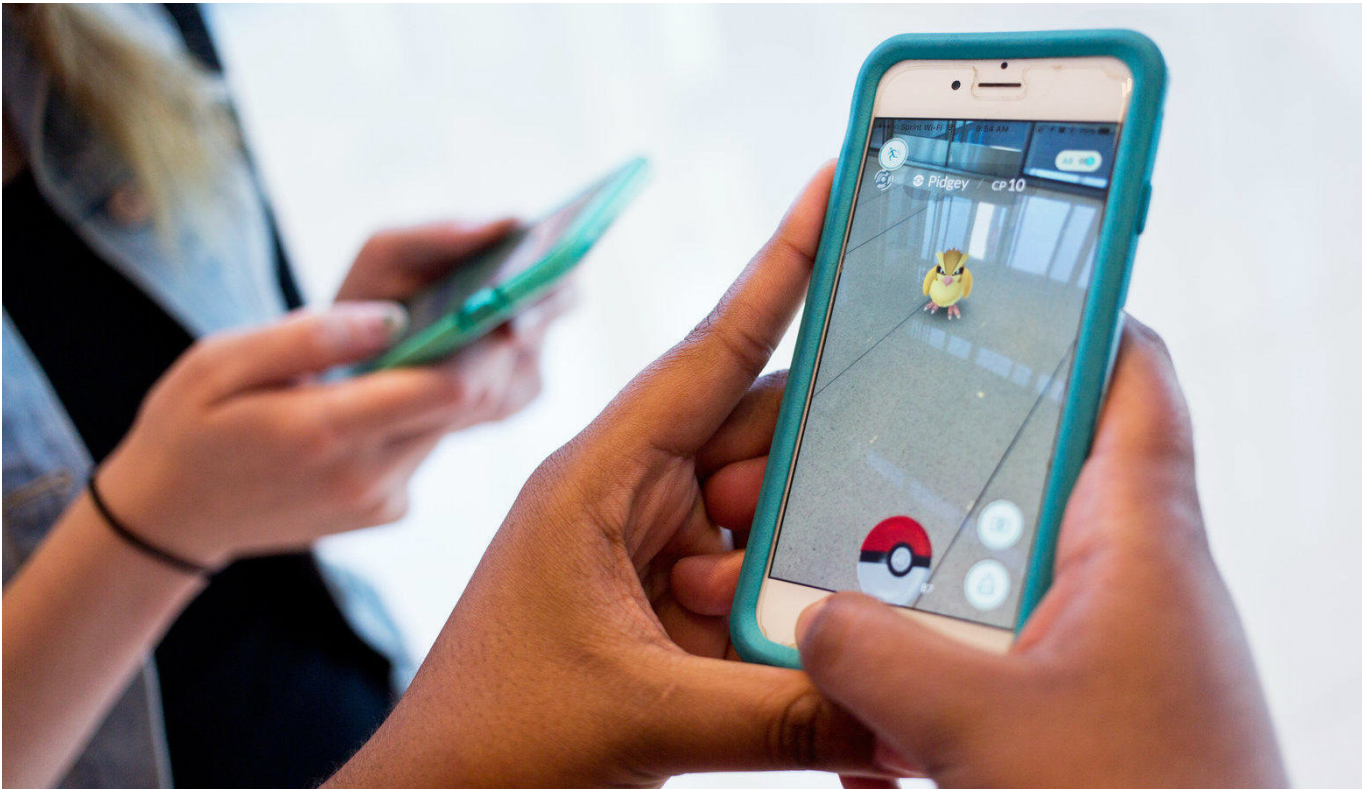


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What is God's Perspective on: Pokemon & Gaming, Distracted Lives & Fantasy,
Social Media & Whether Amusements can be Neutral for Godly Minds

The Evangelical Drug of Choice

- Article by Phillip Holmes



We're obsessed with fantasy. The explosion of interest surrounding Pokémon Go is yet another example of our desire to escape the real world — of real people and real problems — and enter into a make-believe world, or at least an augmented one. In less than a day, Pokémon Go shot to the top of the app stores, and in less than a week it is now the biggest mobile game to date.

But before we poke fun at Pokémon fanatics too quickly, consider that it's only one way our obsession with fantasy and entertainment manifests itself today. On-demand streaming, live television, video-sharing websites, and social media are platforms growing majorities binge on as ways of escape.

Our ability to access entertainment and escape from reality has swiftly and effortlessly encroached on every aspect of our lives. Impatiently waiting at a traffic stop? Grab your smartphone.

Is your wife annoying you? Login to Netflix.

Is the subject in class dry or irrelevant? Check your Twitter timeline.

Bored? Instead of meditating and praying, we go searching for Pokémon.

Although these devices and platforms aren't inherently evil or sinful, they become dangerous when we develop habits of defaulting to them *primarily* or *alone*, allowing them to become our means of escape from the complexities and inconveniences of life into the more easily controlled world of fantasy.

Evangelical Drug of Choice?

While many evangelicals are quick to condemn alcohol and drug abuse, our drug of choice has become entertainment and fantasy. It softly distracts and weakens Christians daily.

Using entertainment as a primary means of escape is like “chasing the dragon” — a slang phrase, which refers to the continuous pursuit of an ultimate high previously obtained at the initial use of drugs.

For example, a drug user tries heroin for the first time and has an amazing experience. But when he returns to the drug, he can't get that same experience. Instead, the experience gets weaker, so the user takes more and stronger heroin to reach that same feeling. As he "chases the dragon," the user's body decays inside and out. This decay usually manifests itself in extreme itching, unwanted weight loss, slurred speech, kidney or liver disease, and more.

Addiction to entertainment is similar. The health effects are not as noticeable as heroin, but the spiritual effects are costly. Many have unrestrained affection for entertainment devices. They may seem to harmlessly distract us from the guilt of sin, friction in relationships, or anxiety about work. They become what daily prayer and Bible reading should be — a sanctuary for the rest and comfort of our souls.

We've failed to recognize that our never-ending pursuit to escape through games and fantasy is a direct enemy of our joy. And our addiction will subtly cause contempt towards God and reticence in our duty to ultimately delight in him.

Broad or Narrow Path

Jesus reveals that when we gravitate towards anything as our primary means of comfort, we're moving further and further away from our Creator ([Matthew 6:24](#)). Jesus exposes an insightful reality: Love of anything other than God will cause hatred towards God. But the hatred is subtle.

Ricky Scaparo

First off, You may be asking what is “Pokemon Go”?

In its world, “trainers” travel the world to catch **varied monsters** called Pokémon — rats, **dragons**, swordlike creatures, and more — and use these critters to fight each other.

The word “Pokemon” is a contraction of two Japanese words, “Poketto” and “Monsut?,” or “**Pocket Monsters**” in English. Pokemon was created by Nintendo in Japan in 1996. It was a role-playing game involving cards, similar to the popular game “Dungeons and Dragons”.

The Pokemon are supposed to be “monsters” that **have special powers** and **share the world with humans**.

CARM

“Is Pokemon dangerous? Potentially, yes it is. It conditions the child who plays the game into accepting occult and evolutionary principles”.

Haunter can **hypnotize, eat a person's dreams and drain their energy**.

Abra **reads minds**.

Kadabra emits **negative energy that harms others**.

Gastly induces sleep.

Gengar laughs at peoples' fright.

Nidoran uses poison.

Charmander, Haunter, Ivysaur, Kadabra and many more evolve. The children are taught to use these creatures to do their will by invoking colored energy cards, fights and commands. Much of it is reminiscent of occult and eastern mysticism.

Like many video games, Pokémon is riddled with occult concepts. Concepts like **"magical stones," teleportation, ghosts, all-seeing eye, psychic power and using spirits to achieve results in the real world** are all givens in this game realm. All of this is contrary to scripture.

The Magic Worldview is the idea, common to all occult belief systems, that there is not really any sovereign Deity over creation. Instead, creation is ruled by a series of occult laws. In a sense, the universe is like a cosmic vending machine. As long as you put in the right coin (ritual or spell) you automatically achieve the desired result.

Particularly disturbing is the concept that children are being trained to "capture" demon-like creatures, train and control them, and use them against others. Many believe this very closely mirrors what many high-level occultists attempt to do with real demons.

The magician works from within a specially prepared magic circle which supposedly protects him from the demon as long as he stays inside it. He uses special magical weapons like a wand, staff or sword to threaten the demon and make it do his or her bidding. Once the ritual is successful, supposedly the demon belongs to the magician to do his or her bidding—as long as the stipulations of their contract are kept by sorcerer. Often the demon will grant the magician occult powers or give him or her special talismans to control others. This is a large part of high magic.

Now, there is barely a dime's worth of difference between this and what goes on in the "make-believe" Pokémon universe!

Staying Focused on God in a World of Distractions

Paul reintroduces us to this quality we have already seen for older men (reverence is the second quality listed in v. 2).

All men whether older or younger, are called to have this kind of singular focus upon a godly, reverent lifestyle. This word “reverence” in word studies that have been published variously describe a man with: a “seriousness about life, a dignified lifestyle, and a goal of pursuing whatever honors God”.

Reverence doesn’t mean never laughing, showing humor, or enjoying life—rather it means because God is your focus, you checking in first with Him, to be sure that the laughter, humor, and enjoyment are pleasing to Him.

This grace-prompted reverence leads men to make to constant choices to avoid the trivial distractions that can consume days, weeks, and months of our lives; and instead of distraction, to focus upon the pursuit of the eternal.

A focused life is what each of us should desire to give to God today.

- Focus light and you get a laser burst.
- Focus water and you get some commercial cutting applications.
- Focus atoms and you get some momentary atomic power.
- Focus on money and you get a passing fortune like a Rockefeller, Gates, or Buffet.

But—focus your life on Jesus Christ and you get an eternal reward, and endless delights.

Learning How to Focus on God

How is your focus this morning? I recently was struggling seeing with my new glasses. They were made by the best doctor, prepared in the best lab as a special gift for me heading out in ministry—but they were a bit fuzzy. I went in and found that the

blurred vision was neither the glasses nor my eyes, it was just one of the nose pads had gotten bent. Just a tiny correction and the world was all clear again.

How clearly are you seeing God these days? Crystal clear, bright, and empowering, or has God gotten blurred over the days and weeks of life that has gone by?

One great benefit of this chosen lifestyle of “reverence” for God is that when we do so, we see Him in His glory and it changes us. As we open to Isaiah 33, we see the continuing effect that Isaiah’s sight of God in chapter 6, had upon his life.

Remember he saw the Lord, felt His holiness, and experienced the sanctifying power of cleansing and consecration. But for Isaiah that wasn’t a one-time event, that led to a life long pursuit of reverence. Look with me at Isaiah 33:14-17 and stand with me for the reading of God's Word:

Isaiah first asks who gets to spend time enjoying the Presence of God, using concepts we later see in the book of Hebrews about our God who is a “Consuming Fire” (Hebrews 12:29):

Isaiah 33:14b-17 (NKJV) *“Who among us shall dwell with the Devouring Fire? Who among us shall dwell with Everlasting Burnings?”*

The answer to that question comes in v. 15 with a list of distractions to be avoided:

*15 He who **walks** righteously and **speaks** uprightly,
He who **despises** the gain of oppressions,
Who **gestures** with his hands, refusing bribes,
Who **stops** his ears from hearing of bloodshed,
And **shuts** his eyes from seeing evil:*

Then the reward for staying focused on God in a world of distractions is offered. This is what makes godly people make the choices to focus on God:

*16 He **will** dwell on high;* [This is the incredible opportunity for: Closeness to God.]

*His place of defense **will** be the fortress of rocks;* [This is the incredible offer of: True Life-long Security.]

*Bread **will** be given him,* [This is the incredible reminder that when we spend time with God: He satisfies us, we NEVER have empty and unsatisfied souls.]

*His water **will** be sure.* [This is the description of a refreshed life: Jesus said in John 7 that when we come to Him He gives rivers of life giving refreshing waters to flow out of our life by His Spirit.]

*17 Your eyes **will** see the King in His beauty;* [This is the incredible opportunity for: Spiritual Insights, if we seek Him we find Him in all His Beauty when we seek Him with ALL our hearts.]

*They **will** see the land that is very far off.* [This is the pilgrim mentality of Hebrews 11: they made it by all the distractions of life because they sought a better place, a Heavenly place. They laid aside the weights that beset them and ran the road that was heading towards Heaven.]

That list of promised benefits is worth more than we can ever imagine.

All of those spiritual treasures are offered to those who REVERENCE GOD, choosing one-day-at-a-time to focus their life on Him and ignore the distractions.

So that is the lesson of our Bible study this morning. But now comes the most important part: the APPLICATION to MY life.

Just like in personal Bible study, when we gather as a church and hear God's Word we have to come to a point of decision.

Am I going to be just a hearer of the Word or a doer. God says don't miss out on my blessings by just listening and walking away and forgetting all you heard: BE DOERS.

Isaiah 33 before us reminds us that OUR God offers to all who focus upon Him the very greatest treasures, when we reverence Him by avoiding those distractions that so easily beset us. The application of this life of reverence is a time of considering some:

Choices that Strengthen Our Focus upon God

- 1. Grace-prompted Young Men (and all the rest of us) who Focus on God will choose to: Start Godly Habits** (Romans 13:14).

Romans 13:14 But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts. NKJV

There are twin imperatives here. "Put on the Lord Jesus Christ" and "Make no provision" are both commands from God.

A command or imperative means an action we must make, and God awaits our response to what He asks us to do.

So the One who bought and paid for us by His own blood says first of all:

I command you to put on Christ in the form of new chosen daily habits.

And secondly He commands: MAKE NO provision to feed, strengthen and supply the old you, your flesh. Don't feed your lusts.

Remember that an imperative in Scripture means that He WAITS for a response.

This morning God is waiting for you to either begin or reaffirm your response.

What is our answer to His command that each of us:

- Choose to put on Christ (which comes through the Word, prayer, and walking in the Spirit); and
- Make no provision (which is cut off all supply routes). It is either yes I will do that, or no I won't. The Christian life has no middle ground.

Simple Personal Choices

At the start of this New Year why not decide to cultivate some godly habits?

If you are distracted from God by websites, TV shows, magazines, games, music, videos, and so on, that are less than Christlike, destroy them.

If there are avenues that defile and deaden your reverence for God, such as cable TV/HBO and ungodly internet access, get rid of them.

Do whatever it takes to starve the evil desires of your flesh, and those of your family. **Put on Christ by starving your flesh!**

How do we start? Here are 5 small choices you could make in this New Year that can completely change the focus of your life away from the distractions of the world and onto the God who waits for your attention each day.

Each of these little choices starve the old habits and lusts we have built up, and allow us to start strengthening the new us we have in Christ. Grab a pen and jot one or more of these down, and prayerfully decide you will begin some of these godly new habits:

- ⇒ 1. Make a choice to: ***Read God's Word before email or any online activities each morning.*** That choice reflects Christ's Words in Matthew 6:33 "Seek FIRST the Kingdom of God".
- ⇒ 2. Make a plan for: ***Creating an intentional place of solitude, so that you can not only read God's Word, but also avoid any distractions until you can prayerfully apply the lesson you found: into your own life. That is the MOST VITAL part of each day's devotional time.*** Jesus called this in Matthew 4:4 "living by every word of God".
- ⇒ 3. Decide you will start a new habit to: ***Pray in the car or meditate on a verse instead of listening to the radio or music for 15 minutes a day.*** This can transform our car time into an altar of sacrifice to God. Many of us are all alone in the car except that Someone else is there, often

sitting right next to us in the front seat. God is waiting for us to talk to Him, invite Him into our day and just acknowledge that He tags around with us everywhere we go.

- ⇒ 4. Take the huge step of fasting from the ultimate distraction of Media: ***Skip a day of reading online news, the newspaper or favorite magazines as a fast to prove you are not controlled by anything; and instead memorize one verse to meditate upon that feeds your soul.***
- ⇒ 5. Finally, ask the Lord if He is able to give you enough of His grace for you to: ***Have a no-television/video/gaming week or month and see if you can study through an entire book of the Bible or read a great Christian classic.***

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