



Spring 2004 *Go! Online* Bible Study

The Cyber Mission Field

Materials:

- *Go! Online* Download Video: “Are You Wired?”
- Computer, monitor, or video projector to display video
- Copies of *Go! Online* Group Activity for “The Cyber Mission Field” (one per student)
- Copies of Spring 2004 *Go!* magazine for each student (unless they’ve already been distributed)

Video Introduction:

The *Go! Online* download video for this study is called “Are You Wired?” It’s 1 minute, 17 seconds, and it’s intended to help your group focus on the topic of Internet evangelism. When you’re ready for the study, play this short video clip for your group.

Discussion:

After viewing the video, take a few minutes to find out about your group’s use of the Internet—specifically the amount of time they spend instant messaging, in chat rooms and on message boards or forums. Possible questions could include:

- How much time do you spend on the Internet, in general?
- How much time do you spend talking with friends and/or strangers using IM, chat rooms, blogs or message boards?
- Have you made friends on the Internet?
- How are Internet relationships the same and/or different from “regular” relationships?
- What are the pros and cons of Internet communication?
- Do the people you spend time with online know more or less about you than the people who know you in the “real world?”
- Have your opinions or worldview been influenced by others online?
- Have you ever participated in a spiritual discussion online or had a chance to tell someone about your faith?

Transition:

Once you’ve covered some of your group’s experience with online community, say something like this in your own words:

Although we don’t always think about it this way, the Internet is a huge mission field. It’s a place where millions of people come together to talk about what they think, what they love, what they hate and how they live. And it gives Christians a chance to spend time with unbelievers who would never show up in a youth group and who we might never get to talk with about spiritual stuff anywhere else.



Many of us get involved in relationships and communities online. But have you ever thought about purposely looking for ways to share your faith in Jesus with people there? Today, we'll look at how we can do that.

Teach the following points in your own words and according to the needs of your students.

1. Living It Online

Conversations with people online can be harsh. Because it's so easy to be anonymous, many people—especially teens—are more likely to be hurtful and sarcastic, to talk about a lot of sexual stuff, to use raunchy language and—of course—to lie.

Unfortunately, even Christian students act this way online. For some reason, we decide that it's okay because nobody will know it's us. Of course, it's not okay. Just like in the "real world," the first and most convincing argument you can make for Jesus is how you live.

Listen to these passages from the Bible and ask yourself if this is what people see in your life in the "real world" and on the Web.

Either read these passages yourself or pick students to read them to the group for you.

Love

"Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres" (1 Corinthians 13:4-7).

Online and in your real-world relationships, do Christians and unbelievers see these things in you? Patience. Kindness. Lack of envy. No bragging. No rudeness. Keeping your cool. Being hopeful by trusting God. Wanting the best for others. Not having fun with sinful things.

That's the way God loves us. If what we believe about God is true, that's the kind of love people should start to see in our lives.

If you're part of a community online or at school, do people know you as the person who is loving, kind and hopeful?

Good, Honest Words

Relationships on the Internet are all about words, and the Bible says plenty on how a believer's words should make him stand out from unbelievers:

"The mouth of the righteous is a fountain of life, but violence overwhelms the mouth of the wicked" (Proverbs 10:11).



A Christian's words give life and hope, as opposed to the many unbelievers online who use their words to destroy others.

“A perverse man stirs up dissension, and a gossip separates close friends” (Proverbs 16:28).

Too many online conversations focus on gossip. A believer who refuses to gossip will stand out.

“The Lord detests lying lips, but he delights in men who are truthful” (Proverbs 12:22).

One of the hard things about online relationships is that you can never be sure if someone is telling you the truth. But Christians can stand out and build a solid reputation by always telling the truth. God hates lying. Every time. Even online.

Hopeful Attitude

“Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have” (1 Peter 3:15).

One more thing that should make a Christian stand out in the real world and in online conversations is that we live in the hope of heaven. We believe God is in control—even when life is very hard. We trust Him to provide for and protect us—even when people online mock or reject us.

Peter wrote that people *will* notice that difference in us and ask how we can live that way—which leads to the next point.

2. Speaking Up

In your real life relationships and those online, living what you believe isn't enough to lead others to faith in Jesus. We also have to *tell* about Him. How can we do that on the Web?

Gentleness and Respect

Here's what Peter wrote immediately after that verse on being ready to answer those who ask about our hope:

“But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander” (1 Peter 3:15-16).

Some Christians on message boards and chat rooms try to argue for their beliefs with the same arrogance, harshness, cutting words and angry comments that unbelievers use to tear down our faith. That's the opposite of what the Bible teaches. We must tell about Jesus' love using Jesus' love to tell it.



Being Ready

The other thing Peter said is that we should "be prepared to give an answer." Often Christians on message boards and in chat rooms say strange or silly things about Jesus and the Bible because they just haven't taken the time to fully understand what they believe and why.

We must be careful not to miss our opportunity to tell others about Jesus in a worthwhile and convincing way because we're not sure what we're talking about. Not everyone needs to be an expert on the arguments for faith in Jesus, but we should be ready to talk about why we believe what we do.

Group Activity

Hand out the copies you made of the *Go! Online* group activity for this study. You should have one for each student. Explain that the questions on this sheet are from the fiction story in the Spring 2004 issue of *Go!* magazine. However, they're very typical of the kinds of things some unbelievers say online. Ask your students to break up into groups of three to five and talk about the best way to answer these kinds of questions online.

After adequate time, call everyone together again and ask for volunteers to share some of the answers they talked about. Encourage some discussion about what the best answers are. Ask for volunteers to share experiences they've had talking to people in the real world or online about topics like this.

Before moving on, suggest that your students find out how the character in the story answered these questions by reading it in the current, Spring 2004 issue of *Go!* magazine. Those interested in using apologetics to influence others for Christ can prepare with some of the resources listed at the end of that article.

Also, consider taking a few minutes to lay out the plan of salvation in the most basic and straightforward way possible to help your students prepare to reproduce it in conversations online.

3. Telling Your Story

When Paul was called to defend himself before King Agrippa, he could have used any of several different approaches to lay out the case for faith in Christ. What did he choose? It's described in Acts 26. He told his story. He told about his past before he was a Christian. He told how he came to know about Jesus and the change that He made in his life. He explained his own personal experience in having a relationship with God through Christ.

Next to letting people see the change God has made in you, telling your own story is still the most powerful tool you have for sharing the Good News about Jesus. People online might be able to counter your logical arguments for God—and they can



definitely just refuse to see the truth—but nobody can tell you that your experience with God isn't real. And when they see a real difference in your online words and attitudes, that's even more powerful.

One great way to share your story online is through ConnectWithGod.com (or link to it through go.studentz.com). At this site, Christian students can write a short description of how God has changed their lives and then e-mail a Web link to their story to friends and family members. What a great way to get the conversation started!

Conclusion

Wind up this study by briefly reviewing the major points of telling people we meet online about Jesus.

- (1) As people get to know us, they should see a difference in our words and attitudes that includes kindness, love, honesty and patience.
- (2) We must be prepared to explain why our faith makes sense to us. That takes a little thought, time and effort.
- (3) We should also be ready to tell our own testimony of Jesus—the story of what He's done in our lives personally.

Take a few moments to close by praying that your students will spend their time online wisely, in purity and taking advantages of opportunities God brings their way to tell others about Jesus.

**All Scripture quoted from the Holy Bible, New International Version, unless otherwise noted.*

