students, and I asked them a question that I have asked many times before. Simply put, I asked them if they ever turned off their phone. These students looked at me, and said they “could”, but they never “would.” And the reason is that if they did, they not only would worry that they missed something important, but that others would wonder why they weren’t responding immediately. As with so many other teens, they confessed that if you have a phone, the expectation is that you respond as quickly as possible, or otherwise something is wrong (with either you or them). And that is simply too much pressure for you to have.

It is the freedom from temptations and exploitation.

In my office at various times over the years, I have had a teenage girl like yourself—from a stable, loving, faithful household—describe to me how they were pressured, or even just asked—if they would send nude images to a boy. They all knew it was wrong. They all knew that despite feeling excited that this boy saw them as attractive, they would regret the decision. And they did, even years after it had occurred. In the best of scenarios, these pictures were never shared (to their knowledge) with anyone else. In the worst of scenarios, they were either passed along to the boy’s friends and many others, or used as blackmail to get even more nudes from them. And in every situation, these girls worried for a long time about where the pictures (and videos) might end up. Temptations to compromise yourself and be exploited have always existed. But the phones have turned temptations into something that happens instantly, every single day.

And finally, if that isn’t enough, **what we want most is for you to have the freedom to live as God would have you live.** We understand that not having a phone has made it hard (and embarrassing) for you in some ways, and we hate that the society is supporting a practice that is not best for you and your friends. But no matter what is happening, we want you to have the freedom to listen to God’s call no matter where it takes you each day. I recognize that having a phone doesn’t mean you can’t still hear and follow God’s call. But just as the seeds (as in the parable) that fall on fertile ground are more likely to grow than others, so we believe that tough decisions like this, too, will give you the best chance to grow into the woman that you are called to be.

We understand the frustration you might feel at us in regard to this decision, but please know we are doing what we believe is best. And we hope that as you continue to grow, you will also continue to be free. We love you and are so proud of you.

Love,

Dad