# What's the Big Deal about Video Games?

By Luke T. Metzger

About the Author: Luke Metzger is a 17 year old child of God that lives on a farm in southwest Ohio with his parents, 3 brothers, and 3 sisters. He has completed his junior year in high school and is also working on his bachelor's degree through CollegePlus, an accelerated distance learning program. He and his family attend Fairhaven Community Church, a small, non-denominational congregation that stands firmly on the Word of God as its foundation. He enjoys working on the farm, reading books, competing at home school speech and debate tournaments, and spending time with his family. At this point, Luke is looking forward to becoming a large-animal veterinarian, but is committed to following God wherever He leads.
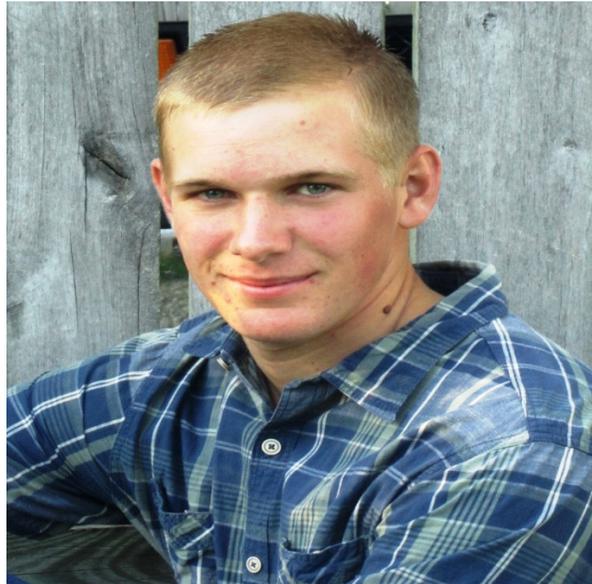
The battle was intense. The opposition was great. The sound of continuous machine gun fire mingled with the screams of approaching artillery shells and dying men. The soldier gripped his M16 tightly and considered his options. The two oil drums he was hiding behind right now were very vulnerable to explosion if hit by an enemy shell. 400 feet away he spotted a concrete pillar that had once been part of a bridge. Three of his buddies were concealed behind it, trying to formulate a course of action. The soldier decided to join them. He waited for just the right moment, and then sprinted forward through the dangerous open area. Unfortunately, an enemy machine gunner positioned atop a nearby building spotted him and released a round of deadly bullets. The soldier's body crashed heavily to the earth as his life slowly drained away. Suddenly the screen darkened, and a message appeared that said, "Sorry, you died. Please restart mission." We rub our eyes and realize that the epic

struggle we just witnessed was being waged entirely by the two thumbs of a teenage boy, who is lounging in his bedroom playing a video game.

Video games are very popular with a lot of people in the world today. For example, a 2013 study released by the Entertainment Software Association[1] states that 58% of Americans play video games. 20.77 billion dollars were spent on video games and accessories in 2012 alone. For most people, video games are just another form of entertainment. But there are many problems that result from playing video games, and they are having a negative effect on our society. As Christians, it is our duty to assess the influences in our lives and honor God with our usage of time. I am not saying that all video games are evil and it is a sin to play them. I am simply saying that video games overall are detrimental to our lives and relationships and we should consider the consequences before letting them become a part of our lives.

Let's first define what a video game is. A video game is *an electronic game played by means of images on a video screen and often emphasizing fast action* according to Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary.[2] Electronic versions of puzzles, checkers, card games, etc. are not video games. Common types of video games include racing games, fighting games, and platformer games.

There are several reasons that video games are detrimental to society, and one of them is violent video games. Scientists have conducted many studies over the years about the effects of violent video games on behavior. They have discovered that violent video games cause increased aggressive behavior in individuals who play them. Dr. Craig A. Anderson, a distinguished psychologist at Iowa State University, is widely regarded as an expert on the effects of violent media. He was quoted in a New York Times article, entitled 'Shooting in the Dark' that was published on February 11, 2013. This is what he said:

"None of these extreme acts, like a school shooting, occurs because of only one risk factor; there are many factors, including feeling socially isolated, being bullied, and so on. But if you look at the literature, I think it's clear that violent media is one factor; it's not the largest factor, but it's also not the smallest. At the very least, parents should be aware of what's in the games their kids are playing, and think of it from a socialization point of view: what kind of values, behavioral skills, and social scripts is the child learning?"[3]

One of the biggest lies about media is that it has no effect on our thinking. Whether we realize it or not, the things we watch and the games we play have a powerful effect on our beliefs, values, and choices. Every movie and TV show we watch, or video game we play is communicating to us whatever idea the creators want

us to believe. Common sense and science tell us that you cannot spend hours every day playing violent games without it having an effect on you.

Christians should not play violent games because it displeases God. Psalm 11:5 states: "*The LORD tests the righteous, but the wicked and the one who loves violence His soul hates.*"[4] Why would we ever play something that God hates? Some people justify playing violent war games because they are fighting "the bad guys." But in reality, war is a terrible, terrible thing that causes great heartbreak and devastation. Even though it is sometimes necessary, we would never fight a war just for fun. And that is exactly what you are doing when you play a war game.

The second problem with video games is that they are addictive. Some children just play video games, but others are actually addicted to them. Dr. Douglas Gentile, associate professor of psychology at Iowa State University, has studied gaming addiction broadly. In an article published in the Science Daily on January 19, 2011 entitled 'Risks, Consequences of Video Game Addiction Identified in New Study,' he said,

"We're starting to see a number of studies from different cultures -- in Europe, the U.S. and Asia -- and they're all showing that somewhere around 7 to 11 percent of gamers seem to be having real problems to the point that they're considered pathological gamers. And we define that as damage to actual functioning -- their school, social, family, occupational, psychological functioning, etc. To be considered pathological, gamers must be damaging multiple areas of their lives."[5]

These people who are addicted to video games have a real disease. Gaming addiction is just as real and harmful as addictions to gambling, alcohol, or drugs. Some consequences of excessive game playing include carpal tunnel syndrome, obesity, sleeping disturbances, attention disorders, eating irregularities, migraines, backaches, etc. Addicted gamers neglect everything except their games, including their health.

The reason video games are addictive is that they create a false reality. As graphics and technology continue to improve, video games continue to get more life-like. As a result, when players win a game or complete a mission, they feel a sense of accomplishment, like they have actually done what is in the game. But, of course, playing video games accomplishes nothing in reality. Also, there is no responsibility involved in video games. If you make the wrong move, and die, who cares? All you have to do is start over. It's not hard to understand why people would rather live in this kind of a world.

Video games are very near and dear even to those who are not addicted to them. This is obvious because many people never stop playing them. The 2013 study by the Entertainment Software Association[6] states that the average age of video game players is 30. Only 32% of gamers are younger than 18. This fact has serious consequences that can be seen all across our culture. There is a whole generation of people today that are 18-30 years old, and yet they have never grown up. They refuse to accept the responsibilities of life, and just wander around aimlessly, living the life, hanging out with friends, and playing video games. This is a problem because men who should be out working, pursuing their educations, and preparing to lead their families, churches, and nations are instead sitting on their couches playing video games and being a burden to society. There is a great lack of leadership in our nation, and one of the major causes of this is video games.

I hope I have successfully shown you all the ways video games negatively influence us. Only one question remains. What should we do about it? The solution is not just to throw away your video games, although that might not be a bad idea. Philippians 4:8 gives us a good standard to evaluate our video games with. It says, *"Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy — meditate on these things."* Also keep in mind Ephesians 5:15-16 which says, *"See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil."*[8]

When it comes down to it, most video games are not inherently sinful. You can play them if you want to, but you are missing out on the best in life. Video games limit your experiences to whatever can fit on a screen. Real life is much more exciting! The world is full of vast oceans, rugged mountains, thick forests, rushing rivers, sandy deserts, dark caves, bustling cities, and quiet meadows that you can explore to your heart's content. And you want to stay home and stomp on gumbas? Reality is the best video game ever! It is in 5D. You can feel it, smell it, hear it, see it, and taste it! There is no video game that can do that.

For Christian young men, however, it is not just a personal choice. God expects us to do great things for Him. We are the future leaders of our world. We need to be prepared to advance the Kingdom of Christ. Young men in other countries are being beaten, tortured, and killed for their efforts to spread the gospel, while we just sit on the couch and shoot zombies. Where are you men of courage? Who will go against the culture and stand for the truth? Who will help advance the gospel and turn our nation back to God? None of this

can be accomplished while Christian teenagers are hiding in their bedrooms playing video games. So, let's put down our controllers, unplug our TV's, go outside, roll up our sleeves, and with the help of God we can spread the gospel, defend the truth, be an example, and reclaim our lives, our communities, our countries, and our world for Jesus!

Citations:

[1] "2013 Sales, Demographic, And Usage Data: Essential Facts about the Computer and Video Game Industry." Entertainment Software Association. Web. <http://www.theesa.com/facts/pdfs/ESA_EF_2013.pdf>.

[2] "Video Game." *Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary*. Merriam-Webster. Web. 12 Dec. 2013. <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/video game>.

[3] Carey, Benedict. "Shooting in the Dark." *NYTimes.com*. The New York Times, 11 Feb. 2013. Web. 12 Dec. 2013. <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/02/12/science/studying-the-effects-of-playing-violent-video-games.html?pagewanted=1&_r=2&>.

[4] "Psalm 11:5." *The Holy Bible NKJV, New King James Version.* Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2011. *Bible Gateway*. Web. 12 Dec. 2013. <http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm+11%3A5&version=NKJV>.

[5] "Risks, Consequences of Video Game Addiction Identified in New Study." *ScienceDaily*. ScienceDaily, 19 Jan. 2011. Web. 12 Dec. 2013. <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2011/01/110119120550.htm>.

[6] "2013 Sales, Demographic, And Usage Data: Essential Facts about the Computer and Video Game Industry." Entertainment Software Association. Web. <http://www.theesa.com/facts/pdfs/ESA_EF_2013.pdf>.

[7] "Philippians 4:8." *The Holy Bible: NKJV, New King James Version.* Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2011. Web. 12 Dec. 2013. <http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Philippians%204:8&version=NKJV>.

[8] "Ephesians 5:15-16." *The Holy Bible: NKJV, New King James Version.* Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2011. Web. 12 Dec. 2013. <http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Ephesians%205:15-16&version=NKJV>.