



A resource to spark biblically-centered conversations with your kids about the issues they face in today's youth culture.

GAMING: THE ENTERTAINMENT OF OUR HEARTS

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In 2023, the gaming industry reached a total of \$184 billion and boasts around 3.38 billion players worldwide. Gaming has come a long way from dots on a screen. Our interaction with gaming can range from it being our job to a key part of our lavatory habits. Anything with this magnitude of impact on our world should cause us to pause, even though it may be easy to jump quickly to the negative impacts of gaming. Asking if games are good or bad is the wrong question. We need to be cautious of anything that captures our hearts (especially the hearts of so many!). It is important to start with the “why” behind gaming. We don’t have to go far to find out that gaming companies have all of us as their business strategy. Although video games can foster positive engagement, even the users know that today’s games are designed to addict. Whether it’s on a console that looks more like an air purifier or your mobile device you carry with you everywhere, we all need to pause and ponder the “why”: Why were they made? Why do I play them? Why am I having this conversation about gaming in the first place?



WORLD

What is Happening?

Entertainment, although certainly not sinful by itself, needs its proper place. Christians should always be evaluating what tugs on and is tied to our heart, especially if they are addictive and designed to entertain us. In America’s entertainment world, gaming has surpassed the movie industry. Why? Gaming invites the user into the action. It involves the user and offers answers to the desires of our hearts.

Reagan Rose in his book, *A Student’s Guide to Gaming*, identifies three specific desires that gaming tries to fill: Dominion, fellowship, and reward.

- **Dominion** - Gaming gives us manageable worlds to conquer in whatever form fits our fancy. Today there are over 5 million different games that can be played on over 100 different consoles. This can be through creating, organizing, building, fighting, or solving. We can tailor our experience to fit our pleasure, but we can also quit when it gets too difficult.
- **Fellowship** - 82% of players said gaming has introduced them to new friends and relationships. There is connectivity and teamwork for anyone and everyone. This is not exclusive to age or gender. In 2022, there were about 1.7 billion male gamers and 1.39 billion female gamers. Instead of being limited to the next door neighbors, we can play with anyone that has access to the internet.
- **Reward** - Students study for grades. Employees work for pay or product advancement. Living for reward is part of almost everything we do. Gaming provides countless ways to win and award hard work.

What is your why? Is gaming the right way to fill it?



WORD

What Does God's Word Say?

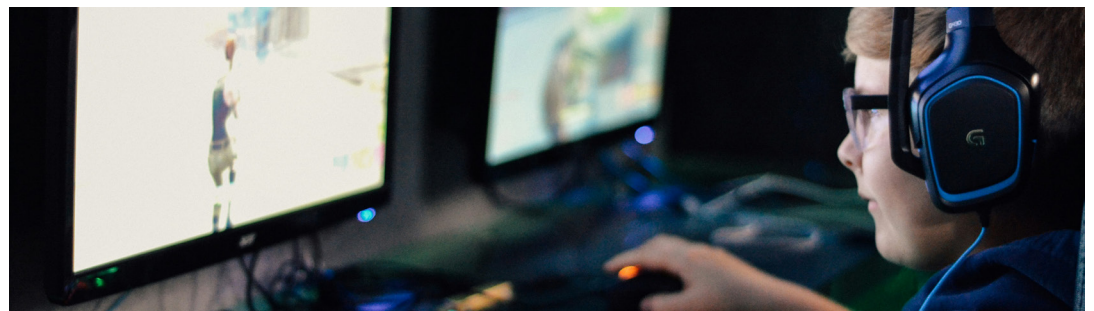
Jesus answers the trap-setting teachers of the law by pointing to our primary mission. All of our desires, whether that be people, power, or possessions, fall into place when we have our entire selves oriented toward loving God (Matthew 22:37-40). All forms of entertainment - gaming is no exception - tempt us to move away from this priority mission of loving God. As Rose cautions us, gaming is a weak substitute to our heart longings of dominion, fellowship, and reward.

In Genesis 1:28 God blesses Adam and Eve and gives them the command to, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth." We were created to rule. Although gaming taps into our purpose, it provides simulated success rather than the tangible dominion God desires of his image bearers.

Only a chapter later, God addresses the first problem in Scripture: Loneliness. Everything in creation to that point had been deemed good, but God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him" (Genesis 2:18). Gaming also tries to meet our deep need for relationship, yet just like the first man and woman chose to do when caught in sin, it actually provides a way for us to hide.¹ Instead of open and genuine connectedness, gaming allows for curated characters that hide the truth of who we are.

Finally, even pursuing reward is a God-given desire to humanity. He put man in the garden to work and keep it to receive the reward of living off of it (Genesis 2:15). The author of Hebrews spurs us on by reminding us of the faith of those before us, but also of the reward ahead of us (Hebrews 11:6). After this hall of fame of faith, the author of Hebrews encourages the readers to, "run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross..." We are spurred on towards our reward in Christ by the example he set for us. Our reward is in Christ and from Christ, a longing all of our hearts desire. This is a reward that we can start to enjoy now through faith in Christ! Our current life with Christ's Spirit brings us a taste of the fuller, future reward of life with God without a world in sin.

¹ A modern term to describe this online behavior is the "online disinhibition effect". This is when one portrays a different persona online than what is true of them in reality. For more on navigating screens in general, not just gaming, see *Raising Kids in a Screen-Saturated World* by Eliza Huie.





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WALK

Conversation Starters and Questions:

Before we look down upon our children who seem easily consumed in their gaming world, we first have to evaluate our own heart. In order to lead them to the God-centered heart desires we find in Scripture, we must first go there ourselves. The idolatry that takes place in the parent that finds their identity in a professional sports team is the same de-throning that happens in the child who finds their identity in professional gaming. In both cases, one may play the game, watch professionals play the game, and even color other parts of their life to mirror the game. Even as parents we must honestly evaluate what tugs and ties to our hearts.

Gaming is not the biggest enemy of our hearts. It's not even entertainment in general. Those can be tools used for good or bad. As we evaluate the impact of gaming on our lives, we must ask, why do we play online games? Are one of my reasons connected to one or several of these categories (dominion, fellowship, reward)? The goal is to get to the heart. Satan seeks to kill and destroy through any means, so we must be diligent about protecting our hearts. We all will be held responsible for how we have spent our time and how we have used good gifts like these. Here are some other questions to reflect on the connection of these heart desires and how we live them out biblically:

- What are some good and bad things you've seen come from video games in your life?
- Where have you noticed simulated dominion, fellowship, or reward in your favorite games?
- What real-world activities can you pursue in each of these categories?
- How can you remain focused on your primary mission of following Jesus?

"So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil."

(2 Corinthians 5:9-10)



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