



# My cell phone is killing my prayer life!

by Christopher Weber



It started innocently enough, with one family cell phone for emergency use. A year later, we bumped up our plan to 60 minutes of use.

Last August, I got my own "emergency phone", this time with oodles of "anytime minutes" to take the place of our regular long distance. I can now call anyone, anywhere, any time. And that is significantly affecting my quality time with God.

## CAN YOU HEAR ME NOW? Hello?

My short commute has been a great time for prayer. I often turn off the radio, listen to a great religious album, sing along, pray out loud, or turn everything off and just reflect. Some days my mind is a whirlwind as I drive home through the peaceful countryside. Other days, I am exuberant and thankful. Just about every time that I pray, I feel blessed by God's reassuring presence.

A recent conversation with a colleague drew me up short. She was talking about why she did not own a cell phone, and did not plan to get one. Her daughter had argued that a phone would enable

the daughter to "get in touch with you anytime." My friend responded that maybe she didn't WANT to get in touch with her daughter anytime! As we talked about wireless phones, and how they are used, I realized that my phone use was creeping into the quiet times in the car. I was, quite literally, on the road to becoming a cell phone junkie!

## Creeping Cellular-itis

Here are some statistics to support what many of us have already noticed:

- Cell phone use has more than doubled in the United States over the past 5 years, to over **169,000,000 users**.

- Over 60 percent of all wireless phone calls take place **IN THE CAR**.
- In 1998, the average wireless customer spent 122 minutes a month on the phone. Just three years later, in 2001, the average use was 320 minutes a month.\*

## That's a lot of wireless talking!

For me, it began with the "I'm-stuck-in-traffic-and-going-to-be-a-little-late" calls. Over the months, it progressed to "need anything at the store" calls. Just three weeks ago, I was heading back to the office from a meeting, and decided that while I had nothing to do I would call my mother. I



chatted with her for the duration of the 20 minute trip to Emmitsburg.

Now, who can argue with the 42 year old calling his mother? Besides, we had a great chat. Don't get me wrong -- the call was a good thing -- but it was symptomatic of a creeping attachment to my mobile phone that is insidiously whittling away at what minimal solitude I have left in my life. It is even creeping in on time spent with my kids, with nature...or time that should simply be spent **enjoying the moment.**

### **Any Time, Any Where**

Mobile phone users can place a phone call (*with digital quality, no less*) from just about any location. You can take calls while walking the dog, playing with the kids in the park, or going to church. If you want to, you can even (*gasp!*) converse while in the restroom. Does this description sound familiar? When I was growing up, my parents used the same examples to describe how I could **talk to God!** My haunting realization was that giving others 24/7 access to my life threatens some very precious times where I can allow God to speak to me.

### **The Other Side of the Story**

In this column I am not starting a campaign to rid the world of mobile phones. After all, they do save lives. Did you know that U.S.

cellular phone users make **200,000 calls a day** to emergency personnel? \* That is a lot of calls for help! Not only that, but wireless phones are an invaluable tool for people who are on the go as they work. My great phone plan allows me to be better in touch

**Can I remember life before mobile phones?  
Can I remember what was better about it?**

with family members, who live far away. And those are all great things.

Despite the benefits, I need to exercise restraint. Here are some things I am considering about my own use of the phone:

### **A Wireless Examination of Conscience**

- Can I remember life before mobile phones? Can I remember what was better about it?
- Do I need to be available 24 hours, 7 days a week?
- If I am going for a 15 minute walk, do I have to take my phone with me? Who will miss me for 15, or even 30 minutes?
- Can I allow a few extra

minutes in the car for solitude, for prayer, or even space for my own thoughts?

- Would the world come to an end if I left my phone at home one day? Would that be worth trying?
- Can I find more moments in my day to listen, pray, reflect?

They say self-awareness is the key to personal growth. Maybe today, during the drive home from work, I will turn off the phone, and savor a few quiet moments alone with God.

Mom -- can I call you **later tonight?** ☒

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**Comments about this article?**  
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**\* Statistics courtesy of the Cellular Telecommunications & Internet Association,**  
<http://ctia.org>