

Finding God in Video Games

“This is the Way”
Scripture of the
Day



A Daily Devotional for
Gamers, by Gamers

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INTRODUCTION:

“Finding God in Video Games” has been our labor of love for almost ten years, blending our personal appreciation for video games with our heartfelt desire to reach this generation with the Gospel of Christ. The mission of our devotions, articles, and videos are to encourage both Christians and non-believers alike of the relevance and necessity of a daily, personal walk with Jesus Christ while challenging some of our perspectives and pre-conceived notions along the way.

The world of gaming is an incredible way to experience an emotional journey, spend time with family, or simply stay connected with friends around the world. It gives us a rich, common language that is shared across all ages, nationalities, and backgrounds in every walk of life. And the reality of God is so much more than what we often give Him credit for because our mortal minds struggle to comprehend Him. When walking the earth Jesus often used allegories and parables to help us understand the complex concepts of God, faith, and living this Christian life. And through our gaming anecdotes, favorite video game narratives, and our passion for all things “nerdy”, we aim to uncover the deep truths of God in our day-to-day adventures in the vibrant world of gaming.

It is our prayer that these daily devotions inspire our readers to see the eternal wisdom of God in a modern light and provide hope and encouragement in a world that is overflowing with negativity, darkness, and suffering. These devotions are meant to take the experiences we have had in the world of video games and relate those to the Biblical truths we have found through our own study of the Bible and the inspiration of the Spirit of God.

Use of particular games in the entries that follow should not be considered a recommendation of these titles or a gauge of the appropriateness of its content for all ages, maturity levels, or beliefs. We strongly encourage all gamers and parents to utilize not only the ESRB ratings on the game cases when making entertainment decisions, but to also listen to the Lord’s guidance on what is beneficial to spend our time with.

January 1

A large portion of our video game experiences are populated with WAITING... waiting for the game to install, then waiting for the patch to download, followed by waiting for the levels to load, and then the waiting REALLY begins. We must wait for our character to level up enough to advance, we wait for the story to build to its crescendo... the most exciting and rewarding part of the game can often be dozens of hours away from the point where we first began our journey. But it is through our patient growth that the game produces the desired results, and we experience the satisfaction of a story that rewards our patience with victory.

It would be nice if our devotion to the Lord was followed immediately by heavenly trumpets, a booming voice from the clouds supporting us, and immediate gratification... but this is not how it typically goes. We are responsible for our obedience, not the results... and He is never late, even if we have to wait. Let's not become discouraged if our faithfulness does not produce immediate fruit... at the right time our patience will align with God's perfect plan, revealing a victory beyond our wildest dreams.

Habakkuk 2:2-3

Then the Lord answered me and said: "Write the vision and make it plain on tablets, that he may run who reads it. For the vision is yet for an appointed time; but at the end it will speak, and it will not lie. Though it tarries, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry."

January 2

Starting a new game feels exciting and full of freedom at first... but that simple quest log with only one or two basic tasks to complete can turn into an unmanageable tangle of conflicting priorities quickly. Next thing you know we are trying to remember whose chickens needed rescuing, which villager asked for this book, and oh yeah... saving the world is ALSO on the list. In all this madness it is easy to wonder how this will end up coming together... but the developer built each part of this story with a specific (and achievable) endgame in mind.

It can be easy to feel overwhelmed as we stare at the challenging road that lies ahead of us, and the deeper we get into the journey our quest log may seem to fill up with more battles and priorities than our screen can even handle. But the Lord planned our entire story... from our humble beginnings in chapter one, through every detour we made, and all the way through our final epilogue. He will deliver on EVERY promise He has made to us... and when He says all His promises will come to pass, He truly means that ALL of them will come to pass before our final credits roll.

Joshua 21:44-45

The Lord gave them rest all around, according to all that He had sworn to their fathers. And not a man of all their enemies stood against them; the Lord delivered all their enemies into their hand. Not a word failed of any good thing which the Lord had spoken to the house of Israel. All came to pass.

January 3

Most video games I play start off with a lot of loss... the protagonist has lost their family, home, fortune, identity, skills, memory, or sometimes all of the above. Then we begin the lengthy process of finding their true purpose and putting their life together again... not the same life they originally had, but a life that is better and stronger than it was before. By their journey's end, these characters have become the best version of themselves and gained a group of friends that have been forged into a family through the adversity that we faced together. Enduring the pain wasn't easy, but there was more to their story than the losses that previously defined them.

Enduring the losses we experience in life is never easy, and when we are still processing them the last thing we want to hear are a bunch of well-intentioned but empty platitudes about how "it gets better". But our faithfulness to the Lord as we walk through the valley of the shadow of death is how we ensure that these painful experiences are used to build us, our faith, and our character. It is our enemy that causes the pain, but it is the Lord who uses even this pain to bring about something GOOD for us... and He always rebuilds us better than the way He found us.

Job 42:10

***And the Lord restored Job's losses when he prayed for his friends. Indeed the Lord gave Job twice as much as he had before.
Now the Lord blessed the latter days of Job more than his beginning.***

January 4

Sometimes it feels like the worst thing that has ever happened to my video game characters was ME. I mean, think about it... they were just living a happy, simple life until I came along and challenged them to solve ALL of the problems of the world they were living in. They did not ask for this destiny, but I picked up a controller and marched them into it anyways. But the truth is that they were created for this very purpose... it is in their coding to be the hero of the story. It is what they were designed to do.

The challenges and battles we face may feel bitterly unfair and overwhelming at times, but there is a reason we have been chosen to be here in this exact place and at this specific time. Our existence is not an accident or a coincidence... it is our destiny in Christ that has brought us to this moment. Will we feel troubled about it at times? Of course we will... even Jesus felt that way during His “play-through”. But we were intentionally designed for this moment, and our purpose is being revealed THROUGH the cross we have been challenged with carrying. If anyone knows how it feels to carry an unfair cross, He does... and He will never let us carry it alone.

John 12:27

“Now My soul is troubled, and what shall I say? ‘Father, save Me from this hour’? But for this purpose I came to this hour.”

January 5

Playing video games typically involves helping people... we round up their missing chickens, search for a lost family heirloom, or assist them with carrying something. But as I assist them, part of me wonders what they are going to do about their problems once I am gone... I mean, all I did was catch their chickens. They are going to get loose again, because the owner never solved the actual root cause issue of their problem... their fence is full of chicken-sized holes. Helping them out is good, but a more permanent solution would be better.

Many times, I have been guilty of simply laying on the ground and wishing things were different, ignoring the outstretched hand of the Lord because I didn't actually want to be "healed" ... I only wanted to be "helped". The Lord hears all our cries for help, but the act of "healing" us is a life-altering moment we must be prepared to embrace... not just for help in our external situation, but the parts that reach deep inside to transform and heal us internally as well. Christ's touch is never merely superficial... it is supernatural. And if we are truly willing, He will heal us... but He always starts from the inside out.

John 5:6

When Jesus saw him lying there, and knew that he already had been in that condition a long time, He said to him, "Do you want to be made well?"

John 4:10

Jesus answered and said to her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, 'Give Me a drink,' you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water."

January 6

Finding new party members in our games who are willing to help us on our quest is always a welcome moment... but I have found that not all of them have my character's best interests at heart. Typically, we find this out at the worst possible time... when they sabotage our journey at a critical moment and reveal their true intentions. Their betrayal hurts... but the truth is they were never loyal to me or to my mission. Their only true connection to me was in how I benefited them, and our partnership ended once their agenda no longer aligned with mine.

Even Christ had followers who only wanted access to Him for what He could “do” for them, and because of this He did not commit Himself to them. These same crowds would soon be chanting “crucify Him” because they were not following Him... just His gifts. We will also face similarly painful betrayals from supporters who seem to be our greatest ally until our calling diverges from their interests. Jesus had thousands of followers and twelve disciples...while He served them all, He only “committed” Himself to three loyal souls He truly depended on. Let's show love to all but commit ourselves carefully.

John 2:23-24

Now when He was in Jerusalem at the Passover, during the feast, many believed in His name when they saw the signs which He did. But Jesus did not commit Himself to them, because He knew all men.

Matthew 26:36-37

Then Jesus came with them to a place called Gethsemane, and said to the disciples, “Sit here while I go and pray over there.” And He took with Him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and He began to be sorrowful and deeply distressed.

January 7

I am pretty mediocre at fighting games, and there is a very simple reason for this... I don't like to block. I prefer the mindless chaos of frantically mashing my buttons, trying to land a move through the sheer volume and speed of my actions... a strategy easily overcome by a more patient player. In many fighting games you don't even press a button to block... it's accomplished simply by doing NOTHING. If I press a button it actually cancels my block, allowing me to take damage... so if I want to block effectively I have to stand there, patiently endure the storm, and wait for the right time.

While Jesus does not simply "take the wheel" in every situation we face, in the circumstances where we have prayerfully followed the Lord's direction on what to do and the situation has not changed, we only have one action left to take... be still, trust Him, and wait. It can be extremely hard to simply stand still while the enemy continues to press the attack, but it is the Lord who will defend us. Let's resist the urge to impatiently make a move out of frustration... He always powerfully delivers on His promises in a way that reveals His unmatched glory.

Exodus 14:13-14

And Moses said to the people, "Do not be afraid. Stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord, which He will accomplish for you today. For the Egyptians whom you see today, you shall see again no more forever. The Lord will fight for you, and you shall hold your peace."

Psalms 46:10

Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth!

January 8

“Realism” in games sounds fun and immersive on the surface, but I don’t love dealing with the “realistic” impact of finding that the items I’m carrying have expired or are no longer usable because they have fallen into disrepair through a lack of consistent maintenance. Nobody wants to reach into their inventory for a much-needed item only to pull out moldy food or broken items that need to be fixed. Taking care of my equipment is not the most exciting part of the game, but intentionally monitoring it is the only way to remain effective at all times.

With all the battles we are constantly fighting through in life, it can be easy to accidentally take our salvation and even our entire relationship with God for granted. This is a relationship that must be intentionally maintained, and if we aren’t careful, we can actually neglect this incredible gift. Unused items expire and frequently used items break... either way they must be attended to. Let’s plan time with Him daily to proactively build and strengthen our relationship, not just when it’s time to repair damage. All relationships require TIME... and He is looking for ours today.

Hebrews 2:1 and 3

Therefore we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away. How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard Him?

January 9

Gaming has become more accessible than ever, thanks to ever-increasing portable and console options as well as mobile devices that allow us to play games wherever we want. But this does not mean we can play everything we want on these devices... platform exclusivity is becoming even more pronounced as we have graduated from “console wars” to “content wars”, with games and characters that can only be found and played on specific devices. Following Spider-Man’s continuing adventures forces us to upgrade to a PS5... because that is the exclusive place where we can find him.

Exclusivity is not the most popular word in our vocabulary, but our limitless accessibility to the Father does have a specific requirement... the singular access point of Jesus Christ. We can reach the throne of the Almighty God in prayer wherever we are, but it is the completed work of Christ and our acceptance of Him as our Mediator that facilitates that access. Jesus is more than just the best way, He is the ONLY way... and maintaining that connection means continuing to follow Him in our daily choices and upgrading our walk accordingly.

1 Timothy 2:5-6

For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time.

John 12:26

If anyone serves Me, let him follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also. If anyone serves Me, him My Father will honor.

January 10

I don't know about you, but I am proud to be a lifelong gamer... and because of this my favorite hobby has saturated my life in many different ways. I wear gaming shirts in public, I excitedly enter gaming stores and arcades while out shopping, and one way or another my passion for gaming comes up in everyday conversation because it is a big part of my life. Even during those time periods when being a gamer was looked down upon or socially discouraged, my love of all things gaming was impossible to miss. I proudly entered my local arcade with a fistful of quarters while rocking a Super Mario shirt... because this is who I am.

Following Christ will rarely be a decision that makes us feel more accepted... we may be misunderstood, rejected, or even persecuted simply on this basis. But when our faith in Him is truly and fully integrated into our lives, everything we say or do will reflect Him. Like my gaming passion, my love of Jesus cannot help but reveal itself because I proudly identify as His servant regardless of how popular that is. Let's make our relationship with Him evident in all we say and do... He is not a secret to be ashamed of.

Romans 1:16a

For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes.

January 11

One of the most compelling parts of the gaming experience is the ability to make choices in the game that not only impact the final outcome, but also make each player's experience unique. The challenge is that many of these decisions are exclusive by nature... helping one character may close off dialogue options with another character, and pressing a button may end the options for one storyline and open entirely new ones. I want to stay true to the character I am playing, but I ALSO want the best ending for the game I am playing even more... decisions, decisions, decisions.

The struggle between walking in the Spirit and living in the flesh is REAL, and it is a daily battle between the selfish wishes of our hearts and God's Spirit within us compelling us to perform His will on earth. We should not be surprised or disappointed that our fleshly desires are still present... the fact that we are struggling against these temptations is proof we have grown, and that Christ is now present with us in this fight. When we make exclusive choices for Him that feed our spirit, His path and His best ending for us and others will become clear.

Galatians 5:16-17

I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish.

January 12

Even in the best games, I find myself reaching a place of “gamer fatigue” ... it’s not necessarily that the game has changed, but the gameplay that previously felt new and exciting now feels like a bit of a grind. I start doing things out of a sense of obligation or requirement, which does not really feel like “fun” anymore. I mean, if I wanted to perform boring and repetitive tasks, I would probably go wash the dishes and laundry that’s waiting on me in the real world. I may want to find something else to play, but I know this grinding period eventually leads to the rewarding endgame that was the whole reason I started playing in the first place.

We will all get tired, drained, or feel fatigued at some point in our walk with Christ, and it is easy to reach a point of frustration when what we are trying to do is not leading to our desired result as fast as we’d prefer. If our service to the Lord starts to feel like compliance, it is time to remind ourselves of the bigger picture. Let’s not quit simply because the path feels boring and the progress isn’t visible yet... our patient obedience is generating invisible growth, and the Lord will be faithful to complete the work.

2 Thessalonians 3:13

But as for you, brethren, do not grow weary in doing good.

Philippians 1:6

Being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ.

January 13

Video game developers face some tough decisions as they begin the process of making a new game... do they stick with using the old game engine and original visual assets, or do they take on the cost as well as the risk of investing into something new? And when a studio is tasked with making games on a whole new hardware platform, upgrading is no longer optional... it is expected. What existed previously may have been perfect for its time, but it can't take them where gaming is going next. Even Mario couldn't stay 8-bit forever...

The Lord has given each of us unique gifts and callings that are meant to expand and GROW with us throughout our life, preparing us for the new missions He has for us... but we can't accomplish His new direction for our lives with our old mindset or by stubbornly sticking to our old ways and habits. Conquering these new spiritual horizons means we will have to challenge ourselves to grow our capabilities and stretch outside of the safety of our comfort zones. Going to new places with Christ starts with walking away from the familiar and embracing change... just ask His disciples.

Mark 2:22

And no one puts new wine into old wineskins; or else the new wine bursts the wineskins, the wine is spilled, and the wineskins are ruined. But new wine must be put into new wineskins.

January 14

Video games tend to have a pretty binary “cause and effect” approach to the actions we take in them... when we complete a quest we get a reward, and if we choose not to complete an objective, we may be unable to advance further. Beating a level unlocks achievements, but failing the mission sends us all the way back to the beginning. While the challenge of earning and achieving these accolades is part of what makes these games fun, it also means that the game only “loves us back” when we perform to its’ extremely specific expectations.

If we are being honest, all of us have done some pretty unlovable things in life... and if others observed us during those shameful moments, it would probably change the way they view us and impact the way they treat us. But we will never need to earn God’s attention, grace, or love... He has loved us at our very WORST. At our most despicable and selfish moment, He still chose to show us love and compassion, offering reconciliation to Him at a cost none of us could ever pay. He loves us unconditionally and completely... and His grace is sufficient to cover every unlovable thought and deed.

Ephesians 2:4-5

But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved).

Romans 5:8

But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

January 15

Most games feature specific objectives based on the story I am playing through... I may be charged with freeing a planet from an evil overlord, rebuilding a post-apocalyptic society, or simply trying to serve hamburgers faster than my guests can eat them. Each game is designed to be played based on its' desired outcomes... some people need to be rescued, and others are just plain hungry. And as the player, I must adapt my play to what is needed for that game, which may mean replacing my sword and shield with a spatula and an apron.

As followers of Christ charged with fulfilling the Great Commission, we must always be sensitive to the leading of His Spirit... and that means adapting how we interact in EVERY situation. Putting our pre-conceived notions, preferences, and desires aside to meet the needs of others is part of that mission, even if that means stepping far outside of our comfort zones. Jesus healed every soul who came to Him, but each interaction was unique to their physical and spiritual needs. We are all "NPC" characters in other's stories... let's live like we are trying to reach, help, and save them all.

1 Corinthians 10:31-33

Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. Give no offense, either to the Jews or to the Greeks or to the church of God, just as I also please all men in all things, not seeking my own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved.

January 16

Gaming characters don't really have much autonomy when it comes to the games they are in... and the journey they are on makes most of the choices in their lives for them. What if Samus would have preferred being the lead character in Legend of Zelda rather than following her scripted path as an intergalactic bounty hunter? But the developers designed each protagonist with unique skills to match the needs of the stories they are in... Samus was specifically chosen and designed to take on the battles that only she could win, and I could not imagine anyone else filling her boots.

It may be hard to understand when everything seems to be going wrong, but the Lord chose us specifically for the very journey that we are on, and He has promised to equip us with everything we need at the exact moment we need it. We aren't in the wrong place, living in the wrong time, or way out of our league... we were selected by our Father for this exact time and place to accomplish a purpose only we can achieve. Let's walk in confidence today knowing He chose us for this specific path, generating fruit that only we could grow.

John 15:16

You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you.

January 17

Chasing down new armor, weapons and loot is a huge part of the progression system in most of my favorite games... every victory we enjoy is typically accompanied by unlocking some new shiny item to make us jump higher, run faster, or make us more effective in combat. But these exciting new upgrades tend to have more than simple cosmetic purposes... we gain access to new moves and abilities right before we need to put them to use in a challenge we couldn't have taken on without them. I tend to equip new items as soon as I receive them, because they are usually needed immediately.

We have received the gifts of salvation, faith, truth, and God's word for a reason... the places we are going will require them for our success and survival. The Lord does not give us grace and strength without a purpose... He knows what we are going to face next and prepares us in advance. Each new day will hold fresh challenges, but He will always give us exactly what we need... and it is up to us to prepare by intentionally putting on His armor daily. Let's start each day with Him in the Bible and prayer to fully equip ourselves for today's battles!

Ephesians 6:13-17

Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

January 18

Few moments are more frightening in a game than taking a leap off of the screen towards something that we HOPE will be there for us to land on. Sure, the level seems designed to have a landing spot past the point where the screen has stopped scrolling, but once I make that jump, I am FULLY committed... if the developer didn't put something firm across this gap for me to land on I am going down. Even if I have watched others successfully make this jump, it is much scarier when it is MY hands on the controller and MY life that is on the line.

It can be challenging to walk by faith when we can't physically see what the Lord is doing to solve our predicaments, but taking that leap of faith towards platforms we are currently unable to see is the only way to move forward. The same invisible hands that sculpted each of us expertly designed every part of our journey, and the Father designed that path to be walked by FAITH, not by sight. He created the very ground we are walking on, so let's exhibit faith that He will guide each step we take on it today... even if we can't see what our next step will be until we after we have jumped.

Hebrews 11:1

Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

Hebrews 11:3

By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible.

January 19

Video games can often make us feel like our character is all alone in their fight to save the world... that is why many developers add non-playable companions to keep us company, provide plot exposition and advice, and sometimes just give us someone to talk to during the journey. It may be a sassy AI like Cortana from Halo, or it may be in the form of a slightly annoying “Hey, LISTEN” like Navi from Zelda... but having a partner that sticks with us through all of our struggles and battles reminds us that no matter how hard this level gets, we aren’t going to go through this alone.

The Lord did not say we MIGHT have to walk through blazing fires and raging waters... He said He will be with us WHEN we pass through them. Our path in life is going to be full of challenges to overcome... challenges we could never face on our own. He didn’t promise we won’t feel the heat... but He DID promise we won’t get burned. He didn’t say we won’t have to swim through some deep waters... but He WILL be with us through them, and His hands will hold our head up above the waves. He is with us in every battle... all the way to the end.

Isaiah 43:2

When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned, nor shall the flame scorch you.

January 20

I typically gravitate towards games that let me make choices regarding what my character says, because at least then I feel partially involved with the outcome. But most games don't provide me with that level of control... for years Link had no voice, and characters like Tidus and Sora would typically say things that only made the situation WORSE. As a matter of fact, I would've been much better off if they had remained silent... many of the problems I found myself trying to solve was the result of the words that had come out of their mouths.

The Lord is always with us in the battles that we face, but there have been many times I have found myself guilty of speaking negativity and doubt into a situation that He is already in the act of solving. Our own words have the power to decrease our faith when we are careless with them, and even Christ's miracles were limited to the faith demonstrated by those who reached out to Him. Let's speak words of faith and hope to ourselves and others within the challenges we are facing... and in those times when we can't speak words of faith, let's learn the art of holding our peace.

Proverbs 18:21

Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruit.

Exodus 14:14

The Lord will fight for you, and you shall hold your peace.

January 21

As a gamer, I am completely at the mercy of my controller, so it is a good thing it performs as expected. While I may be inconsistent with my playing skills and decisions, my controller always does exactly what it is programmed to do. If I push the jump button, my character will jump, and when I press the analog stick to the right I will move in that direction. My controller consistently behaves in a manner matching its predetermined specifications, so I can have confidence it will do exactly what it said it will do... regardless of the circumstance I am in.

When we pray, we can have confidence in a couple of things... the Lord will ALWAYS hear our prayers, and He will ALWAYS answer them in a manner that is 100% consistent with His character as well as His unique plans for us. Praying with the confidence that our prayers will be answered begins with spending time with our Father, seeking to understand Him as well as His specific will for our lives. He is the same yesterday, today and forever... and that includes how He answers our prayers. Let's pray with the expectation that He will respond to our prayers... exactly the way that we need.

1 John 5:14-15

Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him.

January 22

Over the years I have taken on some iconic foes with epically powerful weapons that made them seem impossible to defeat. From battling on foot against Liquid Snake's massive walking nuclear battle tank to the absurd size and strength of Sephiroth's massive sword, the sheer scale of their instruments of destruction seems designed to do more than just defeat us... they were also engineered to completely diminish our confidence in the process. But despite their best efforts to break our spirits in an overwhelming display of power, each of them eventually fell as the story played out the way it was designed to end... with our victory.

As Christ's followers, we should not be surprised that weapons are being formed against us... we should expect it. The Lord never promised that we would not face adversaries, but He DID guarantee that they would not prosper in their attempts to destroy us. Our enemy may have unleashed a "shock and awe" campaign designed to intimidate and discourage us, but we serve a shockingly awesome Savior who has already defeated them on our behalf. That's not a prediction, that's a spoiler.

Isaiah 54:17

"No weapon formed against you shall prosper, and every tongue which rises against you in judgment you shall condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord, and their righteousness is from Me," says the Lord.

January 23

One of the most frustrating parts of any game for me are those infamous “escort this person here” missions... partially because they don’t tend to be great followers, but also because I’m still figuring out where to go myself. We both may want the same things, but our path to get there is often misaligned. My attempts to guide them safely through the environment often results in them getting stuck behind an obstacle or caught in a crossfire. It is only when we are both aligned with the same goals as well as what path we will follow that we both reach the destination successfully.

As believers, the voices we choose to “follow” in life matter. The people and platforms we listen to for guidance either push us deeper into our relationship with Christ or farther away from Him, and many of the “obstacles” we get “hung up” on are due to following a skewed or incomplete version of the truth from another player’s well-meaning but flawed perspective. Every voice we listen to has an impact on us, and even a small divergence from Christ will lead us to the wrong destination. Let’s choose who we follow with prayer and with care.

Amos 3:3

Can two walk together, unless they are agreed?

Matthew 15:14b

And if the blind leads the blind, both will fall into a ditch.

January 24

In almost any form of entertainment media we will find characters who are protected by the infamous “plot armor” ... no matter what they do or how carelessly they behave, they will survive and thrive for as long as the story requires their presence. They emerge completely unscathed from circumstances that would completely derail others... not because of their skills, but because they are protected by a plot that can’t reach its proper conclusion without them. It’s frustrating when these “undeserving” characters are impervious to challenges that we struggle to overcome.

We will find many people in life who are openly adversarial to us, our mission, and our Lord and yet they still seem to be blessed by the fruits of God’s provision and protection. It can be both difficult and confusing to watch those who lovingly serve the Lord struggle while those who persecute them are eating right out of His invisible hand. But the Lord sends His undeserved blessings to all His children, even those who are currently rejecting Him... and His eyes are on His future plans for all of us, not just our present behavior.

Matthew 5:45

That you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.

January 25

Most of the time I play video games casually and as a way to relax... winning or losing is typically less important to me than having a good time. Someone walks in front of the screen in the middle of the action? That's fine. Trying to eat a plate of nachos with one hand while holding a controller in the other one? Yes, and please pass me the guacamole, too. But if I am trying to play a game competitively for the purpose of achieving victory, that distracted mindset is a recipe for certain failure. If I want to perform with any level of skill and stand victorious at the end, I must keep my mind focused on winning strategies.

While we don't control all of the distractions that we will face during the day, we DO choose what we consciously allow our minds to focus on. What we make the decision to look at, listen to, and absorb into our spirits either supports our walk with Christ or hinders it. Following Christ each day requires disciplining our mind to intentionally dwell on the RIGHT things... and whatever we choose to meditate on throughout our day will shape the decisions that we make and the actions we will take.

Philippians 4:8

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.

January 26

Setting the right “mood” in a video game is a delicate balance... the perfect combination of music, art design, and game mechanics can transport us to another world while we play. But this experience can quickly be marred as soon as I slip a headset on and hear other gamer’s voices filling my ears. While many players are here to participate in the story and use their words to enhance our enjoyment of it, others only use their voices to amplify negative and hurtful language, detracting from the game. Trying to embrace my destiny and save the world while listening to hateful drivel is more than just distracting... it makes me turn the game off.

The words we use are POWERFUL... both in what we say to others and even the internal dialogue we have with ourselves. The Lord has given us a powerful gift, but with this gift comes the responsibility of choice... do we use our written and spoken words to build others up or to tear them down? In life there are no meaningless words, only words with an impact that we failed to comprehend. Each word we share either imparts light or darkness into someone’s life... let’s choose them carefully.

Ephesians 4:29

Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers.

James 3:10

Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be so.

January 27

Over all the years that I have been playing video games, I have to be honest... I've never played a completely perfect game from start to finish. EVER. Even my BEST runs are still riddled with mistakes caused by my own human errors or a random combination of unpredictable events that caused me to experience a critical lapse in judgment. But pressing on towards the finish line is less about my perfection and more about my PERSISTENCE to press forward after these setbacks. Every time I fail, I respawn... and that provides me with the opportunity to learn from the mistakes I made and I try again.

We have all sinned... each and every one of us has made decisions that we would happily go back in time and change if we could. But it is our ENEMY that tells us that we must hang our heads and walk in shame and depression after our failures. We are told to go BOLDLY to the throne as a child of God to receive mercy for our sins and the grace to get back up and try again. Yes, we failed... but the mission isn't over. Let's accept the gift of grace that Christ purchased for us, boldly press continue, heed what we've learned and get back in the game.

Hebrews 4:16

Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Proverbs 24:16

For a righteous man may fall seven times and rise again, but the wicked shall fall by calamity.

January 28

When I am playing a game, I find there is a direct correlation to how adventurous I am and the current state of my character's health bar. When I have a full health bar, I am actively curious about every part of the map... I will boldly march into any cave, fully explore every dungeon, and take a deep dive in the dark to see just how deep this ocean really is. But when I take damage in a game like a "Legend of Zelda" title, I lose a piece of my "heart" that displays the current condition of my health. If I lose enough "hearts" I start playing the game more cautiously and less courageously... and I miss the best treasures the game holds.

We all take some "hits" every day... the challenge is for us to not lose "heart" and stop doing the will of the Lord when those hits happen. Even Christ experienced massive resistance the closer He got to His destiny, but He found the strength to press on when He stopped to pray and recharge in the midst of the battle. The most critical victories are often found within the darkest caves and after our most challenging battles... stay strong and don't let the hits weary you from doing good!

Galatians 6:9-10

And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith.

January 29

One of the best parts about being a “gamer” is belonging to this incredible community... while there are certainly pockets of “toxic” gamers, there is something heartwarming about the way gamers come together to share their tips and strategies to help others. MANY times I have received guidance on how to solve a difficult puzzle or survive a challenging level from a fellow gamer who unselfishly shared their keys to victory... and thanks to those who upload solutions on the internet or YouTube, gamers who may never even physically meet still help each other move forward thanks to someone showing them that it CAN be done.

As followers of Christ this is OUR way as well... we will all struggle and suffer at times. But these trials that we face are not unique to us. Many of our brothers and sisters around the world have either already fought through these battles or will face similar ones in the future. The purpose of belonging to the “body of Christ” is for us to comfort and support each other through these struggles, extending the same love and grace to those who are hurting that was once given to us in our hour of need.

2 Corinthians 1:4

Who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.

January 30

Long before we get to face the final boss fight in our video games, we encounter multiple “mini-bosses” along our path to the endgame. While pushing through each member of the primary antagonist’s entourage can seem annoying, frustrating, and unnecessary, these lower-level villains are far more important to our journey than they may seem. It is only through the process of facing and defeating them that we gain critical experience and learn new techniques, forcing us to both gain and successfully demonstrate the skills that will eventually be needed to claim final victory.

The Lord doesn’t place temptations or adversaries in our path... but He does use these trials to build us up and strengthen us for the future challenges we will face. These painful and frustrating skirmishes teach us how to patiently watch for the weak points in our adversary’s attacks, learn to lean on Christ to overcome them, and prepare us for the next battle. Let’s not lose heart during these trials... the Lord is using these circumstances to fully develop us as He guides us towards victory in the more difficult “final boss” fights ahead.

James 1:2-4

My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.

January 31

I am always amazed by the incredible worlds and adventures that game developers craft for us, and yet even these lofty accomplishments are often surpassed by the next big game on the horizon. My mind was completely blown the first time I dropped into an open-world game, but many of the titles that are currently out for purchase on store shelves put my original experiences to shame.

And when I watch the previews for some of the upcoming titles I am looking forward to this year and into the future, it is hard to imagine that they will find a way to exceed the lofty standards that already exist... but they will. They always do.

What the Lord has planned for us is beyond the most intricately designed concepts we can comprehend or imagine... His power is immeasurable, and His desire to give good gifts to those who serve Him is unfathomable. No matter where we started on our journey or what He has already done for us, there is no “cap” to what He is prepared to do for those who love and serve Him. What Christ has already done for us is merely a prologue for the mind-blowing sequels He has lined up!

Ephesians 3:20-21

Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

February 1

Want a tip on how to make a challenging part of your video game even more exciting? Have someone shut off the TV while you are in the middle of playing it... ask me how I know this. On a VERY related note, it seems our TV in the living room can be controlled by a different remote in another room. Through experience, I have found that the enemies I was facing were unaffected by my predicament... as a matter of fact, they were even more lethal when the screen turned dark. Frantically mashing my controller buttons while watching a dark screen was not the answer... it was only through pausing the game and restoring power to the monitor that I could move forward safely.

Trying to walk through life without Christ lighting our way is as hopeless as trying to defeat a game while playing on a dark screen. But just as the game changes once the screen lights up, the power our enemy holds over us is broken through Christ's sacrifice. No matter how hard we try, we cannot beat this game while playing in the dark... let's press pause, take the remote control back, and allow Jesus to shine His light into the darkness we are facing today.

Colossians 1:13-14

He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins.

February 2

Flashlights are among the most important and iconic equipment staples in gaming for a reason... if we are provided one, we know we are going to be required to use it very soon. When we are navigating through the dark places our games take us to, our flashlight is often the only comfort and illumination we receive. But the flashlight must work in the darkness to serve a purpose... a flashlight that only works in the sunlight or in a well-lit area would not really provide any value. I need to be able to rely on my flashlight to work in the dark far more than I need it to function in the light.

The Lord has called us to shine as lights in the world... while it is important for us to serve Him in our homes and places of worship, showing His light involves far more than being a witness for Christ in the safety of our comfort zones. It is also reflecting His light through a lifestyle lived in unity as His children wherever we are...continuing to shine in the dark places that life takes us, where His light is needed the most. The darkness will be present until His return... and as vessels of His light, our active presence in this world is needed now more than ever.

Philippians 2:14-15

Do all things without complaining and disputing, that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world.

February 3

Few gaming moments are more frustrating than picking a weapon up off the ground in the middle of a firefight only to find out that it is completely EMPTY. Stumbling across a rocket launcher gives me hope that I have just upgraded my combat capabilities, but that hope turns to horror quickly as I realize that it was discarded by its' previous owner for a reason... I was better off with the weapon I dropped so I could pick this useless, empty rocket launcher up. The middle of the battlefield is the worst possible place to find out that I am carrying something that looks powerful on the outside but is filled with empty promises.

The peace that this world offers is like that empty rocket launcher... it looks good on the outside, but it is hollow on the inside. It lacks the power to actually help us in our times of trouble, and leaning on it during our moments of crisis only makes our problems worse. Let's avoid these empty shells masquerading as solutions... the pursuit of money, fame, power, possessions or any other worldly pursuit will never bring us peace. Only Christ can offer true peace that will comfort our hearts during the trials and tribulations we are facing.

John 14:27

Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.

February 4

Almost every time I finish a game, I find that I am STILL loaded with unused armor, currency, food, and ammo. Once the game is over, all the resources I spent my time collecting and hoarding just goes to waste... I can't roll it over into a different game, and there aren't any trophies or achievements for reaching the end with excess inventory. Why do I still have all this overstock? Because the game gave me more than I needed to play it, but I didn't know that at the time. Many of them are items I was "saving for a special occasion" or a moment of need... so I played the game conservatively, used my resources sparingly, and saved all the cool things I found for a rainy day that never came.

Nothing we pick up down here is actually ours, and we can't bring any of this stuff with us when we leave. The sooner we recognize this, the easier it becomes to be grateful for what we have been given while we have it... and be willing to let go of it when the time comes. The Lord had promised to supply all our needs, so let's be thankful when He gives, patient when He takes away, and praise Him in the sunshine and in the rain. He will always give us enough.

Job 1:21

And Job said: "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return there. The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord."

February 5

Of all the gaming tropes that exist, one of the most common is the adversary who eventually becomes our ally. Sometimes it is merely due to the mutual benefit of working together against something bigger than our previous conflict, and other times it is because they experienced a genuine change of heart and switched allegiances... either way, we have to find a way to move past what we have done TO each other and make the choice to move on WITH each other. The challenges that lie ahead will require us to trust the creator of the game and provide an opportunity for these complicated characters to redeem themselves.

It can be incredibly hard to forgive those who have hurt us, but it is a necessity if we want to move forward in our story as well as advance the larger mission of Christ on this planet. It does not mean they didn't hurt us or that what they did was ok... it simply means we are showing others the same unearned mercy and grace that we ourselves have received from the Lord. At one point we were the villain of our own story... and the Lord redeemed us and put us back in the game. Let's go and do likewise.

Matthew 6:14-15

For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

Galatians 1:23b

He who formerly persecuted us now preaches the faith which he once tried to destroy.

February 6

I love open world games, but it feels like each character I run into has a mission for me... typically one that is much less critical than the world-saving adventure I am currently on. While these side-missions often contain some of the most entertaining content in the game, they can also pull me away from what I was originally trying to get done. I understand that you lost your locket in a dark cave full of giant spiders, but that is probably not the best use of my time when I'm trying to prevent a nuclear meltdown. Isn't there a form of pest control that can help with the rats in your basement?

There is no shortage of worthy causes and interesting side missions for us to explore in life, and many have substantial merit. But only one path leads to the destiny God designed for us... a plan He set in motion before we ever pressed start. It is only through intentionally and fully committing our way to Him each day that we can make the right decisions and avoid the siren call of side missions that only serve to distract us from the way. The Father knows the path and the location where the deepest desires of our heart can truly be found!

Psalm 37:4-5

Delight yourself also in the Lord, and He shall give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the Lord, trust also in Him, and He shall bring it to pass.

February 7

Have you ever reached the end of a game believing you were finished, only to realize that you didn't get the "best ending"? The easiest and most obvious path to the finish line is not always the one that leads to the outcome I would prefer... the ultimate finale typically involves additional battles that are much more challenging, as well as requiring me to search diligently for specific items that allow me to truly complete the game. Sure, it takes more time, work, and discipline... but what is the point of saving the world if my character and their companions don't receive the best possible conclusion to their story?

Jesus Himself said that the easiest and most obvious path in life is not "the Way" to our best ending. Following the path of Christ may be narrow and difficult, featuring a higher level of resistance and requiring a deeper level of commitment... but it is where the best ending to our story is found. If we are considering a path that involves taking an immoral shortcut or pressures us to compromise our faith, it is not HIS way. Taking up our cross will never feel comfortable...but the ending is worth it.

Matthew 7:13-14

Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.

February 8

Games tend to provide a gentle warning when a difficult challenge or a major boss fight is imminent... we are reminded to save our game, we suddenly get a massive restock on our health and ammo, or we unlock a specific new skill or find a powerful weapon that turns out to be a requirement to defeat our upcoming opponent and advance. While I would have preferred to receive all these supplies about an hour ago to help me comfortably complete some of these smaller battles, the game developer knew exactly when I would NEED each of these items, providing exactly what was necessary for the surprises waiting in the next room.

The Lord is never taken by surprise by any of the challenges or trials we face, and He will always prepare us for our big battles at our EXACT moment of need. We do not need to stay up at night worrying about what needs to be said or wondering how we will survive the upcoming encounter... let's just spend time with Him and allow Him to recharge and equip us for what lies ahead. The Lord has promised through His Spirit to give us the right words to say... exactly when we will need to say them.

Matthew 10:19-20

But when they deliver you up, do not worry about how or what you should speak. For it will be given to you in that hour what you should speak; for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you.

February 9

Most of my gaming adversaries behave in a manner that is inherently hostile towards me, even if I am approaching them completely unarmed and full of positive intentions. I could be carrying harmless items such as a book and a loaf of bread while simply walking in their general direction...they will react like I have invaded their home while dual-wielding rocket launchers and riding a fire-breathing dragon. But it is nothing personal... this is simply how they have been programmed to react to me. They are exclusively prepared for combat because that is all they typically see.

We should not be surprised or upset when the people we interact with have their defenses up... their previous experiences and past trauma has compelled that response. Those we are trying to reach in love may be initially hostile to our mission because they have been conditioned through their pain or forcefully programmed to react that way. As followers of Christ, we have been sent to SOW peace in order to MAKE peace... we are called to be the initiators as well as the cultivators of peace in every situation the Lord places us in.

James 3:18

Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

Matthew 5:9

Blessed are the peacemakers, For they shall be called sons of God.

February 10

When I get stuck on a tough portion of a game, I don't have to panic... I can simply hop online and find a gameplay video from someone who has already faced the same part of the game and overcome it. It wouldn't do me much good to reach out to someone who has never played or beaten this particular game and ask them for advice... they might mean well, but they don't have a useful perspective for my specific problem. I need someone who has already walked in my shoes, felt the frustration, and found the solution to show me the way.

If the literal Son of God experienced massive hardships and difficulties throughout His time on earth, we shouldn't expect much different during our time here. It is through His suffering that we can relate to Him as one of us, and it is through both our common struggles as well as our unique difficulties in life that we are able to authentically reach out and support others in their times of need. Rather than be surprised by the obstacles we face, let's remember that His painful path served a critical purpose... not because He did anything wrong, but so all who follow Him have a light to guide us on our way.

Hebrews 2:10

For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings.

February 11

At the end of an intense and competitive multiplayer match, there tends to be at least one player on the defeated team who feels the pressing need to get at least one last cheap shot in after their team has lost and the match is over... and even though it doesn't count towards the score or have any impact on the outcome of the match, it is still annoying and frustrating for the victorious team members celebrating a hard-fought win. These are the futile final actions of a player who was soundly defeated, but has refused to accept that reality.

Even though the battle is continuing to rage on in our lives, this war has already been won and Christ's victory is complete. Our enemy is already defeated, but he is still going to give us as many late hits and cheap shots as he can before his time runs out and his screen fades to black. We should expect to be on the receiving end of his most vile tactics, but we can still have peace in the midst of our storms knowing that none of these attacks can alter our final outcome. Let's deny our adversary's attempts to steal our peace... all who put their trust in Jesus are already on the winning team.

John 16:33

These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.

Revelation 12:12

Therefore rejoice, O heavens, and you who dwell in them! Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and the sea! For the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, because he knows that he has a short time.

February 12

Playing a cooperative game with someone can make the experience twice as fun while also splitting the burden, but it is almost impossible to successfully coordinate your efforts without effective and consistent communication. Even if both players are skilled enough to survive without communication, we miss the additional perspective our partner can provide to make the battles easier and the puzzles less challenging. And even the worst games are much more enjoyable while talking to a friend who is playing that same game alongside us.

The challenge to live a life in which we “pray without ceasing” can seem daunting, but it isn’t much different than playing games while talking to our “co-op partner”. It can be as easy and simple as asking for guidance and keeping an open line of communication at all times with the Lord... He will do all the heavy lifting in our battles, He knows the solution to every puzzle we will face, and He has the only perspective that truly matters. Christ’s companionship makes even the most painful situations bearable... let’s share every part of our cooperative journey with Him today.

1 Thessalonians 5:16-17

Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

February 13

If I am keeping it real, “assists” are my least favorite accolades to earn during a multiplayer match... while they serve a critical purpose to achieving victory, it’s not very satisfying to see everyone else’s incredible score at the end of the match while all I managed to churn out was a whole lot of assists. “Assists” feel like the equivalent of a “participation trophy” the game handed me so I feel like I accomplished something in the match. While my team’s victory in the match is ultimately the most important thing, it can be disappointing when my contributions don’t show up on the scoreboard in the way that I would prefer.

As followers of Christ we will all serve different roles... some will plant seeds while others will patiently water them without ever seeing growth. We may start someone out on their journey, help them along the way, or get to be there during that last step towards Christ... but we are all equals on this mission field working together for the glory of God. When we aren’t seeing the results we would prefer, let’s remember that if we are each faithful to do our part, it is the Lord who gives the victory!

1 Corinthians 3:7

So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase.

February 14

Brothers can be a bit of a hit or miss in gaming... while Mario and Luigi have worked together incredibly well for years as both co-op partners and friends, not every sibling pairing has fared as well. Entire franchises are based on the ongoing rivalries between characters such as Dante and Virgil or Liquid Snake and Solid Snake... adversaries who share very little common ground with each other in spite of sharing many things in common. Imagine how much they would have accomplished if they had chosen the path of love, focusing on what unites them instead of what divides them.

Not all of our “brothers” will make it easy for us to love them, but that DOESN’T change the Lord’s command for us to love them anyways. Christ loved us when we were at our most unlovable, and we are called to show that same love to others. The path of following Christ means we are not waiting for others to become worthy of His love before giving it... just as He showed on the cross, we simply spread our arms wide to demonstrate His love openly and equally to all and allow them the freedom to choose if they want to receive it.

1 John 4:21

This commandment we have from Him; that he who loves God must love his brothers also.

Matthew 5:44

But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you.

February 15

After someone gets the best of me during a competitive match, I would like to say that my response is to genuinely congratulate them on their superior skills in a display of good sportsmanship. I would LIKE to say that... unfortunately, I can't.

Instead, I tend to waste my next several lives within the game targeting that specific player to extract my revenge... typically with disastrous results. Even if I DO succeed in taking them down, I will never actually get ahead with this strategy... the best I can hope to accomplish is breaking even.

Spending our life trying to "get even" with someone is a fool's errand with an empty achievement as a reward. More importantly, refusing to forgive others and failing to demonstrate mercy and grace to them places a limit on the mercy that WE are able to receive from the Lord. Do they deserve it? No. Does it undo the damage that is already done? Also, no.... but we didn't deserve His grace, either. The infinite grace Christ offers each of us is measured out using the exact same measuring cup we use when forgiving others, so let's forgive each other extravagantly!

Mark 11:25-26

And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses. But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses.

Matthew 7:2

For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you.

February 16

One of the most amazing things to consider while exploring a video game is that every item I am seeing, touching, or just walking past has been intentionally created by someone... from an ordinary blade of grass to the individual bricks that make up a massive castle. Even procedurally generated games are using art assets that were thoughtfully and carefully crafted. The remarkable level of detail the designer demonstrated to fully immerse me in my experience means there are some objects that may get greater attention than others, but each were created for a specific purpose.

Many times in our lives we can feel like we are unseen, unheard, and even unimportant in the larger scheme of things. We may feel like our place in this world is so far off “the main path” that nothing we do even matters. But the same omnipotent God who designed the rings around Saturn and crafted each unique snowflake that falls also intricately detailed each one of us, placing us exactly where we are at right now in the timeline. Our loving Father always sees us, always hears us, and we are always at the forefront of His mind.

Matthew 10:29-31

Are not two sparrows sold for a copper coin? And not one of them falls to the ground apart from your Father's will. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Do not fear therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows.

February 17

Do you remember the first time you unlocked invincibility while playing a Super Mario Bros. title? Touching this little star protected me from every angry mushroom, malevolent turtle, and pesky piranha plant that I ran into... I even received catchy new theme music while this “star power” was activated. But this “star power” did not provide 100% protection from EVERY danger... for example, if I didn’t pay attention to where I was going and fell down a hole, it didn’t do anything for me. Even while enjoying “invincibility”, I was only protected while I remained on the prescribed path.

There is nothing in life that compares to the feeling of freedom we receive from Christ to live without condemnation for our sins... but that freedom includes the guidance to walk in obedience to Him and place ourselves under the control of His Spirit, not our own selfish desires and fleshly impulses. The Lord died to give us freedom FROM sin and condemnation, not freedom to continue to sin without any ramifications. Let’s enjoy the freedom He has purchased by honoring Him in our choices and using this “star power” to do His will on earth!

Romans 8:1

There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.

February 18

During the most challenging and intense portions of my favorite games, it helps to minimize distractions. When someone walks in front of the screen or an undesirable phone call comes in right in the middle of attempting to perfectly time a challenging jump or hit a moving target, my odds of success are much lower. Sure, I can't prevent every potential distraction... but I CAN be proactive to limit the ones I have control over by silencing my phone, sitting closer to the TV, or even turning down the in-game music to help me focus.

The challenges we face in life are difficult enough, but if allow all the distractions that surround us to cloud our minds and interrupt our thought processes, we will struggle to keep our focus on what really matters and is truly beneficial. Many things are simply not healthy to absorb, and when we give them a place in our thoughts, they occupy valuable bandwidth that limits our capacity for more critical pursuits. Let's mute those non-beneficial conversations, unfollow those toxic groups, and scroll past anything that don't meet these criteria to keep our meditation on The Lord!

Philippians 4:8

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.

February 19

Mario's methods of "powering up" are a bit unorthodox... eating a mushroom causes him to grow in strength and stature, a fire flower grants the ability to shoot fireballs, and simply touching a leaf makes him sprout a tail and fly. Conversely, touching poisonous mushrooms or negative 1-ups have the opposite effect, taking away his powers. What he interacts with and consumes does more than simply change Mario... it alters the way he plays the game, either expanding or limiting his options for how to overcome the challenges ahead of him.

What we choose to consume into our hearts and minds gives us our "equipment" and unlocks options we can use for the battles we face in life as well. Each day we feed our souls with either power-ups or poison, and what we ingest either renews our minds and grows our strength in Christ or weakens us and limits our response options. When we consume negative and toxic information it changes the way we interact, conforming us to the limitations of this fallen world. Let's choose to ingest peace, love, hope, and joy from the Lord each day to empower those responses in our actions!

Romans 12:2

And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

February 20

As a gamer who enjoys a great story, a well-made cinematic cutscene is always welcome... and in many of my favorite titles these brief cutscenes provide critical exposition as well as a nice break in the action. But after I have failed in the same spot enough times to see the same cinematic over and over and OVER again without the option to skip it... well, I tend to enjoy them a lot less. I would prefer the option to bypass them if I have already watched them once, and when they can't be skipped, they almost feel like a punishment. No matter how skillfully they are made, I would prefer to move forward and get back to the fun stuff.

We all have times in our lives that we wish we could skip through, especially when it feels like we have experienced them before. But as Job demonstrated in the midst of his painful period of tribulation, we must endure adversity just as faithfully as when we enjoy the blessings of the Lord's favor in our lives. Let's deny these momentary obstructions the power to steal our joy or weaken our faith... the Lord has NOT forgotten us, and in His time, we will press through them and move forward again.

Job 2:10b

Shall we indeed accept good from God, and shall we not accept adversity?

James 1:2-4

My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.

February 21

Has this ever happened to you? I was playing a Fall Guys match cooperatively with my wife when she picked my character up and threw me straight down a hole. Did

I mention we were playing COOPERATIVELY? Sure, she never meant for that to happen (I think), but the result was the same regardless. Our goals were both aligned (to survive the level), but by failing to coordinate her actions with me she removed my freedom of choice as well as my input on the matter. Despite her best intentions and my willingness to join her in victory, I lost my life... and we ended up failing the level.

As believers in Christ, we want everyone we meet to experience the fullness of love, joy, freedom, and peace that He brings to our lives. But, regardless of our best intentions, trying to forcibly throw people towards Christ against their will simply does not work... it only leads to frustration and loss. Reaching others for Him is a cooperative experience... we cannot force it. It is only through lifting Jesus up, shining a light on His saving work on the Cross, and compassionately introducing Him to others that we will effectively draw souls toward Him.

John 12:32

If I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all peoples to Myself.

Colossians 4:5-6

Walk in wisdom toward those who are outside, redeeming the time. Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one.

February 22

Have you ever bought a brand new game on the day of its' release, brought it home and installed it, and after playing it reached the horrifying realization that it is AWFUL? I'm not talking about disliking it... I mean absolutely everything about it is terrible and no amount of patches will ever fix it. The act of going out and purchasing a new game comes with the hope and expectation that it is actually, you know... GOOD. It is so disappointing to fork over hard-earned money for a game that simply isn't enjoyable. Games are not cheap... and the higher the cost of the game, the higher my expectations for that game climb.

Making the choice to belong to the Lord is not just a nice benefit we get to enjoy... it is also a responsibility that we must take very seriously. Christ paid the highest possible price for each one of us, and with that comes an expectation of acting and behaving in a manner that glorifies Him. As carriers of His Spirit, we bear His name in all we say or do... we are not only recipients of His grace, but ambassadors as well. We were all purchased at the highest of costs... let's represent Him well today.

1 Corinthians 6:19-20

Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's.

February 23

I am not really sure what the interview process looks like for most guards in video games, but it may not be as comprehensive as it should be... they tend to demonstrate the situational awareness of a dog who spotted a squirrel. They can get hit by a truck as explosions and alarms go off all around them... and then thirty seconds later go back to walking in circles around the shed they were supposed to be guarding like nothing ever happened. While I appreciate their single-minded dedication to guarding an area that I have now successfully looted, it seems they kind of missed the point.

Without the Lord's guidance and blessing, our best laid plans are as predictably pointless as the patrol routes of these video game guards. We may have the best of intentions, but with Him there is only ONE way... His way. God will only bless the plans that He initiated, He only answers prayers that are aligned with His will, and He only protects what was built on the solid rock of Christ. Let's break the cycle of trying and failing to guard our own selfish desires and pursuits, and instead allow the Lord to open up our minds to His perfect plan.

Psalm 127:1

Unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who build it; unless the Lord guards the city, the watchman stays awake in vain.

February 24

When I play competitive multiplayer games with my friends online, I don't expect to win every match... but it sure would be a whole lot cooler if we did. I like being on the winning team as much as anybody, but regardless of how skillfully I or any of my teammates may play at any given time, our team may still lose the round. We may get randomly matched up with other players with lower skill levels, face superior opposition, or it may just not be our night. If I am only able to "have fun" when I am on the winning side, I will only enjoy the game roughly half of the time that I am playing it.

Our walk with Christ may be filled with glorious victories, but it will also feature disappointing losses along the way. During his ministry, the Apostle Paul succeeded in planting churches in some cities and was kicked out of town and nearly murdered in others... but he continued undeterred by both the wins as well as the losses. We must show the same courage and faith in both victory and defeat, armed with the knowledge that Christ is the One who gives us the strength to achieve any success we enjoy as well as endure setbacks when they occur.

Philippians 4:11-13

I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

February 25

Truly great games stand the test of time regardless of the platform they were originally launched on. Pop in Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time from the N64, the original Metal Gear Solid from the PS1, Super Mario World on the SNES, or the original Sonic games from the Sega Genesis and you will find that these classic games remain imminently enjoyable... even with what may be considered outdated graphics and simpler control schemes. Video game technology may advance exponentially almost every year, but what makes a game a “masterpiece” over the years hasn’t changed.

It is easy for this generation to think that our modern era has somehow advanced beyond the grasp of the Bible, dismissing it as a relic that is thousands of years old and no longer relevant... but the Lord and His wisdom are neither outdated nor obsolete. Every part of the Bible is timeless and exists for a specific reason... providing context, encouragement, wisdom, or correction as needed. And its’ eternal purpose is to guide readers towards the unchanging center of God’s plan for each of us... salvation and a relationship with Him.

Hebrews 13:8

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

2 Timothy 3:16-17

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.

February 26

Many of my favorite video games are built around a very specific gameplay loop... search out items of value, lug all of my new loot to a shopkeeper to sell them, and over the course of time save up enough in-game currency to buy new equipment that is slightly better than what I started with. Then I lather, rinse, and repeat until I have acquired the shiniest armor, the most powerful weapons, and the coolest swag in the game. If want the best stuff, I must trade items of equal or greater value to attain them... and the more damaged or broken an item is, the less it is worth. The exchange rates are rarely in my favor.

While that may be true in most of our games, God's economy works much differently. We offer Him our urn that is filled with the ashes of our broken dreams, our heartbreaks, and our disappointments... and He exchanges them for unlimited love, joy, peace, and hope. The Lord wants to give us something beautiful and immeasurably valuable in exchange for our scars, our pain, our fears, and our failures... we just have to be willing to place all of them into His nail-scarred hands and leave them there.

Isaiah 61:3

To console those who mourn in Zion, to give them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they may be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that He may be glorified.

February 27

I have always been confused by the banking strategies exhibited by the non-playable characters in the video games I enjoy. I mean, who hides their money and valuables in clay pots, tall blades of grass, and easily smashed boxes? It is almost like they WANT me to take all their rupees, gold, and coins... so they put them inside exceptionally fragile items for my convenience. But the reality is that without them “funding” my journey through the game via this insecure storage system, my character would not get very far. The game was designed so I would find the resources I needed to advance hidden within these “weak” vessels.

The Lord chose us, the very similarly breakable “earthen vessels” to carry the most valuable resources on the planet - His Spirit and the good news of Jesus Christ. The Father has intentionally chosen us exactly as we are, not in spite of our weaknesses but BECAUSE of our unique brokenness, so that His strength can be shown through us. We were designed to be fragile... because that is what makes the message that we carry ACCESSIBLE to others during their journey, exactly when they need it.

2 Corinthians 4:7

But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us.

February 28

The act of “healing” in a video game has gone through a major transition over the years. The days of scouring a level for rations, first aid kits, or other health power ups have largely been replaced by a simple game mechanic... resting. If I want my character to heal, most games simply ask me to get out of the line of fire, find a quiet place to relax, and allow my armor and health to regenerate. All that combat damage takes a toll on even the most resilient character, breaking them down and limiting their abilities to help others until they stop to rest and recuperate for themselves.

Many times, the best medicine to bring back joy and peace to our hearts is to take a break, get into a quiet place with the Lord, and HEAL. Just like our favorite gaming heroes, we can do more for the Lord when we are at full capacity than when we are running on empty and on the verge of collapsing. When we feel wounded, weary, and we can practically hear the “low armor” alarm sounding in our helmets, let’s take a break from the battlefield and refill our hearts with the true peace and unlimited joy that can only come from being in His presence.

Proverbs 17:22

A merry heart does good, like medicine, but a broken spirit dries the bones.

John 14:27

Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.

February 29

There are some STRANGE things that exist in our video games that we eventually stop questioning and just accept as part of the experience. Why does touching a flower give me the ability to throw fireballs out of my hands? Why don't these fireballs burn my hands or at least scorch my gloves? Why can I swim through water on some levels, but if I fall into it on others, it is instantly fatal? But willingly discarding my views of what makes sense in the game world and choosing to play from the character's perspective is the only way to both conquer the game and enjoy it in the process.

There will be many battles we face in life that may not seem to make a lot of sense... but it is only through these challenges that we learn the correct perspective on the temporary nature of this life. Many parts of our lives may not seem "fair" ... but it wasn't exactly "fair" that Jesus suffered and died for the sins of others, either. It is only through obediently enduring these "strange" trials that our view will be shaped to see our obstacles through the lens Christ chose to view His... in service of the story the Father designed to save others.

1 Peter 4:12-13

Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy.

March 1

I don't have a lot of free time to play video games, so I can't waste my valuable gaming time running around in the wrong direction. Fortunately, most modern games provide me with plenty of "way finders" to keep me on the right track... from quest logs to remind me of my main priorities to a literal arrow on the map that points me in the correct direction, I am only as lost as I choose to be. No matter how far I get "off track", if I'm willing to humble myself and utilize these resources, I can get back on the optimal path quickly... and if I consult them before I make my first move, I can proactively avoid costly future detours.

We only pass through this life once, and if we want to avoid the traps and pitfalls that waste our time and consume our energy, we must start the day by consulting the "way finder" for this game we call life... the Bible. And like most guides, it works best when it is an ACTIVE part of our experience. By seeking His guidance before each choice we make, the light that His Word shines on our path will provide us with the insight we need for each step we take AND show us the way back when we get off track.

Psalm 119:105

Your Word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.

Isaiah 30:21

Your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, "This is the way, walk in it," whenever you turn to the right hand Or whenever you turn to the left.

March 2

I don't like to admit this, but I have been guilty of "rage quitting" during a video game... when another player is cheating to win or a portion of the game is too broken to play, even those of us who consider ourselves "mature gamers" can be susceptible to momentary breakdowns. Games are intended to be fun diversions, and when they add to the disappointment and frustration we are experiencing in our lives, this can lead to very real anger. But tossing my controller has never made anything better... it just ends up breaking it and giving me one more problem to be upset about.

We all get angry in life... especially when we are confronted with things that feel unfair or seem intentionally designed to frustrate us. We can't prevent these moments from occurring, but we DO choose how we respond to them. When we press pause and submit our feelings to the Lord before reacting, we can avoid "controller throwing" behaviors that reflect poorly on us as His followers. Let's tighten our grip on our controllers, submit our emotional responses to Christ, and deny the enemy an opportunity to gain a foothold in our lives!

Ephesians 4:26-27

"Be angry, and do not sin": do not let the sun go down on your wrath, nor give place to the devil.

March 3

Playing a multiplayer game against “bots” and the computer AI can be incredibly deceptive... even if I experience success in these controlled settings, playing the same game against real, human competitors reveals that I am not quite as good at the game as I thought I was. But if I genuinely want to improve my skills and grow as a player, I must resist the urge to stay where I am comfortable and go play where the stronger competition is. It is only in the crucible of these more challenging battles with “real” opposition that my assumptions are tested, my skills are developed, and my capabilities are grown.

The trials we experience in life can be a rude awakening for all the knowledge and skills we “thought” we possessed but were never forced to apply during actual combat. But it is only through enduring the grind of these daily battles that we grow our character and learn to place our hope in Christ, rather than leaning on our own knowledge and capabilities. Every challenge we face today is an opportunity to learn perseverance, develop our character, and increase our dependence on the Lord... and even our setbacks serve a purpose.

Romans 5:3-4

We also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope.

March 4

Rules may not seem like the most fun parts of the games we play, but we certainly miss them when they are broken or abused by others. Players who use hacks/cheats to experience success not only ruin the experience for those they are playing with, but they are also cheating themselves out of becoming better at the game. Using shortcuts, aim-bots, or other game-breaking exploits might make the game seem easier and more fun, but they actually prevent the user from improving their skills at the game they are cheating at. Cheaters may seem to win, but cheaters never GROW.

Following the Lord's commandments may not seem like the most exciting part of following Christ, and resisting the urge to take shortcuts is not easy. But the guardrails He has given us are there for our personal development and growth as well as for the benefit of our fellow "players". It is only by following His commands of how we treat others that we show His full definition of love to everyone we come into contact with (as well as those we may never meet) ... and we grow to become more like Him through each Christ-like action we take.

2 John 1:6

This is love, that we walk according to His commandments. This is the commandment, that as you have heard from the beginning, you should walk in it.

March 5

We have all endured it at some point in our gaming experiences... the agony of defeat. And as the disappointment of absorbing the loss sinks in, the last thing we typically want is to hear is a play-by-play breakdown from someone sitting on the couch next to us reminding us of the poor choices we made and what we should have done differently. Even if it is meant to be helpful, in that moment we are still trying to process the frustration and pain of failure... and we are looking for comfort, not a critique. There is a time and place for honest reflection, but right now we just need support.

Nobody who has just experienced a crushing loss appreciates someone else coming along with unhelpful comments such as “I told you so” or “I warned you that this would happen” in the middle of their storm. When we are in pain, we aren’t looking for criticism of our poor choices or even some well-intentioned words of wisdom. Let’s be the people who weep when our brothers and sisters weep and rejoice with them when their joy is restored. The Lord provides correction in His time... but in their sorrow it is our place to comfort them.

Romans 12:15

Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep.

2 Corinthians 1:3-4

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.

March 6

One of the primary reasons I play video games is for the stories themselves... and one of the hallmarks of a great video game plot is that after the game is over and the credits have rolled, I can look back at the story and it all makes sense. Some parts of the story may have been confusing and hard to follow at first, and others felt completely unnecessary and random in the moment... but it is all worth it when everything finally comes together in the hands of a skilled storyteller, connecting even the smallest of details to the main narrative in an important and meaningful way.

We were chosen by our Creator before the formation of the entire planet for the exact story we are in... the Lord knew each choice we would make before Adam drew his first breath. He knew us before we committed our very first and our very worst sins... and He chose us anyways, building a story arc that would lead us right back to Him and into our destiny. Our story may feel unnecessarily difficult or hard to understand right now, but it will all make sense when the final credits roll and His full purpose finally becomes clear.

Ephesians 1:4

He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love.

March 7

You would think that playing through a game in co-op would automatically make the game easier, but that is not always the case. Even when we are playing through the level together, we STILL have to climb every platform and dispatch every enemy... and in many games the presence of a co-op partner means that either the quantity of enemies are DOUBLED or that they have TWICE the usual amount of health. Playing together does not always mean it is easier... it just means we are never alone.

The reality in this game of life is that we have Christ as our co-op partner with us each and every day, but that is not a promise that the game will suddenly become easy, and we will automatically soar over every obstacle we face. We are guaranteed to face overwhelming water levels, scorching hot fire levels, and everything in between... at times the game may even seem MORE difficult and the enemies we face are even MORE vicious now that we are following the Lord. Jesus never promised we wouldn't feel the heat during the journey... but He DID promise He is with us through all of it to keep us from getting burned.

Isaiah 43:2

When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned, nor shall the flame scorch you.

March 8

“Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic” is my all-time favorite game for many reasons, but the largest contributing factor is that STORY. Both the high-minded Jedi and the power-hungry Sith acted in ways that were equally duplicitous to achieve their goals, blurring the line between who truly possessed the moral “high ground”. Both were fully convinced of their viewpoints and pressuring me to choose between the lesser of two evils... revealing that they were both essentially two sides of the same flawed coin. Neither truly had my best interests at heart... Revan was just a pawn in their game, an asset to be exploited for gain.

Many times in life the choice between light and dark can become blurry, with both sides of any “moral conflict” appearing reasonable when it suits them and irrational when disagreed with. Philosophies are always changing based on what is aligned with self-serving goals... they may be convinced of their good intentions, but each side will let us down when their facades are exposed and ulterior motives revealed. Only Christ has our eternal best interests at heart... and the only side He is on is His own.

Proverbs 14:12

There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death.

Joshua 5:13-14

And it came to pass, when Joshua was by Jericho, that he lifted his eyes and looked, and behold, a Man stood opposite him with His sword drawn in His hand. And Joshua went to Him and said to Him, “Are You for us or for our adversaries?” So He said, “No, but as Commander of the army of the Lord I have now come.”

March 9

One of my favorite parts of role-playing games is that they are typically full of interesting party members, many of whom provide fun and unique side-quests to complete. While their personal missions are often entertaining and provide additional reasons to explore the game world, things can get a little hectic once my quest log starts to fill up with their requests. Next thing I know, I am running around in circles trying to figure out who needed a piece of mail delivered, which ally is searching for a family heirloom, and which character is missing their favorite chicken... it is a lot to keep track of.

While this life and all its' hectic missions and side-quests can often feel overwhelming for us, the Lord's thoughts towards us are beyond our comprehension or ability to calculate. He is intimately aware of every thought and need of EACH of His beloved children, and He is never overwhelmed by the quantity or difficulty of our requests. We are always on His mind and in His immeasurable thoughts... no matter how crazy our day gets, He has no problem keeping track of it and is always thinking of us... and He wants to hear from us today.

Psalm 40:5b

Your thoughts toward us cannot be recounted to You in order; if I would declare and speak of them, they are more than can be numbered.

March 10 (Mario Day)

Gaining invincibility in a game is an incredibly powerful feeling... think about how we play the game differently when we receive temporary protection from a “star” in Mario. We become much more confident when we know that we cannot be harmed, running straight towards enemies and obstacles that we would have previously avoided. And we eliminate them with ease, not because we are suddenly stronger, but because we trust in the power of the star that has empowered us to do what we could never have accomplished on our own.

When we are walking obediently on the path that the Lord has prepared for us, we do not have to fear the enemies and obstacles that lie ahead... and as long as we are following Him, He has promised to provide exactly what we need for the next step we must take. We don't have to “feel” strong enough for the battle... even the smallest Mario can defeat the largest Bowser when he has “star power”.

Let's run towards the challenges that lie ahead today with the confidence of Mario saturated with “star power” and put our trust in Christ and His strength to do all that He has promised us.

Psalm 27:1

The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?

The Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?

March 11

There are certain “unwritten rules” when we are playing a multiplayer match with others... one of the most important ones is to avoid running your teammates over with a vehicle. They really hate that. And if you DO run them over, an apology is typically in order along with more caution displayed moving forward. I am usually pretty forgiving in these scenarios... the FIRST time it happens. The second time it happens, I am a little more annoyed. The third time? I’m booting them from the match, even if their absence causes us to be outnumbered and placed at a disadvantage... but in my dogged pursuit of “justice”, I typically end up costing my team the game.

We all expect to take some damage out on the battlefield... but when it comes from our own team it feels much worse. Being betrayed or hurt by a teammate doesn’t impact me any differently than taking damage from my own actions or an opponent, but I took it personally because I expected better from them. As followers of Christ, we are commanded to not only forgive those who hurt us, but most importantly to forgive our fellow brothers and sisters who should have known better but STILL hurt us... as many times as is necessary.

Matthew 18:21-22

Then Peter came to Him and said, “Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?” Jesus said to him, “I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven.”

March 12

I love playing games in co-op... and as long as both players are communicating with each other, working together towards a common priority, and supporting each other's needs this can be some of the most fun one can have while playing a video game. However, when one or both players selfishly pursue their own agenda and plow through the level without any regard for the needs of our fellow co-op partner... well, it goes much, MUCH differently. When we play the game with only our personal best interests in mind, it becomes a frustrating and unenjoyable experience for BOTH players... one that is unlikely to lead to victory.

Taking up our cross daily is not some form of punishment for our sins... those have already been paid for fully and completely by Christ. The act of "taking up our cross" is choosing to put on the unselfish mind of Christ in all we say and do, pursuing His will over our personal desires, and serving the eternal best interests of our fellow co-op players in life rather than going our own way. It is learning to say just as Christ did, "Not my will, but His be done" ... offering ourselves up daily as a living sacrifice.

Luke 9:23

Then He said to them all, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me."

Romans 12:1

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.

March 13

Of all the multiplayer match types that a game may have, playing “capture the flag” is my LEAST favorite. Is it because my team rarely wins those matches? Probably... but it is ALSO due to the nature of how those specific match types play out. While I am out there trying to capture my opposition’s flag, they are just as busy absconding with mine... making these matches one long merry-go-round as I run around in circles without making any actual progress. It is a never-ending war of attrition to see who will make the first mistake, and it is often more exhausting than entertaining... I’m just not a fan.

I have found a similarly frustrating challenge with the thoughts that run through my mind. Right when I think that I finally have one problem solved, another unhelpful thought grabs my “flag” and runs off, creating a chain-reaction of entirely new problems to ponder. Chasing down all these runaway thoughts is exhausting... but we weren’t designed to manage these challenging and disruptive thoughts alone. We can choose to capture and bring each thought directly to Christ in prayer, where they can either serve Him or be silenced by Him... once and for all.

2 Corinthians 10:4-5

Casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.

March 14

One of the things that I enjoy about playing a “cinematic” game is that each decision and dialogue choice I make truly matters... but that also adds a lot of pressure, because I never know which choice could be the one that permanently alters the direction of the story. It may be something as seemingly small and inconsequential as what I choose to say to a teammate before a mission. My decision impacts more than one moment... it alters the entire ending of the game in ways I could not have possibly comprehended at the time.

As followers of Christ, it is our responsibility to represent Him in all that we say and do... for someone, we may be the only ambassador for Christ that they interact with. The words we speak and the actions we take could have a profound impact on how their story unfolds, and even a seemingly small and simple choice may unlock a perishable moment to either guide them closer to Christ or push them farther away. In our homes, jobs, schools, social media, or wherever else we interact, let's demonstrate Christ intentionally. Today may contain an opportunity we won't get back.

Colossians 3:17

And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.

March 15

While it can be a divisive choice at times, the act of playing from the point of view of the “opposing team” (like switching to the Arbiter in Halo 2) gives us a chance to see the world we are playing in from a completely different perspective. In many cases we find that our antagonist was just ONE mutually beneficial objective away from becoming a critical ally... once we stopped fighting and found common ground. The joint desire of the Master Chief and the Arbiter to prevent the Halo rings from eliminating all sentient life across the galaxy brought these adversaries together to achieve a victory they wouldn't have achieved alone.

It is very tempting to respond to the attacks of others the same way they have addressed us, fighting fire with fire until everybody loses. But as followers of Christ, we are commanded to respond to others with grace, patiently giving everyone we interact with the same unearned gift the Lord has freely given to each of us. The Apostle Paul would know better than anyone that former adversaries can become brothers in Christ when grace is shown... let's be the ones who bless our enemies with grace today.

Colossians 4:5-6

Walk in wisdom toward those who are outside, redeeming the time. Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one.

March 16

My least favorite part about games with timed levels is that I typically do not have enough time to explore the area fully and find all the fun secrets that are contained inside... at least not in one play-through. The steady countdown of the timer in the upper right-hand corner of the screen may add to the challenge and make the level more exciting, but the stress of running out of time is real. The feeling of finding and snagging the last green star in Super Mario World 3D with JUST the right amount of time remaining to reach to the flagpole at the end of the level is both exhilarating and exhausting.

Many times in life it may feel like our time is running out, that flagpole looks like it is a mile away, and we STILL haven't found all of our green stars... but if the Lord has made us a promise, He WILL keep it. True, the timing is not always what we would prefer... but if things happened when WE wanted them to happen, it may look like they were accomplished through natural causes. He tends to wait until the situation looks impossible because the Lord deals in the SUPERNATURAL, and He delights in showing us that nothing is too hard for Him.

John 7:6

Then Jesus said to them, "My time has not yet come, but your time is always ready."

Genesis 18:14

Is anything too hard for the LORD? At the appointed time I will return to you, according to the time of life, and Sarah shall have a son.

March 17

As a gamer who likes the feeling of completely clearing out an area before moving forward, automatic enemy respawns can be a bit of a challenge to contend with. No matter how many enemies I eliminate, more of them will appear... resulting in me spending more time battling a never-ending wave of opponents than I do pursuing the actual goal of the level. In games that require completing the assigned objectives to achieve victory, spending my time fighting endlessly respawning adversaries is not only counterproductive, this tactic typically results in frustration and mission failure.

Our enemy is already defeated, but he would enjoy nothing more than making us waste our time and energy worrying about him and his never-ending schemes.

He will populate wave after wave of adversaries to distract us from pressing forward towards the Lord's plan for our lives... and many of these battles are NOT necessary to fight. Let's lift our eyes above these diversions and fix our minds on Christ, resting safe in the knowledge that even though our enemy will never stop coming at us, our Lord has already achieved absolute victory.

Psalm 121:1-3

I will lift up my eyes to the hills— From whence comes my help? My help comes from the LORD, Who made heaven and earth. He will not allow your foot to be moved; He who keeps you will not slumber.

Jude 1:9

Yet Michael the archangel, in contending with the devil, when he disputed about the body of Moses, dared not bring against him a reviling accusation, but said, "The Lord rebuke you!"

March 18

It's not the most exciting part of the gaming experience, but deciding which items I have chosen for my character to carry is a core part of the challenge in many of my favorite titles. Games featuring the ability to magically carry a multitude of objects without any regard to their weight, size, and quantity are becoming rare, and with a limited amount of item slots available I am forced to make some tough decisions. Do I pick up this cool new sword I just found, grab the treasure that I was originally searching for, or do I drop this heavy armor that I am wearing so I can carry both... leaving me without valuable protection for the perilous journey back? Decisions, decisions...

As believers, we are told to "put on" Christ... not only as an armor to protect us from attacks, but also because carrying Him consciously with us each day helps us limit what else we choose to carry. There are many temptations in life that will try to convince us that they are worthy of picking up... but if we start each day aware of His presence and choose to make Him our priority, we will not have room to carry that which we never needed in the first place.

Romans 13:14

But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts.

March 19

It is easy to get caught up in the passion of the moment when playing games with others, and as a result our communication to each other may not be interpreted the way we intended. Urgent bursts of thoughts such as, “I need you to come here and push that button, NOOOooooo not that button” often lead to misunderstanding, frustration, and failure. But if we pause the game and patiently take the time to speak and listen with understanding and compassion, we can work together to formulate a plan and get through the level successfully every time.

Speaking from a place of pain, anger, or other heightened emotions might make us feel better, but it is not going to accomplish the Lord’s purpose. When our feelings are strong, that is the time we must stop and press pause on the game, giving us the space to prayerfully collect our thoughts, seek the Lord’s guidance, and let His Spirit guide us to the right words to speak to those we are collaborating with on this play-through. Our thoughtful and patient response to the challenges we face will accomplish the righteousness of God much more than our emotional responses ever could.

James 1:19-20

So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God.

March 20

Even the most beloved game studios are one unpopular decision away from losing a large chunk of their fan base... and releasing a “bad game” can result in fans permanently turning their backs on a developer or a franchise. Sure, we may say we love BioWare... but where is our copy of Anthem? Buried deep in a hole somewhere? Yep, that is what I figured. And we all adore the Metroid franchise... but we still burned our copies of Metroid: Other M with fire. Then we set THAT fire on fire... just to be on the safe side. Our fandom is earned... and can easily be lost by ONE developer’s misstep.

We may often be guilty of measuring our love of a gaming franchise by its’ most recent performance, but that is not how our Father operates with us. His love for us does not rise or fall based on our choices, and His arms are open wide to receive ALL His repentant children when we miss the mark. If everything from angels, demons, and all that is in between can’t separate us from His love, then nothing we have done, tried to do, or thought of doing can separate us either. Let’s embrace His limitless love, forgiveness, and grace today!

Romans 8:38-39

For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

March 21

Some gaming characters just seem to have all the bad luck... I mean, Mario has had to save his princess from pretty much every castle he has ever come across, Link seems stuck in a never-ending cycle of fighting some version of Ganon every few hundred years, and Master Chief has saved the universe so many times he has run out of room for punches on his “Free Sandwich after saving the universe” card. There isn’t a version of these characters where they lead a simple, drama-free life... but by sharing their battles with us, we can patiently and carefully guide them through each one.

The reality is that we are going to face MANY afflictions in life, and following Christ may seem to bring even MORE adversaries out of the woodwork than we thought was possible. But just as each of us have taken the controller into our hands to guide our gaming characters from one hard-earned victory to another, the Lord has promised that if we obediently hand Him the controller to our lives, He will deliver us through these battles as well. We will face unwanted challenges in life... but all who follow the Lord will never face them alone.

Psalm 34:19

Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the LORD delivers him out of them all.

March 22

Most games tend to follow a fairly linear path of progression... the developer gives the player simple challenges at the beginning of the game and gradually increases the difficulty level as we play. But in an open-world game like Elder Scrolls or Fallout, the freedom to explore the entire map comes with an added layer of complexity... we can very easily run into an enemy that is WELL above our current skill level and capabilities. But we cannot hide in a cave and avoid combat if we want to save the world... we have to actively prepare ourselves for it.

The opportunity to represent and share Christ can occur at any time and in any place... and as followers of Jesus we must be prepared for these perishable moments of opportunity. As Peter wisely advises us, we must be ready at ALL times to defend our faith by knowing what we believe AND why... and after Peter failed his test with his denial of Christ, he knows all too well the folly of being caught unprepared. In this open-world game of life, we must humbly and graciously be prepared with a skillful representation of why our hope in Christ is greater than all the challenges we will face!

1 Peter 3:15

Sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear.

March 23

There are few pains that a gamer feels more intensely than building up a huge lead against their opponent and then squandering it through arrogant and reckless gameplay. Too many times I have snatched defeat from the jaws of certain victory, allowing my temporary success to mutate into over-confidence... my team's actions became careless as we started taking foolish and unnecessary risks, and as a result our team lost a match that we should have easily won. If we had only stayed humble and respected our opposition's capabilities...

One of the greatest weapons our enemy has in their arsenal is tapping into our tendency to become over-confident in ourselves and our successes. As soon as we begin to think we are standing on our own instead of relying on His grace for our strength, we have already started the process of losing our balance and toppling to the ground. As followers of Christ, we are completely dependent on Him every day and in every way... and the only victory we possess is the one He purchased for us with His blood. It is only through His favor and grace that any of us were even able to stand in the first place.

1 Corinthians 10:12

Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.

Proverbs 18:12

Before destruction the heart of a man is haughty, and before honor is humility.

March 24

As much as I love getting a new headset, there is always a period of adjustment... either the in-game chat is too quiet, the sound effects are too loud, or the in-game music completely drowns out the sounds of my friends speaking. I spend the next twenty minutes of my life trying to blend the background music and the sound effects until they are perfectly balanced (as all things should be) ... until I eventually decide to just shut down all the extra noise so I could hear what I genuinely cared about. The whole point of my new headset was to enable me to talk to my best friend while we play together.

There is a LOT of competing “noise” surrounding us that can make it difficult to cut through the distractions and tune our ears to hear what truly matters. Our Father’s voice is powerful enough to command the entire universe into existence, but when He called out to Elijah, He chose to use a still, small voice... the same still, small voice He uses to speak to His children today. If we silence all the noise, open His Word, and get to a place where we can hear what He has to say to us through it, He will guide our every step today. Can we hear Him?

1 Kings 19:11-12

Then He said, “Go out, and stand on the mountain before the LORD.” And behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind tore into the mountains and broke the rocks in pieces before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire; and after the fire a still small voice.

March 25

If I had a dollar for every time that I ran out of ammo in a game at the WORST possible time, well... let's just say I wouldn't need to be heading into work today.

The intentional and strategic reloading of my ammunition before, during, and after each enemy engagement is often the difference between winning and losing the entire match. I may be carrying the most powerful weaponry in the entire game, but it STILL needs to be reloaded after every use... otherwise it is just another useless item in my arsenal, full of untapped potential.

We are told to come to the Lord EACH day for our DAILY bread... and this passage is not simply referring to our daily physical needs, although He will certainly supply those as well. As followers of Christ with daily battles to fight, there is not an option to live off of yesterday's "leftover" time with Him. We must intentionally take the time to "fill up" each day so we will have enough ammo for the challenges that EACH day will bring... and then return to the table for a "reload" throughout the day as often as we need to. Don't face the challenges of today on "empty" ... let's fill up on Him before rolling out.

Matthew 6:11

Give us this day our daily bread.

Colossians 4:2

Continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving.

March 26

Many of our favorite games like Destiny or Monster Hunter can be enjoyed as a single-player experience, but some of the most difficult objectives and raids (as well as the most lucrative rewards) can only be accessed when playing together with a SQUAD. Certain areas and game modes are inaccessible unless we have the correct amount of party members necessary to take on the challenges that lie within. While we are certainly free to hunt alone, these battles show us that we can accomplish more as a cooperative fireteam than we could ever achieve all by ourselves.

Jesus not only encouraged us to see this life as an adventure designed to be played “in co-op”, but He also lived it Himself, consistently bringing His “fireteam” of Peter, James, and John with Him into his fiercest spiritual battles. Peter continued this with John, and Paul traveled with Silas... we are stronger together as the body of Christ. Whether we are physically or virtually joining together in unified prayer and purpose, the Lord is with us. Let’s reach out to our co-op partners in Christ today and take on these battles designed for us to fight together!

Ecclesiastes 4:12

Though one may be overpowered by another, two can withstand him. And a threefold cord is not quickly broken.

Matthew 18:20

For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them.

March 27

From the early days of trying to discreetly choose our plays in Madden, through the glory years of GoldenEye, and in every split-screen match of Halo in-between, there has been an honor system between gamers in any same-screen competitive gaming situation... no screen peeking! Looking to see the formation our opponent was selecting or sneaking a peek at their side of the screen to find their hiding place might be tempting and provide temporary satisfaction, but demonstrating the discipline NOT to look showed respect to our friend as well as actually EARNED the victory.

It may feel difficult in a world full of increasing temptations, but having a “covenant with our eyes” is a commitment we must each make as followers of Christ... a commitment to the Lord, our real world partners, and ourselves. It is showing the discipline to consciously avoid anything we have no business absorbing, and immediately turning away or scrolling past them when we cannot. As gamers we learned this honor system long ago, and as believers we must be gatekeepers of what we allow into our eyes, ears, and minds to protect our light.

Job 31:1a

I have made a covenant with my eyes.

Matthew 6:22-23

The lamp of the body is the eye. If therefore your eye is good, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in you is darkness, how great is that darkness!

March 28

Wireless controllers and video games might go together like chocolate and peanut butter now, but the act of “synchronizing” the controller wasn’t always easy. For example, the original Nintendo Wii remote had a little button that was hidden INSIDE the battery cover... and that had to be pressed and held down at the SAME TIME as the matching button on the console. If three friends brought their remotes over, it was going to take a minute before everyone was ready to play. But “syncing” them up was necessary... otherwise all the button pressing in the world wouldn’t change anything about what was occurring on the screen.

Being “synced” with the Lord and His will for us is not a passive process... it is an active choice that we must make throughout the day to communicate with Him and allow Him to guide our decisions. As His followers, we are called to stay in a continual state of intentional contact with Him, remaining prayerfully connected at all times. If we want our actions to generate outcomes that reach beyond our physical realm, this is the only way to bear the spiritual fruit that changes hearts and lives.

John 15:4

Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me.

March 29

For years, most video games only included one standard difficulty level... if the game was too challenging for us to play at its' default setting, our options were pretty limited. Sometimes, we might be able to find a cheat code or track down a strategy guide that would help us with tips and tricks to guide us through the tough parts... or if we were fortunate enough to have a friend with superior gaming skills who had already beaten that part of the game, they could come over, grab a controller, and help us work through those challenging spots together.

There is only one Biblical standard for the love that we are commanded to show each other, and it has an extremely high "difficulty" level... the standard of Christ's love for us. Jesus lived out the expectation for showing love to others, including those who may make loving them more difficult... a standard that nailed Him to a cross for my sins, your sins, and everyone else's, too. While we don't have an option to decrease the difficulty level of demonstrating His love, we never have to face this challenge alone or in our own strength... let's allow Him to shine His perfect love through us today.

John 15:12-13

***This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.
Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends.***

March 30

The mere act of existing in a video game tends to bring adversaries directly into my path. I can be minding my own business, just walking around the level, when BOOM... nearly every item in the game world immediately becomes hostile towards me without any provocation. But I shouldn't be surprised... my experience with games over the years tells me that this is completely normal.

When I load up a game, I should expect challenges to appear and combat to occur... it is in the script. It would be more surprising if I entered a level and it was completely lacking combatants or obstacles... their presence is why I'm playing the game.

We shouldn't be surprised by the presence of battles, tribulations, and trials in our lives... we should expect them. Jesus never promised we wouldn't face problems or adversities... He actually guaranteed that we would STILL have to deal with them as a part of living on this fallen planet. We will all be confronted by MANY obstacles during our journey down here, but as followers of Christ we don't have to face them alone. Christ is the source of our peace THROUGH the storm, not FROM the storm.

Isaiah 43:2

When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned, nor shall the flame scorch you.

John 16:33

These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.

March 31

Many of my favorite games start out with a “character creation” mode, where I select everything from what my avatar will look like to what inherent skills they will possess when the game begins. As an experienced gamer who knows my preferred play style as well as the genre we are about to explore, I customize each of them based on the skills I know they will need for the specific journey we are about to embark on together. The football player I built would be ill-suited for traveling across Skyrim, and my Fallout vault dweller is better suited for the wasteland than Animal Crossing.

Each of us has been carefully designed and “customized” by our loving Creator for the unique missions we will take on during our planet-side journeys, with skills that match the needs of the battles that lie ahead. There are no “mistakes”, redundant skills, or characters with flawed designs... we are just uniquely forged for our specific assignments. Rather than accept the lie that we were created with defects, let’s embrace the destiny that each of us were wonderfully and perfectly crafted for... an adventure built for us to explore with Him.

Psalm 139:14

I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Marvelous are Your works, and that my soul knows very well.

Ephesians 2:10

For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

April 1

As a gamer, I have a love/hate relationship with April Fool's Day... while I enjoy all the jokes and humorous takes on fake gaming news and made-up gaming announcements, there are a few that disappoint me because I want them to be true. These teases briefly bring me hope before reminding me that we will probably never see these April Fool's jokes come to life... like Hideo Kojima making a new Metal Gear, Valve giving us Half-Life 3 or a true sequel to Portal, or the return of Disney Infinity or Rock Band. I know these jokes are all for laughs, but the pranksters make them look SO real that I want to believe in them... especially since some of these are things I actually WANT.

It is easy to confuse a potential answer to our prayers with something that is simply our own heart's desire, seeing what we WANT to see instead of recognizing the counterfeit solution our enemy has presented to us. They may look and sound good, but they are false promises without substance. It is only by submitting our thoughts and desires to the Lord that we can avoid fooling ourselves, allowing His Spirit to guide us into discerning the difference.

1 Thessalonians 5:21-22

Test all things; hold fast what is good. Abstain from every form of evil.

April 2

My online gaming sessions fall into two distinctly different experiences... the nights when everything is clicking and I feel like an unstoppable juggernaut, and the nights when literally EVERY decision I make is the wrong one. I pick up weapons with no ammo, I reload at the worst possible time, and my vehicles explode about two seconds after I sit in them. And on those nights when I don't have my "A" game, it is pretty nice when someone else carries the team to victory, allowing me to share in a win that I did nothing to earn... I was simply a member of a superior player's team.

One of the most amazing aspects of having a relationship with Christ is that we are always on the team of the undefeated champion of our league. By submitting to His leadership, we can enjoy the forgiveness for our mistakes and sins that He purchased with His flawless victory. He has already done all the heavy lifting for us, taking away the burden and responsibility of carrying our sins. And if we are willing to give Him control, He will cleanse us of all we are willing to give Him, sharing a victory that we could never attain on our own.

2 Corinthians 5:15

And He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again.

1 John 1:9

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

April 3

Over the years I have found that many of the best “secret items” and “Easter eggs” in the video games I play are often hidden in the darkest and most difficult to see areas of the level. Consequently, at the beginning of the game when I am given the option to adjust the lighting level, I tend to turn my brightness level up higher than the game recommends. Sure, I may deal with images that are slightly washed out, but it makes it easier for me to see the answers to my problems are often hidden in plain sight... they are just obscured by the dark.

During the difficult seasons of our lives, it is easy to allow the trauma and drama of the darkness we are currently facing blind us to an important reality... the answers to our prayers are already on their way. Whether it takes three hours, three days, three weeks or three years, what God promised us in the light does not disappear simply because we are currently in the dark. As the disciples found after three agonizing days of searching for answers, the darkness of that tomb could not hold the Light of the world... and even in our darkest times His light will show us the way.

Isaiah 42:16

I will bring the blind by a way they did not know; I will lead them in paths they have not known. I will make darkness light before them, and crooked places straight. These things I will do for them, and not forsake them.

Isaiah 45:3

I will give you the treasures of darkness and hidden riches of secret places, that you may know that I, the Lord, Who call you by your name, am the God of Israel.

April 4

I have a bad gaming habit I must confess... I am a tutorial skipper. Guiding me on how to successfully play the game? Nope, I think I will figure it out the hard way, thank you very much. Critical exposition that gives purpose to the story? Sorry, I am too busy mashing my buttons to hear you. Through a combination of my gaming arrogance and impatience I tend to skip past the things that would have made the rest of my voyage MUCH easier... if I would have simply slowed down to listen and absorb them.

Many times in life I have been guilty of being so focused on making progress that I tried to rush the process... and this has always led to disastrous results. The Lord has more than merely a destination for us in mind... He has an entire journey mapped out for how we will get there. Even the unwanted “detours” we endure are designed to serve a purpose... and if we try to skip past these times of learning and growth, we will emerge unprepared for what is coming next. Tutorials are intended to slow us down, teach us what we need to know, and set us up for success. Let’s embrace these “tutorials” with patience... He put them here for a reason.

Proverbs 3:5-6

Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths.

Ecclesiastes 7:8

The end of a thing is better than its beginning; the patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit.

April 5

The environments in our video game worlds are more immersive than ever, but that doesn't mean every object we see is interactive. While it isn't realistic for the developer to make every item functional, it is frustrating to be stuck in a room full of doors that don't open, buttons that can't be pressed, and items that can't be picked up... they may look useful, but they don't actually DO anything. When faced with a countdown to nuclear meltdown or searching desperately for a door that leads us away from a stalking nemesis, these non-interactive items aren't merely annoying... they can be a critical distraction that results in mission failure.

As followers of Christ, our belief in the Lord and His teachings compels us to be ACTIVE with our faith. When the opportunity to function as the hands and feet of Christ is presented to us and we don't help, we are as useful as those non-interactive gaming objects that appear functional on the outside, but don't serve any purpose when the pressure is on. Let's be the door that opens. Let's be the button that saves the day. Let's be the arms of Christ around someone who desperately needs it today.

1 Corinthians 13:1-2

Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.

James 2:17

Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.

April 6

As a life-long gamer, it can be quite humbling when a game politely suggests that I am not doing very well. Sometimes it comes in the subtle form of an unsolicited hint or a gentle invitation to turn the difficulty level down, and other times it is the bright gold “invincibility block” in Super Mario World 3D that appears after failing the same level multiple times. While I would prefer to be strong enough to do this without help, the game is simply looking at my performance, evaluating my needs, and offering a means of moving past the things that I cannot accomplish on my own. It’s not pity... it’s an act of mercy to move me forward.

Jesus didn’t come down to earth to “shame us” for our inability to serve God without His help... He came to offer us a better way. He faced every trap, challenge, and boss fight we will ever face, and He knows our weaknesses better than we do. Christ has felt the pains of betrayal, pain, sadness, loneliness, exhaustion, and disappointment... and after enduring every hardship life can throw at us, He’s in a position to lower the difficulty level and lovingly guide us through them all. Let’s lean on Him today.

Hebrews 4:15-16

For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

April 7

As you may have surmised by watching a few of our gameplay videos, we don't always win. And one of the worst feelings I have had in a game is coming SO close to victory that I can practically taste it, but still finding a way to fall short. Whether it was "almost" surviving the solo on "Through the Fire and Flames" in Guitar Hero or narrowly missing an Atlas moth in Animal Crossing, the feeling of coming close but still failing is addictively frustrating in a video game, compelling me to keep trying over and over and OVER again in hopes that "one more try" will finally be enough effort to win.

Christ never asked us to try harder, give more effort, or "do better" ... He is waiting for us to realize that we CAN'T succeed in our battles over sin on our own. That is why He asked us to hand Him the controller... because He is the only One who has. It doesn't matter if we were "mostly good", or if we have failed so mightily our life should be on a blooper reel... we have ALL fallen short. There isn't a path to victory over sin through our own efforts... but if we accept His free gift, surrender control, and submit to His will, we can share in His victory.

Romans 3:23-24

For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.

April 8

Have you ever wondered what would happen if you could just go straight to the end of a game immediately after pressing start? While I may not appreciate it at the time, slogging through all the hours of grinding, battling, rescuing others, and slowly becoming strong enough for the final fight is what makes the grand finale meaningful and beautiful. I care more about the ending of my video game journey because of all the fighting, crying, and struggling I endured... including the painful losses of many of my most beloved characters along the way.

I have often struggled with why we experience so much pain, hurt, and tears down here... but it's for the same reason my character doesn't skip to the end of the game and just defeat the final boss. The ending only becomes meaningful BECAUSE of the path that we walked to get there. It is through these struggles that we build our faith, grow stronger in our gifts, and are placed in a position to help others who are in need along the way. It is okay to despise the enemy who causes all this pain and grief, but don't despise the journey. The endgame is sweeter because it makes all of this worth it.

Revelation 21:4

And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.

April 9

Very few developers are willing to take the approach of a game like “No Man’s Sky” and feature fully procedurally generated worlds and levels... and that is for a very good reason. While the technology that randomly creates places, items, and creatures so that no two gameplay experiences are alike is impressive, few titles can pull this off and still make the game playable. Because most games are fully scripted, we are accustomed to experiencing games the way the designer crafted them... complete with perfectly aligned music and cutscenes, predictable progression, and skills that unlock exactly when we need them.

God created a vast expanse of possibilities, with every star in its’ place and every item we would need fully planned out. But even though He carefully scripted our life, we still live in a procedurally generated world full of undesired suffering and pain. The Lord didn’t design our pain, but He DID design a way for us to reach out to Him when these hurts happen. The Creator who put the planets in their orbit still has time to hold and heal every broken heart... let’s reach out to Him with our pain today.

Psalm 34:18-19

The Lord is near to those who have a broken heart, and saves such as have a contrite spirit. Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivers him out of them all.

April 10

Few gaming moments are more awkward than finishing a match against a bitter rival only to get matched up with them as a new teammate in the next round. Multiplayer matches can get exceptionally heated, and many times as opponents we can speak to each other in... let's just say less than constructive ways. But in these random matchmaking games, many times the players we were just waging war AGAINST may suddenly be on our same side... and when that happens we are going to wish our conduct was a bit more sportsmanlike and appropriate, as we now share the same goals and are counting on each other for support.

The Lord's plan for our lives will often create some very interesting matchups down the road, so we must always consider every current human adversary as someone who may potentially become an advocate, an ally, or in Paul's case, an actual apostle. We must do more than simply pray for our enemies... we are expected to be kind and help them when they're in need. It may feel like we are losing this current battle, but we may actually win the war for their souls as well as countless others in the process.

Romans 12:20-21

Therefore "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; If he is thirsty, give him a drink; For in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Galatians 1:13 and 23

For you have heard of my former conduct in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it. But they were hearing only, "He who formerly persecuted us now preaches the faith which he once tried to destroy."

April 11

For years, I have had a bad habit of making “half-committed” jumps in games... you know, the one where you “mostly” jump, but not at full speed. It’s when I lightly tap the button when I should have mashed it, and as a result I end up missing the landing entirely. Sure, it can be difficult to fully commit to a jump when the landing spot is off of the screen... but a half-hearted leap is always destined to fail. If we have faith in the game designer, we can be confident that the ledge we need to land on WILL be there... as long as we do our part and make a fully committed, running leap of faith.

When the Lord guides us to take a “leap of faith”, we don’t typically get to know how far away the ledge is or even sneak a peek at where we will land. His biggest plans for our lives will always require one of those fully committed, all-or-nothing, “leaning towards the screen with sweaty palms” kind of jumps... a maximum-speed blind jump towards a landing zone that we won’t be able to see until we have already jumped. If the Lord has asked us to make that leap, welcome to world 8-1. We are closing in on the right castle...

Romans 4:20-21

He did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully convinced that what He had promised He was also able to perform.

April 12

There are certain unwritten rules when playing a cooperative multiplayer game with others... avoid friendly fire as much as possible, mute your mic when eating chips, and share ALL mutual resources. When someone selfishly hogs ALL the health or ammo as soon as their squad enters a new area without checking on the needs of their teammates, it isn't just rude... they are limiting the success of the entire team. And taking a power-up that isn't needed while their teammate is in the process of completely bleeding out results in a short-lived partnership as well as mission failure.

When praying, it can be easy to think only in terms of our own personal needs and desires. While we certainly should cast all of our own cares on Christ, that is not the sole purpose of prayer. He came to heal the hurting and mend the broken-hearted, and even in our current pain I guarantee each of us know someone that needs a touch from the Lord as well. Let's reach out in prayer for that person today. We may find more joy in seeing their needs fulfilled than our own personal desires... and our own prayers may also be answered in the process.

Job 42:10

And the Lord restored Job's losses when he prayed for his friends. Indeed the Lord gave Job twice as much as he had before.

James 5:16

Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.

April 13

Many of my favorite games are built around the concept of an ordinary person thrust into an extraordinary situation with massive ramifications... from the nameless, anonymous characters in titles like Fallout or Elder Scrolls to some of our most famous gaming icons such as Mario, Aloy, Link, Gordon Freeman, or Cloud Strife. These seemingly unqualified and often unwilling protagonists had very little reason or desire to become a hero/heroine until the story conveniently called for it.... and yet they were tasked with saving their worlds, because they were the only ones who could.

It can be easy for us to think that someone more qualified or better skilled should be out there doing the Lord's work while we watch from the sidelines and cheer them on. But the people in our daily circle of influence are searching for something that only Christ can give... and He doesn't require us to possess a degree in theology to reach them in their time of need. We were placed into their lives for a reason, and if we know and serve the Lord we are in the best position to introduce them to each other... no fancy degree required.

Isaiah 6:8

Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying: "Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?" Then I said, "Here am I! Send me."

1 Corinthians 2:1-2

And I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

April 14

I don't particularly enjoy games that have stiff punishments for simple mistakes. Trust me, I'm already disappointed enough for both of us that I accidentally took one step too far and fell off a ledge... I certainly didn't intend to do that, and I really don't want to go all the way back to the beginning of the level to atone for it. Honestly, the harder a game penalizes me for an error, the less likely I am to pick it back up again. I know I messed up, and I will do it all differently next time... can't I just try again?

The reality is that over the years the body of Christ tends to make the process of returning from sin to grace more difficult than it's supposed to be. There shouldn't be stones in any of our hands because we are ALL guilty of sin... and the one Person who could have picked up a stone (because He truly was the only one without sin), chose mercy instead. Christ did not come to condemn, but to SAVE all who are willing to repent and place their lives into His hands. Whether we stepped off a ledge yesterday, last week, or last year, forgiveness and restoration is waiting where the last stone of judgment fell... at His feet.

John 8:7

So when they continued asking Him, He raised Himself up and said to them, "He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first."

Colossians 3:12-13

Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do.

April 15

I have a bad habit of diving directly into playing a game without reading ANY of the instructions... I don't check to see what the buttons do; I don't play any of the tutorials that are available... NOTHING. Sometimes I even skip through the opening cinematic cutscenes because I want to get straight to the action. I mean, this isn't my first rodeo... I'll figure it out, right? But because I impatiently raced through the parts of the game that were designed to train and prepare me, I inevitably reach a point where I am missing critical context to the story as well as the skills that I need to advance... all because I refused to slow down and wait.

It's difficult to be patient when the Lord places a dream in our hearts and doesn't immediately fulfill it, but there is a good reason for the delay between when He gives the dream and when He accomplishes it. The dream shows us the destination, and the tutorials give us the skills and knowledge we will need to execute His plan. Let's avoid the temptation to button mash through these tutorials and cutscenes in life... they are all part of the process of growing into the role that we were designed to fulfill.

Psalm 27:14

Wait on the Lord; Be of good courage, and He shall strengthen your heart; Wait, I say, on the Lord.

Hebrews 6:15

And so, after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise.

April 16

I have one game controller that I prefer to use when gaming, but because I rotate between two different consoles it may not be “synced” with the one I plan to play on. Many times, I sit down and press the center button on my controller, only to hear an entirely different console power up in another room. For my controller to work it can only be synchronized with ONE console at a time... and I must be actively connected to the correct system and disconnected from the wrong one if I want to access the games on that specific console.

Getting answers to our prayers comes with a similar prerequisite... our faith links us to the Lord’s infinite power and provision, but unbelief severs that connection and limits what He can do in our lives. Prayer is not a magic lamp we rub in times of need... it is an intentional and exclusive connection with Christ. Just as my system full of games will sit there powerlessly until I connect my controller to it, the promises of God are waiting for us to connect our faith to them. Let’s disconnect from whatever does not bring us closer to the Lord and plug into the source... He specializes in the impossible.

Mark 9:23-24

Jesus said to him, “If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes.” Immediately the father of the child cried out and said with tears, “Lord, I believe, help my unbelief!”

John 15:7

If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you.

April 17

Over time I have amassed a modest collection of downloaded games on my system, but when trying to make room for a new game I realized I don't really want to play most of them again. There's typically a good reason why I stopped playing them, and now they are just taking up valuable space. At some point I made the choice to download them at a cost that I can't recover, but now I need to delete them and move on so I can install something better.

As followers of Christ, we must be mindful of what we download and retain in our hearts, minds, and lives. We are the temple of God on this earth, and He has chosen to live in us... but we DO have to make room for Him by moving on from things that aren't beneficial or deleting pursuits that can't coexist with Him and His plans for us. Our body is HIS temple, created to serve a unique purpose... what He chose for one of us may not work for another. Rather than trying to fit the Lord into the available space that we have for Him, let's listen to the Spirit of God for guidance on how much room He needs and what we should delete. Only He knows what our temple was designed to do.

Hebrews 12:1

Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.

1 Corinthians 3:16

Did you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?

April 18

As the shelves of both physical and digital video game stores become more crowded than ever, games with stylish cover art and a hefty marketing budget have more opportunities to gain exposure. For new, unproven properties or smaller studios, it is difficult to stand out next to all the other games that are backed by big brand names and characters we have grown to love and appreciate over the years. But every great franchise once started small... and while style might make me notice a game, it is the substance inside that matters the most.

As an overwhelmingly “ordinary” follower of Jesus, we can mistakenly believe that the gifts He has placed in us are diminished because of what people see on the outside... when we lack a famous “franchise” name, a flashy exterior, or a record of outstanding output it can feel like we’re “too small” for His plan. But our Father isn’t interested in our fortune, fame, followers, or any other external measures of success. He is seeking willing hearts full of love and hands prepared to serve Him and His Kingdom. It is the substance on the inside that the Lord sees and uses to accomplish His will.

1 Samuel 16:7

But the Lord said to Samuel, “Do not look at his appearance or his physical stature, because I have refused him. For the Lord does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.”

April 19

While I have a healthy appreciation for all the current console developers, I have to give huge props to Microsoft for their commitment to physical backwards compatibility on the Xbox Series X. From my original Xbox copy of KOTOR, through my entire 360 library and beyond, if it came on an Xbox disc it will play in that console. Between the fractured formats across Nintendo's vast library to the limited digital compatibility Sony offers, love them or hate them, Microsoft certainly gets credit for keeping their family of Xbox games together through all of the generations for all to enjoy.

Across the centuries, Christ's followers have found more ways to divide than to unite. Now more than ever, the world must see believers across every nation, tribe and tongue behave as ONE loving family in Christ. We are ONE body, joined by ONE faith, serving ONE Lord. We have ONE calling and share ONE hope... eternity together with Christ. It is our faith in Him that makes us all one fully backwards compatible body across all generations. We will be living together for all eternity... let's start acting like a loving family before we get there.

Ephesians 4:4-6

There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.

John 13:35

By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.

April 20

My gaming characters tend to leave a pretty big mess behind after they complete a level... the still-burning wrecks of all the vehicles that were blown up (often with me in them) litter the landscape, the ground is dotted with all of the discarded armor and weapons that were broken and replaced during these battles, and if you look closely you can even make out the exact spots where my character was defeated and respawned. Each level tells a complicated story, but I cannot linger in this place. The path forward compels me to keep moving on, past these failures and disappointments and on towards the next chapter of the story.

None of us escape this battlefield without some mistakes and regrets... when we look in the rear-view mirror, we all see some fiery wrecks and places where our armor broke down on us. But these painful reminders of our past failures must be left behind as we press forward towards the next mission the Lord is calling us to, regardless of the outcome of our previous chapters. Let's take the lessons we learned and move onward and upward... His death purchased freedom from EVERY chain.

Philippians 3:13-14

Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

April 21

Most games force us to make tough choices about which items are going to move forward with us, and which things we are willing to leave behind. From the limited amount of weapons we can carry in Halo to the specific amount of weight we can hold in Elder Scrolls, some tough decisions need to be made as to what is most valuable and necessary for the next part of our mission. Rocket launcher or sword? Heavy armor or extra health supplies? What we will be facing next separates what is truly critical from what is simply dead weight.

The more we grow with the Lord, the more of Him we need... and the less useful other things are in comparison. "Lower level" items that previously occupied space in our "load-out" not only decrease in importance, but become active hindrances as we move forward, taking critical space away from more meaningful pursuits. If we find ourselves needing more from the Lord in the battle we're in, let's review what might be taking up room in our inventory and preventing Him from being equipped as our primary weapon and armor. We have as much of Him as we choose to carry with us.

Philippians 3:7-8

But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ.

April 22

There are gaming masterpieces, and then there is the Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time. While the entire game is packed full of strange enemies and challenging temples, Link's primary means of advancement was not his iconic sword and shield, but the Ocarina... a musical instrument that could move us through time, warp us from place to place, change day into night, and more. While it seemed strange to choose music over combat, these puzzles could not be defeated by raw strength... only the songs we learned through our challenges and struggles could advance our story.

When the Apostle Paul tells us to rejoice at ALL times, he means ALL times. Rejoicing only when times are good makes as much sense as waiting to play the Ocarina until AFTER solving all the puzzles and finishing the game. Let's rejoice in Him even when times are tough, the answers aren't obvious, and it seems the only way forward is back. Let's play our "Ocarina" to the Lord at all times... if praising God in the midst of their unsolvable problem broke Paul and Silas out of prison, it has the power to break whatever chains are around us as well!

Philippians 4:4

Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!

Psalms 34:1

I will bless the Lord at all times; His praise shall continually be in my mouth.

April 23

I love games with robust dialogue trees... titles like Mass Effect and Outer Worlds that offer multiple ways to respond to everyone I interact with during my adventure. But choosing what to say to each character is more than just a matter of personal taste... the content and manner in which I respond to each choice will typically have long-term ramifications that aren't evident at the time, impacting my relationship with them as well as others. Entire missions, quests, and often even the ending of the game can be impacted by what I say as well as choose NOT to say in these situations.

As ambassadors of Christ, we must always keep our mission at the front of our minds when interacting with others. Similar to these dialogue options in a game, the response that FEELS right may not be the response that is aligned with the "best ending" for us, the person we are talking to, and perhaps people we will never meet. We must challenge ourselves to consider if our conversations are full of grace and salt, or simply "salty". Every interaction we have may possess eternal significance... let's choose wisdom and grace.

Colossians 4:5-6

Walk in wisdom toward those who are outside, redeeming the time. Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one.

April 24

We all get “stuck” while gaming at times, and when we do it is pretty nice to be able to find somebody else’s gameplay videos online and learn how they succeeded on a level that we couldn’t pass. Challenges that I thought were impossible now feel achievable because I can watch a fellow gamer’s tactics, mimic their actions, and overcome the same challenges and obstacles I am facing the way that they did.

All of us have messed up, made mistakes, and failed some levels. But hiding how the Lord redeemed us is only going to prevent others from being encouraged and enabled by our testimony. No matter where we started, we are His SUCCESS story... and there are others out there who are in need of the saving work of Christ to perform the same miracles inside of them that He has performed in us. We are not unworthy to carry the flame because of our failures... it is BECAUSE of what we have battled and overcome that makes us exactly the inspiration someone else needs to conquer their “boss battle”. Let’s upload our path to salvation today to someone who is stuck on their current level... because we know the way.

1 Timothy 1:15b-16

Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief. However, for this reason I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show all longsuffering, as a pattern to those who are going to believe on Him for everlasting life.

Philippians 3:17

Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern.

April 25

Too many times I have finished a game and realized that I still have a virtual fortune of in-game currency and items that now serve no purpose. I can't carry them over into another game... they will just sit there in my character's virtual account and rot. I wasted so much time on pointless side missions gathering and hoarding all these resources, and I didn't even end up needing or using them. It's not like the final boss cared about my character's net financial worth... all that mattered when the credits rolled is that I played the game in a manner that yielded the best possible ending.

Money is not the root of all evil, and there is certainly nothing wrong with having some. But the LOVE of money and the blind pursuit of all that it brings will open traps and detours that are designed to distract us from our actual mission here, as well as the true purpose for these resources. When we reach our endgame, our collection of money and material possessions will not carry over into eternity. Pursuing earthly riches is a side mission with rewards we cannot keep... only in living for Christ will we find treasure that lasts.

1 Timothy 6:9-11

But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows. But you, O man of God, flee these things and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness.

April 26

When a friend asks if someone I am unfamiliar with can join us in playing online together, I typically have one very simple and important question... “Are they any GOOD?” Maybe that shouldn’t be my first thought, but it is. While I appreciate personal qualities such as how fun and enjoyable they are to talk to, none of that talk is going to show up in the “win column”. I want to know if they are going to actively participate in our missions and cooperate to successfully achieve the critical goals for our team. All the “talk” in the world isn’t going to help us defeat our foes... I want a teammate who is actually skilled in “doing good”.

We have not been called to simply “talk the talk” ... we have been called to do GOOD. The most well-spoken intellectual reply or opposing viewpoint has never saved a single soul, and we are called to more than engaging others in a spirited debate. Ignorance isn’t silenced by words alone, but with the loving and righteous actions of our hands and hearts. Rather than merely fire off a tweet or send a comment, let’s follow the example of Christ and actively do good, sowing peace in the world around us.

1 Peter 2:15

For this is the will of God, that by doing good you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men.

Acts 10:38

God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him.

April 27

Playing games cooperatively is one of my favorite parts of the gaming experience, but most of the time there is an appreciable gap in the capability and experience level of the players on the team. Players who are either more skilled in the game or have previously played this level will typically find themselves shouldering most of the load for the rest of the team, willingly taking the lead and absorbing most of the damage. By taking the bulk of the enemy's attention away from their co-op partners, they ensure their teammate's journey through the level isn't as challenging as theirs was the first time they faced it on their own.

We are all part of a cooperative experience in life, and the struggles that have caused us bruises, sadness, and pain are not without a purpose... they can be used to bring guidance, healing, and comfort to others just as Christ's suffering was used to bring healing to us. Let's draw on our previous battle experiences to help others carry their burdens today. Even Christ needed someone to help carry His cross... and it is when we help shoulder the burdens of others that we are most like Him.

Galatians 6:2

Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.

2 Corinthians 1:3-4

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.

April 28

I don't know about you, but I kind of miss the days when video games had actual physical, printed instruction books in the case. Flipping through the pages of that little book was part of how I coped with waiting until I got home to actually play the game... and long before any "strategy guides" existed, those little tattered pages were all we had to guide us through tough spots and explain how to play the game. Now we have access through the internet to actual gamers all over the planet to function as our "instruction books", guiding us through places they've already been. They aren't perfect, but their stories are often exactly the help I need.

As believers we are the living, walking, talking epistles of Christ... we are the only "instruction book" on living for the Lord that many people will ever see. Just as the Bible includes the good stories as well as the bad ones, our testimonies can serve as both a story of redemption as well as a source of inspiration to others... but only if we choose to be an open and accessible book to those we interact with. Let's live our lives out loud so we can be the mouthpiece of the Lord in every situation!

2 Corinthians 3:3

Clearly you are an epistle of Christ, ministered by us, written not with ink but by the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of flesh, that is, of the heart.

April 29

One of my favorite things about video games is playing through these adventures with characters that can jump farther than I ever could, run faster than I would care to try, and save the princess/planet/universe in ways I could never accomplish in real life. When I am playing a video game I can cast aside my fear of heights, my own physical limitations, and any concerns about my own mortality... in this space I am safe. I don't have to physically move mountains myself... I simply press the correct buttons on the controller and my character will perform all the heavy lifting.

If we are feeling fear in our circumstances, that means we are leaning on our OWN limited power and strength instead of Christ's. It is the Spirit of God working in and through us that accomplishes the mission we could never complete on our own... and He has unlimited power, perfect love, and complete omniscience at His disposal. When we submit ourselves to His guidance and trust in His provision, we don't have to fear any challenges or outcomes because they are in HIS hands.

With Him there is no fear of failure... because He doesn't fail.

2 Timothy 1:7

For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.

Galatians 2:20

I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.

April 30

If I said “Up, up, down, down, left, right, left, right, B, A”, I would HOPE that you would know what I’m talking about. I mean, it’s only the most infamous and well-known secret code in all of gaming... the Konami code. Punching in this code was the secret to gaining extra lives, additional power ups... everything that made the game easier to beat. If only there was a secret code that unlocked additional abilities, improved the quality of our lives, and tapped us into power that we could never achieve or possess on our own... but perhaps there IS.

After a long life spent pursuing every excess and enjoying every advantage, the wisest man who ever lived shared the secret code to a life lived to its fullest... and it wasn’t found in fame, money, power, or relationships. King Solomon possessed all that we traditionally consider as measurements of success and happiness, and after a life of unrestrained consumption he found that the only lasting satisfaction was found in service to the Lord and following His plan for our lives. Pursuit of the Lord doesn’t restrain us... it is the secret code that unlocks our fullest life here AND in the world to come.

Ecclesiastes 12:13

Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is man’s all.

Proverbs 16:3

Commit your works to the Lord, and your thoughts will be established.

May 1

As I become more familiar with the work of different studios and game designers, I have found I can recognize their unique “signature” within their titles... regardless of the franchise, a game from Hideo Kojima has a sensibility that is specific to his creative style. From Tim Schaffer’s zany humor to the unmistakable artistry of Miyamoto, to the way a game from Bethesda or Bungie just has a “feel” to it... we can always see the love and care of each specific game designer reflected in their work.

Many times, we fail to recognize the beauty of the world God created simply because most of His created beings have unfortunately trashed it. But when we stop and admire the intricate design of a planet that was created with the perfect temperature, rotation, and planetary spacing necessary to sustain the lives placed upon it, it is awe-inspiring. Our Creator’s face is reflected all over this unique world we call home, and His thoughtful character design runs all the way down to the “signature” of the fingerprints we carry. He designed and chose each of us for exactly this time and place, to play a part in His plan that only we could play.

Psalm 8:3-5, Psalm 19:1

When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, the moon and the stars, which You have ordained, what is man that You are mindful of him, and the son of man that You visit him? For You have made him a little lower than the angels, and You have crowned him with glory and honor. The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows His handiwork.

Romans 1:20

For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse.

May 2

Critical reviews have been a part of video games for years, but like all other forms of entertainment they are now being subjected to “review bombing” by players who are unhappy with things that have very little to do with the actual quality of the game itself. This new habit of overloading a game with undeserved negative reviews is sadly becoming common in the industry... while some games may rightfully deserve a negative review, this will also make future developers less likely to take the kind of creative risks that tend to make great games.

We will all face critics in life, but we cannot grant them the power to alter our moods, mindset, or missions. Even Christ Himself wasn't immune to constant, undeserved trolling from others all the way through His final hours on this planet... and as His followers, we should anticipate negative responses and reactions as well. The only critical “reviews” we should be concerned with are from those who are watching us from the “cloud” ... so let's concentrate on running the good race until we hear, “Well done, good and faithful servant” from the voice of the only “Critic” whose opinion about us truly matters.

Matthew 5:11-12

Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Hebrews 12:1

Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.

May 3

What is your all-time favorite game? You know, the single best game that you have EVER played? Ok, now that you have that game in your mind, let me ask you another question... is it perfect? No bugs, no flaws, no parts you would change if you could? For me, even the games that I love the MOST still have multiple areas where they could be improved, refined, remastered with modern graphics, or at the very least expanded with additional content. And because of the areas that could be better or are still slightly imperfect, some people may not love them the same way that I do, or at all.

The same way I dearly love my favorite games despite their imperfections, God is absolutely infatuated with each of His imperfect children as well. He LOVES us, and nothing on this plane of existence can get in the way of that. Nothing we have gone through and nothing that has happened can change that. His love for us is unconditional, everlasting, and waiting for us to accept it. Don't fret about what others say... we are ALL a "work in progress". In His eyes we are precious, and He died for us to prove it. Let's embrace His endless love today!

Jeremiah 31:3

The Lord has appeared of old to me, saying: "Yes, I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore, with lovingkindness I have drawn you."

Romans 8:38-39

For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

May 4

The Star Wars story may be one of the longest and most complicated stories of repentance and reconciliation ever told... and if there is one thing that I have learned in all of the video game galaxies I have explored, it is that many times the characters that are currently acting like the villains of our story may end up being more than just an ally... they might just end up being the one that saves the day. Even if they have a troubled backstory and have done us wrong in the past, our shared mission compels us to work together for a common goal... a goal that requires us to truly forgive them.

Even in our new life as followers of Christ we can and WILL miss the mark... we are still flesh and blood humans prone to sinful mistakes. But we cannot turn our backs on each other in the midst of the critical mission we share when these inevitable missteps occur. Christ did not make the process of receiving His forgiveness difficult or painful... He made it simple and free. And as His followers, we must grant others the gift of forgiveness as freely as we received it and in the same manner He forgave us... sacrificially, genuinely, and completely.

Ephesians 4:32

Be kind to one another, tender hearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.

Mark 11:25-26

And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses. But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses.

May 5

Even the best games can make us angry at them while playing... and if you haven't experienced that yet, just try any Mario Party title because I GUARANTEE they will get you there. I love Mario Party, and there is a good reason why this series has been so successful for so long... but the combination of all of the "random chance" elements in the game, the game-controlled characters always seeming to get EXACTLY what they need (perfect dice rolls and easy stars), all while I get everything I DON'T want or need... well, it can lead to real anger and frustration at the unfairness of it all.

Life will often feel "unfair", and it may often seem like the deck is stacked against us as the game "cheats" to win. It is perfectly normal for us to feel frustrated or angry when these times come, but if we allow these negative feelings to linger, they will rob us of our joy, lead us into sinful choices, and give satan a foothold in our lives. Jesus understands feeling plotted against, falsely accused, and unfairly attacked better than anyone... let's bring Him our angry feelings so He can show us how these bitter scars can become our victorious testimony.

Ephesians 4:26-27

"Be angry, and do not sin": do not let the sun go down on your wrath, nor give place to the devil.

James 1:19-20

So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God.

May 6

Many times, I become so busy completing the optional side missions in a game that I lose focus of the primary reason I'm playing it... to complete the main storyline. The best games authentically balance chasing these pursuits by connecting their fulfillment to the primary objective... when the side missions act as beneficial and supplementary objectives to the overall story, completing them is both intuitive and fun. When they compete with my true priorities or pull me in the opposite direction of my destiny, participating in them only delays or prevents me from fulfilling my actual purpose.

Our lives have many rewarding and fulfilling options to choose from... but if we want to find success and satisfaction in ANY of our pursuits, we must first anchor our path in complete submission to the Lord and His full plan for our lives. It is only when the foundation for our path is built on a full commitment to Christ and His eternal purpose that we will reach the desired endgame for our primary mission on this planet as well as bring meaning and purpose to all of the additional "side missions" we choose to pursue along the way.

Psalm 37:4-5

Delight yourself also in the LORD, And He shall give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the LORD, Trust also in Him, And He shall bring it to pass.

Matthew 6:33

But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.

May 7

Now more than ever, we get advanced looks at games before their fully playable phase in the form of alpha releases, beta tests, pre-release demos, and early access games... but as we enjoy the opportunity to see these games while they are still in active development, the truth is they aren't finished yet. There are often areas that won't load, graphics that aren't pretty, and bugs that break the game in a variety of ways. But if we only look at the game in its unfinished state and never play the completed version, we will have an incomplete and flawed view of the game as a whole.

Many times, our experiences in life can feel like we are playing through a buggy, incomplete, alpha version of a game... uncomfortable, painful, and completely broken in many places. But we are only looking at one small vertical slice of a story that isn't finished yet. All these challenges, frustrations, and tears WILL combine to form something beautiful when the work of art that is our life is fully completed... and while we may only see glimpses of it now, in eternity it will all finally be visible to us from the point of view of the master Creator as well.

Ecclesiastes 3:11

He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also He has put eternity in their hearts, except that no one can find out the work that God does from beginning to end.

1 Corinthians 13:12

For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known.

May 8

There is a common theme running through most of my favorite games... the presence of an adversary who keeps finding ways to return to the battlefield no matter how many times I have defeated them. Bowser, Ganon, Eggman, and the rest of their villainous fraternity may fall at the end of every game they are in, but then they pop back up in the very next game in the series... often even stronger than last time. It makes me wonder how final ANY of these battles are when it takes me dozens of hours to win just to find that I will face them again.

Christ still has the power to calm our storms and still our waves, but He doesn't end ALL storms and waves permanently... if He did, that would actually be a pretty big problem for the entire planet and the ecosystems that depend on them.

Storms and waves serve purposes beyond our ability to comprehend, and He permits them because there are larger things going on than we can see right now.

He still calms the storm for His children when we cry out to Him... but even if there is another storm coming after this one, we can still have peace knowing exactly Who is in control of it.

John 16:33

These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.

Mark 4:39

Then He arose and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, "Peace, be still!" And the wind ceased and there was a great calm.

May 9

Before “achievements” and “trophies” existed, my satisfaction in accomplishing something extraordinary in a game was purely because those actions were connected to my primary mission in a meaningful way... but when these delightful little notifications started popping up, the sweet sound that accompanied unlocking one unintentionally became my new measurement for progress in a game. Even if the “achievement” wasn’t related to advancing the story or completing a mission, these arbitrary accomplishments became pursuits all of their own, compelling me to spend my time chasing random goals that often had very little to do with why I was playing the game.

In our lives, “shadow achievements” will always be present to distract us and give us a false indication of progress while pulling our focus off of our primary purpose. By seeking Christ and His priorities FIRST, the value of all the other pursuits available to us in life will become clear. There is only one achievement truly worth chasing... to hear the words “Well done, good and faithful servant” at the end of our quest from the only voice that matters.

Colossians 3:1-2

If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth.

Luke 10:41-42

And Jesus answered and said to her, “Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things. But one thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her.”

May 10

Have you ever had someone hand you their controller to try a game they were playing, and upon trying to move around realized that they play with a controller layout that is “inverted” compared to your preference? You go up when you meant to go down, you point down when you needed to look up... even my best friend plays Halo using a completely different control scheme than I do. It is exceptionally difficult to try to understand or mimic his style of play due to my preferred controller layout running completely opposite of his.

The truth is the message of the cross doesn't make sense to those who are playing through this game of life using a control scheme other than Christ's. It is what they are used to, and when we give well-meaning advice to those who have not accepted HIS layout it simply does not compute. His way requires counter-intuitive choices that are hard to understand such as the first will be last, bless those who curse you, and turn the other cheek... so let's show patience with those who only see foolishness in our walk of faith, pray for them, and lead them to His love with grace.

1 Corinthians 1:18

For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

Colossians 4:5-6

Walk in wisdom toward those who are outside, redeeming the time. Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one.

May 11

One would think that as we progress further into a game it would start to “feel” easier, but the opposite tends to be true. I guess if we kept playing world 1-1 in Mario over and over, we wouldn’t feel much of a challenge. But when we choose to move forward into the next level and towards a boss battle, the opposition becomes more challenging, the leaps of faith are more difficult, and the missions require us to learn new skills and abilities to proceed. I suppose if I just stayed in the very first area I would face easier opposition, but I would also never get closer to accomplishing my mission.

Challenges don’t increase if we aren’t moving forward... they are the result of choosing to live for the Lord and press on towards His call. Our enemy is not opposed to our presence, but with our actions in service to Christ. If it feels like we are marching uphill, against the wind, while carrying the weight of the world on our shoulders, then we are in very good company... Jesus did, too. Feeling the burden of the cross we are carrying is a sign we are heading in the right direction, moving one step closer towards reaching the souls we were put here to help.

1 Peter 4:12-13

Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ’s sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy.

2 Timothy 3:12

Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.

May 12

While exploring the open world in a game like Legend of Zelda, Fallout, or Elder Scrolls, it would be foolish to proceed without equipping our character with armor and weapons first. Even at our maximum health and stamina levels, the relentless attacks we will face from even the simplest and most basic of enemies can prove fatal without protection... and without any weapons to counterattack and keep our enemies at bay, we will slowly get worn down by them before we ever reach our destination. It truly is “dangerous to go alone” ...

If we don't start out the day prepared for the battles we are going to face, even a low-level enemy attack (traffic jam, bad news at work/school, social media post, etc.) can quickly defeat even the strongest of us. And if our armor starts to wear down over the course of the day, we must take quick action to repair it by resetting our minds in prayer, reading some Bible verses, and restoring ourselves back to full strength. Don't try to limp through the day with your armor at less than full strength... let's start with every piece in its' place and take time to repair after each battle we face today!

Ephesians 6:10-13

Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.

May 13

Wouldn't it be nice if our gaming characters were as committed to their development as we are? I hate to say it, but mine are kind of lazy. As soon as I put the controller down and turn off the console, they stop leveling up, building their skills, or gathering new gear. It is almost as if they expect me to be responsible for their growth... and if I am not actively playing the game with them, it seems that not much is going to happen. For a character concerned with saving the world, they sure seem to do a whole lot of sitting around and waiting on me for weeks and even months at a time.

If we want to "grow as characters" and "save our world", it is not going to happen all on its' own. Bearing fruit is the END result of the process of "abiding" ... remaining consistently connected to the vine that is Jesus Christ. Spending daily time in prayer and digesting the nutrients found in the Word of God is not just a recommendation... it is the only way we grow and begin to bear fruit. Building our faith only occurs through our intentional actions to remain connected to Him as our source... each and every day, in every way that we can.

John 15:4

Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me.

May 14

We typically appreciate when game studios give us exactly what we want, like the Mass Effect Trilogy remaster we received after years of asking for it. But when the same studio makes decisions we don't understand (like the poorly received Mass Effect Andromeda or the "Mess Effect" that was Anthem), those are more challenging to appreciate. These games may have paved the way for the remaster through the technological advancements that were learned, but it was hard to be thankful for them at the time when they weren't very good.

Passive acceptance is hard enough... being truly THANKFUL for the experiences in life that we don't understand is IMPOSSIBLE unless we view them through the lens of eternity. We all experience dark days, long nights, and broken dreams... but when we choose to be thankful in the midst of our storms in life, we will start to see them differently. In His infinite grace, the Lord will use even these unwanted struggles to develop us, shaping us into someone who sees the cross we carry as a mission instead of a burden... a mission that doesn't always make sense until we are on the other side of it.

1 Thessalonians 5:18

In everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

Philippians 4:6-7

Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

May 15

Class-based games require a high-degree of selflessness from the players participating if they want to succeed in their mission... and while every member's role is important, the difference between winning or losing is often determined by the caliber of the "medic" or "healer" on the team. While playing as a tank or a ranged warrior tends to be more fun and exciting, the ability to heal others after they have fallen in battle is a necessary but often undesired support role. Acting as a "healer" requires the willingness and courage to help those who can't help themselves, and many times the gift of healing comes at a high risk and a heavy cost... saving others usually does.

It can seem "unfair" to have to carry someone else's burden, and they may never thank us for it or even understand the sacrifices that we made for them. But just as Christ sacrificially carried the burden of the cross that set each of us free, we are called to help carry each other's burdens. The gift of restoration is in our hands and giving it to others means we must die to our own selfish desires the same way He did, allowing all to share in His victory.

Galatians 6:1-2

Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.

Luke 10:36-37

***"So which of these three do you think was neighbor to him who fell among the thieves?" And he said, "He who showed mercy on him."
Then Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."***

May 16

I love games that involve a party of characters to travel with... each of whom typically bring their own unique story and missions that we will need to complete together to resolve their arc and bring them closure. If I rejected them because they still “needed to work out their own issues”, I would have missed out on an amazing ally. Sure, they aren’t perfect yet, and sometimes they create as many problems for us as they solve. But I didn’t choose them for their perfection... I chose them because I genuinely wanted to take this journey with them.

The love that comes from Christ is not earned or deserved... it is simply given. He knew our weaknesses and chose to come down here to travel with us anyway. He didn’t require us to become perfect to receive His love... He died for us when we didn’t have a single redeeming quality to offer in exchange. His love isn’t based on what we produce... what we produce is simply evidence of His love being active in us. If we truly understand His love, then we will show His same quality of love to others... even when they act unworthy by our standards. We were all unworthy when He loved us the most.

Romans 5:7-8

For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

John 13:34

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another.

May 17

Over the years I have found that the quantity of “lives” I possessed in my video games had a direct correlation to my success with that game... more quarters at the arcade meant I might finally have enough “continues” to beat Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, and for every hundred coins I collected in Mario I would gain another opportunity to defeat Bowser once and for all. In pretty much any game I have ever played the act of hoarding all of the coins, continues, and lives was not just the easiest path to victory... it was the only way to win.

Jesus’s response on how to achieve eternal life might seem counterintuitive to the way we have been playing the game of life, but it is the ONLY path to victory... in our present life and beyond. Racing around to gather the “loose change” this life offers is a poor substitute for the true riches that can only be found in Christ. When we choose to give up control of the one and only life we have here on earth to the Lord, we gain access to a victory we could never achieve on our own... in this life AND in the life to come. Giving our life to Him is not “losing” our life... it is actually the only way to keep it.

Mark 8:35-36

For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel’s will save it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?

May 18

My best friend and I have very different ways of playing the exact same video games. I like subtitles on all my media... he is not a fan. He sets the controls to play with inverted inputs and the highest possible turn speed, while I stick to whatever the default layout is. If he hands me his controller in the middle of a game, his style of play will feel uncomfortable and foreign to me. But inverted controls and unique turning speeds were built into the design of the game for a reason... he is more successful playing to his strengths while I play better using the default control options.

We have all been called by the Lord to serve Him in distinct and different ways, and we may not always understand or even agree with the way He chooses to use others. But He has given each of us unique gifts and specific purposes according to His will, with each individually crafted member of the body of Christ filling a necessary function that only we could fulfill. Each of our missions in life have been calibrated to the specifications of each unique pair of hands holding the controller... and we follow one Savior who unites us all.

Romans 12:4-6a

For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another. Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them.

1 Corinthians 7:17

But as God has distributed to each one, as the Lord has called each one, so let him walk. And so I ordain in all the churches.

May 19

There is an art to playing fighting games like Marvel vs. Capcom or Smash Brothers... it's all about the COMBOS. Sure, I can experience a small amount of success for a short time by furiously "button-mashing" my way to a few cheap victories... but when matched up with a superior opponent, I will quickly fall victim to a multi-hit combo and see my health bar flatline in no time. All my most committed, well-meaning, button-mashing efforts will result in failure against a single, well-executed combo.

While all things are absolutely possible for those who have obediently placed their faith in Christ, this verse also means that His blessings and perfect destiny for us are IMPOSSIBLE for us to reach by our own efforts. The Lord has designed our lives to work in a very specific "combo" ... HIS plan and power combined with OUR faith and obedience. He has never asked us to try harder in our own strength... He wants us to put our FULL faith and confidence in Him no matter how things look on the outside. There is only one "combo" that can lead to a "flawless victory" ... His power and our patient trust and faith that He is always in total control!

Mark 9:23

Jesus said to him, "If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes."

Hebrews 11:6

But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.

May 20

We love co-op games, but there are many games that are deliberately designed to require more than just the two of us working together to beat. Many of the biggest and most rewarding raids in games like Destiny cannot even be attempted without a group of Guardians that is large enough to trigger the conditions for the mission's launch. And while the coordination required to get everyone together and on the same page to engage in these battles can often be frustrating, the challenge is usually rewarded with exclusive gear and rewards as well as victories that cannot be found or acquired any other way.

Jesus Himself saw that some of His battles called for His three most powerful prayer warriors, other conflicts were created for all twelve disciples, and some missions required seventy co-op partners. We were not sent to fight these battles on our own... we are part of the BODY of Christ for a reason. There are spiritual strongholds to take down that were built for believers to conquer in unity... let's invite others to join us in prayer to see the walls we are marching around come crumbling down.

Matthew 18:19-20

"Again I say to you that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them."

May 21

When playing through a game that features “power ups” such as a Mario title, the normal features of the character are still present... but they fade to the background to allow the new “power” to do what Mario couldn’t do without it. From a flower granting firepower, temporary invincibility from a star, or a skill-enhancing cat suit, Mario’s original capabilities as a mild-mannered plumber fade to the background so these powerful abilities can help him reach new places, overcome challenges, and save those that he couldn’t have helped on his own.

The key to becoming the best version of ourselves is not to double down on the limited abilities that we possess, but to increase the quantity of Jesus that we carry within us. It is the amount of Christ that we allow to shine through us that has the power to love, heal, and save others. In our own strength, our best efforts can barely scratch the surface on the issues of those we are trying to help... but Christ working through us can break through the bricks we could never break, soar to the heights we could never reach, and impact the very heart and soul of those who are in need.

John 3:30

He must increase, but I must decrease.

Galatians 2:20

I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.

May 22

With all the exciting new advancements in technology giving us the ability to cross-play games across console and PC platforms like never before, we still have one critical area of distinction... the controller. PC gamers rock the mouse and keyboard, Switch owners have their very uniquely designed Joy-Cons, and we can all tell the difference between a Sony and Microsoft controller within seconds of picking one up despite their similarities. While each controller style has its' own unique qualities, the variability between each of them means the playing field still isn't completely even.

There is one unifying controller format for all followers of Christ... the active demonstration of His love that we show for each other. We may have pursued different paths to come to this family of Christ, but we are all part of one body now with one universal language... love. Not love based on our personal interpretation or comfort level, but the SAME love we have received and been shown by Christ Himself. There is only one "controller preference" when following Christ... and it is HIS love placed in control of OUR thoughts, words, and actions.

John 13:34-35

"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."

May 23

As gamers, we accomplish some pretty epic things with this unassuming piece of plastic we call a controller... I have saved a princess, a planet, a galaxy, and on a few occasions all of time and space. My controller has taken me to incredible heights, defeated epic foes, and accomplished numerous achievements. But if I don't put it back on the charger or refresh the batteries when it is drained, it will let me down when I need it the most. A controller without power may look useful, but it quickly reverts to a useless piece of plastic... causing even the simplest of battles to result in a bitter defeat.

Maintaining our "charge" is a continuous event... like a controller, our battery requires a consistent recharge to remain effective. Our inner self needs to be reenergized by the Spirit of God just like our physical body needs to be fed and rested daily for optimal results. Let's take time today to "recharge" our spiritual battery... even Jesus Christ Himself often took time to get away and pray. And He did more in three years of ministry with these frequent controller "recharge sessions" than we could ever do in a lifetime of running on empty.

Ephesians 3:14 and 3:16

For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man.

Luke 5:16

So He Himself often withdrew into the wilderness and prayed.

May 24

A well-made video game can be as beautiful and meaningful as any famous work of art or cinematic masterpiece... once it is completed, anyways. Until then, a game that is still in an “alpha” state will have fuzzy textures, broken mechanics, and a large number of bugs and glitches. The wrong vertical slice of the game might be completely unplayable. Some of the BEST games still have day one updates that take up GIGS of data ... because even after the game has shipped, developers are feverishly working on patching newly discovered issues.

As believers, we exist in an “alpha state” with bugs and glitches that may reveal themselves at very inopportune times. We are still being developed by the Lord, and that means one “vertical slice” of our life may reflect poorly on the journey we are actively working on. We require daily patches and updates from our “Developer” to continue to grow and remain functional, so let’s not lose hope when we encounter a glitch today. Turn that bug in for patching, remain confident that He is still working on each of us, and know that we are in the process of becoming His masterpiece.

Philippians 1:6

Being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ.

1 John 2:1-2

My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.

May 25

One thing we can consistently count on in the gaming realm is CHANGE... new technological advancements create opportunities for better graphics, faster load times, deeper combat, and more immersive worlds to explore. While many games still stand the test of time, others are only “good” when viewed through the lens of that specific era. After going back to play some of these “classics”, I’ve found that their gameplay and graphics have aged about as well as I have... most need to be fully remade to have any relevance to the current audience.

Our problems in life are never too modern or complicated to find solutions for them in the Bible... despite their age, the timeless wisdom and incomparable power in Christ’s messages and their relevance to those He came to seek and save has never changed. His promises were spoken for the purpose of being heard and applied through EVERY era of time... and when He said He is with us always, He was saying that to ALL of us. He fully relates to every emotion we feel, and His unchanging love is always present to help us solve every problem we face in this ever-changing world.

Hebrews 13:8

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

John 6:63

It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life.

May 26

Video games are an incredibly immersive medium, with great games typically pulling us into all their drama and excitement... even providing a well-earned “jump scare” or two along the way. But despite the potentially stressful elements of enemies surrounding us, high stakes storylines, and a clock that never stops ticking down, we still tend to play games to relax, reduce our stress, and decompress. Why? Because the whole time we’re playing the game we know who is truly in control. We are literally holding a device called a controller, and if things get a little too intense, we can simply press the power button and turn it off.

When we start to feel anxious or stressed in life, we must remember that it is the Lord who is in control. Life is absolutely full of high-stress situations, deadlines, enemies, and “scares”, but as soon as we start to feel that pressure closing in, we must consciously choose to place the controller into the hands of the One who has the power to make even the most challenging times serve His purpose. It is only through yielding to His control and submitting to His power that we find peace in our storm.

Philippians 4:6-7

Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

May 27

Sound effects in video games serve multiple roles, immersing us in the ambience as well as providing critical audio cues within the game's environment. Hearing and being responsive to these sounds can often make the difference between victory and defeat, alerting me to the telltale sounds of an opponent sneaking up on me or a gentle twinkling sound that indicates a treasure chest is nearby. If I have the volume turned down or become distracted by listening to alternate sound sources from outside of the game, I miss out on these important warnings as well as these valuable, hidden rewards.

What we choose to listen to matters... our lives are full of distractions that are designed to weaken our faith and disrupt our focus. We must make the conscious choice to stay tuned in to the Lord's voice and keep the volume turned all the way up throughout our day. By intentionally injecting and absorbing positive, Christ-focused messages that encourage us and feed our spirit, we can remain attuned to His voice in every environment, insuring we can clearly hear Him through all the noise as He guides us, provides for us, and protects us.

Romans 10:17

Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.

Ephesians 5:19

Speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord.

May 28

Back when they first released, I would never consider purchasing a new video game from Square Enix like Final Fantasy or Kingdom Hearts without picking up the accompanying strategy guide at the same time... and while the guide was a valuable tool that helped me explore these new worlds more efficiently, they are ultimately the record of someone ELSE'S play through. These guides were designed to enhance my journey within the game through providing solutions to problems and insight on winning strategies, but it is still ultimately MY responsibility to apply these and craft my own unique, personal experience with the game.

We are each called to build our own unique experience with our Creator, not just blindly follow another's path to the endgame. The Bible is designed for us to personally explore, study, and prayerfully build our own authentic and individual relationship with Him. Forging a relationship with Christ is not something we can do through simply emulating someone else's beliefs or following their "play-through". He designed our story specifically for us to seek Him, find Him, and truly get to know Him.

Jeremiah 29:13

And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart.

Acts 17:11b

They received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so.

May 29

Few feelings in gaming match the satisfaction of leveraging the correct offensive strategies and defensive items to defeat an incredibly powerful opponent in a role-playing game... while fighting a fire-based enemy with fire attacks only strengthens them, equipping flame-resistant gear and using water-based attacks negates their strength for an easy victory. Even the largest boss falls when their primary weapon has been disabled, their poisonous attacks have been blocked, and their weaknesses have been exposed.

We will still face spiritual enemies in life, but they have been disarmed of all their most powerful weapons... the guilt, fear, and shame we once carried have been permanently nailed to the cross. These attacks aren't defeated through our own worthiness, but through His. Our battles with these enemies may still feel overwhelming at times, but their poisonous teeth and claws have been removed by Christ through His heroic sacrifice. Let's deny them the power that they no longer have, reject their false narratives, and embrace the power and freedom that Christ has given us over them!

Colossians 2:14-15

He wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it.

May 30

Reaching the end of a great game is always a bittersweet feeling for me. On one hand, I genuinely appreciate all the art and craftsmanship that went into delivering an unforgettable journey that I emotionally connected with... but once the final credits roll, I also wish I had just a little more time with it. Sure, I can replay it... but then I cannot move on to the new adventures that await me once I place this disc back into the case for the last time. Sometimes I wish that these fantasies weren't quite so final...

We were not built for “goodbye” ... the tears and sorrow that accompany death and loss were never meant to infect our world. But as we mourn and reflect on those we have lost; we can also look to the victory that Christ has purchased for us so that we can be reunited with them permanently... in a place where we will never shed a tear or feel the pain of “goodbye” ever again. The memory of those we have lost should encourage us to live our lives in service to Him, so we can experience the never-ending epilogue of joy that awaits all those who committed their lives to Christ... a joy that is only complete at our journey's end.

Revelation 21:4

And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.

May 31

The building of a team or “party” in a video game is one of my favorite parts of the gaming experience. As I journey through titles like Final Fantasy, Mass Effect, or Kingdom Hearts I slowly build up a group of people I have never previously met who agree to join me on my quest, leaving behind everything they were previously doing. This new “family” sacrifices their plans, their time, and for many of them their virtual “lives” to battle alongside me and ensure I make it to the endgame of my journey. And each time it is this unselfish, ragtag group of explorers who wind up saving the world.

The beauty of being part of the body of Christ is that we aren’t a family by a mere natural bloodline, but through choosing to be part of each other’s journey. We are called to use our freedom to serve, support, help, and sacrifice for each other on this voyage so that each of us can reach the best possible ending to our stories. The liberty that Christ purchased for us was not for our selfish consumption, but to support our unselfish participation in each other’s adventure... sharing His love to the world through kindness, service, and sacrifice.

Galatians 5:13-14

For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

June 1

I have left behind a great deal of in-game currency and other cool, valuable, and often unused items from my video game characters over the years. By the end of the story, my Commander Shepherd had saved up enough money to simply bribe the Reapers to go away, while Link was sitting on enough rupees to purchase an entirely new kingdom for Zelda. That rocket launcher I had saved in case of an emergency? I never ended up using it. Once these adventures are over, all the treasures and wealth I have been hoarding and the items I have been chasing lose their relevance and value. I can't carry them into another game.

The path of chasing the “cake” that this life offers may seem to promise satisfaction, and many of those that find it will assure us that it looks and tastes real to them... but at the end of this adventure any “cake” we find isn't even ours to keep. The cake may indeed be real, but the fulfillment it offers is a lie. Those who have everything except for Christ will NEVER be content... and those of us who have nothing BUT Christ possess the only contentment that truly matters and the only gift we get to keep.

1 Timothy 6:6-7

Now godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out.

Matthew 6:19-20

Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal.

June 2

Ironically, the most dangerous adversaries I face in many games are not the “big bosses”. Most of my defeats are at the hands of basic opponents like dungeon slimes, large crabs, or simple grunts that tend to appear when I don’t have the time, patience, or the remaining HP to deal with them... often right after conquering a particularly challenging mission and in need of a quiet place to save my game. They shouldn’t warrant my time or attention, but because they are such a nuisance, I often stop to fight them... even though these battles offer little reward other than the brief satisfaction of their defeat.

As sure as there are missions to complete and a “Great Commission” to fulfill, there will also always be adversaries who seek to distract us from moving forward through their persistent insults and personal attacks. But if we bring ourselves down to fight at their level, the work we are doing ceases... even if we win that battle, they ultimately win the war by moving our focus off Christ and onto them. There will always be trolls between us and our next checkpoint... let’s remain focused on the Lord and the critical work He has called us to do.

Nehemiah 6:3

So I sent messengers to them, saying, “I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down. Why should the work cease while I leave it and go down to you?”

1 Peter 2:21-23

For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps: “Who committed no sin, nor was deceit found in His mouth”; who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously.

June 3

So, after getting stuck in a spot of my game I decided to search the internet for the answer. Lo and behold, I found a video that covered the EXACT area I was at. I painstakingly lined everything up and precisely replicated what I watched a more experienced gamer do... but it didn't work. I tried over and over, but despite my best efforts I couldn't mimic their success. Because they had invested their skill points differently than I had, their unique character had "leveled up" abilities I hadn't developed yet. I couldn't simply copy them to achieve the same outcome... I had to put in the work to grow, too.

We are instructed to work out our salvation with the Lord personally and directly... and that means we are each in a different part of our relationship with Him that is unique to us and our journey. We can't simply mimic another believer's walk and expect that to work for us, because we have all traveled different paths to get to where we are. Forging our relationship with the Lord is a serious, personal, life-long journey that cannot simply be replicated... it must be grown organically and intentionally, one carefully placed skill point at a time.

Philippians 2:12b-1

Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.

James 4:8a

Draw near to God and He will draw near to you.

June 4

One of the most exhilarating parts of a role-playing game is that moment when we earn the ability to “level up”, increasing our health and strength as well as unlocking new abilities. But using the skill points we have earned is an intentional process that requires our direct involvement... we are the ones who choose which areas of our character we will invest in and grow. If we don’t allocate our skill points wisely with our primary mission in mind, we will have a character with a wealth of “experience” that is still only a level ONE character in some of the most critical areas of their development, rendering them incapable of saving anyone.

The goal of our Christian walk is not to simply gain knowledge, gifts, abilities, or experience... it is to use these gifts to grow our capacity and ability to display the love of Christ Himself to everyone we come into contact with. These gifts are designed to serve others in a spirit of humility, kindness and love by HIS definition, not our own. Any word or action that doesn’t proceed from a spirit of love doesn’t come from the Spirit of God. Let’s invest into loving others as Christ did. It’s the only gift that lasts.

1 Corinthians 13:1-2

Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.

John 15:12

This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.

June 5

I appreciate it when games have “demos” or “beta” versions that release prior to their full retail launch so I can “try before I buy”. But as nice as it is to make sure a game fits what I want before I commit to it, only a handful of games let me carry my progress from the demo or beta over into the full game once it is released. After putting multiple hours into creating my character, completing the tutorial, and gaining experience and new skills by playing through the first few levels, the ability to continue where I left off influences my desire to purchase the final version of the game.

Following the path of Christ provides incredible benefits in this current life... peace, joy, love, and a multitude of other blessings. But our earthly life is only one small, temporary part of our eternal existence. Christ’s resurrection was more than just the fulfillment of a promise, it is His proof that the same victory awaits all who have put their faith in Him. Eternity is a continuation of our relationship with the Lord, and we choose what progress we will carry over into the most permanent part of our existence... let’s invest in that which will last.

1 Corinthians 15:19-20

If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable. But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep.

Matthew 6:19-20

Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal.

June 6

My wife and I both love playing cooperative adventures together... but sharing the same screen can result in some friction when we want the in-game camera to point in different directions. When we stick together with a combined vision for exploration, it tends to work very well... when we advance independently from each other, not so much. The camera can't follow us both, causing one of us to explore blindly until we perish off of the screen... resulting in BOTH of us failing the level. Even in a split- screen game, there is a limit to how far we can go before the game reorients us back together.

Successfully walking with Christ is dependent on following Him as CLOSELY as possible each and every day. When we pursue selfish goals instead of aligning our path with His direction, we will follow "off-screen" paths that lead to unpleasant outcomes. The camera doesn't follow us, because WE aren't the protagonist of this story. It follows HIM, and if we want to continue on the path to our own best destiny as well as the best ending for all of our co-op partners in this life, it can only be found by following in His footsteps... one step at a time.

John 8:12

Then Jesus spoke to them again, saying, "I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life."

Amos 3:3

Can two walk together, unless they are agreed?

June 7

My gaming characters tend to behave in the exact manner I direct them to based on the buttons I press. If I tap the “jump button” they jump, and when I press the analog sticks they move in that direction. It would be a lot less successful for both of us if they used their free will to make independent decisions instead of following my directions. The choices I make are designed to minimize their pain and guide them into achieving the best possible ending... to delay in performing these actions and follow their own will would result in complete disaster.

It shouldn't be a surprise that our internal will doesn't always automatically match up with the Lord's plan for our lives simply because we have chosen to follow Him. On the final day of His natural life on earth, even Christ Himself still prayed for His will to be aligned with the will of the Father. Let's not be surprised or disappointed when our mind and body still try to default to their own preferences... let's just take a moment to recalibrate and pray the same prayer for help that Christ did in His time of need. Jesus didn't carry His cross alone... and He is with us so we don't have to, either.

Luke 22:42

Jesus says “Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from Me; nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be done.”

Galatians 2:20

I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.

June 8

While the Assassin's Creed series may have popularized the "leap of faith", our first "leap of faith" happened way back on the original NES system... specifically on the first Super Mario Brothers title. Multiple blind jumps in the game led to an off-screen platform or landing spot that was completely out of view... so we simply built up a bunch of speed, hit that jump button as hard as we could, and even leaned our physical body towards the edge of the screen hoping for the best. The game always gave us a safe space to land... as long as we were prepared to make a fully committed leap.

It would be nice if we could "scroll" the screen ahead and see where we are going to land, or at least feel more comfortable about the jump He has asked us to take.

But following Christ is a walk of faith, not sight. Our limited vision will try to convince us that His destiny for us isn't possible... our abilities are too weak, that gap is too large, and the platform is too small. If we can see where we are going and land the jump safely on our own, we aren't jumping far enough. Doing the impossible isn't just the Lord's specialty, it's the main way He operates.

2 Corinthians 5:7

For we walk by faith, not by sight.

Hebrews 11:1

Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

June 9

I have managed to lose at video games in a variety of embarrassing ways over the years... but of all the ways that I have found to fail in a video game, the most frustrating way to lose is by my own indecisiveness. Hesitating to take the action that I knew was right and committing myself fully to that decision has prevented me and my team from achieving victory on many painful occasions. If I had chosen to act with confidence and pressed towards the finish line without looking back, we would have won.

Like the followers of Christ who have gone before us, we have a choice to make to fulfill the destiny presented to us. While it is critical to seek confirmation of the Lord's will through prayer and Bible study, we have an equally important part to play in the fulfilling of His will... by applying our unwavering faith to His limitless power. We aren't called to have confidence in ourselves, but in our Father... the God who never breaks a promise and makes a way where there seems to be no way. He is the Master of the storm even when the sky grows dark, but we must have the faith to walk out to Him on the waves when He calls us.

Romans 4:20-22

He did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully convinced that what He had promised He was also able to perform. And therefore "it was accounted to him for righteousness."

June 10

“Open world” games offer a level of freedom that simply can’t be found in titles built around linear level progression... they are designed to encourage exploration and offer a unique experience from one gamer to the next. But even the most expansive “open world” games still have some limitations... I have to download the game as well as its’ frequent updates on the specific gaming system I want to play it on. And that console has to be plugged in. And the power has to be turned on. You get the idea... even the “freedom” this game offers still has participation requirements and “rules”.

Following the Lord is a unique, individualized, open-world relationship for each of us, and no two of our stories will play out the same way. But experiencing the freedom that only Christ can give still requires something from us... we must “abide” in Him and His teachings. This is not to limit us... it’s because true freedom can only be found in His presence. The freedom to explore our best life only comes from walking hand in hand with our Creator... and it is in our intentional daily walk with Him that we find the truth that grants freedom in this open world.

John 8:31-32

Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, “If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.”

June 11

I have found that I just can't get everything I want from the developers that I love. For example, while I am excited about whatever new experience Hideo Kojima is cooking up next, I know it won't be the Metal Gear Solid Remake that I want the most. Many times, my favorite studios seem to be willing to make everything EXCEPT what I am most interested in... but there are reasons for these decisions beyond my perception. And perhaps his next game will be even better than the game I want.

Our commitment to the Lord is only truly a "commitment" if we accept both His ability to answer the most impossible of our prayers, as well as accepting His wisdom and sovereignty when He chooses not to. Our prayers are not a means of getting WHAT our heart desires from the Lord... they are the means of getting our heart WHERE the Lord desires. God sees all the hidden variables in the equation, and while He could have prevented them from getting thrown into the fiery furnace, His power was most potently displayed by protecting them IN the fire. And if we are in the fire, we can always be assured He is in the fire with us.

1 John 5:14-15

Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him.

Daniel 3:17-18

If that is the case, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us from your hand, O king. But if not, let it be known to you, O king, that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up.

June 12

Struggling through an online match isn't new to me, but the struggle feels different in those matches when everything that could possibly go wrong IS going wrong... all while enduring my opponent's mockery of my team's efforts the whole way through. In those moments it can be easy to simply "rage quit", abandon ship, and take up a new and less competitive hobby like stamp collecting. But while quitting is the easy way out, the only path to victory for me as well as my team is to endure to the end.

The most amazing part about the crucifixion of Christ was not just His choice to GO, but His decision to STAY. He could have climbed down anytime He wanted, but He chose to remain there through all the insults, pain, and feelings of abandonment and betrayal. This is what it means to be crucified with Christ... to hang tough on our cross even as our enemies and critics gleefully surround us, mock our pain, and proclaim their victory. But it is in this place that we truly die to ourselves so He can fully live through us. Christ's greatest victory was fought and won on an undeserved cross... and He will give us the strength to stay on ours.

Galatians 2:20

I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.

Psalms 69:9

For zeal for Your house has consumed me, and the taunts of those who taunt You have fallen on me.

June 13

When I play a game that features a computer-controlled partner or “AI bot”, they don’t always behave in the manner I would expect... sometimes they perform actions that are clearly complimentary to our collective goals, and other times I struggle to understand the behaviors they are exhibiting. Many of their decisions make me wonder if they are truly on “my side”. But they are simply acting on the pre-determined “scripting” that controls their actions... they follow specific, invisible criteria that serve the larger story being told.

Living a life of service to Christ doesn’t mean we will always “feel” like God is on our side. During many frustrating times I have cried out to the Lord, “Whose side are you on?”, only to realize the Almighty God doesn’t take anyone’s side. He has one priority for the events of our lives... the accomplishment of His will on this planet. He is not here to act as a mere “tag team” partner in life... He is here to act as the Commander of the whole entire thing. As His followers, we are responsible for making the choice to align ourselves with His desires and plans for our lives... not the other way around.

Joshua 5:13-14

And it came to pass, when Joshua was by Jericho, that he lifted his eyes and looked, and behold, a Man stood opposite him with His sword drawn in His hand. And Joshua went to Him and said to Him, “Are You for us or for our adversaries?” So He said, “No, but as Commander of the army of the Lord I have now come.”

James 4:14-15

You do not know what will happen tomorrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away. Instead you ought to say, “If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that.”

June 14

Truly being surprised by an announcement of a video game in development is becoming very rare. Despite the stacks of confidentiality agreements that are signed and the massive amount of caution used to prevent leaks, gamers still find out about unannounced titles by watching for the “signs”... developers posting job openings that point to new titles being created, designers updating their social media accounts that indicate they are working on those titles, tell-tale applications for titles and trademarks, and ESRB submissions that prove a title is in the final stages of completion. We may not know the exact date or time, but the signs show us that it is definitely coming.

As followers of Christ, His triumphant return is always on our minds... and while we can't know the exact day or time of His return date, we CAN see the signs and make sure we are preparing ourselves and others for this world altering event. We shouldn't fearfully watch the news dreading what might be coming next... we should be actively preparing in cheerful anticipation of His second coming, investing our time meaningfully until His return.

Matthew 24:3, 36, and 44

Now as He sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, “Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?”

“Of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only...”

Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.”

June 15

Most adventure games give us the satisfaction of knowing when we have beaten them... the final battle ends, the theme music starts, and as the end credits begin to roll, we feel a sense of completion washing over us. But games that feature an endless challenge mode or “horde mode” don’t play by these rules... they continue to raise the stakes, increase the level of difficulty, and send relentless, never-ending waves of enemies at us until we finally tap out in exhaustion or become so overwhelmed by their persistence that we make a fatal mistake.

Feeling outnumbered and constantly under attack is unfortunately a pretty standard operating procedure for each of us down here. In this life we will have tribulation, but we don’t have allow these battles to overwhelm us. We have a direct line to the Father to release our worries, fears, and sorrows whenever we want. The key is to intentionally bring them to Him in prayer all day, every day, and THROUGHOUT the day instead of letting them build up. We don’t have to silently struggle and try to carry these overwhelming burdens alone... He is waiting for us to call on Him so He can answer.

Psalm 55:17-18

Evening and morning and at noon I will pray, and cry aloud, And He shall hear my voice. He has redeemed my soul in peace from the battle that was against me, for there were many against me.

June 16

When I make a list of the greatest games I have ever played, they tend to have a lot of the same qualities in common... such as being simple enough for me to immediately pick up and play while still possessing enough of a challenge that will require my full commitment to master them. While I expect my games to ramp up in difficulty as my skill level increases, that should feel like an organic progression that takes place across the entire course of the story. If my ability to get started is hindered by a needlessly convoluted control scheme, it makes me wonder if the developers actually wanted their game to be played at all.

The path to Christ was intentionally designed to be simple and easy to understand, giving every one of us access to eternal life based on our choice to believe in and follow Jesus. It is as simple as Paul makes it sound, and any attempt to make it more difficult is misguided. Sure, following Christ compels corresponding behaviors just as a great game is designed to shape us into the best possible player through our actions... but the high price of entry has been fully paid so we can all choose to play.

Romans 10:9-10

If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.

Ephesians 2:8-9

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.

June 17

Getting “stuck” in a game can be an incredibly frustrating feeling... something that was supposed to be a fun and relaxing experience has now become just as stressful as the reality I was trying to take a break from. While most games provide multiple helpful hints and clues during the early tutorial levels to guide me in what to do next, they tend to be painfully silent in the places where I desperately need their assistance the most. Getting caught in an endless cycle of trying and failing without any guidance from the game never gets fun.

When we are feeling stuck or overwhelmed in life, we have a choice to make... to keep trying to do things our way or seek the Lord’s help. This “game of life” has neither mercy nor grace for those who are struggling, offering useless non-Biblical advice like “God helps those who help themselves”. While His answers may not be what we want to hear, they ARE the way out of our predicament. When we turn our eyes off of our burdens and up towards Him, we are reminded that our biggest problems are never a problem for Him... as long as we lift them up to Him rather than try solving them on our own.

Psalms 121:1-2

I will lift up my eyes to the hills— From whence comes my help? My help comes from the LORD, Who made heaven and earth.

Hebrews 4:16

Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

June 18

Very few games are designed to be completed in one sitting... many of them are played over weeks, months, and even years. Each time I pick up my controller, I don't worry if my character forgot how to jump while I was gone or if the right trigger button will randomly serve a new function the next time I play. I have such a tremendous amount of confidence in the game that I don't even consider loading up the tutorial to see if my character is operating differently... I simply press the correct button and expect the corresponding action to occur.

When we pray, we should EXPECT the Lord to do mighty things. If we can trust a video game character to jump when we press the jump button, we should certainly trust that the God Who never fails will be faithful to fulfill His promises, too. I cannot jump as high or run as fast as my favorite characters, and fortunately I don't have to. I don't perform those feats; I'm simply expected to respond to circumstances by aligning my input with the actions of the hero so they can show off THEIR power and capabilities. Let's allow the Lord to show off His power as the hero of all our battles today!

John 14:12-14

He who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do, because I go to My Father. And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask anything in My name, I will do it.

June 19

While there are several games that trust me to make a handful of dialogue choices, most of my favorite game characters still do all the talking while I am simply along for the ride. Perhaps it is for the best... while I would like to have some creative control over how Link or Master Chief communicates, the truth is that their entire mission may be compromised if I had the opportunity to choose what they say. Honestly, if I was making those decisions, Zelda and Cortana would probably pick a different hero to try to save the world.

When the Lord places us into positions to speak on His behalf, He doesn't abandon us to our own discretion. As a matter of fact, if we faithfully submit our thoughts and voices to Him, the Spirit of God will give us EXACTLY what we need to say in those critical circumstances. Take the time to stop, pray, and let the Lord speak through us today... The dialogue tree we've been presented with may seem overwhelming, but there's only one choice that never compromises the mission. If we give Him our voice, He will speak healing, grace, and love exactly when it's needed.

Luke 12:11b-12

***Do not worry about how or what you should answer, or what you should say.
For the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say.***

June 20

“Dads”, “fathers”, and “father-figures” from the worlds of video game, sci-fi, and anime stories have a complicated history... there is a higher likelihood of them being revealed as the villain of the story rather than a supporter of the main character’s quest. From the heartbreaking reveal to Luke that his evil adversary was actually his father (Spoiler alert?), to the plethora of horrible fathers in games ranging from Final Fantasy to Tekken, a lot of these guys really are the worst. Most of the time our gaming journey is completed in spite of our father, not with their support.

It can be difficult to see our Heavenly Father in the proper context if we have struggled with a complicated or non-existent relationship with the fathers and father figures in our lives... and when the Lord doesn’t give us what we want exactly when we want it, we may chalk Him up as yet another disappointment. But whether we had the blessing of a great father or one that felt more like a final boss fight, our Father in heaven truly has our eternal best interests at heart. Even when His actions seem hard to understand, He only gives good gifts to us at the time we are fully prepared to receive them.

Matthew 7:9-11

What man is there among you who, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!

June 21

I hate to say it, but I tend to be a bit of a litterbug when I play Destiny, Halo, or pretty much any game that lets me simply discard used vehicles once they've finished serving their purpose. If I had a chest full of "glimmer" for every Sparrow in Destiny, Warthog in Halo, or pretty much any other transportation device I've left behind once it was too damaged to be useful (or because some newer, shinier, less damaged vehicle caught my interest)... well, let's just say I'd have enough in-game money to finally make all of my armor match.

I might be in the habit of "dropping sparrows", but the Lord has never failed to account for a single one. As a matter of fact, He knows each and every hair on our head (even if some of us are getting to the low single digits). There are no discarded creations in His kingdom... no matter how "battle-damaged" we may feel, our continued presence here is evidence that we have substantial value to the Lord and still serve a critical purpose. He has preserved us through each and every battle and in His eyes we are beyond precious... which is why He paid the ultimate price to buy us back.

Luke 12:6-7

Are not five sparrows sold for two copper coins? And not one of them is forgotten before God. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Do not fear therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows.

June 22

There is a large difference between playing a game that features real-time combat and titles that utilize a turn-based approach... turn-based games give us the opportunity to stop, think, maybe go get a plate of nachos, and come back and handle business whenever we feel ready. Other games don't afford us this same luxury unless we pause the game... enemies will take us out with ease if we take one second too long to react to their presence, and they will keep coming so we don't have the opportunity to regroup and fight back.

Life will never provide us with a convenient time to make the decision to choose Christ or deepen our service to Him, and there isn't a "pause" button we can press to cease the spiritual war we are in. The vicious, personal, unrelenting attacks of the enemy are designed to pressure us into delaying our decision until it is too late. Let's choose today to serve Christ in whatever calling or capacity He has placed on our hearts... the pressure to push pause is not coming from the Lord, but from the enemy opposition that is trying desperately to distract us and prevent us from fulfilling our destiny.

2 Corinthians 6:2

For He says: "In an acceptable time I have heard you, and in the day of salvation I have helped you." Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.

June 23

I have a bit of a problem when using one-time use items such as requisitions in Halo 5... more appropriately, I have a problem with NOT using them. I'm a bit of a hoarder when it comes to these special one-time use weapons and vehicles, finding more excuses to save them than reasons to put them to use. Many losses may have resulted in victory if I would have simply used them in my current battle instead of saving them up for a rainy day. Ironically, I tend to receive more of these requisitions to use in the future when I willingly open my armory to be used... as long as I am willing to empty my stockpile out in this current mission.

The Lord's economy works in a way that is completely counterintuitive to our natural way of thinking. When we surrender ourselves and all that we have fully to Him, we always end up with exponentially more leftover than what we could ever have acquired or accomplished on our own. Let's not worry about what we may have lost or what this path has cost us along the way... He is the God who asks for all we have to give, because He has more than we could ever imagine to give us back in return.

Mark 8:19-21

When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many baskets full of fragments did you take up?" They said to Him, "Twelve." "Also, when I broke the seven for the four thousand, how many large baskets full of fragments did you take up?" And they said, "Seven." So He said to them, "How is it you do not understand?"

June 24

My “day one” experience when purchasing a new game is quite a bit different than it used to be... once upon a time I would rip the plastic wrap off, place the game in my console, and begin playing almost immediately. Those days are GONE. The excitement of opening a new game is now tempered by the reality that I must wait for the game to install, followed by downloading day one updates that may be even LARGER than the install... depending on the strength of my Wi-Fi, I may not even play the game until the following day. Watching the download bar slowly creep towards 100% is a great way to build anticipation, but I miss the simpler days of immediate gratification.

The Lord is always faithful to deliver victory in our battles, but He also knows how much of our destiny we can occupy at each point along the way. While it can be frustrating to see His promises delivered piece by piece instead of all at once, the Lord will only let us expand to the capacity of our current bandwidth. The download bar may seem to be moving slowly, but His pace is deliberate for our own benefit... and full victory is assured in His perfect timing.

Deuteronomy 7:22-23

And the Lord your God will drive out those nations before you little by little; you will be unable to destroy them at once, lest the beasts of the field become too numerous for you. But the Lord your God will deliver them over to you, and will inflict defeat upon them until they are destroyed.

June 25

For years, gaming events and expos such as E3, Gamescom, TGS, PAX and more have brought us exciting announcements, trailers, and game reveals that fill our eyes with graphical wonders that seem too good to be true... and unfortunately, most of the time they ARE too good to be true. Even with the best of intentions, it can be challenging for developers to fulfill all the lofty promises they make to their fans from these grand stages... many times they can't even hit the release dates they committed to because too many of the variables are simply out of their direct control.

The Lord has given His committed followers a multitude of promises, but unlike our well-meaning friends in game development He has full control over EVERY variable that will bring His words to pass. He can guarantee that He will fulfill every promise He has made and hit every release date He has committed to... and because He has complete knowledge of every step along the way, not a single word He has spoken will ever fall to the ground unfulfilled. It may not happen when or how we prefer, but His promises will come to pass in His time.

Joshua 21:45

Not a word failed of any good thing which the Lord had spoken to the house of Israel. All came to pass.

June 26

Just about ANYONE can be the hero of the story in a video game... many of my favorite iconic gaming heroes were simply regular characters living very normal lives until their true destiny was unveiled. Ordinary people like Mario jumped from solving pipe clogs to saving princesses, Sora exchanged his simple island life for a keyblade wielding adventure, and even characters who started off on the wrong side (like the Arbiter from Halo) can find the path to redemption and help save the day.

Our complicated backstories, the lack of a “heroic” resume, or a seemingly plain/ordinary start in life has no bearing on the extraordinary things the Lord has planned for each of our lives. He is the One who qualifies us for the adventure and inheritance we have been destined for... and His stamp of approval is the only one that truly matters. We don’t need someone else’s approval to do what He has called us to do. Whether we started off slow, unnoticed, or running the wrong direction... we have an important and critical destiny that is uniquely ours... and His qualification is the only seal of approval we need to do His work.

Colossians 1:12

Giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light.

June 27

Almost all games have prerequisites built into them... for example, we can't unlock the most powerful abilities on our character's skill tree until we have achieved the basic ones first. Mastering the highest-level abilities in the game requires us to have already developed and demonstrated the right combination of "prerequisite" capabilities, as well as the necessary amount of strength and power to perform them. What good does it do for us to find a powerful sword that is too heavy for our character to carry, or unlock a new power that requires more stamina than we possess?

The beginning of a believer's skill tree is faith, and the final gift we are trying to produce is love. But demonstrating the true love of Christ also has prerequisites that each of us must fulfill first... we cannot show His perfect love from a place of faithlessness, ignorance, impatience, unkindness, or lacking basic self-discipline.

As followers of the Lord, we must intentionally develop and cultivate each of these areas to become capable of showing His definition of love to others. Love that doesn't display these characteristics isn't His love.

2 Peter 1:5-8

But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

June 28

I had never previously considered the proper use of shadows in a video game until the first time I played Metal Gear Solid on PS1. The need to survey my environment and find the safest position to proceed was the exact opposite of my tried and true “run-and-gun” approach that had served me well in my other gaming experiences. Much to my surprise, the environmental obstacles that I previously viewed as a hindrance were actually designed to provide the cover I needed... the shadows that they cast helped me advance without detection, avoid unnecessary battles when possible, and always presented the safest place to be when I was engaged in combat.

The challenges and battles we face in life are not due to the ABSENCE of God in our lives but serve as a reminder of our need for His PRESENCE in our lives. He is the Lord of the storm even though He didn't cause it, and if we want to walk on these troubled waters, we must allow these battles to push us TOWARDS Him, not away. It is when we have chosen to walk close enough to be in His shadow that we can experience His peace in the midst of the storm.

Psalm 57:1

Be merciful to me, O God, be merciful to me! For my soul trusts in You; and in the shadow of Your wings I will make my refuge, until these calamities have passed by.

June 29

We all have them... “guilty pleasure” games that are categorically rejected by the entire gaming world as terrible, broken titles that on a scale of 1 to 10 would receive a negative 100... and yet we still love, play, and enjoy them. Some of my favorite games over the years belong buried in a landfill with a pile of ET cartridges... games that are SO universally reviled that if anyone knew I played them and genuinely LIKED them, they would probably challenge my credibility as a gamer. But as imperfect as they are, they sit proudly on my recently played list... because I love them.

Many times in my life I have made decisions that brought shame on myself, my family, my friends, and worst of all my Creator. But as embarrassing as my behavior has been to the Lord on many occasions, He still freely admits that He both knows me and accepts me as HIS child. And if the Son of God is willing to acknowledge that this wayward, imperfect, prodigal nerd belongs to His family and claims me as His own despite my flaws, then the least I can do is proudly name myself as His loyal follower everywhere I go and in everything I do.

Luke 12:8

Also I say to you, whoever confesses Me before men, him the Son of Man also will confess before the angels of God.

June 30

Difficulty levels in video games have evolved almost as much as the games themselves... While older titles typically only featured one default difficulty setting, modern games cater to the widest possible audience by offering a variety of challenge levels... from virtually impossible difficulty settings that only the most elite gamers can tackle, to settings so casual that even non-gamers can fully enjoy the story without experiencing frustration. While both offer something for everyone, I always feel guilty about dropping the difficulty level down just so I can actually ENJOY playing the game.

The Lord has made the path to His grace and forgiveness so simple and accessible it can seem too good to be true... and as a result it can be tempting for us to add to the “difficulty setting” by creating additional hurdles to jump over or add unnecessary mountains to climb. Don’t allow yourself, others, or the enemy to add an artificial difficulty level to the healing and restoration that was already purchased at the highest degree of difficulty by Christ... He did all the heavy lifting so we can receive what we would never have been able to achieve.

2 Kings 5:13

And his servants came near and spoke to him, and said, “My father, if the prophet had told you to do something great, would you not have done it? How much more then, when he says to you, ‘Wash, and be clean’?”

July 1

In many of my favorite games, there is simply no way for the protagonist to survive the story. Without sharing any spoilers, some of the best stories I have played end with a tough, self-sacrificial decision to be made... and the hero of the game doesn't always get to see the outcome of the fruits of their labor. It is truly a bittersweet ending to know that after all the battles, trials, and challenges that they endured, the character who gave it all never gets to live in the universe they have saved.

We can rest assured that the hero of our story not only paid the ultimate price for us, but He STILL lives today and will continue all the way through the rolling of the end credits. And because Jesus Christ has overcome death, He can fully guarantee that all who have put their faith in Him will get to stand together with Him at the end of this battle and enjoy the victory that He fought, bled, and died to deliver for us.

Job 19:25-26

For I know that my Redeemer lives, and He shall stand at last on the earth; and after my skin is destroyed, this I know, that in my flesh I shall see God.

July 2

I don't always agree with every narrative decision the developers make in the games I play... if I was in charge, the story would have unfolded MUCH differently.

Even in titles that feature open dialogue options and multiple paths to the endgame, the addition of these choices STILL may not lead to the path I would have chosen and the outcome I would have preferred. The Reapers still invade the Mass Effect universe no matter what decisions I make, and Bowser abducts Peach pretty much every time he sees her whether I like it or not.

We may not always understand or agree with the narrative choices the Lord has made in our lives... but He doesn't ask us to. He is asking for our faith within the storms we would have avoided if we were in charge of the story. We may struggle to see His purpose, but we can't allow the limitations of our viewpoint to offend us or blind us to His love... even through the hardest of times, when it seems life could have gone a better or easier way. Jesus prayed for a different cup, too... but He still chose to drink out of the bitter goblet He was served because it was the only one that could save us all.

Luke 7:23

And blessed is he who is not offended because of Me.

July 3

There are few moments more awe-inspiring in a video game than performing a “summon” in a title like Final Fantasy... these massive, magnificent creatures boast powers and abilities far beyond the scale of me and my party members.

Launching them into battle on my behalf can almost seem unfair at times...

ALMOST. And when they finally reach their “Overdrive” option, it is intensely satisfying to watch them unleash their most powerful attack against an adversary I was unable to defeat without them... ending the battle easily and with finality once I move out of the way.

While there are certainly parts of the battle that are our responsibility, it is the Lord’s desire that we summon Him through prayer to fight for us on our behalf in every challenge we face. And when the Lord tells us to stand back and let Him show the power of His mighty hand, the enemy that was too much for us to handle without Him simply doesn’t stand a chance against Him. Let’s summon the God of the universe into the struggle we are facing today... He gave us access to Him and His power because He wants us to see Him use it.

Exodus 14:13-14

And Moses said to the people, “Do not be afraid. Stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord, which He will accomplish for you today. For the Egyptians whom you see today, you shall see again no more forever. The Lord will fight for you, and you shall hold your peace.”

July 4

Names in games are pretty important... a great deal of money and research are poured into determining the best possible title for the game and the main character's name. Can you imagine if the iconic Halo series was titled "Stinky John and the Space Doughnut"? We wouldn't take either of them very seriously, and it is unlikely they would have had the same degree of success. Has the Master Chief smelled badly? Probably. Does the Halo ring look like a space doughnut? Yep. But they rejected those definitions for a better name.

We have all faced our share of struggles and battles... and sadly, many of us allow those negative and painful experiences to define us and determine our remaining path in life. As redeemed believers in Christ, the Lord doesn't call us by the names of our public shame or private suffering... we have been given a NEW name. Experiencing misery and tragedy is an unfortunate and often unavoidable part of our lives, but allowing ourselves to be defined or limited by these events is still our choice. Let's define ourselves by the names our Father has given us... His beautiful, overcoming children.

Isaiah 62:2b;4a

You shall be called by a new name, which the mouth of the Lord will name. You shall no longer be termed Forsaken, nor shall your land any more be termed Desolate; but you shall be called Hephzibah, and your land Beulah; for the Lord delights in you.

July 5

Battling elemental enemies in a game such as Pokémon or Final Fantasy requires the use of very specific tactics and capabilities to be successful... such as the use of the OPPOSITE element to win the battle. Using an electric-based attack on an electric-type enemy is not only ineffective, but many times it also serves the completely opposite and undesired effect of reinforcing the battle capabilities of these adversaries, recharging their strength. Fighting fire with fire only drains my limited energy while simultaneously making my opponent's attacks more potent. There is only one path to victory... unleash the water.

Engaging those who oppose us with the exact same attack style and energy they are using is an exercise in futility... responding with anger and hate only adds fuel to the fire and feeds the conflict. The only Biblical solution to a hate-fueled conflict is the cleansing power of love... Christ's love flowing through us in all we say and do. Christ set the example of how to overcome evil with good, rage with calm, and hate with love... and He has charged all of us who want to follow Him to go and do likewise.

Proverbs 10:1

Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all sins.

Romans 12:21

Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

July 6

Starting a brand-new game can be intimidating at the beginning... even after successfully completing a previous game and unlocking every achievement, staring out at the expansive, undiscovered open world in front of this new character can be overwhelming. I may have just finished saving the galaxy in an unrelated adventure, but this new game will unfold in a completely different manner, with a unique control scheme and fresh challenges that have nothing to do with my previous triumphs. My victories as Mario may not help Link, but the same hands that saved the Mushroom Kingdom are about to free Hyrule.

In life, we frequently move from one battle to the next, with little time to savor victory before embarking on a new adventure. And often our success in a previous challenge may not seem to have anything in common with the conflict we are about to face... but the one thing that is consistent in what lies behind us and what stands before us is the Lord. We can have peace and courage knowing the same hands that held the controller in our last battle are in control of this next one... and He's undefeated.

Joshua 10:25

Then Joshua said to them, "Do not be afraid, nor be dismayed; be strong and of good courage, for thus the Lord will do to all your enemies against whom you fight."

July 7

While I enjoy fighting games such as Super Smash Brothers or Injustice, I rarely take the time to become proficient at them or grow my capabilities beyond the basic moves. Rather than commit myself to learning the advanced combos that would make me a more skilled combatant, I tend to simply mash the handful of attacks I know furiously and hope for the best. A skilled and studious player will easily defeat me because they have mastered their moves, memorized the frames in each attack, and know counters to my less skilled attacks.

Christ has absolutely done all the work to reconcile us to the Father, and accepting His act of sacrifice has given us the right standing with God. But we are also instructed to GROW in our faith, keeping our feet firmly grounded in Christ so that we are not moved off our faith by the skilled combo attacks of our enemy. Making active, daily, intentional decisions to develop ourselves in our faith grows our “skill set” to both defend against the increasing complexity of our enemy’s attacks as well as builds our ability to seek out and save other souls who are waiting to be set free.

Colossians 1:21-23a

And you who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight - if indeed you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel which you heard.

July 8

I would make a pretty terrible video game hero in real life... I'm not naturally gifted athletically, I can't double jump (I can barely single jump), and most the time I lack the detective skills to solve the riddle of where the remote control is (it was under the couch). But thanks to the extraordinary abilities of the characters,

I get to inhabit in my games, I enjoy these capabilities as well as many other powerful skills that are either extremely difficult or impossible for most of us humans on our own... I just have to do my part during the gameplay to put them in the right position to do what they do best.

The Lord specializes in doing the kinds of things that we can't even understand, much less attempt to do on our own. As a matter of fact, if we can walk the path we are on without His help, we probably aren't on the path He crafted for us. Fulfilling His destiny for our life is designed to be impossible without Him... we are EXPECTED to lean on Him daily for His strength to accomplish our mission. When we obediently place ourselves in the right position and yield full control to Him, He will achieve things through us we could never do alone.

Jeremiah 32:27

"Behold, I am the Lord, the God of all flesh. Is there anything too hard for Me?"

July 9

Playing games online with my friends and teammates would devolve into complete chaos without consistent communication. Even if my co-op partners have every intention of helping me, we have no hope of emerging victorious if we don't verbally coordinate our plans of action and align our movements with each other. Whether we are validating our load outs in preparation for a challenging raid or are currently in the middle of a multiplayer mission, actively communicating before, during, and after the battle keeps us all on the same page.

Prayer is an active and intentional process for both us AND the Lord... as our prayers go up, He hears us, inclines His ear towards us, and guides our path. He desires to be intimately involved in the lives of His children, but His support is limited if we don't involve Him and seek His guidance in every aspect of our lives... before we make decisions, in the midst of our battles, and after the dust settles. If we will seek His will for everything, from the little annoyances to life-altering decisions, He will faithfully coordinate His immeasurable power with us through every challenge we face.

Psalm 116:1-2

I love the Lord, because He has heard My voice and my supplications. Because He has inclined His ear to me, therefore I will call upon Him as long as I live.

July 10

I appreciate games that challenge me and force me to become better at them as I play... but some titles possess a difficulty curve that borders on impossible. You know which ones I'm talking about... games like the "Souls" series that are unrepentantly designed for the most hardcore of gamers. These experiences are exceptionally unforgiving, punishing players for their mistakes and missteps by resetting their progress, taking their items, and stretching out checkpoints far enough to make us replay HOURS of already completed content just to get back to where we started.

When we stumble and fall during our walk with Christ (and we WILL), we have a forgiving and loving Father waiting to welcome us back onto the path. While our sinful choices certainly hurt ourselves, others, and have real-world consequences, the Lord is not waiting to strike us down with a thunderbolt when we have an errant thought or make a poor decision, taking everything from us and starting us over at a far-off checkpoint. Thanks to the price Christ already paid for us, the Father is waiting to fully restore us in His infinite mercy and grace.

Psalm 103:8 and 10

The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in mercy. He has not dealt with us according to our sins, nor punished us according to our iniquities.

July 11

Every gamer plays their games differently, and I mean that literally. Some get as close as they can to the TV, silently rocking back and forth on the floor, fully immersed in the experience. Others sit on a couch with a strategy guide loaded up next to them, painstakingly following a walkthrough step by step. And many invite as many people over as they can, make it a party, turn the volume all the way up, and play all night long. But they are ALL passionate gamers, demonstrating it differently based on who they are and what game they are playing.

Every child of God has a unique relationship with our Father, and we express that love in different ways. Some of us may demonstrate our unspeakable joy in the Lord through up-tempo song and dance, and others may show our profound reverence and awe for our Creator in a quiet and subdued manner... but this is not a reflection of differences in our passion level, just our personalities. Each of His children show Him affection in different ways, so let's not judge or define how others should worship or show their love for Christ... let's serve in love as one diverse, united family.

Romans 14:10-13

But why do you judge your brother? Or why do you show contempt for your brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. For it is written: "As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to Me, and every tongue shall confess to God." So then each of us shall give account of himself to God. Therefore, let us not judge one another anymore, but rather resolve this, not to put a stumbling block or a cause to fall in our brother's way.

July 12

Once upon a time, video games included printed instruction booklets that provided an overview of the game, the story, and most importantly the CONTROLS. Now that most games ship without these little manuals, all of that information is supplied within the game through menus and tutorials... which would be helpful if I ever used them. Unfortunately, most of the time I simply charge ahead into battle due to my gaming overconfidence and figure it out as I go along, resulting in a lot of painful trial and error... mostly just error.

While unpreventable challenges will always be present in life, self-inflicted wounds created by arrogantly trying to live life on my own terms are the WORST. I have failed the exact same levels in life multiple times because I chose to follow my own instincts instead of listening to my Creator's directions and fully submitting to His control. The only way to avoid the pitfall of believing our enemy's lies and chasing false "cakes" in life is through humbling ourselves and seeking the Lord's will in all the decisions we make. There is a REAL dessert party at the end of these trials for all who follow His path :)

Proverbs 3:7-8

Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord and depart from evil. It will be health to your flesh, and strength to your bones.

July 13

The number of operations that occur behind the scenes in even the most basic video game is staggering... from invisible walls that prevent us from progressing outside of the playable area to AI scripting that determines the actions that non-playable characters take. The lines of code that tether objects to the ground and control their movements remain invisible to me throughout my experience, allowing me to run and jump without worrying about flying off into space. I don't have to meet the game's creator or even understand the mechanisms that make the game playable to appreciate what they made and believe that they exist.

Our inability to physically see the Lord can be a challenge for our minds to accept, but we CAN observe the proof of His existence in the world around us if we open our eyes to see the underlying beauty in all He has made. From the invisible walls that guide our paths to the intricate details that permit our continued existence, the invisible God is visible through what we CAN see... and if we choose to believe, it changes the way we play this game and the ending we receive at its' conclusion.

1 Peter 1:7-9

That the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ, whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, receiving the end of your faith—the salvation of your souls.

July 14

One very common video game trope is when the story conveniently strips our protagonist of their memories, weapons, armor, or special abilities and forces us to earn them, relearn them, or unlock them throughout the rest of their story. Whether we are helping Cloud recall his lost memories in Final Fantasy, rebuilding our power armor in Metroid Prime, or procuring our weapons on site in Metal Gear, restoring what was taken from our hero so we can finally take down the final boss tends to be the painful but necessary path to the endgame for our favorite characters.

All of us have experienced different forms of loss during our journeys... either from our own poor choices or the selfish actions of others. But the Lord has promised to restore ALL that we have lost... we can experience rebuilding and reconciliation in this present life as well as a full restoration in the life to come. The years that have been stolen from us are NOT lost... and if we will place our broken hearts and shattered dreams into His hands, He is faithful to fill our hearts with joy, renew our strength, rebuild our purpose, and restore our destiny.

Joel 2:25-26

So I will restore to you the years that the swarming locust has eaten, the crawling locust, the consuming locust, and the chewing locust, My great army which I sent among you. You shall eat in plenty and be satisfied, and praise the name of the Lord your God, Who has dealt wondrously with you; and My people shall never be put to shame.

July 15

Leveling up a character can be tedious work... slogging through the same areas and grinding through identical enemies just to see one tiny little stat point pop up is my least favorite part of some of my favorite games. Whether we are trying to max out our character or simply attempting to reach the skill level that will unlock the next area in the game, the wait to move forward can be excruciating. But it is in patiently learning these new skills that I grow in my proficiency with them, becoming capable and confident enough to wield these new abilities through my repetitive use of them.

Grinding through our repetitive daily battles in life doesn't get "fun", and there isn't a shortcut to the process the Lord has for us. It may feel long, boring, painful, seemingly going nowhere, or all the above... but if it found its' way into our story, it exists for a purpose. The Lord's work happens slowly, little by little, beneath the surface and often hidden from view... at times, it we may feel like we aren't making any progress at all. But in His time, it will explode with supernaturally exponential growth that couldn't have been achieved any other way.

Isaiah 60:22

A little one shall become a thousand, and a small one a strong nation. I, the Lord, will hasten it in its time.

Exodus 23:30

Little by little I will drive them out from before you, until you have increased, and you inherit the land.

July 16

The online multiplayer portions of the games I play tend to make up a large component of the entire experience, often representing much of the title's longevity and all of the post-game content. But most of these online modes have a prerequisite to access them in the form of an online membership to their respective console platforms... and without the price being paid for my access to the Xbox Live, PlayStation Plus, or Switch online services, I don't get to enjoy the fullness of the experience as well as the endless replay value that the developer crafted for all of us once the campaign ends.

The grace we enjoy as followers of Christ is not actually free... it was purchased at the highest possible cost. He paid the price we could never have afforded, once and for all, so we could have an unlimited lifetime membership to the grace that we need each and every day. Just as we must choose to activate our online memberships to enjoy the benefits of their services, it is our active choice to place our faith in Him and the grace that He has offered us that activates our access to all the benefits that membership in His family provides.

Romans 5:1-2

Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

July 17

I have learned a simple yet profound truth to succeed in not only Halo, but many of my favorite games... would you like to hear it? When my armor is depleted, my health is low, and the screen is flashing red, I get out of the action long enough to recover so I can resume the battle at full strength. I suppose you could call it HIDING... I call it a legitimate strategy to face the enemy on my terms, not theirs.

As a matter of fact, it is typically my pride that compels me to emerge from the shadows before I am fully recovered, allowing my opposition to take advantage of my weakened state and dispatch me with ease.

The Lord is our hiding place, but only if we humble ourselves and admit that we need to take a break and recover. There is no shame in getting away to recharge and rest... Jesus did it frequently while He walked the earth, and even the Father rested on the seventh day of creation. Take a day each week to hide yourself in the Lord and recover your mental, physical, spiritual, and emotional armor. If you feel like your screen is flashing red, it's time to find a quiet place with our Healer and recover.

Psalm 32:7

You are my hiding place; You shall preserve me from trouble; You shall surround me with songs of deliverance.

July 18

The game engine that a developer chooses to work with is critically important to the success of their game... even the best gaming ideas are doomed to failure when executed on a faulty or insufficiently supported engine. While a great game engine won't magically make a terrible game fun, the wrong game engine will cause a potentially amazing game to be completely unplayable. Choosing the right game engine as early as possible in the development process is critical, because nobody wants to find out halfway through the creation process that they are building on the wrong foundation.

What we choose as our foundation in life matters... all our well-laid plans, best intentions, and incredible ideas must be generated and built upon our belief in Christ, His work, and His teachings... and only the work we have done on the foundation of Jesus Christ will last. Let's prayerfully consider not only the nature of our pursuits, but the soil they are rooted in... and if it isn't for the glory of Christ and the growth of His Kingdom, we should reconsider our plans. Build on His foundation today... it will yield eternal rewards.

1 Corinthians 3:11

For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

July 19

“Insert coin to continue” ... my four favorite words to see as I entered an arcade were also my least favorite phrase to hear on the way out. Arcades thrived for years for a simple reason... the low cost of entry to try a game (usually just a quarter) concealed the FULL cost of actually beating the game (typically many, many, MANY more quarters). As my sister and I found when we finally defeated the first TMNT arcade machine, victory could only be accomplished when we exclusively used every single one of our quarters on it. It cost us two full rolls... but we finally saw Shredder fall once we were willing to sacrifice them all.

The gift of grace and forgiveness that Christ has given us is absolutely free... but choosing to take up our cross and follow Him comes at a cost. We cannot “nickel and dime” our way in our relationship with the Lord... He wants it all. Each day we are called to intentionally plan our lives around Him, committing our time, thoughts, and actions to His service. Sure, it will cost us everything we call our own. But the victory and rewards that await those who come prepared to give all are immeasurable.

Luke 14:27-28

And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple. For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has enough to finish it?

July 20

If you have played a continually progressing game like Destiny, then you know the completion of the story campaign is really just the beginning. From additional in-game missions, new raids, and full story expansions, the quest to craft the perfect armor set and grow our maximum light level is a never-ending journey. Every Guardian's path is as unique as the Guardian we are playing as, but we all have the same "destiny" ... to "level up" as our path unfolds before us, one step at a time.

Our experience with the Lord is like any other relationship... It is not built in a moment or through the singular decision to believe in Him, but through the continual day to day experience of seeking Him, following Him, talking to Him, and growing in our faith. Our path in life is not found in simply knowing OF Him, but In GETTING to know Him. He IS the journey.... and our individual steps are revealed as we consciously walk with Him through every random battle and boss fight we face.

Psalm 25:4-5

Show me Your ways, O Lord; teach me Your paths. Lead me in Your truth and teach me, for You are the God of my salvation; on You I wait all the day.

July 21

Playing Grifball in Halo may be one of my favorite guilty pleasures. I mean, everyone is armed with a giant hammer that they swing indiscriminately, all while trying to carry the ball across the goal... what's not to love? But this game type also lends itself to the MOST betrayals you will ever see in Halo... and after multiple careless mistakes by the same teammate the game asks if I want to permanently BOOT them from the match. And as much as I may WANT to boot them out of frustration or anger... immediately yanking them out of the game may further hurt my team and our ability to recover and try again.

Our sins and mistakes, whether accidental or intentional, hurt us as well as our fellow teammates in life... but the Lord is so rich in His grace and mercy that He doesn't immediately boot us from the game. He is not vengefully waiting to drop the "banhammer" on us... He is slow to anger and stands waiting to forgive our sins and heal what we have broken. We all miss the mark... but if we return to Him in repentance, He will renew a right spirit within us and restore us.

Joel 2:13

So rend your heart, and not your garments; return to the Lord your God, for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness; and He relents from doing harm.

July 22

As much as I love playing open world games, the absolute freedom they provide to explore around at my own discretion has one very significant disadvantage... I can get into situations that are WELL above my current skill level VERY quickly. Even with the best of intentions, the vast number of options at my disposal opens the temptation to explore areas filled with battles that I am not yet ready to handle... or I can diverge from my optimal path to complete entertaining side quests that distract me from pursuing my primary mission.

Regardless of how we get into some of our predicaments in life, when we find ourselves in over our heads there is only one solution that always works... calling out to the One who can reach down into the deepest of pits and breathe life back into the weariest of souls. When we have swam too far from the coast and lack the stamina to return, or we've made some poor choices that got us trapped behind enemy lines, the Lord still hears the prayers from our overwhelmed hearts... and if we turn to Christ, He will faithfully raise us up from the deepest, darkest waters and restore our souls.

Jonah 2:5-7

The waters surrounded me, even to my soul; the deep closed around me. Weeds were wrapped around my head. I went down to the moorings of the mountains; the earth with its bars closed behind me forever; yet You have brought up my life from the pit, O Lord, my God. When my soul fainted within me, I remembered the Lord; and my prayer went up to You, into Your holy temple.

July 23

The most challenging boss fights in video games can require multiple attempts to complete, often requiring us to memorize their specific attack sequences to determine which periods of time the enemy is invulnerable to attack. Being patient enough to watch and learn their patterns as well as accept that we will rarely defeat them on our first try can be frustrating, but each time our video game adversaries taunt us when we fall, they fail to realize that we just learned a little bit more than we knew before... and we are now one step closer to defeating them permanently.

Every losing battle we experience in life serves a purpose, even though in the moment they can often feel painful and pointless. But each time we fall, we learn a little more than we knew before, moving one step closer to moving past them and pressing forward to the next challenge. Let's be patient with the process and lean on Christ for the strength to rise back up after each knockdown, trusting that He will be our light in these dark moments. The empty tomb of Christ is proof that when we place our trust in God, no setback or defeat is ever final.

Micah 7:7-8

Therefore I will look to the Lord; I will wait for the God of my salvation; My God will hear me. Do not rejoice over me, my enemy; when I fall, I will arise; when I sit in darkness, the Lord will be a light to me.

July 24

Few things ruin a cooperative matchup faster than teammates who are only interested in pursuing their own personal achievements and accolades in the match... or worse, they play as “lone wolves”, believing they are the only one on the team pursuing the correct path, refusing to coordinate their efforts with their fellow participants. The most talented player on the planet cannot succeed long-term with such tactics, and that elitist attitude is actually a liability that is easily exploited and overcome by even the weakest of organized opposition.

Division within the body is not only against Christ’s teachings, but it is also unproductive and destructive to our mission. We may all serve different purposes, have different callings, and fulfill different roles within this team, but each of Christ’s followers are part of one body, one family, and one Kingdom of God here on earth as well as in the life to come. As one body we only advance His Kingdom when we move together selflessly and in unison. There is no room for lone wolves pursuing personal glory on Christ’s team... we are simply fellow sheep following the voice of the Good Shepherd.

1 Corinthians 12:12-14

For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into one Spirit.

Mark 3:24-25

If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. And if a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand.

July 25

Most games involve resources and weapons that can be picked up and used by either side... the same weapon a fallen enemy boss once used against me can become a powerful asset in my armory. But when I play poorly or carelessly, I am not merely defeated, but I drop all of the assets I was carrying as well... items which can now be used against me and my teammates. And if I use specific weapons like grenades or rocket launchers in the wrong manner, I can accidentally blow myself up and leave them for the enemy... even if I am alone, these actions still hurt me and my team.

Our time, energy, and abilities can be used to the glory and advancement of Christ and His will, or in service to our own personal desires and gratification. As followers of Christ, each daily decision matters... when we are yielded to the Lord even the weapons our enemy once used against us can become powerful assets, but if we give priority to our flesh, we submit ourselves to a sin nature that hands our enemy an advantage. Let's deny the enemy access to our thoughts and actions today and turn the weapons he once used against us back at him!

Romans 6:11-13

Reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts. And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God.

July 26

Picking up a new video game is exciting... tearing the cellophane off, popping the game into the console, impatiently waiting for the install to reach the point I can press start... all for the moment to finally arrive. That moment when I eagerly dive STRAIGHT into the tutorial level and painstakingly learn critical skills like walking left, walking right, looking up, and jumping. WAIT... no, I actually tend to skip the tutorial if it's an option because I just want to get GOING. And because of my impatience, I spent the next hour struggling to do basic things the tutorial would have taught me, like swapping weapons or locking onto a target.

Small beginnings aren't fun, but they ARE important. David's first battle wasn't against Goliath, but against the wild animals that attacked his flock of sheep. Noah didn't gather the animals until he finished building the ark FIRST, and Joseph didn't start fulfilling his own dreams until he helped others understand theirs. Don't be discouraged if the start is small and the progression is slow... the Lord will grow us and our gift at the perfect pace as we take one step of faith at a time.

Zechariah 4:10a

For who has despised the day of small things? For these seven rejoice to see the plumb line in the hand of Zerubbabel.

July 27

We've all done it... maybe it was at the end of a Mario Kart race, a last second touchdown in Madden, or squeezing out a win after a grueling Halo match. Most of us who have played and won a competitive game are guilty of at least a LITTLE showboating or smack talk at the end. While most post-game celebrations are done with good-natured and humorous intent, excessive gloating or boastful behavior not only reflects poorly on our sportsmanship, but also fails to recognize the contributions of others that led to that winning result.

Humility is not just a virtue... it is an expected trait for followers of Christ. Any success we experience is not simply a reflection of our own hard work and commitment, but also a demonstration of the Lord's favor on our lives as well as the result of countless souls who have prayed for us and supported us to attain this result. Rather than patting ourselves on the back, let's celebrate a win by pointing one hand towards heaven to give God the glory for His gifts, and use the other hand to reach behind us and pull others up to the top of the mountain alongside us to share in the victory.

Matthew 18:3-4

Unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

Proverbs 16:18

Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.

July 28

The first time I ever stepped onto the virtual deck of the Normandy in Mass Effect, I didn't worry too much about how to fly the ship or which buttons controlled the thrusters. You know why? Because I never actually had to fly it... I just had to select where I wanted to go on the map and trust the ship would get me there. I didn't have to understand the physics of the "Mass Effect relays" to fly through them to my next destination... I simply prepared myself to perform MY part of the mission and trusted the advanced technology to handle the rest.

We don't have to understand the mechanisms of how the Lord operates to trust Him and His plan... we simply follow the guidance He has provided in His Word and the direction of His Spirit in our lives. The Father will always be faithful to perform what He has promised when His children step out in obedience and faith to follow His commands... even when they don't make sense to us. He is the pilot, and we are the ground team... and if we will place our trust in the Master to steer the ship, He will land us exactly where we are needed to reach those we couldn't have reached any other way.

Proverbs 3:5-6

Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths.

July 29

I've done it, you've done it... just about anyone who has played a game featuring dynamic dialogue options has done it. We looked at the choices, made a quick decision on what to say as the timer ran down, and then watched in horror as chaos was unleashed... realizing too late that even if we meant well, we made a foolish and destructive choice. If you're like me, you immediately turned the console off, reloaded a previous save to make a different choice, and tried to pretend none of this ever happened. Too bad I don't have the option to reverse the destruction my choices cause in real life the way I did with Megaton in Fallout.

We all have a choice to make at every point within a conversation... to answer softly and kindly, or harshly and insensitively. Even truth, when delivered without grace and love, is inconsistent with our purpose as ambassadors of Christ. The tone and intent of our words are just as important as the content, and whether it is in a social media comment, text, email, or verbal interaction, the expectations are the same... to show the same unearned mercy and kindness we have received in all we say or do.

Proverbs 15:1-2

A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger. The tongue of the wise uses knowledge rightly, but the mouth of fools pours forth foolishness.

July 30

Each video game challenges us to solve the unique puzzles it contains to advance... some test our hand-eye coordination through tricky platforming, others force us to painstakingly search the environment for clues on how to proceed, multiplayer-focused titles test our ability to cooperate with others, and many combine exploration, character building, and dialogue choices to make each experience unique. But every game is designed to be beaten and every puzzle has a solution... the developer always creates a path to overcome the trials and challenges if we search for it.

We all face temptations and challenges in life, and while these struggles may vary from person to person, they all have one very important thing in common... they can ALL be overcome through Christ. The battle may seem impossible... that's because it IS impossible if we attempt to solve them in our own strength. He is faithful to provide a winning path through all the trials we face... if we will turn to Him in faith for the wisdom and power to accomplish what we could never achieve on our own and obediently follow His solution to the puzzle.

1 Corinthians 10:13

No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.

July 31

We have come a long way with wireless controllers and internet connectivity speeds over the years, but despite all this progress, “lag” still finds a way to exist within our games. Online players disappear and reappear at the worst possible times, or the amount of time between pressing a button and seeing the corresponding action occur can vary... and when the gap between the time we initiated a move and the moment it occurs on the screen often makes the difference between winning and losing, it can be incredibly frustrating.

Nobody enjoys the gap of time between the moment we desperately shoot off a flare gun of prayer into the dark night to the time we finally start seeing an answer. But we should take heart in knowing that our prayers are heard by the Lord from the moment the words fall from our lips, even if His answer may take longer than we would like. If it seems like there is a “lag” in His response to our desperate situation, keep faith... He heard us the first time we pressed the button. And when His answers arrive, they will always provide exactly what we need... even when we have to wait.

Daniel 10:12

Do not fear, Daniel, for from the first day that you set your heart to understand, and to humble yourself before your God, your words were heard; and I have come because of your words.

August 1

Many times, in our video games we have to say goodbye to our favorite characters along the way... characters that made us laugh, made us cry, and made us FEEL. When the plot calls for them to move on, our inability to change this outcome can make us feel disappointed, helpless, and sometimes even angry at the game and its' developers. But their purpose was fulfilled... their part in this adventure, just like ours, eventually reaches its' conclusion. They were designed for a specific entry and exit, and if it is hard to say goodbye that means they performed their part perfectly.

It is never easy to say goodbye to the loved ones that we lose on this planet... and in those times of loss we can feel a range of emotions from anger and grief to wondering what we could have done differently to change the outcome. But as hard as it can be to see during our times of mourning, we all belong to Lord and serve His larger plan through both our entry and exit from this life... and for those who have committed to Christ, moving on from this level is simply a passing of the controller to us as they begin a new adventure with Him.

Romans 14:7-8

For none of us lives to himself, and no one dies to himself. For if we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. Therefore, whether we live or die, we are the Lord's.

August 2

Want to get some attention quickly? Simply share your opinion on a favorite video game or gaming character and opposing viewpoints will climb out of trees, appear out of bushes, and fall out of the sky to quickly correct us and provide a lengthy list of all the ways we are the most incorrect person who has ever lived. While many discussions start out with fun and innocent intentions, arguing and debating about a different perspective rarely converts anyone to our point of view, and can distract us from the common ground that we share.

As followers of Christ, we should expect to face opposing viewpoints often, but there is a fine line between sharing the burden that the Lord has placed on our hearts and engaging in arguments and debates with those who are only seeking an audience for their divisive rhetoric. Wasting our time and energy dealing with unproductive distractions only leads to detours that will not result in glorifying the Lord or strengthening His people. The devil is gonna troll and haters are gonna hate... but we make the decision to avoid engaging them when we can and respond in wisdom when we can't.

Proverbs 9:7-8

He who corrects a scoffer gets shame for himself, and he who rebukes a wicked man only harms himself. Do not correct a scoffer, lest he hate you; rebuke a wise man, and he will love you.

Jude 1:9 (ESV)

But when the archangel Michael, contending with the devil, was disputing about the body of Moses, he did not presume to pronounce a blasphemous judgment, but said, "The Lord rebuke you."

August 3

I love playing co-op games, sharing the combined experience with a friend or fellow gamer to overcome challenges and enjoy the thrill of victory as a team.

What I do NOT enjoy is having a “backseat driver” in a game... you know, someone sitting on the couch commentating on my gameplay even though they aren’t playing. It’s easy for an observer to tell me where I should’ve jumped or what strategy I could’ve used when they aren’t participating themselves. Advice from someone who has never played the game is typically unwelcome even if it’s accurate.

In the heat of the battle, it can be easy to feel like God is removed from the circumstances of our pain and suffering, but we must remember that He chose to actively participate in our challenges as a member of the human race and experience it first-hand. He didn’t have to feel pain, loneliness, loss, or any of the struggles we face... He willingly CHOSE to, walking among us so He could relate to us. Place your hand into the hands that CHOSE to become nail-scarred for us... He has been where we are, and He will lead us through this.

John 1:14

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

August 4

Video game protagonists always seem perfectly suited for their role on the surface... until we look a bit deeper. The stoic Master Chief was essentially ripped from his family and unfairly subjected to horrific physical experiments before emerging as the hero that saved the universe, while Aloy was simply born into a broken and fallen world at what seemed like the worst possible time. They didn't choose how they got there... they simply chose to save those placed in their path using the skills and opportunities they wouldn't have gained any other way.

You are not here at the wrong time, the wrong place, or with the wrong capabilities... you are exactly where you need to be and designed perfectly for the battlefield you have been called to. If you have been given different gifts than you would have chosen or been placed in a different role than you would have preferred, focus on what the Lord uniquely prepared you for... you too were chosen by God for such a time as this, intentionally placed by His hand precisely where you are, and the mission before you is one that only you can do.

Esther 4:14b

Who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this?

August 5

There is a simple action that each of us take when we make the decision to start a new game... whether we are saving Hyrule as Link or chasing Bowser down as Mario, it all begins by moving forward from our previous game experience and pressing START on this new one. An entire world full of new adventures and bursting with potential is begging to be explored... and it doesn't care if the last game I played ended in triumph or disaster. This new game represents a fresh start for me even if I failed in my last attempt, and it is waiting for me to learn from my past mistakes, pick up the controller, accept this mission, and press start.

We are qualified and conscripted into service for the Lord from the very moment we commit our lives to Him and He washes away our sins... but we still have to choose to stand up, raise our hand, and actively volunteer to be used. It is up to US to pick up the controller and press start on His mission for our lives... the Great Commission IS our invitation. As soon as we have been cleansed, reborn, and filled with the power of His Spirit we are cleared for battle... starting right where we are!

Isaiah 6:7-8

And he touched my mouth with it, and said: "Behold, this has touched your lips; your iniquity is taken away and your sin purged." Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying: "Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?" Then I said, "Here am I! Send me."

August 6

It all starts with a simple line of code... all the magnificent adventures we have embarked on, the galaxies we have saved, and the characters we have grown to love all started life as a concept that was brought to life by a creator's careful coding. Every letter, number, or symbol generates a specific item based on how they are combined, and the scripting also determines what actions they take in the environment... people walk, birds chirp, cars move, and when the time is right, we will find that even the most stubborn doors will open.

Every single one of us was designed uniquely by our Creator... even areas of ourselves and our lives that we may view as mistakes have a purpose that may not have been fully revealed yet, just as some buildings in a game can't be accessed until the right story moment permits it. We were made intentionally and created for a specific purpose... the Lord who set our path in motion before we drew our first breath has a specific mission that ONLY we can complete. He didn't just choose us... He BUILT us for this specific moment in time. There are no glitches in His game... just unique destinies to fulfill!

Jeremiah 1:5

Before I formed you in the womb I knew you; before you were born I sanctified you; I ordained you a prophet to the nations.

August 7

Side missions serve multiple purposes in a game... sometimes they provide additional story exposition and an opportunity to grow skill points, but many times they represent the least compelling portion of a game and simply exist to pad out a game's length. Whether these diversions are fun or pointless, the one thing that has always bothered me about them is that while I'm running around chasing chickens or rounding up lost items, I have lost my urgency to complete the primary mission. I'm not sure that saving the world can wait while I track down a few more terrarium seeds.

While we have all received different gifts and skills to support us in our mission, we all share ONE ministry... the ministry of reconciliation. Reconciling the Lord's children back into a relationship with Him is not a side-mission... it belongs at the heart of every action we take on His behalf. As ambassadors of Christ, we are a living representation of His mission... to lovingly guide everyone we meet toward the open and forgiving arms of our Heavenly Father. Let's prevent these side missions in life from distracting us from our purpose!

2 Corinthians 5:18

Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation.

August 8

Post-game content is slowly becoming a standard in games, and that is a GOOD thing... in the past this rare support would typically only offer useless in-game items to purchase or meaningless challenges that had very little to do with the story. But now we are seeing titles that offer expansive quests set AFTER the endgame has reached its conclusion... additional levels, stories, and adventures that allow us to continue the journey with these beloved characters after we thought the story had reached its' conclusion. Some of the best parts of my favorite games didn't begin until AFTER I believed the final credits had rolled.

One of the most comforting parts of serving Christ is the knowledge that our story doesn't end here... there is an entirely new adventure beyond our endgame where the ENTIRE family of Christ will be reunited. New friends will be made, familiar faces will return, and an entirely new set of exciting stories will unfold. With this post-game content in mind, we can celebrate those who graduate to the next level with the anticipation that our journey with them is not over... the best parts are still yet to come!

1 Thessalonians 4:16-18

For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words.

August 9

Most open world games include the ability to “mark” the map, setting a virtual waypoint so I can continue to move towards my chosen destination even when obstacles, mountains, or adversaries steer me in a different direction. To be fair, the path to my destination is rarely a straight line across flat ground, and the hazards in the game often present additional challenges that must be completed before I can continue towards my goal. But if I keep that guiding light fixed as my waypoint, I know I am moving in the right direction.

If we want to grow in our relationship with Christ and fulfill His destiny for our lives, our waypoint must be fixed on Him and the things that hold eternal significance. We are all guilty of drifting off course at times, but if we center our gaze back on the Author and Finisher of our faith, we will realign our actions with His purposes. It is easy to get caught up in what is happening around us... but by taking time to pray and reorient ourselves on Him, we will find that the difference between critical objectives and pointless distractions are revealed when we step back and view them through His eyes.

Colossians 3:1-2

If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth.

August 10

When it comes to my video game saves, I have some “trust issues” ... while saving a game on my hard drive feels safe and natural, trusting an important game save to the “cloud” is still difficult for me to do. While I comprehend the concept of “cloud saves” and understand the level of security that it provides, putting my trust in a system I can’t physically see to protect something near and dear to my heart is still hard. But if I want to take advantage of the storage saving capabilities of the cloud or utilize portable storage options, I must confidently send my precious save file to them for safe keeping and trust it will be safe there.

One of the prerequisites to receiving what we are praying for is our fully committed belief in the power and willingness of the Lord to act on our behalf. While there are some prayers that our omniscient Father may answer with a “No” or “Not now”, all our prayers must be sent with the full confidence that He not only can but WILL act on our prayers with our best interests in mind. Let’s pray in confidence that the Lord not only hears our prayers but has the power and desire to act on our behalf!

Matthew 8:8 and 8:13

The centurion answered and said, “Lord, I am not worthy that You should come under my roof. But only speak a word, and my servant will be healed.”

Then Jesus said to the centurion, “Go your way; and as you have believed, so let it be done for you.” And his servant was healed that same hour.

August 11

Anyone who has played a cooperative game has most likely experienced this... a teammate swooping in to “save” us, only to inadvertently cause our demise. I

have attempted playing “the hero” on many occasions, only to have the completely undesired opposite impact. Even though my heart was in the right place, when my good intentions aren’t aligned with their willingness to receive my help, the only result is frustration and disappointment for all sides. Our desire to help our teammates must be matched with their willingness to receive it.

It can be very discouraging when our good intentions and well-meaning actions are misunderstood or rejected by those closest to us... but we can be encouraged knowing that we are experiencing the same reaction Christ Himself received. Let’s not take it personally if those we love the most are the least receptive to our mission... even Christ’s family didn’t accept or appreciate His. The battleground we were given may result in reaching someone else’s family, and that person may be the one to reach ours... and we will work together in harmony to reach all of them for the Lord!

Mark 6:3-4

“Is this not the carpenter, the Son of Mary, and brother of James, Joses, Judas, and Simon? And are not His sisters here with us?” So they were offended at Him.

But Jesus said to them, “A prophet is not without honor except in his own country, among his own relatives, and in his own house.”

August 12

One of the most unfortunate aspects of the online gaming experience is the sheer amount of abusive language, inappropriate communication, and general vitriol that can be displayed within the guise of “trash talking”. In a realm in which most of us are seeking a safe place to play or at least enjoy a respite from the challenges and hostility of the world around us, what should be an oasis for gamers sharing a common love of this hobby often devolves into the lowest possible form of human communication.

We are all children of the same Heavenly Father, individually hand-crafted by Him as one family... not just as gamers, but as fellow travelers on this journey in life. We won't always agree... but in the heat of the battle we must always remember that we are all on the SAME SIDE. Our enemy is not flesh and blood, it is the supernatural opposition of satan and his forces to separate us from the Lord and each other. As gamers as well as simply members of one family, representing the love of Christ must be present in all our forms of communication, even when we disagree.

Malachi 2:10

Have we not all one Father? Has not one God created us? Why do we deal treacherously with one another by profaning the covenant of the fathers?

August 13

In most video games, timing is EVERYTHING. When approaching a challenging gap to cross in a Super Mario title, accelerating into a run followed by pressing the jump button at PRECISELY the right time is the difference between landing securely on the next platform or pressing continue to try the level again. In many games, the difference between a victory dance or crushing defeat can be measured by a single frame of animation... the right move executed at the wrong time never works out.

Even our best intentions must be synchronized with the Lord's timing... Christ knew the perfect time for His public ministry to start, peak, and grow through sending out His disciples. If He started too early, His death on the cross would have occurred prematurely. If He had sent His followers out on the Great Commission before the cross, they wouldn't have had a Gospel to share. Let's be patient in each phase of what the Lord has called us to... every step, every leap, and even every pause has a reason that may not be apparent until we have finished the entire course. His timing is always perfect... He is never too early, and He is never too late.

John 7:6

Then Jesus said to them, "My time has not yet come, but your time is always ready."

August 14

Nobody enjoys being the person at the end of a match who has to raise their hand and admit that we were the ones who tossed that errant grenade... you know, the grenade that accidentally bounced back at us, blew up our own teammates, and cost us the match. The grenade throw was obviously intentional, but the outcome was certainly not what we had intended... we never meant to hurt our own teammates. But if we want to move forward, we must own what happened, acknowledge our errors, and learn from the mistake.

It's always painful and embarrassing to admit failure, but owning it is part of the healing process... not only for us, but for those who were caught in the splash damage. Even if we didn't mean for our actions to harm others, taking the time to address it and take steps to prevent it in the future brings peace to us as well as the entire team. All of us fall short, and after that grenade explodes the Lord is still faithful to forgive us and restore us. We've all been on both sides of a bad grenade toss... let's repent authentically, forgive graciously, and regroup as a unified team enthusiastically!

Proverbs 28:13

He who covers his sins will not prosper, but whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy.

August 15

Why do we play video games? While we all play for different reasons, they typically come down to one simple goal... to have FUN. That could come from spending time battling with friends and family, blowing off some steam through some multiplayer mayhem, or quietly enjoying a compelling narrative. No matter what we play, when we play, or who we play with, we want to have a good time... and the games we choose to play as well as who we play them with are selected with that goal in mind. If the game doesn't serve that ultimate purpose at its' core, we tend to stop playing it.

The reason why believers in Christ are committed to following His commands is simple as well... they are designed to show us how to demonstrate His perfect love to others from a pure and sincere heart. If our service to Him feels like a bunch of rules and regulations, we have missed the point. These guardrails exist to ensure the love we are showing in our words and actions is both authentic and fully aligned with His definition of love. The point of all of this is LOVE... the perfect love He has shown us, actively flowing in and through us.

1 Timothy 1:5

Now the purpose of the commandment is love from a pure heart, from a good conscience, and from sincere faith.

August 16

The best part about starting a new multiplayer match is that we all begin with an empty scoreboard... regardless of how our previous round ended, everybody spawns on a new map with a chance to start over. Our mistakes from the last round are in the past, and with this fresh opportunity we can move forward carrying the new knowledge we gained, the skills we added, and a better awareness of the dangers and pitfalls we should avoid. After a few of my less successful rounds, starting over is a welcome and needed breath of fresh air.

The Lord does not run low on compassion or grace for us... His mercies are fresh and new EVERY morning. Perhaps yesterday's battles didn't end the way we wanted, or the last moments of the day didn't represent us the way we would have preferred... our Heavenly Father has sufficient grace for ALL our needs, and Christ's blood is powerful enough to wash away EVERY sin. Yesterday's mistakes only live rent free in our minds if we let them... their price has already been paid, the scoreboard is reset to zero, and today is a NEW day full of grace. Let's respawn with joy and confidence!

Lamentations 3:22-23

Through the Lord's mercies we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness.

August 17

Over the years I have developed a very consistent and methodical approach to my multiplayer games... I use the same load outs, I rush in the same predetermined order towards specific capture points, and I try to force my opponent to play to my strengths. If you want to defeat me, the answer is simple... disrupt my game plan. As long as I get to stick to my “script”, the odds are pretty good that my team and I will stand victorious at the end of the match. If my teammates or my opposition throw me off my “routine”, my comfort zone implodes... and my defeat is much more likely.

We all have routines in life that provide us with a sense of peace and comfort, and our enemy knows those preferences and has plans each day to disrupt them and destroy our peace. If maintaining our peace requires life to adhere to a perfectly choreographed rhythm, the truth is we won't have many peaceful days. Only a peace that comes from faith in Christ and His control over our drama will keep us calm when things go sideways. Let's expect that things may go differently than the plan today... and trust that the Lord is with us through it all.

2 Thessalonians 3:16

Now may the Lord of peace Himself give you peace always in every way. The Lord be with you all.

August 18

Every great role-playing game has a skill tree that allows us to tailor our character to our preferred playing style... if I want to sneak around and hack enemy turrets,

I will need to invest skill points into my “tech” skills. Players who prefer to parkour around the level should invest into speed and jumping skills, and if you want to play like a “tank” then you will need to pour your experience points into “tank” skills like strength and defense. Most importantly, if I don’t like the way my character plays, then I must look into the mirror and see what I have been pouring my “points” into.

In our real world, everything that we choose to absorb into our hearts and minds through reading, watching, listening, or participating in them is feeding skill points into that area of our “character”. If we desire wisdom, we must invest our time and energy into consuming the knowledge and understanding that only comes from the Lord. If we ingest negative and harmful things, that will be all we can produce. Let’s prayerfully consider what we invest our time into, and it aligns with what we intend to produce... tanks aren’t born, they are BUILT.

Proverbs 15:14

The heart of him who has understanding seeks knowledge, but the mouth of fools feeds on foolishness.

August 19

In most of my favorite video games I find that the famous “less is more” adage typically applies... I appreciate it when a game sticks to what it does best and avoids the temptation to artificially pad the length of the game with broken mini-games or pointless fluff. While side quests that add to the lore of the world are fun, excessive filler content or meaningless “follow this guy” missions only water down an otherwise excellent gaming experience... and may even dilute the story so much that a fantastic game is completely unenjoyable.

In our real world we often find “less is more” as well... each and every word we speak or write carries resonance far beyond what we may have intended, and even a well-meaning point of view can be diminished by the unintended context of the words that surround it. The words we speak are powerful, and when we exhibit self-control over our written and spoken words we can deliver a message from the Lord with His love, grace, and clarity. If we struggle with “opening our mouth and inserting our feet”, remember that short and sweet ensures His words are heard clear and complete.

Proverbs 10:19

In the multitude of words sin is not lacking, but he who restrains his lips is wise.

August 20

We have all been there at some point... rolling in first place with the finish line on the horizon and then BOOM. That “blue shell” in Mario Kart comes out of nowhere, seeks us out, blows us up, and we see our hopes for winning vanish as everyone else rolls past us. And if that wasn’t bad enough, you glance to the side and see that the person responsible for that blue shell is sitting right next to you trying to pretend like they DIDN’T just blast you with it. Green shells are a bit random and red shells can be an accident... but that blue shell has one target and is meant for one person... YOU.

The hardest hit to absorb is that one that we never expected, because it came from someone we loved and trusted. But just as David wrote in this Psalm, even Jesus Himself was betrayed by one of His twelve closest friends (that He JUST had dinner with) and was abandoned by almost all the rest when He needed them the most. That blue shell only comes for us when we are in the lead, so don’t get discouraged or take it personally... it is proof you are walking in Christ’s footsteps and found worthy of satan’s most personal attack.

Psalm 41:9

Even my own familiar friend in whom I trusted, who ate my bread, has lifted up his heel against me.

August 21

Many games start us out as a nameless, faceless, relatively powerless character with a destiny that has just begun, allowing us to slowly build our random vault dweller into the hero of the wasteland. It is much harder to accept playing a game as an established hero like Samus in Metroid Prime, a formidable and capable bounty hunter who loses all her skills and is forced to start over from scratch with none of her iconic abilities. Building tends to be more fun than rebuilding, because it can feel like everything we are doing is just a waste of time as we fight to get back to square one.

Whether we had our progress stolen, our power suit broken through battle, or simply lost valuable time through our own poor choices, I have some GREAT news for all of us... the Lord has promised to restore ALL the years that have been consumed by the enemy. We are not too old, too broken, or too compromised to start over and finish this mission. If Samus could finish an entire TRILOGY of games after being forced to start over from scratch, we can as well. We can't change how we got here, but we can choose what we do now. Let's suit up!

1 Peter 5:10 (NIV)

And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast.

August 22

Few parts of the arcade experience are more iconic than the redemption counter... the final place of reckoning after a long day of earning tickets through games of skill and chance. Clutching a fistful of tickets in my grubby hands, I would gaze up at the cool prizes I had high hopes of winning... before reality crushed my dreams with the realization that the “cool” prizes were WAY out of my price range. With no hope of bringing home that giant robot, I would cash in my measly pile of tickets and settle for some over-priced toys and candy.

None of us have fallen so far that we are out of reach from Christ’s redemption...

He defeated every game down here and He has earned enough tickets to purchase every single one of us. Our sins, whether great or small, do not affect His ability to buy us back. He owns the whole counter, and to Him we are the greatest prize. Don’t settle for the small and temporary rewards that we can achieve on our own efforts... give the Lord your little stack of tickets so He can exchange them for the “big prizes” we can’t afford... a clean slate, peace, happiness, security, and meaning to our lives.

Isaiah 44:22

I have blotted out, like a thick cloud, your transgressions, And like a cloud, your sins. Return to Me, for I have redeemed you.

August 23

Gaming graphics have risen to an unthinkable level of realism... while they may appear real, concepts such as lighting and shadows are the deliberate work of skilled animators and artists. Neither light nor darkness technically “exist” in the video game world... they are simply lines of code that interpret how we view objects in the environment based on our character's placement in relation to the object. Even potentially beneficial items, when viewed from the wrong position or perspective, can result in a shadow rather than illumination.

While there are certainly harmful and destructive things we must avoid as followers of Christ's light, the reality is our eye is the lens through which all things are absorbed into our spirits. When we look for the beauty of the Lord and His plan we will find it in even the most challenging of circumstances, and when our vision is clouded with darkness even His grace and love can be hard to see. We all go to dark places sometimes... and the only way out is to reorient our perspective, allowing His light to shine in all the dark places, revealing what is beneficial to absorb and what is toxic.

Luke 11:34

The lamp of the body is the eye. Therefore, when your eye is good, your whole body also is full of light. But when your eye is bad, your body also is full of darkness.

August 24

Even after all these years of successfully playing video games, there are still times when I get “stuck” on portions that feel impossible to beat. It could be a an incredibly cheap boss fight, a treacherous bit of platform hopping, or an unrelenting series of challenging battles that require a level of patience and perfection that I don’t currently seem to possess. When I have reached that controller tossing point and have lost any hope of breaking through, it can feel easier to simply give up and stop trying than to press in deeper, because the constant frustration is worse than the feeling of failure.

It can be easy to reach a point of exhaustion and frustration when we don’t see any tangible proof that the Lord is acting on our prayers or reacting to our needs. But many times, the answers we seek lie in the DEEP waters... far outside of our comfort zone, beyond where we were prepared to go, and long after we have hit our breaking point. Let’s not throw down the controller or lay down our nets, even if we are tired of this seemingly never-ending battle. Let’s listen for His voice and press deeper... only shallow victories lie in shallow waters.

Luke 5:4-5

When He had stopped speaking, He said to Simon, “Launch out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch.” But Simon answered and said to Him, “Master, we have toiled all night and caught nothing; nevertheless at Your word I will let down the net.”

August 25

Making a great video game is not an accident... It is the result of many groups of people all working together with a common vision, fusing every element of the game from the dialogue, the soundtrack, the action, and the story into one cohesive masterpiece. Taken individually many of these elements may not feel complete or even make sense... but as they merge into the final product, they not only enhance the other portions but also reveal their ultimate purpose... to take us on an amazing experience we will never forget.

The work of the Lord in our lives may not always make sense when viewed through a singular moment in time... but His purpose does not restrain itself to merely one area of our life. He works His way into EVERY element of our physical, mental, and spiritual lives, and those pieces that don't seem to fit only make sense when the entire story is complete. Just as yeast tastes terrible by itself but is delicious when worked into dough, and a game plays best when it all comes together, the challenges we face also serve a purpose that will become clear... when our journey concludes.

Luke 13:20-21

And again He said, "To what shall I liken the kingdom of God? It is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal till it was all leavened."

August 26

While it may seem a bit unrealistic, most of our video game protagonists have a simple and effective way to heal themselves from all the damage they absorb during their battles... they get out of the action long enough to regroup, reset, and recover their energy and health. Sometimes it can be as simple as finding a wall or a vehicle to crouch behind so we can catch our breath, and other times we may have to fully retreat from the battlefield and find a place free from conflict for a spell... even Master Chief has to stop and give his armor time to recharge when the going gets rough.

Jesus was a living example of ensuring that we take time to get away, pray, and recharge for battle. The more that He gave of Himself, the more we find Him seeking out some “alone time” with the Father to receive some much-needed spiritual restoration. If our energy level is flashing red and we feel like our armor has reached its limit, let’s stop and find that private place where we can receive a recharge that can only be provided by our Heavenly Father. We can’t give what we don’t possess... let’s press pause and refill our vessels today!

Luke 5:15-16

However, the report went around concerning Him all the more; and great multitudes came together to hear, and to be healed by Him of their infirmities. So He Himself often withdrew into the wilderness and prayed.

August 27

When I'm playing a game cooperatively with someone and the game keeps our health, lives, ammo, and armor separate from each other, it tends to be much easier for me to enjoy it. Our assets are individually depleted based on our own choices and actions, so we can enjoy all the benefits of working cooperatively while still essentially playing the game "solo" when it comes to being impacted by each other's choices. When we are forced to share all these assets in a common pool, the fun of cooperation can disappear quickly as each player's individual need pulls from the other... but that is what TRUE cooperative gaming is.

If I am being honest, my personal prayer life can be very "me-centered". Many times, the solution to what is standing between us and the answers we are seeking is not God's lack of grace for us, but rather His abundant mercy for someone else who may be impacted by our prayers in ways we could not have anticipated. If our prayers don't seem to be answered as quickly as we desire, let's start playing in "co-op mode" and pray for OTHERS. We might speed up our own answers in the process!

2 Peter 3:9

The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.

August 28

Watching another gamer take on a challenging portion of a video game can move past mere entertainment and into actual education... and often results in encouraging me to try again on a title I couldn't previously overcome. Even if the gamer I am observing is a more capable and dedicated player than I am, watching them persevere through these battles and find a way to succeed where I couldn't inspires me to try again and use similar tactics in my own gameplay. By replicating their commitment as well as their winning strategy, I may experience similar success in an area I had given up on.

As followers of Christ, we have an incredibly challenging goal... that everything we say and do should guide those who are following us closer to the Lord. While we will certainly fall short on this course many times during our "play-through", our humble and repentant heart in these circumstances can demonstrate a behavior worthy of imitation. At our best, let's attempt to demonstrate Christ to all who are observing us... and at our worst, let's demonstrate that we are followers who know our way back to His arms when we fall short.

1 Corinthians 11:1

Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ.

August 29

Strength and size within the video game realm are merely constructs of the developer... since none of the objects in the game are “real”, their weight and power are actually just lines of code covered by an impressive coat of paint. That heavy rock takes up about the same amount of coding space as a clipboard, and the only internal difference between them is the numerical attributes they were given by the designer. Neither of them is heavier nor lighter... it is all a matter of our perspective.

Many times, in life our problems can feel too big for even God to solve, and the longer we look at our impossible situation the more hopeless it becomes. But that is because we are limited to our perspective of the problem and the limitations we have as the “player”. The Lord does not have limitations... He designed every mountain and possesses the power to move them at will. The undefeated Almighty God has yet to meet a problem He can’t solve... and ours won’t be the first. Sometimes He moves the mountain for us, and other times He gives us the strength to climb it. His power is limitless... let’s give Him our mountain today.

Zechariah 4:6b

“Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit”, says the Lord of hosts.

Mark 9:23

Jesus said to him, “If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes.”

August 30

Many of the seemingly impossible challenges we face in our video games only reveal their solutions after we have endured the pain of experiencing failure and loss FIRST. It could be the safety of an invisible platform that we didn't see until after we attempted the jump and missed, or maybe it is finally observing a vulnerability within the attack pattern of a seemingly invincible boss battle that wasn't apparent until they had already defeated us several times first. One thing is for certain... pain and loss often precede our final victory.

These losses in life are often impossible to understand while we are enduring them, but the Lord will use these painful times of loss to reveal paths that were previously invisible to us. While it was hard to accept at the time, the most challenging losses I have experienced in life went on to reveal a beautiful and previously unforeseeable future... beauty and joy finally emerged from these heartbreaking ashes. And when we allow the Lord to be our comfort and rebuild us from these broken places, His loving hands will guide us through our present darkness to a victory beyond what we can see.

Isaiah 61:3-4

To console those who mourn in Zion, to give them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they may be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that He may be glorified. And they shall rebuild the old ruins, they shall raise up the former desolations, and they shall repair the ruined cities, the desolations of many generations.

August 31

I have a love/hate relationship with cutscenes in video games... the first time I watch them they tend to provide meaningful exposition as well as a nice little break from the action. But after losing a battle and being forced to watch the EXACT same cutscene and being unable to skip it... I tend to appreciate it much MUCH less. What previously provided a welcome break now just feels like an unwanted wait... and my frustration with enduring this scene one more time makes it even harder to concentrate on doing what I need to do to move forward in the hope that I NEVER have to watch that cutscene again.

The Lord hears all our prayers the moment we pray them even if the answer may seem a long time in coming, forcing us to endure what feels like the same “cutscene” in our life day after day after day. As hard as it is to endure these delays, they aren’t an indication of His lack of care or proof our prayers will go unanswered. There is an end to every cutscene, even those we’ve viewed a hundred times. He hears us, He cares, and He will answer His children’s cries in His perfect time.

Luke 18:7

And shall God not avenge His own elect who cry out day and night to Him, though He bears long with them?

September 1

I am always deeply appreciative of any video game that allows me to “press continue” after my character meets their demise... even if it is for the hundredth time. I get an opportunity to regroup, process what went wrong, and try again with a fresh perspective. Games with “infinite continues” remove the pressure of needing to live my current life to the fullest, because I know I will have another one after this one expires. But if I only had ONE life and no continues, I would probably play the game quite a bit differently and make each decision much more carefully and intentionally.

We don't get an infinite number of “continues” in this life... waking up each morning to try again is a precious gift we should never take for granted. Because we have a limited and unknown number of days, we must make the most out of each of them through being an encouragement to everyone we meet as well as shining the light of Christ's love and grace to every soul we are given an opportunity to reach. None of us are guaranteed tomorrow, so let's choose to make today a day we would be proud of leaving as our final chapter.

Hebrews 3:13-14

Exhort one another daily, while it is called “Today,” lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. For we have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end

September 2

There is something about the feeling of being “watched” while playing a video game that affects the way we play... suddenly, simple jumps that I previously landed with ease unintentionally become epic fails in front of my audience. But if we relax and choose to allow even these mildly embarrassing moments to be viewed by spectators as “part of the fun”, we will find that these periods of trying and failing over and over and OVER again typically turn out to be the most relatable and memorable bonding moments between the player and the observer.

It can be incredibly hard to understand why the Lord takes so long to answer our prayers, but the uncomfortable truth is we are enduring our challenges in an arena full of spectators who have not yet chosen to follow Him. The troubles and trials inflicted on us by the enemy are being used by the Father to reach others... and sometimes the delay is to ensure His miraculous answer is observed by those who need to SEE it, not just those of us who need to RECEIVE it. His victory in our private struggle may change someone else’s life... let’s allow His grace to be seen by all who are watching!

Psalm 40:1-3

I waited patiently for the Lord; and He inclined to me and heard my cry. He also brought me up out of a horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my steps. He has put a new song in my mouth—praise to our God; many will see it and fear and will trust in the Lord.

September 3

There are times while starting a new game that I wonder to myself, “Does this game HATE me?” I mean, what did I ever do to this game to deserve this treatment? I paid good money for it, I’m giving it my exceptionally limited leisure time, and all it does is leave me disappointed and upset. I picked up this video game with the best of intentions, and all it seems to do is make my day worse.

Why am I still playing this game when it only provides frustration and pain, especially when more pleasant options exist?

Sometimes it can feel the same way when we are pursuing a deeper relationship with the Lord... the more we try to get to know Him, the more difficult our life can become. But the thoughts He has for us are for our GOOD... most importantly for our future good, not just our present happiness. The areas that are the least enjoyable are also the most temporary, and even in these painful parts He still hears every prayer we pray. His thoughts towards us are for our ETERNAL good and PERMANENT peace, so let’s keep hope in our hearts and a prayer on our lips.

This present battle isn’t the only level of our game... it’s just “World 1-1”.

Jeremiah 29:11-12

For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope. Then you will call upon Me and go and pray to Me, and I will listen to you.

September 4

Using “one-time use” items in my games really stresses me out. I worry that I won’t have enough health, ammo, or other resources to handle whatever battle that I’m going to face next, so typically when I finish a game I’m still loaded with items in my inventory that I saved up over the course of my adventure... items that now serve no purpose. I would’ve enjoyed the game a lot more if I had fully trusted the game’s developers to successfully account for what I would need during my journey and provide me with enough supplies to finish it and arrive at the ending they created for me.

It is the Lord who places people and resources into our lives to supply our needs, bring us joy, and give us a purpose in life... and it is our enemy who has the singular purpose to steal, kill, and destroy all that our Father has given us. But God’s abundant supply far exceeds the constant attacks that are designed to strip away our peace, joy and blessings... He has infinite resources at His disposal and an endless supply of grace for all our needs. He has more than enough to cover all we need AND replace all that our enemy has stolen!

John 10:10

The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.

September 5

One of my least favorite parts of any video game is BACKTRACKING... even many of my favorite games have those “Water Temple” portions that force me to slog through long, boring portions of the EXACT same area over and over and OVER again. Some developers do this to artificially add to the length of the game, while others may genuinely believe that we love pointlessly running back and forth across the exact same terrain (we don’t) and facing enemies that have respawned (we REALLY don’t). But enduring these painful interludes is necessary to reach the reward of the endgame and enjoy a well-earned victory.

We all go through seasons in life that feel like we are moving backwards... none of our efforts seem to be gaining traction and the only news we receive is bad news. But the Lord has a compassionate and merciful outcome planned for even these hard-to-understand parts of our lives. Job felt the pain of losing everything, but at the end of his trials he received double what he lost because he ENDURED. Let’s hold firmly to Christ’s hand and persevere through today’s setbacks... the reward at the end is worth it!

James 5:11

Indeed we count them blessed who endure. You have heard of the perseverance of Job and seen the end intended by the Lord—that the Lord is very compassionate and merciful.

September 6

Most games take place from one perspective... our own. As the lead character, we're the star of the story and tend to play the game with our own needs in mind as a result. We see money hidden inside of pots or bushes in Legend of Zelda, so we smash them and take it without any thought. If we were aware that the item in that chest was a birthday gift for their child or maybe their life savings, we would probably be less likely to take it for ourselves... we would see their needs, their happiness, and their adventure as equal in importance to our own.

As followers of Christ, we should seek what is best for others at all times and be mindful that everyone we meet is the protagonist of their own story. We may only be a part of their adventure for a short period of time, but our impact is often larger than we realize. We can be the cause of each other's pain or choose to be the sunshine in their rain... maybe in a small way like giving a kind word and a smile, or by being there in a tough time with a hug and a prayer. We don't need to know each other's battles to know we need help fighting it... let's put others' needs ahead of our desires today.

Philippians 2:3-4

Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.

September 7

When I begin a new game, I tend to feel weak, powerless, and a little bit lost as I grapple with an unfamiliar control scheme and face battles that are often above my current skill level. Every time I turn around there are new foes, harder quests, and bad news coming from every direction. I can't even imagine surviving, much less finishing the game in my current pathetic state. But the game developers designed a path that was invisible to me at the start, and once I finally got to the end I could look back and see I always had everything I needed EXACTLY at the time I needed it.

When we take the time to stop and truly realize the infinite power, knowledge, and capabilities of our Heavenly Father, our circumstances may not seem to immediately change... but our perspective on them will. The adversaries and challenges that are overwhelming us with their size and strength are mere insects compared to our Lord's indescribable omnipotence. Let's not give in to fear when these inevitable trials arrive... let's put our trust in our incomparable Lord to solve these problems according to His plan, in ways far beyond our comprehension.

Psalm 112:1, 6-8

Praise the Lord! Blessed is the man who fears the Lord, who delights greatly in His commandments. Surely he will never be shaken; the righteous will be in everlasting remembrance. He will not be afraid of evil tidings; his heart is steadfast, trusting in the Lord. His heart is established; he will not be afraid, until he sees his desire upon his enemies.

September 8

All good things eventually come to an end... including my favorite video games.

After all the skill points have been maxed out, the side missions have been completed, and the final battle has been fought, I usually feel a bit sad and melancholy as I slide the disc back in its' case for the final time. Sure, I could replay it... but it won't be the same. This journey, the good and the bad, is over with finality... and even the most thorough game endings still leave me wanting to know what happens next for all the characters I've grown to love.

It's always hard to grapple with losing a loved one or getting news that reminds us of our own mortality... all the unanswered questions leave us desiring closure that we don't receive on this side of eternity. But passing on isn't the end... it's the beginning. The Lord has built an eternal home for each of us who love Him and have chosen Him, and the life we will share with Him and our loved ones who await us on the other side is simply beyond our ability to comprehend. Our adventure is not over once we close the book on this race... let's run well until we joyfully meet again on the other side.

2 Timothy 4:7-8

I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.

September 9

Over the years I've been burned by games that promised features and experiences in their promotional trailers that they didn't actually end up delivering in the final product. When a developer who has previously released broken games tries to show me something new and guarantees that they will deliver this time, it can be difficult to trust them again. But if I never let them move on from their mistakes, I will miss out on the new gaming experiences they have created that reflects their growth.

Guilt and shame have no place in the life of a follower of Christ... for us or for others. Once we have fully submitted to the Lord in repentance and He has cleansed our sins, they are permanently washed away. It's our enemy who attempts to convince us that this offer is too good to be true, that it doesn't apply to us, or that it shouldn't apply to the mistakes made by others. At the cross, Christ's complete perfection purchased our total redemption without exception... regardless of our past failures. Let's accept His gift of forgiveness for ourselves and others without restrictions and move forward as fellow new creations in Christ!

Isaiah 1:18

"Come now, and let us reason together," says the Lord, "Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool."

September 10

With a few exceptions, video games have become much more forgiving over the years... most games feature unlimited lives and the ability to continue as many times as we need to finish the game. But even though we get to continue playing the game despite our mistakes and failures, we may still lose valuable progress or any of the items we collected in between save points. This is not because the game is angry or punishing us, but because there are still ramifications to the mistakes we make... even as the game washes the slate clean and gives us another try.

When we make a sinful choice, it can be easy to confuse the consequences of our actions with “punishment from God”, and as a result we can mistakenly feel that our sins aren’t actually forgiven. Certainly, the Lord hates sin because of how it damages relationships and hurts His children, but He does not hold the sins we have repented from against us... they are removed fully and completely. He is not mad at us... Christ’s sacrifice redeems, washes and cleanses all of us completely. And when we face discipline, it is as His beloved children.

Micah 7:18-19

Who is a God like You, pardoning iniquity and passing over the transgression of the remnant of His heritage? He does not retain His anger forever, because He delights in mercy. He will again have compassion on us and will subdue our iniquities. You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea.

September 11

There are game developers who I've faithfully followed for many years, playing each game they crafted with excitement... I trusted them because they've created some of my favorite gaming experiences. But even these skilled artists are limited by the platforms they are working with... and many times their intended designs don't show up in the final product because the game engine couldn't run them.

In tough times I wonder why the Lord doesn't simply come to earth, put a stop to all the pain and suffering, and bring us peace... but the truth is He DID come down here to guide us into loving each other, and we all know how that went. His heart breaks for us... Jesus wept in the presence of death as He saw the pain it inflicted on those He loved. There is an unthinkably wicked enemy force on this planet with one focus... to steal, kill and destroy. But we have these promises that remind us that the Lord is near the broken-hearted because our omniscient Lord knew we would experience moments of pain and tragedy on this broken planet... and He promised to be fully present for us through each and every one of them.

Psalm 34:18

The Lord is near to those who have a broken heart and saves such as have a contrite spirit.

John 16:22

Therefore you now have sorrow; but I will see you again and your heart will rejoice, and your joy no one will take from you.

September 12

A large portion of my video game experiences are populated with WAITING... waiting for the game to install, then waiting for the patch to download, followed by waiting for the levels to load, and then the waiting REALLY begins. We must wait for our character to level up enough to advance, we wait for the story to build to its crescendo... the most exciting and rewarding part of the game can often be dozens of hours away from the point where we first began our journey. But it is through our patient growth that the game produces the desired results, and we experience the satisfaction of a story that rewards our patience with victory.

It would be nice if our devotion to the Lord was followed immediately by heavenly trumpets, a booming voice from the clouds supporting us, and immediate gratification... but this is not how it typically goes. We are responsible for our obedience, not the results... and He is never late, even if we must wait. Let's not become discouraged if our faithfulness does not produce immediate fruit... at the right time our patience will align with God's perfect plan, revealing a victory beyond our wildest dreams.

Ecclesiastes 4:9-10a; 12

Two are better than one, because they have good reward for their labor. For if they fall, one will lift up his companion. Though one may be overpowered by another, two can withstand him, and a threefold cord is not quickly broken.

September 13

Few items are more powerful or essential to their story than Link's iconic ocarina in "The Ocarina of Time" ... this simple instrument could call for support, access healing points, unlock closed doors, and solve puzzles that were impossible to complete without playing the right songs on it. But these songs only worked if our character had both earned them AND learned them. These weren't merely cheat codes we could enter in to bypass tough spots... these songs could only be learned after successfully enduring dangerous battles in some very dark dungeons to acquire them.

As a believer we don't always feel like making a "joyful noise", but our ability to shine our light isn't based on our present circumstances... it's predicated on the amount of His Word we've absorbed and are choosing to meditate on. Letting His words dwell in us is an active choice we make throughout the day, and these songs in our heart aren't because we have successfully overcome our current problems... they are a reminder of His faithfulness in our previous battles and His continuing promise to be with us through each and every storm.

Colossians 3:16

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.

Psalms 98:4 (ESV)

Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth; break forth into joyous song and sing praises!

September 14

Open world games represent many of my favorite gaming experiences, but on multiple occasions I have found myself in way over my head and gotten myself “lost”. Sometimes it was my careless and curious exploration that was at fault, and other times it was the result of my own deliberate and poor choices within the game... either way, I would be completely lost without a “waypoint” to find my way back. But no matter where I find myself, the game still knows exactly where I am even if I don’t... and if I avail myself of its’ guidance I will be directed safely back to the optimal path.

We all experience periods of time in our lives when we feel like we have hopelessly lost our way, but even the most wayward sheep is still being searched for by the Good Shepherd. He has never lost track of any of us... even in our most unlovable state. There isn’t a section on this map where we can become so lost that we are hidden from Him. He is watching for us and seeking us out as the faithful waypoint for every explorer, redeeming His repentant sheep no matter how high we have climbed up the wrong mountain or how far we have fallen.

Ezekiel 34:11-12

‘For thus says the Lord God: “Indeed I Myself will search for My sheep and seek them out. As a shepherd seeks out his flock on the day he is among his scattered sheep, so will I seek out My sheep and deliver them from all the places where they were scattered on a cloudy and dark day.

September 15

I certainly appreciate a healthy dose of realism in my games to keep the action grounded, but being damaged by friendly fire may be my least favorite “realistic” choice in a game. While it is logical that the same weapons that damage my enemies would also harm me, that doesn’t mean I ENJOY it... the constant spray of ammunition intended to suppress the opposition can be very inconvenient when I find myself caught between a well-meaning teammate and their intended target. And if my teammate is as heavy on the trigger as I tend to be, we may end up with a zero-sum gain.

As humans who are in a constant state of learning and growth, we are not always going to see things the same way... even in the body of Christ. But internal disputes and conflicts are not only unproductive, but they are also damaging to those in the faith as well as those who are observing us from the outside. Let’s avoid the wild goose chases that distract us from our mission... to introduce others to Christ and grow in our own personal faith. Friendly fire has no place in the family of God, regardless of our “good intentions” ... let’s check our fire.

Titus 3:9

But avoid foolish disputes, genealogies, contentions, and strivings about the law; for they are unprofitable and useless.

September 16

Generating a truly original idea in a game is becoming exceptionally rare... and once one is successfully brought to life, imitations aren't typically very far behind. The "Battle Pass" monetization concept popularized by free-to-play titles like Fortnite has now been adopted by franchises such as Call of Duty and Halo... titles that made the idea of charging for new multiplayer maps an industry standard. But imitating the successful ideas of others must still be matched up with our specific destiny... I don't mind if Halo is going free-to-play, but please, no floss dances for the Master Chief.

Imitation may be the sincerest form of flattery, but if we imitate the wrong ideas (even from the right people), we end up sincerely wrong. In the body of Christ, we have been uniquely called and equipped for specific purposes, so what works for one may not be the right choice for another. Bowing to peer pressure in an attempt to emulate another's success or happiness doesn't give us our own. Christ is our role model, and only the Spirit of God can be trusted to shine the light on what is truly good and guide us into our perfect destiny.

3 John 1:11

Beloved, do not imitate what is evil, but what is good. He who does good is of God, but he who does evil has not seen God.

September 17

It happens to me in almost every video game... everything is going fine, the story is getting exciting, I'm learning new abilities, and then BOOM. I reach an area or mission that I can't access until I have gained a certain amount of "experience" or pushed through some very annoying side quests first. I don't want to go collect chickens, figure out why rats are in the basement, or grind through pointless battles until I reach level 20... I just want to keep progressing towards the fun stuff. But these repetitive diversions and unwanted trials serve a critical purpose, forcing me to stop, take the time to grow stronger, and truly hone my skills.

It can be frustrating when we feel like we should be out defeating giants and instead we are just grinding through the same drudgery day after day... but if we underestimate them, these daily battles can wear out even the strongest of us. Let's look past the monotony of these trials to see the ways they are being used to grow us, our character, our gifts, and our patience. We can find joy, even as we endure these unwanted diversions, knowing that the Lord is perfecting us THROUGH them.

James 1:2-4

My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.

September 18

My time to play video games is pretty limited, so I tend to move very quickly towards my core objectives... and I get a bit impatient with anything that doesn't seem "necessary". Sure, I may get some secret trophy or achievement for exploring hidden areas and perhaps learn interesting lore within the game... but who has that kind of time? And as a result, many times I miss out on critical upgrades that would have either increased my health, added additional abilities, or improved my understanding and appreciation of the events in the game... all because I was too busy rushing through it.

There will always be more things on our "to do" list than there is time in the day... but the most important part of any day is the time we spend in the Lord's presence to recharge, grow, learn, and seek His guidance. Pressing needs and deadlines will always compel us to prioritize them, but our critical "self-care" only occurs when we stop what we are doing FOR Him and simply focus ON HIM. Let's take some time today to quiet our mind, rest our body, and spend time with the Father. The strength and answers we need are found at His feet.

Luke 10:41-42

And Jesus answered and said to her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things. But one thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her."

September 19

In video games there is typically a reaction for every action we take... when I press the jump button, I expect my character to jump. When I toss a grenade, it is with the anticipation that an explosion will occur. But when a game fails to operate by these simple rules of “action and corresponding reaction”, it can become very frustrating and even impossible to play... sometimes it is due to bugs and glitches in the game, and other times it is from “lag” between the controller and the console. But if the game continues to be unresponsive to its’ design, I don’t simply lose faith in it... I quit playing it.

Many times in life we reach frustration points due to our actions failing to result in a visible and immediate reaction... and when our prayers and acts of faith don’t receive the response we had hoped for, it can damage our confidence in the Lord and His plans for us. But His promises will never fail... and even when our actions don’t generate a response we can see, His answer is in motion in realms far beyond our comprehension. Every Word the Father has spoken WILL come to pass, and His purpose for us WILL be accomplished!

Isaiah 55:11

So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; It shall not return to Me void, but it shall accomplish what I please, And it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it.

September 20

The world of gaming we enjoy is made up of unique genres and fandoms that are almost as diverse as the gamers who play them... from thoughtful RPG's that require exceptional patience to twitch-based shooters predicated on our hand-eye coordination, our hobby is full of experiences that all belong to the same family, even if they couldn't be more different. Rating a game is often a matter of taste... and looking down on a style of game that doesn't suit our preferences only limits our enjoyment of what they offer. Each are unique, none are perfect... and they're all beautiful to someone.

As believers in Christ, we know that NONE of us meet God's qualifications for "good" ... we are all on equal ground with the Father as His unworthy yet beloved children. There are no "second cousins" or distant relatives... we are one body as brothers and sisters. If we saw each other the way HE sees each of us, we would remove all the categories and labels that we use to divide ourselves and simply see each other as unique fellow children on this planetary playground, with an opportunity to show His love and grace to everyone we meet.

James 2:1

My brethren, do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with partiality.

September 21

The most memorable video game stories I've ever played always involved a massive amount of very painful, VERY personal challenges for the protagonist to overcome. But the reason these stories are so compelling is because the writers of the plot used these events to not only grow and define my character, but all the various characters I would interact with along the way as well. The self-sacrificial path my destiny required wasn't just MY story... it impacted the lives of every explorer I met (and some I didn't) and changed their lives as well.

Even Jesus Himself endured incomparable trials, challenges, and suffering during His short life on this planet... but it was through His obedience to endure that painful journey that He is the "Author" of our salvation. It was through Christ's submissive humanity, not just His omnipotent deity, that we are saved.

We will also face massive obstacles during our journey, but these aren't punishments or a lack of His care for us. These are our "stories" we are writing, and it is our faithful obedience to Him THROUGH our personal stories that the Father uses to lead others to His saving grace.

Hebrews 5:8-9

Though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered. And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him.

September 22

Most of the best items, weapons, and equipment in a game are hidden, requiring a large amount of searching, exploration, and guidance from others to find. These hidden resources are typically the most powerful items in the game, rewarding the player with superior capabilities that can overcome challenges that would have been impossible to complete otherwise. But these items are only present in the game for me to find because at some point, before my current state of need, they were hidden away... putting them in a position where they could be successfully found and used when the time was right.

If we want to overcome our most serious sinful challenges in life, we must hide the Word of the Lord in our hearts PRIOR to our state of need. Waiting until we are struggling with temptation will often result in regretful decisions... but by spending time reading and absorbing Christ's teachings in advance, we are able to find and use the right words and actions in the heat of these battles. Let's spend time daily hiding nuggets of God's wisdom in our hearts... we will typically need them sooner than we think.

Psalm 119:11

Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You.

September 23

The games we play are made up of numerous components... physics engines, visual assets, audio files, AI scripting, and a plethora of other separate mechanisms that all combine to make up our gaming experience. Some may be featured prominently such as a famous voice actor narrating the story, and others may serve critical but more subtle roles such as the user interface... but we all know one thing for certain. When one part of the game ceases to integrate and synchronize with the other components, the entire game suffers and becomes completely unplayable.

We all make up one singular body of Christ... one family, made up of diverse individuals all over the world. Each member is uniquely gifted for our distinct missions and designed to work together in harmony... but when we try to operate in a disconnected state, the entire body of Christ suffers... and others become hurt and broken by the division. We are designed to be codependent on each other in our service to Christ, and it is in our unified love and serving of each other that we demonstrate His perfect love to a hurting and divided world.

1 Corinthians 12:12-14

For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into one Spirit. For in fact the body is not one member but many.

September 24

Many of my favorite video game characters don't tend to have a whole lot to say, choosing to let their actions do most of the talking... but this makes the things they say when they DO choose to speak much more interesting and valuable. Their words provide a momentary glimpse into the true thoughts and feelings of the iconic person behind the armor, and in that moment when they finally do say something, their entire aura can be defined or destroyed based on what comes out of their mouths.

The things we choose to say are far more important than we may realize... there are no meaningless words. What comes out of our mouths or is written by our fingers says a great deal about our character, our relationship with the Lord, and who we truly are on the inside. There is a high level of accountability for every word we say, write or share because they have power beyond our understanding, impacting others in ways we don't always comprehend. Our communication in all forms reveals who we truly are on the inside... and they either bring people closer to Christ or push them farther away. Let's choose them carefully.

Matthew 12:34b-36

For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good things, and an evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth evil things. But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment.

September 25

The only thing I love more than PLAYING my favorite games is TALKING about my favorite games... it's always exciting to "nerd out" with a fellow gamer who has a shared experience and appreciation for the same games I have enjoyed. Many times, we approached aspects of the same game differently and can learn from each other's unique journey. But what I enjoy even MORE is sharing my passion for a game with someone who hasn't given it a try... and sharing my experience and connecting what the game offers with their interests may encourage them to try it out for themselves.

Our personal testimony about Christ's impact on our life is powerful... but as wonderful as it is to share our inspirational stories of His grace and love with our fellow believers to lift each other up, the most critical use of our testimony is when we use our personal experiences and adventures to introduce Him to those who haven't tasted His grace yet. Both the good times and the bad can act as a connection point for souls waiting to press start, and if we listen to the leading of His Spirit, the Lord will use our journey to launch their story with Him!

John 4:39, 41-42 (NAS)

Now from that city many of the Samaritans believed in Him because of the word of the woman who testified, "He told me all the things that I have done." Many more believed because of His word; and they were saying to the woman, "It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves and know that this One truly is the Savior of the world."

September 26

The concept of our characters possessing and equipping physical or kinetic “shields” in our video games is a convenient way of preventing us from becoming frustrated by the constant attacks we will face in the game. Could you imagine perishing and starting a game like Halo completely over every time Master Chief takes some damage? But while the presence of a shield provides a bit of comfort and a welcome feeling of protection, it also implies the presence of combat and the reality that there will be enemies and obstacles ahead that will seek to do us harm.

The barrage of attacks from our enemy can be constant and relentless, leaving us feeling helpless and overwhelmed... and during these battles it is easy to wonder why God doesn't simply prevent them from occurring. But the presence of the Lord in our life doesn't stop our enemy's attempts to harm us... Christ endured all of the same tribulations, and He reminded us His followers would face them as well. But He WILL faithfully shield and protect us through each attack we face, establishing our faith in the midst of the storm.

2 Thessalonians 3:3

But the Lord is faithful, who will establish you and guard you from the evil one.

September 27

I hate to admit it, but sometimes I get a little bit careless in my enthusiasm to “save the day” in my gaming adventures. While my completely pure intentions are to burst into the room in a blaze of glory, skillfully eliminate the opposing forces with pinpoint accuracy, and save everyone in the process, I can get a little loose with my fire... and some of the players I was trying to save end up as unintended casualties from my heavy-handed efforts. If I had only shown more patience when planning out the engagement, attempted less lethal tactics, or shown a little more humility and gentleness in my approach I might have achieved the desired result without collateral damage.

As followers of Christ, we DO have a mission to complete and a “Great Commission” to fulfill, but HOW we go about accomplishing this is just as critical as WHAT we do to follow it. We are called to be peacemakers... and humility, gentleness, and patience are critical and required components of sharing Christ with others. If our mission is to truly save others, then our passion to share His truth must always be tempered with His love and grace.

2 Timothy 2:24-26

And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth, and that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will.

September 28

Almost every video game revolves around challenges that must be endured and conflicts that must be resolved. Whether it is the age-old battle between Link and Ganon or the futuristic wars of Master Chief against whoever he is facing this time, these games are all about grueling campaigns and costly sacrifices... and each battle scar and crack in the armor tells the story of a hard-fought victory over the setbacks they faced. While these characters deserve a break, the truth is nobody wants to play “Master Chief sits on a couch”. It is the intensity of these battles that makes the story of their triumph so compelling.

Nobody enjoys hard times, but we must keep in mind that we are neither passengers nor vacationers during our pilgrimage down here. We are soldiers for Christ in a battle for souls... and while we may enjoy times of peace and an occasional oasis from the battlefield, fulfilling our purpose will absolutely contain periods of pain. Even Jesus carries His battle scars as an eternal reminder that His triumph came at a painful cost... so let's not allow the battle to wear us down.

Final victory is already ours.

2 Timothy 2:3

You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.

September 29

Sometimes I feel bad for the characters in my favorite games... for example, Sora was just trying to enjoy a nice day on the beach with his friends when he suddenly had to save multiple universes from complete destruction. That's a pretty tough gig... especially considering Sora was still just a kid. But most of my games don't take the basic humanity of these fictional characters into account... it forces them to not only accept these unwanted and unexpected hardships but embrace them as their destiny.

The hardships we face in life are not always within our control, but our perspective on them is. Many of these challenges don't seem "fair", but they are still used by the Lord to serve a higher purpose... to save others who couldn't have been reached any other way. Perhaps our destiny has led us on an uncomfortable path we would have never chosen on our own... let's make a conscious choice to shine our light in that dark place and look for the purpose within the pain. The mission we've been entrusted with may have a point of activation exactly where we are right now to save those we wouldn't have met otherwise.

Philippians 1:12

But I want you to know, brethren, that the things which happened to me have actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel.

September 30

Our games tend to focus on moving forward... on to the next mission, the next battle, the next checkpoint, and the next achievement. Even after I finally take down a challenging boss or complete a lengthy raid, I scarcely take time to do anything more than equip all of my newly acquired weapons and armor before heading off towards the next skirmish. I am so busy moving on towards the next challenge, I fail to stop and savor the moment I am currently in to appreciate the victory I just achieved.

Most of us tend to reach out to the Lord DURING times of trouble, but taking time AFTER He has delivered us to thank Him and give Him the glory can often be overlooked as we pivot to our next challenge. Our enemy is not going to let us take a break and reflect on what the Lord has already done, so we must intentionally make time to give thanks for each aspect of our victory as we press forward into the next phase of our battle. Let's slow down, even during our current struggles, and thank Him today. The encouragement we need for our next battle may be found when we look back at what He has already done for us.

Psalm 50:15

Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify Me.

Colossians 3:15

And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful.

October 1

I love playing games with my friends, but I have found a persistent problem in our gaming sessions... we aren't consistent in our output. In some matches we operate as a well-oiled machine, flawlessly working together as the victory seems to fall right into place... other times we have played so poorly that we might be more successful if we just took our helmets off and threw them at our opposition instead. As imperfect players, even our best intentions often yield disappointing results... our dependability is limited by our capability.

Placing our confidence solely in our family or friends will frequently result in disappointment and frustration... not because we weren't meant to walk with them, but because even their best efforts will still yield inconsistent results. Our path was not designed for us to handle armed only with our own combined strength, resources, connections, and abilities. There is no substitute for the active presence of Christ walking with us in our battles... and when we lean on the Lord as the source of our strength, He will work with and through all of us together to bring victory to the entire team!

Psalm 20:6-7

Now I know that the Lord saves His anointed; He will answer him from His holy heaven with the saving strength of His right hand. Some trust in chariots, and some in horses; but we will remember the name of the Lord our God.

October 2

Shadows are typically dangerous places in our video games, often concealing hidden enemies or lethal traps that would have been obvious and easy to avoid if they were in a well-lit area. Many times I have found myself defeated by a cleverly concealed, low-level adversary who would have been no match for me in an open space surrounded by light... but because their presence went undetected, they were able to inflict massive damage on me before I could even register their presence and react.

Choosing to follow Christ does not make us immune to the darkness... it simply gives us the ability to discern it. Darkness is the natural enemy of a follower of Christ, obscuring things that are dangerous or harmful until we have already taken damage from them. If we are not sure if something is wholesome or proper for us to participate in, there is a simple way to find out. Shine the light of Christ into the situation by speaking His name and talking about Him... and if He is not welcome in that conversation, relationship, or activity, then we have our answer. His light always exposes the darkness and what it hides for what it truly is.

Ephesians 5:8-11

For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, righteousness, and truth), finding out what is acceptable to the Lord. And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them.

October 3

Video games are popular virtual playgrounds for a reason... players can explore through trial and error with limited consequences. If we want to try a risky path, we can save our game and give it a shot... and if it goes poorly, we can just reload our game save and keep playing like it never even happened. The game doesn't judge us for our misguided efforts, it simply restores us back to the place we last saved at (hopefully a little wiser this time). If the game stops me from progressing because I made some poor decisions (and who hasn't), I won't be playing that game for very long.

It is impossible to explore new horizons when we or others are unwilling to let old mistakes go. Reminding ourselves of our past failures or allowing others to do so is not only unhealthy, but it is also un-Christlike. Jesus regularly pressed pause, uploaded a clean game save to the wayward souls He met, and told them to "go and sin no more". The Lord has a new path for even the most prodigal of His children, and His salvation doesn't just break every chain... He forgives AND forgets, freeing us to joyfully return to Him and get back to our mission.

Isaiah 43:18-19

Do not remember the former things, nor consider the things of old. Behold, I will do a new thing, now it shall spring forth; shall you not know it? I will even make a road in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.

October 4

Well, it finally happened to me. After years of avoiding it, I finally fell victim to the dreaded “Joy-Con drift” ... a defect in Nintendo Switch controllers that causes the character to move the wrong way regardless of my intentions. This drifting problem has resulted in several painfully self-destructive moments such as Mario running off of ledges or directly into harm’s way for no reason. And unless I allow the creator of the Joy-Con to repair it, it will continue to lean in the wrong direction and cause losses that could have been avoided.

The Lord isn’t trying to ruin our fun or take away our joy with His guidance... He simply knows that we have self-destructive “drifting” tendencies towards sin that only He can fix. We are all bent towards sinning in unique directions, and those choices bring suffering and pain to us and to others. And if we stop making excuses for our controller and choose to yield control of our lives to our Creator, He will work on us to remove the causes of our “drifting”. All of us struggle with something... let’s hold that faulty “Joy-con” up to Him today in prayer and let the Lord take full control.

Romans 6:23

For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

October 5

Almost every major gaming or movie villain feels the pressing need to explain themselves through massive one-sided monologues... they preach about their glorious purpose as they attempt to rationalize and justify their actions. And regardless of their intentions, the way they are trying to “save the world” always puts them at odds with our hero. The irony is that many times the end goal of peace and harmony is shared by both characters... but the means by which they are willing to achieve those goals couldn’t be more different.

Our communication as ambassadors for Christ has very specific expectations... and when we fail to demonstrate His love and grace through whatever we choose to say, share, or write we not only compromise our message but cause grief to the very Spirit of God as well. We have been given the ability for our voices, videos, and words to be heard, viewed, and read all over the world... let’s use this technology to give joy, share love, and promote peace through salvation in Christ. The world doesn’t need more anger and bitterness... it has plenty of that. Let’s choose the high ground today.

Ephesians 4:29-31

Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice.

October 6

The most common video game trope is also one of the most endearing... an insignificant, simple, small-town character with limited skills suddenly crosses paths with a destiny that requires them to save the world. Along the way they will gain powers as they need them, learn skills right in the moment they become necessary, and find allies who conveniently arrive when the plot requires it. But if Link had decided to just stay in bed because he didn't know how to "circle-strafe" yet, the war for Hyrule would have been over before it started.

Our capabilities may seem too small to make an impact in comparison with the massive challenges that lie before us... but if we are willing to obediently place these seemingly insignificant gifts and talents into the hands of the Master, He will multiply them beyond our comprehension. The Lord specializes in taking those who have been counted out, rejected, or marginalized and using them to change the world. Let's give Him our time, gifts, talents, and skills... and trust that if we do our part to share His message, He will do His part to accomplish a purpose beyond our imagination.

John 6:8-11

One of His disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to Him, "There is a lad here who has five barley loaves and two small fish, but what are they among so many?" Then Jesus said, "Make the people sit down." Now there was much grass in the place. So the men sat down, in number about five thousand. And Jesus took the loaves, and when He had given thanks, He distributed them to the disciples, and the disciples to those sitting down; and likewise of the fish, as much as they wanted.

October 7

One of my biggest gaming weaknesses is my tendency to play like a lone wolf, breaking free from the safety and protection of my squad to try to win the battle single-handedly. As soon as my enemy sees that I'm separated from the protection and covering fire of my teammates, they quickly surround me and move in for an easy elimination. Attacks that would have been quickly repelled by my squad and injuries that would have been easily healed by my allies become fatal when I find myself alone and vulnerable out on a hostile battlefield.

Our enemy stalks us like a lion hunting in the wild, targeting prey when they are separated and at their most vulnerable points. When we feel alone and weak, we must press ourselves back into the safety and support of the Lord and our spiritual family. We're all under attack in different ways by the same vicious enemy...but together we can pray for each other, share encouraging verses, and provide support. We are one body for a reason... to work together as ONE. It's dangerous to go alone... even Christ Himself brought His personal "fireteam" with Him into the garden for His final battle.

1 Peter 5:8-9

Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world.

October 8

Choosing a specialization or a “class” in a video game is a major decision... it opens a specific path of skills and abilities while also removing or limiting growth in areas that are not native to that class. If I choose the path of a mage/medic, I know that I have chosen a critical supporting role that is vital to my team, but it also means I will play my character much differently than a “warrior” class. We don’t perform the same actions because we are growing our characters into different destinies to serve unique and important purposes.

Choosing the path of Christ gives us both liberty AND limitations... while we are freed from our past sinful bondage to pursue a relationship with the Lord, as His followers the skill trees we unlock and decisions we make must align with this new calling. Once we have chosen to live in the Spirit, we must begin to walk in the Spirit... in a game, if I’m a medic I’m not only one in name, but I ACT as one on the battlefield and I apply myself to growing in the areas that build me up in that specific “calling”. Let’s embrace our callings within the body of Christ and walk fully and freely in them!

Galatians 5:24-26

Those who are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.

October 9

Playing cooperative games and dispatching enemies together is a great way to bond with a fellow gamer... unless that game requires us to SHARE all the health, ammo, and cool loot that we find. Unselfish cooperation can morph into unhealthy competition quickly, as teammates gobble up items without regard for the other's needs. True cooperation is not about what is equitable... it's when one player communicates their needs of health or ammo and the other unselfishly provides covering fire so they can both make progress together, covering each other's weaknesses and needs without blame.

This remarkable gift of undeserved mercy and forgiveness from the Father is not merely for our consumption... it is a gift we are expected to SHARE. Our new life of freedom from guilt and sin that we have received is part of our ministry to others... forgiving those who have hurt or wronged us is not just for our own peace, but to share a taste of the joy and freedom Christ offers with each other. Let's forgive someone today with the forgiveness we were given and set them free, even if it's not "fair" ... they need it more than we know.

Colossians 3:12-13

Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do.

October 10

Video games have a challenging line to walk between providing us with an entertaining environment to explore while keeping enough realism to remain tethered to the basic rules of the “real world”. Many games require us to find, cook, and eat food to restore our strength and heal from our wounds, while others restrict how long we can run without resting or how much weight we can carry at one time. These limitations may not seem “fun”, but when they are properly balanced, they provide a challenge that both grows our skills and makes our victories meaningful.

The Lord did not promise us that we would live a life that is absent from burdens... He actually guaranteed that we would face trials and tribulations on a regular basis. A life without challenges would be as dull and unrewarding as playing a game without any obstacles. But there is good news... He promised that He would sustain us as we carry these burdens, and that we would never carry them alone. Let's bring Him our burdens in prayer today... He may not remove every one of them, but He will always give us enough strength to carry them.

Psalm 55:22

Cast your burden on the Lord, and He shall sustain you; He shall never permit the righteous to be moved.

October 11

Even while playing my favorite games, I can fall victim to a “check box” mentality, pushing through my quest log to complete boring side missions or plodding through repetitive areas to grow my skill level or unlock new items. Next thing I know, I’m not even ENJOYING the game anymore, and playing it has become WORK rather than a source of joy and fun. As time goes on, the actions that were once exhilarating now feel pointless and stale, and completing all these tedious tasks honestly makes me start to resent the game.

If we aren’t careful, our relationship with the Lord can easily fall into this same feeling of completing a “checklist” ... going through the motions of prayers and devotions but without the passion we once felt. Does our service to Him spring from a place of love or a sense of obligation? Are we sending up our prayers out of faith or merely out of habit? Let’s take some time today to refresh our heart and renew our mind, seeing Him the way we did when we first started.

No matter how far we fall or how stale we feel, the Lord is always ready to remind us of why we fell in love with Him in the first place.

Psalm 51:10-12

Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me away from Your presence, and do not take Your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of Your salvation and uphold me by Your generous Spirit.

October 12

I have fallen for it more times than I care to admit... I have heard and followed the siren's call of a powerful, game-changing weapon laying open and exposed in the middle of the battlefield, practically BEGGING for me to come pick it up and use it to save the day for my team. With the best of intentions, I raced to grab it and turn the tide of the battle... but as soon as I picked it up, I realized that the enemy was simply using it as bait to lure me into a trap... and that weapon was empty all along.

We've all heard seemingly innocent phrases like "The heart wants what the heart wants" or "Follow your heart" ... but the truth is that our heart is not a reliable decision maker and is frequently responsible for much unnecessary and preventable heartache in life. The Father sees beyond our heart's desire and into the painful, unintended outcomes that following it will result in... and if we yield our stubborn hearts to His eternal wisdom, we will avoid the snares of our enemy. Let's set aside our instincts and good intentions and listen for the Lord's voice on the battlefield... His restrictions may be protecting us in ways we cannot see.

Jeremiah 17:9-10

The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it? I, the Lord, search the heart, I test the mind, even to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his doings.

October 13

Most role-playing games follow a logical skill progression system... we “level up” or become better at critical abilities such as sneaking, jumping, or using a specific weapon through consistently PERFORMING that activity as well as intentionally investing our skill points into it. Our character’s growth and progress is intentional, not accidental... and mastering a skill is achieved through routinely practicing that desired skill and fully committing to developing it at the expense of other pursuits.

As believers we do not instantly hit our “level cap” by choosing to follow Christ... we are also responsible for taking deliberate steps to build and grow our personal character by investing our time and energy into spiritual pursuits. We become more capable witnesses by actively witnessing, and we grow our ability to absorb and apply His Word by spending time in it. Each day we choose where we invest our time, talents, and “skill points”... into unhealthy pursuits that result in reaping the undesired outcomes of those investments, or into things of eternal value that improve our “character”, benefit others, and grow His Kingdom.

Galatians 6:7-8

Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life.

October 14

Developers typically build hype and awareness around their upcoming games through the release of “trailers” ... sizzle reels pulled from various vertical slices of the game designed to showcase and highlight some of the most dynamic and compelling content. But these can be misleading, as many times the portion that we viewed isn’t even included in the final build of the game... or the trailer may fail to demonstrate the game accurately, resulting in unhappy customers who purchased something much different than what was originally promised.

Hype is fun, but context is critical.

The reality is many of the truths found in the Bible are going to be incredibly unpopular, especially among those who are unfamiliar with the Scriptures or lack a relationship with the Author. Verses taken separately or out of context can be very divisive when they are not incorporated into the entire message.

We are responsible for sharing the WHOLE truth of the Lord in a manner consistent with His character, from His love and grace to His standards for Christian living and behavior... all for the purpose of pleasing Him and saving others.

1 Thessalonians 2:4

But as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, even so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God who tests our hearts.

October 15

I appreciate a healthy level of challenge in my games, but some feature portions that fail to achieve a balance between an enjoyable degree of difficulty and being unrelentingly painful. You know which ones I'm referring to... those boss fights that SEEM to be over when suddenly a new musical theme in Latin kicks in, revealing that the boss has MULTIPLE exponentially more difficult final forms to fight. And every time it defeats me, I must start ALL over again on their first form. Fun turns to frustration quickly as I question why I even bought this game since it clearly hates me.

These unavoidable boss battles in life are not easy, but they aren't here because we have been abandoned or are receiving punishment from the Lord... they are simply the way to the next level. Even Christ was spit on, mocked, beaten, and murdered... and He still showed love and mercy while on the cross. We can't let this battle steal our kindness or our joy... this boss fight is proof we are progressing. No matter how hard it becomes... let's love and pray for our enemies. They will push us farther than our friends could ever carry us.

Matthew 5:44

But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you.

October 16

Most video game battles are built around the concept of learning a “pattern” ... from slowly figuring out the order of the punches to dodge and counter Mike Tyson in Punch-Out to memorizing the attack sequences of the alien bosses in Metroid. I didn’t typically succeed in my first, second, or even twentieth try because I was still discovering the pattern... but once I learned it, I found that even the most powerful enemies could be tamed. And after I learned the pattern the hard way and finally achieved success, I rushed to show all my friends so they could find victory in their battles as well.

All of us have fallen, and many times I have felt like the worst sinner of all time. But even those dark times can serve a purpose... we are the living, walking proof that no matter how far we have fallen, we serve a God who will reach down and restore all who are willing to ask. Let’s use our path to demonstrate this winning “pattern” to those who are seeking the solution to a battle with sin that they cannot win... if He still loved, wanted, and forgave me, then He can do that for ANYONE. We are the pattern that proves He doesn’t give up on any of us.

1 Timothy 1:15-16

This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief. However, for this reason I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show all longsuffering, as a pattern to those who are going to believe on Him for everlasting life.

October 17

Turn-based RPGs are a unique experience in the gaming world, featuring cinematic styling, epic stories, and an unforgettable cast of characters that are rarely duplicated in a game featuring a real-time combat system. But there is one part I don't typically enjoy... all the WAITING that occurs during the battle. Selecting my moves from a menu and waiting for the result requires a high level of patience... in most games I'm accustomed to pressing a button and seeing the result unfold in real time. Making a choice and then helplessly holding my controller to see its' effectiveness is hard, and watching my opponent take actions while I wait for my turn to counter is excruciating.

Waiting on the Lord after we have prayed and obediently submitted to His will is hard, and it can feel like our situation is getting worse as our enemy makes his move during the silence between "turns". But once we've performed the actions the Lord has given us to complete, it is time for us to REST in Him... even if the battle isn't over yet. Acting in frustration only delays our desired outcome... let's take this time to rest in His arms. The answer is coming!

Psalm 37:7-8

Rest in the Lord and wait patiently for Him; do not fret because of him who prospers in his way, because of the man who brings wicked schemes to pass. Cease from anger and forsake wrath; do not fret—it only causes harm.

October 18

There are boss fights, and then there are EPIC BOSS fights... the gigantic, Galactus-sized guardians who fill up the entire screen and make us feel puny and weak by comparison. Their massive health bars and almost instantly fatal attacks make them seem unstoppable... until I remind myself that they are merely lines of code designed to “look” monstrous. If I am patient and keep my cool within the conflict, they will eventually reveal their “critical hit points” ... and their defeat typically unlocks more rewards than I can carry and opens doors that couldn’t be opened any other way.

We all face these “super-sized” boss battles in life... massive and powerful obstacles with no perceivable weaknesses. But these situations that threaten to overwhelm us with their size and ferocity are not permanent... and hidden within them are eternal rewards that not only unlock the next stage in our journey but set other captives free as well. Let’s patiently endure the seemingly endless taunting and cheap shots of these gargantuan challenges... they are designed to look scary and intimidate us, but through Christ we will overcome them.

2 Corinthians 4:17-18

For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal.

Romans 8:37

Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us.

October 19

I have learned a critical truth over my years of playing (and sometimes getting stuck) in video games... many times I just need to put the controller down, walk away, and gain some perspective on my current predicament before diving back in. I have failed over and over and OVER against the exact same challenge, but I stubbornly kept pressing continue in an attempt to succeed through sheer force of will and determination... until I reached a point of exhaustion and frustration.

And typically, after walking away for a day and coming back to the game with fresh eyes, I often succeed on my first attempt at the exact same problem.

In life we often get knocked out on our feet by the challenges and battles we face, but we keep on standing and fighting in this semi-paralyzed state anyways, hoping we can still find a way to win. It is hard to force ourselves to stop, put the controller of our lives down, and seek God's perspective on our dilemma... and as a result we frequently compound our problems with added stress and frustration. Let's normalize taking a prayer break as often as we need to and lay our burdens at His feet.

Matthew 11:28-30

Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.

October 20

When you play enough social multiplayer matches online it is inevitable... members of the opposing team that JUST played a ferocious match against me get split up, with a few ending up on my team. And typically, many times these new “teammates” are still loyal to their real-life friends who are on the other side... and as a result they sabotage my team’s efforts to win through a combination of intentional “friendly” fire on my team, refusing to fire on their original squad mates, and intentionally costing our team points. Their loyalty is to their squad first... and honestly, I would probably do the same thing.

This is a challenging verse of Scripture... it is NOT advocating that we are unkind, unloving, unsupportive, or completely disconnected from those who do not share our faith. The only way to reach others is to REACH out to them... but we also must understand that our loyalty to Christ supersedes all other loyalties. Our priorities are informed by our commitment to the Lord, and those who have not made that commitment are guided by competing priorities. Let’s consider our alignments carefully...

2 Corinthians 6:14

Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness?

October 21

I'm not proud of it, but the first thing I tend to do after the end of a multiplayer match is to check and see how I performed... did I score the most points? Get the most "medals"? Sometimes I'm even guilty of doing this DURING the match, even though it serves no purpose other than to inflate my ego or artificial feelings of self-confidence. The goal is for my TEAM to succeed, but if left unchallenged my need for accomplishing arbitrary and selfish accolades can hinder me from accomplishing the desired outcome... victory over the opposition through unselfish collaboration with my teammates.

We all face daily challenges to crucify our selfish ambitions and lay our ego down at the foot of the cross... even within the body of Christ we can be tempted to seek validation based on our personal achievements. But our value to the kingdom is not defined by the heights we personally attain, but by who we LIFT UP. Let's seek opportunities to provide an "assist" and support our teammates in the accomplishment of their goals... we glorify the Lord the most through our unselfish service to others. We all share victory on this team!

Mark 9:34-35

But they kept silent, for on the road they had disputed among themselves who would be the greatest. And He sat down, called the twelve, and said to them, "If anyone desires to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all."

October 22

I am not the most cautious gamer... I tend to be fairly reckless and prefer a strategy that is bold and disruptive rather than patient and stealthy. And while my style may occasionally overwhelm the opposition and result in success, there are also many times that I run right into an enemy ambush... an ambush that not only eliminates me, but also takes out the loyal teammates who were following my lead. As my screen fills with the red "X's" marking the spot my comrades fell, I realize that my actions have consequences beyond the fate of my character... those "X's" are on me as well.

We are all an influence on someone every day... and our decision to serve Christ makes us an ambassador on His behalf everywhere we go. We represent Him in our words and actions at all times, so we must be mindful of the path we are leaving behind for others to follow. Our footsteps leave a deeper impression than we will ever know, and we may not always be aware of who is following the trail we are creating. Let's live like we are always leading someone towards Christ... whether we know it or not, they are following.

Mark 9:42

But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were thrown into the sea.

1 Corinthians 11:1

Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ.

October 23

My favorite games feature choices I can make for my character that determine their path in the game. From dialogue options and party member selections to the missions I decide to take on and how I choose to complete them... my actions in this virtual world determine how other characters respond to me, which either restricts future paths or increases my access to greater rewards and better endings. And helping these characters with their smaller and more personal missions (like finding a lost locket) can be the key to solving a massive problem (like parts I need for my ship) later.

Our daily walk as a believer is some of the most important work we do. Demonstrating the love, gentleness, and peace of Christ through our day-to-day choices and actions is the way we open different paths in the future... paths that provide opportunities for being His witnesses and fulfilling our calling. It is often through our service to others that our larger destiny will be revealed... and within each choice there is the potential of an eternal impact. These “small” missions may be more critical than we think... let’s walk accordingly.

Ephesians 4:1-3

I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

October 24

There is just something special about playing a brand-new video game on its' launch day... the experience of "flying blind" and spoiler-free is both scary and exhilarating. Without knowing what to expect in advance, I get to play the game as it was originally designed to be played... free from any preconceived ideas or expectations of what will happen based on other players' perspectives or their previous experiences. How long is the game? I have no idea. Will I like it? Who knows. But not having all the answers is part of the fun, allowing me to have a personalized play-through with the game that is completely and uniquely my own.

Faith would be a lot easier if the Lord gave us times, dates, or at least a general idea of what each season of our life will look like. But our adventures with Him will always be "spoiler-free", and basing our expectations on the experiences of others will only result in frustration and disappointment. His timing is unique and perfect for each of His children and our specific paths in life, so let's embrace the joy and peace that only comes from blind faith in Christ and His personalized plan for us.

Acts 1:6-7

When they had come together, they asked Him, saying, "Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" And He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority."

October 25

There are bad matches, and then there are BAD matches. You know... the ones when you look at the score and wonder, "How are we already down 21-3??!!"

Sometimes matches just start out with everything going wrong in the worst possible way, and through a lethal combination of our own mistakes and the skills of our opposition, it becomes impossible to even make the match competitive at this point. It would take a miracle to pull us out of this rapidly increasing deficit... wait, now it's 30-3. On the positive side, at least it's almost over.

We all experience times in life when we feel like we have fallen too far to be helped... but there are NO situations that are too desperate or too difficult for the Lord. His arms of love can reach us no matter how deep our problems go, how unsalvageable our situation is, or how hopeless we believe we are. It is not our role to figure out HOW He can solve our problems... we simply have to raise our voices in prayer and let Him pull us up. His love runs farther, deeper, and wider than our sins can drag us, and His nail-scarred hands are stronger than our chains. Let's give Him our controller today.

Numbers 11:23

And the Lord said to Moses, "Has the Lord's arm been shortened? Now you shall see whether what I say will happen to you or not."

Ephesians 3:20-21

Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

October 26

Mario Kart is a classic for a reason... over the years it has defined the kart racing genre with its' simplicity and accessibility. While picking up the coins scattered around the course is a priority because it increases our top speed, accelerating to the front of the pack has a down side... it makes us a primary target for turtle shells, and as soon as we take a hit, those precious coins we collected scatter all across the pavement. What I am carrying at the point of an attack is revealed by what pops out of me when I take that unexpected hit. And as believers in Christ, we are going to take some unexpected hits today... plan on it.

Following the Lord absolutely places a target on our backs, and what we have chosen to consume PRIOR to that surprise attack will come pouring out of us when we absorb the inevitable impact. What we actively ingest and download into our hearts and minds is what will come out of our mouths... if we invest time with the Lord, that pain will cause the positive things we placed in our heart to flow out of our mouth. Let's proactively fill our heart up with Him today BEFORE we need it.

Luke 6:45

A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart brings forth evil. For out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.

October 27

It is PRETTY important for a gaming controller to obey the input that it is receiving... unless, you know, it wants to get chunked across the room. As the player, I expect my controller to process my button presses without delay, as even the most minor lag in response time generates a dramatically different and much less pleasant outcome than I had planned. Controllers that aren't aligned with the directions of the one holding them only results in disappointment, confusion, and frustration... and a controller that continues to behave in an unreliable manner will soon find itself being recalibrated.

If we call ourselves “followers of Christ”, that implies that we are placing control of our lives into His hands and actively following His input, commands, and directions. When we delay, drift, or actively disobey His will we disconnect ourselves from our purpose as well as His protection from the consequences of our poor choices. He knows what storms lie ahead of us, and His directions are designed to prepare us so we can safely pass through them... and those who fully submit to His will can be found resting safely in His hands after each of them.

Luke 6:46-48

“But why do you call Me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and not do the things which I say? Whoever comes to Me, and hears My sayings and does them, I will show you whom he is like: He is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid the foundation on the rock. And when the flood arose, the stream beat vehemently against that house, and could not shake it, for it was founded on the rock.”

October 28

There are few gaming moments worse than this one... the moment I realize that after many hours of grinding through challenges to level up my character, I have been doing it all WRONG. I have invested valuable skill points into pointless attributes that I have no intention of using, and areas of critical need have not been developed as a result. The challenges and valuable “EXP” I earned that could have been used to permanently increase my speed, strength, and endurance were wasted on short-term boosts that don’t fit with the way I am playing my character now... why did I even think the bartering skill would be so important?

Every day we choose to invest our time and resources into developing our “character” ... and in order to grow in our faith we must make active choices to spend our time engaged in spiritual pursuits. Understanding the words of Christ, getting to know Him, and building our spiritual strength requires an intentional investment of our time... and the “experience points” we place in non-essential areas will not benefit us in the battles that lie ahead. Let’s invest time into our spiritual growth today.

John 6:63

It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life.

October 29

It's hard for me to walk away from a game that isn't good once I have invested a significant amount of time into it... I almost feel obligated to continue playing it through to the ending, even if I am no longer enjoying it. Since my leisure time to play games is already extremely limited, it doesn't make much sense to spend it playing a game that isn't fun... but I often keep plugging away at it so I don't feel like I wasted my money, fooling myself into thinking it might get better. But I don't have to keep throwing myself and my valuable time at a bad game... there are many others far more worthy.

Each of us are a valuable and important child of God... but there will be many people who will not see that. Wasting our time seeking the approval of those who do not appreciate us or our God-given gifts is a fruitless endeavor that only ends in frustration, resentment, and pain. Let's recognize our worth in His eyes and avoid throwing our energy or our time at anyone who attempts to diminish that. Our value is not in what we are worth, but what the Lord was willing to pay for us... and to Him we are worth every drop of blood that we cost.

1 John 3:1

Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him.

Matthew 7:6

Do not give what is holy to the dogs; nor cast your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you in pieces.

October 30

I will never forget the first time I experienced the fear of heights while playing a VR game... while I was actually safely and securely seated in a chair, the expert design of the developers made the virtual environment within my VR headset FEEL like I was unstable and at risk of plummeting to the ground. What I could see and hear was so convincing that my body responded to those images in fear as if they were more “real” than my actual environment. If I had realized that what I was seeing was merely a cleverly designed construct, I wouldn’t have reacted in fear. What was truly real was simply invisible to me at the time.

Fear has no place in the heart or mind of a follower of Christ... and any area in which we are feeling fear is an indication that we are not 100% convinced of the Lord’s provision and love in that part of our lives. His arms are securely wrapped around us at all times, regardless of what we see and feel around us.

Let’s close our ears and eyes today to all the noise around us and center ourselves on the hands that are holding us... His love is more powerful and real than any fear that we feel.

1 John 4:18-19

There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love. We love Him because He first loved us.

October 31

“Creating” a character by customizing and personalizing them is one of my favorite parts of starting a new game... if I’m being honest, sometimes I have spent more time crafting my character than I end up spending playing the game itself. The funny thing is that all the time spent making my character “look” a certain way doesn’t have any impact on how well they perform in the game... it’s only cosmetic. Time invested into character creation can be fun and enhance my gaming experience, but ACTUAL character growth only comes from performing actions that add to my character’s experience and improve my skills.

There is certainly nothing wrong with taking some time for physical exercise and personal improvements, but we must balance these “cosmetic” pursuits with our spiritual growth. The most critical and eternal part of our selves isn’t the part we see in the mirror... it is the amount of Christ that we mirror in the deepest parts of our hearts and the inner beauty we reveal through our words and actions. When this mortal shell is cast away, only the time we invested into being more like Christ will last.

1 Timothy 4:8

For bodily exercise profits a little, but godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come.

November 1

Even in my favorite video games, the different types of missions I am given can be a mixed bag... while many involve fun exploration into exciting new areas that advance critical plot points, others are simply routine fetch quests that feel like pointless busy work designed to extend the game's length. The challenge is in trying to find a proper balance... it's frustrating spending my limited leisure time completing boring "maintenance" quests and having time run out before I get to the "good parts" of the game. I must make time to pursue the most important things, because my quest log fills up with required but less enjoyable gravel quickly.

Today will be full of challenges, to-do lists, and conflicting priorities... and most of these activities have value as they keep our lives productive, our homes livable, and society moving forward. But these all exist to support the most important part of our lives... spending time with the Lord and gaining His wisdom and insight so even these basic missions are given context and meaning. Let's make some time today to stop and enjoy "that good part" with Him and linger there for as long as we can.

Luke 10:41-42

Jesus answered and said to her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things. But one thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her."

November 2

One of my favorite time-savers in games is the ability to look through my mission log, select my priority, and then set a waypoint to mark that spot... a visible indication on my in-game map that tells me what direction I should be headed in to pursue that objective. Moving towards that beacon and following the corresponding arrow ensures that I don't get pulled off my path and into a wild-goose chase that leads me in the opposite direction. While that side-mission journey may involve some sweet loot and fun challenges, it does not contribute towards the primary mission that I had chosen to prioritize above all else.

The direction we are investing our time, energy, talents, and resources into not only indicates what direction our heart's deepest desire is... it dictates it. Following the Lord often comes at the exclusion of other pursuits... not because they are bad, but because the treasure they offer is only temporary. Let's set a waypoint in our hearts and minds today to intentionally invest in our primary mission... to grow in our relationship with Him, build His Kingdom in all we do, and store up treasures that will last.

Matthew 6:19-21

Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

November 3

I'm not a very patient gamer... my time to play is limited, so when I start a new game, I want to dive right in. Tutorials? Skip... this isn't my first rodeo. Cutscenes explaining the story and providing valuable context? No thanks, I have stuff to do. But in my pursuit of rapid progress, I often get lost in the middle of a quest with no idea of what I am doing or why I'm doing it... I should have simply waited for the answers to come through the mechanics the game had created. The "waiting" I skipped was designed to prepare me for what is coming next.

Waiting for the Lord to answer an urgent prayer request is never easy, and if we aren't careful, we can become guilty of trying to force the answer we would prefer or accepting a counterfeit solution because it arrived faster. Our goal in prayer is not simply to get the answers we seek, but to allow Him to prepare us for His answer. When Jesus prayed in Gethsemane, He didn't get the answer He asked for... He received the strength to walk in the answer He was given. Waiting on the Lord isn't just about getting an answer; it's allowing Him the time to develop our ability to receive it.

Psalm 62:5-6

My soul, wait silently for God alone, for my expectation is from Him. He only is my rock and my salvation; He is my defense; I shall not be moved.

November 4

Every game we play is built on the foundation of a “game engine” such as Unreal, Frostbite or Unity... a suite of tools for a developer to create the world’s we play in. For the game to play cohesively throughout each level, every component must be designed and anchored within the specific engine the game developer chose... and any elements designed separately on a competing engine will struggle to interact correctly with the rest of the game. The only way to avoid a “system crash” is for all the components to share one common foundation.

Gaining the Lord’s blessing on our efforts in life is only possible when we are actively following His will and building on HIS foundation... and the only areas of our lives that will survive the storms that lie ahead for each of us are the ones rooted and grounded in Him. Every activity, relationship, and pursuit that is being built on a foundation other than Christ and His stated will within His Word will collapse when pressure is applied to them. Storms are inevitable for all of us regardless of how we choose to build... let’s invest our time and efforts in building on a foundation that will last.

Matthew 7:24-25

Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock.

November 5

When your spouse calls out, “I’m stuck and need your help”, you probably come running into the room. When they follow with, “I’m trying to jump across this space but it’s too far to double-jump, and the dragon keeps blowing fire and pushes me off the edge, and I can only touch the water once” ... well, you might be a gamer. In the real world that sentence would be absurd, but as a fellow gamer I completely understood it. Video games have their own unique language, mixing abstract concepts with real world references in a way that only those actively playing them would perceive.

While the Scriptures certainly contain practical wisdom and knowledge, the full spiritual truth contained in the Word is impossible for our limited carnal mind to fully understand. Only the Spirit of God can open our minds to fully comprehend and apply His words correctly, so we shouldn’t be surprised when these spiritual things make very little sense to ourselves or others when viewed outside of His perspective. If we have found a passage that is difficult to understand, let’s avoid personal interpretation and take time to pray so He can reveal it to us.

1 Corinthians 2:14

But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.

2 Peter 1:20-21

Knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.

November 6

A “hero” or “paragon” play through of a game often requires a lot more patience and effort than a “renegade” play through... and many times even the “good” choices I make come back to smack me in the face as I am betrayed by characters that I had previously shown trust and mercy to. My kindness to others may not always be immediately rewarded with a more pleasant path, but taking the unappreciated high road in my sessions often pays off much later in the game in ways I never would have anticipated... determining not only how my story concludes, but also the ending of others who I didn’t even realize would be impacted.

It’s easy to get frustrated when we show mercy and kindness to others only to have our efforts rejected and thrown back in our face... but just as Christ endured the insults and mockery of those He came to save, as His followers we cannot become weary of doing His work. We may never get to see the full impact of our “paragon play-through” on this side of life’s endgame, but I can guarantee we will never regret a kindness we have shown anyone on His behalf. So, let’s be kind to all... always.

2 Thessalonians 3:13

But as for you, brethren, do not grow weary in doing good.

November 7

It's' been a long time since I have hidden in this particular cave... normally, I am out on the frontlines of the battle protecting my friends. Today, I'm the one receiving cover fire from my allies as I drag myself off the battlefield for some critical recovery. But this place of refuge is only a temporary place to dwell... my team still needs me to take my place at their side once my healing is complete and my strength has been restored. I may have been damaged in battle, but I survived to fight another day because I still have a critical purpose to fulfill.

There are always going to be seasons of mourning in life as we process disappointment and loss, but these places of pain are not meant to become our permanent residence. Christ's arms are open to provide refuge from the storms we endure, but in His infinite love for us He will also nudge us back out onto the battlefield in the proper time. If we are still down here, it's because we still have a calling to fulfill... and others are depending on us to complete missions that only we can achieve. Our scars are proof that we survived, and we are still present on this planet for a purpose.

1 Samuel 16:1

Now the Lord said to Samuel, "How long will you mourn for Saul, seeing I have rejected him from reigning over Israel? Fill your horn with oil and go; I am sending you to Jesse the Bethlehemite. For I have provided Myself a king among his sons."

November 8

Thanks to the incredible advancements in gaming design over the last few years, the visual shift between a “cutscene” that I am merely watching and the actual gameplay I am responsible for can be almost imperceptible. Many times I have found myself still staring at the screen when I realize that the game is waiting on ME to do something... and because I wasn’t holding my controller in a state of constant readiness, I missed the timing on a critical dialogue cue or gave my opponent an advantage. Setting my controller down during a cutscene simply isn’t a good idea anymore.

As followers of Christ, we must remain in a state of constant readiness to share the messages that Christ places on our hearts... whether we are in line at the grocery store or flipping through screens on our phone, we never know when a perishable opportunity for acting as His ambassador may be present. The only way to be ready “in season and out of season” for every situation is to prepare our hearts and minds daily to always remain intentionally sensitive to the leading of His Spirit, everywhere we go. Let’s stay frosty...

1 Peter 3:15

But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear.

2 Timothy 4:2

Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching.

November 9

While it can be hard to believe during those tough, controller-tossing battles, video games were designed for the player to WIN. There is a solution to every puzzle and a weakness to exploit in every boss fight... but finding them often involves enduring the difficult process of figuring out that strategy and trusting that a path to victory is present, even if we can't see it yet. The game creator has set the "rules" for the battle, and while the boss fight may involve cheap tactics and an oversized health bar, we can trust that this mission was crafted with boundaries and rules for our opponents, our environment, other players, and ourselves.

Feeling the peace of God in our hearts can be challenging during the times of chaos and distress we all experience... but He promised us peace IN the storm, not FROM the storm. Peace isn't the ABSENCE of problems, but the PRESENCE of the Lord within our struggle. Letting His peace "rule" our hearts means trusting that He has set up the "rules" of this encounter and remains in control of the outcome. He is with us in every round of this fight and has set the boundaries for this battle.

Colossians 3:15

Let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful.

1 Peter 5:10

But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you.

November 10

Most video game “heroes” are simply normal citizens like Mario, Chell, or Link... people who were just trying to live their best life when the antagonist of the game disrupted their entire world and violently shoved them onto a new path. The resulting journey changed the protagonist’s life, the lives of everyone they interacted with, and many more characters who they will never even meet... all because a nefarious villain set a course of events in motion that pressed our hero into action.

It can be hard to “bless our enemies” when we view their actions through the lens of the pain and hardship they are currently causing us... but despite their ill intentions, it is often their actions that push us to places we would have never gone on our own. And it is from THAT position that we can do the greatest good for those we have been sent to help... because our antagonists forced us to embrace a destiny we wouldn’t have pursued on our own. Christ’s saving work was only achieved because His enemies placed Him on that cross... and those who mean us the most harm may be putting us in position for our greatest victory as well.

Genesis 50:20

But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive.

November 11

Multiple times I have been in the middle of playing a game that I was really enjoying when the game randomly spikes the difficulty level so suddenly and dramatically that I'm not even sure I can move forward. I don't mind a bit of a challenge, but c'mon... REALLY? A boss fight with indefensible attacks that take away half of my health with ONE hit? That hardly seems fair. While there are times the developer will fix a broken part of a game through an update, often that is simply the way the game was designed. If only I had a shoulder to cry on...

The difficulties we endure in life can make us wonder if the Lord is truly paying attention to what we are going through and sees our pain. When we are hurting, we simply want the Lord to intervene... but even when He doesn't, we can rest assured that our loving Father is not unaware of our struggle. He hears our cries, and He keeps each and every tear that runs down our cheek. If your heart is broken today, know that He hears, He cares, and He draws near to every broken heart that calls out to Him. He may not give us what we ask, but He is always with us and will deliver us through it.

Psalm 56:8

You number my wanderings; put my tears into Your bottle; are they not in Your book?

Psalm 34:18-19

The Lord is near to those who have a broken heart and saves such as have a contrite spirit. Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivers him out of them all.

November 12

The amount of work that goes into each detail of my favorite video games is staggering, a careful blending of art and skill to tell a story and make it playable. Each object in the game must be painstakingly designed with authentic size and weight, dynamic lighting scripts must account for the unique shape of each item to generate accurate shadows, the purpose of each item must be pre-determined, and it must pop up in the right time and place... all to serve its proper role within the story being told. The scope of everything that must line up so I can pick up the right key in the right dungeon right when I need it never ceases to amaze me.

The complexity of the universe we live in is beyond our ability to comprehend, and the level of craftsmanship our Creator put into the smallest of details is not only proof of His incredible power, but of how much care He has put into the story of every one of our lives. From the awe-inspiring design of Saturn to the intricate details within the iris of each of our eyes, the omnipotent Lord who designed our galaxy has crafted us and our story as well... and all will reveal its purpose in His time.

Psalm 19:1

The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows His handiwork.

Psalm 139:16

Your eyes saw my substance, being yet unformed. And in Your book they all were written, the days fashioned for me, when as yet there were none of them.

November 13

Most video games have a simple process for healing all the damage our character has absorbed... taking a break from the battle and running to a place of safety, giving our health and our shields a chance to recharge. When our screen is flashing red and we have been pummeled by rockets, bullets, and shrapnel, there is an easy solution... stop what we are doing and make a mad dash to a quiet place so we can regroup, reload, and get reoriented. And because an oasis of healing can be found in multiple spots on the battlefield, we can have peace in the middle of any war zone.

Our lives are full of challenges and battles, and in the heat of the conflict we can often feel out of control, overwhelmed, and outnumbered. When we feel like our screen is flashing red, we must run to the only safe refuge in this storm... the loving arms of our Father. Sure, the battle is still raging out there, and we will still have to head back into it to fulfill our mission. But anytime we need to escape and find shelter the Lord is there, ready and willing to restore us. He doesn't always calm our storm, but He will always calm the hearts of His children.

Psalm 46:1-3

God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, even though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; though its waters roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with its swelling.

November 14

The ability to “save” our game is a luxury that didn’t always exist in video games.

There was a time that suffering defeat at the hands of an enemy didn’t merely stop our progress... it ended the entire game, wiping out everything we had accomplished. Now to be fair, “saving” our game doesn’t mean we are invincible or impervious to damage... we still face setbacks and endure painful losses. We may fight the same battles multiple times before we are able to move forward... but we can play with the confidence of a gamer who can bounce back after the situation says that our game is over.

The act of being “saved” by the Lord does not grant us complete immunity from damage in the battles we face... we still get knocked down on occasion. But we CAN go into battle with the confidence that no matter how much our enemy throws at us, our relationship with the Lord and His plan for our life is safely stored beyond our adversary’s reach. The screen may say the game is over, but if you’re reading these words, I can assure you that it isn’t. He is faithful even when we aren’t, and He saved us knowing exactly how many times we would fall.

2 Timothy 1:12

For this reason I also suffer these things; nevertheless I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that Day.

November 15

I have noticed a strange and persistent issue with many of my favorite gaming characters... even the most minimal contact they have with water can be fatal.

This same character can get hit by vehicles, scorched by fire, absorb missile strikes, survive huge falls... but if their little toe touches even the smallest drop of water it is GAME OVER. Maybe they have just been too busy saving the world to stop and take swimming lessons, or perhaps it's the weight of all the inventory items they have crammed into their pockets... either way, high quality H2O tends to be their kryptonite.

Whether we feel like we are overwhelmed by the raging flood waters around us, or perhaps we simply lost our footing in the shallows and can't pull ourselves out, there is always a way out of our current predicament and back onto solid ground...the Lord can hear our prayer from wherever we are, and no matter how we managed to get there. The quantity of water in which we are "in over our head" doesn't matter to Him... He WALKS on this stuff, and His loving arms reach as deep as they need to in order to reach down and save His children.

Jonah 2:5-7

The waters surrounded me, even to my soul; the deep closed around me; weeds were wrapped around my head. I went down to the moorings of the mountains; the earth with its bars closed behind me forever; yet You have brought up my life from the pit, O Lord, my God. When my soul fainted within me, I remembered the Lord; and my prayer went up to You, into Your holy temple.

November 16

Thoughtfully choosing which items my game character procures, carries, and uses tends to be critical to my success... there are dozens of different armor sets, swords, shields, boots and other items, each of which offers unique strengths and enhancements. Some are more beneficial than others, a few are perfectly suited to my play style, and many are purely cosmetic. But only the items that have been both acquired and actively equipped can be used to protect and support me in the battles I am about to face... if I fail to “equip” them they don’t serve any useful purpose to me at all.

Believing in Christ is central to our faith but possessing that belief without choosing to actively abide in Him and act on His words limits the benefits of that relationship in the daily challenges we each face in life. It is only through the conscious act of “putting on our spiritual armor” in prayer and Bible study that we truly become “equipped” ... a proactive decision we make BEFORE we head into battle. We must know the truth before that truth can actually set us free... let’s take time today to carefully choose what we equip ourselves with.

John 8:31-32

Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, “If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.”

Ephesians 6:11

Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.

November 17

Starting a new video game is EXCITING... we are dropped into a brand-new world, meet fascinating characters, and see our quest log fill up with interesting missions to take on. But over time, the newness wears off. Traveling from place to place becomes a chore, party members bore us with repetitive dialogue, and all these side quests start feeling suspiciously identical. The path to the endgame seems to be getting longer and longer, and as a result many of us own games that we never end up completing... games we once loved and looked forward to are now simply gathering dust.

Many times in life we may feel like we are stuck in a rut, and the lack of visible progress in our situations can make us wonder if the Lord pressed pause on the game, walked away, and forgot all about us. But our story is one that will take the rest of our days to complete, and the Lord will be using every one of those days to develop us and prepare us for the next chapter. He has a plan and a purpose for every seemingly redundant side quest on this journey, and He will be faithful to complete it with us, hand in hand, until our final breath.

Philippians 1:6

Being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ.

November 18

Many of my favorite protagonists, such as Samus from the Metroid series, are forced to face their challenges alone... no helpful teammates to support them in combat, no squad to belong to, and nobody to lean on when the game is on the line. And while that makes for a uniquely challenging gameplay experience, it is also a very lonely one... and it leaves very little margin for error. While Samus seems to do most of her best work alone, one can only imagine how much more effective she might be with a formidable ally by her side.

Christ Himself walked our entire path and battled every boss fight we face... He endured a lifetime's supply of loneliness, sadness, heartbreak, disappointment, and frustration that we all feel. And He didn't just do that for our salvation... He did that so we would never have to handle ANY part of our battle alone, without someone who truly understands what we are going through. Whatever challenges we are up against, He is with us... not as some invincible Being who is unable to relate to our problems, but as the ONLY One who truly can. And He will never let us face our fight alone.

Hebrews 2:17-18

Therefore, in all things He had to be made like His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted.

November 19

Playing a game cooperatively with friends or family changes EVERYTHING... while many parts of the game become significantly easier by sharing the burden across other gamers, there are also challenges that aren't present when adventuring solo. Taking everyone's health, ammo, and position on the screen into account takes effort, and many times in the frenzy of all that is happening I may make some mistakes... like an errant grenade toss that unintentionally catches a teammate in the blast radius. "Friendly fire" may be accidental, but it still inflicts real damage and pain.

We all make mistakes... even as followers of Christ we can still be guilty of intentional or accidental thoughts, words, and actions that hurt our fellow co-op players. And when that happens, we must confess these failings to each other... not just to heal that relationship, but to heal them of the hurt we caused and ourselves of the guilt we carry. Let's not allow another day to go by without reaching out and praying for those we have hurt, and humbly ask them to pray for us as well. Healing takes time... so let's start the healing process today.

James 5:16

Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.

November 20

Approaching the end of a video game is a bittersweet feeling... partially because we realize the game we have been enjoying is about to reach its' conclusion with an unavoidable finality, but also because we may not actually be happy with HOW the game ends. Many of my favorite games have ended with a whimper instead of a bang, tarnishing an otherwise wonderful experience. And when a game that we have invested our time, money, and emotions into fails to stick the landing, that disappointment often ends up defining our entire experience with that title.

Christ's story looked like it ended painfully on a horrific wooden cross... but that wasn't the actual ending of His journey. He endured that shame because He knew the Father had written His story, and it didn't end there. Jesus is the author and finisher of OUR faith, and wherever we are right now, our story doesn't end here either. The part we are currently in may be painful and hard to understand, but it is not the end. There is more beyond this grief. He has a perfect conclusion for our story... trust Him with every part of it.

Hebrews 12:2

Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

November 21

My character's progression in a video game takes many forms... it may be experience that is earned through battle or by intentionally developing specific skills. But there are parts of my journey that cannot be unlocked until I have found and acquired specific pieces of equipment like a boomerang or a unique pair of boots... items that provide access to new areas and add skills that cannot be learned any other way. No matter how advanced my combat skills become or how many skill points I invest in other areas, if I want to walk the ocean floor, I'm going to need some iron boots.

Spending time in God's Word is not simply an act of spiritual discipline or something we do out of a sense of obligation... it is a place of growth where we gain the critical equipment we need to advance our "story". If we find ourselves stuck behind an unbreakable wall or reach an impasse in our progression, let's look to His Word for guidance. Just as an ancient song played on Link's ocarina opens sealed doors that can't be opened any other way, these words are still very much alive with the power to speak directly to our present needs.

2 Timothy 3:16-17

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.

November 22

As gamers, we know that there is a massive difference between “restarting” a game and “respawning” in a game. While many of us may like the idea of pushing “restart” when things get out of control and the difficulty level ramps up, this would also erase ALL our progress... all the skills our character has learned, all the experience they have gained, and all the relationships they have built. While “respawning” doesn’t change everything that is going on around us, it does change US... replenishing our health, refilling our ammo, and resetting all the damage done to our armor.

Many times in my life I have wished to “start over” without understanding all I would lose if that prayer was answered... but in His infinite grace, the Lord granted me a restored heart instead. The Lord is faithful to “respawn” our repentant heart after each failure and mistake, and while it may not change the repercussions of the choices we previously made, He does renew us so we can try again. Let’s allow the Lord to renew our hearts and cleanse any pain or shame we are carrying. He will respawn us as a brand-new creation from the inside out.

Psalm 51:10

Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.

November 23

Somewhere near the beginning of a video game the main villain is typically revealed in a grandiose display of overwhelming power, and in that moment my inexperienced protagonist is no match for them. As the game continues, the villain's capabilities only grow in strength, making them seem even MORE unstoppable... but thanks to the obstacles they keep throwing at me, so are mine.

What once seemed to be impossible becomes the inevitable conclusion to the story, with my character finally defeating this formerly invincible foe... all because I took this journey one step at a time, slowly growing stronger through each battle, just as the developer of the story had planned all along.

Today's battles may seem like too much to handle, and tomorrows may look impossible... but these are the very challenges that the Lord uses to prepare us for those boss fights that lie ahead. If we were responsible for doing this all on our own, we SHOULD be worried... we can't do this in our own strength or power. But when we walk with Christ, we know He will equip us with exactly what we need, right when we need it. He's got today AND tomorrow in His hands.

Matthew 6:34

Therefore, do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.

Zechariah 4:6b

'Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,' says the Lord of hosts.

November 24

From the hidden warp pipes and whistles in the original Super Mario titles to the secret caches of loot in Destiny, developers have been hiding the most powerful items, weapons, and armor in their games for years... and only committed explorers will find them all. Sometimes a specific sequence of buttons must be learned to unlock these hidden items, and other times they are contained within an invisible block, hidden in plain sight. But if we want to find the best gear and some of the coolest secrets in the game, we must look beyond the surface and explore every inch of the game for them.

Many times, I have wished that the Lord would make Himself and His plans straightforward and obvious to me, but He has chosen to be exclusively found by those who are actively searching for Him. The deepest wisdom in His Word and the most powerful “unlocks” are waiting to be discovered by those who explore beyond the surface. He wants us to truly SEEK Him, even through the most difficult parts of our lives... it is through these challenges that we are led down new paths to explore and into a deeper knowledge of who our Father truly is.

Acts 17:27-28

So that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; for in Him we live and move and have our being, as also some of your own poets have said, 'For we are also His offspring.'

Jeremiah 29:13

And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart.

November 25

Even when doing something fun like playing a game, we can still get frustrated for a variety of reasons. Maybe the save points are placed too far apart, the cutscenes aren't skippable, the difficulty level randomly spikes, the health or ammo is too sparse to explore comfortably, or the glitches and bugs in the game mar the overall experience. But in those moments, I can forget something incredibly important... I am still just playing a GAME. I am beyond blessed to own a console, a game to play, a working controller, and to have any leisure time at all. The worst hour of my life spent playing a game is still better than an hour of NOT playing one.

Life is full of tough times, difficult challenges, and losses that are hard to understand. But as hard as it can get down here, each breath we take is a gift that we have been given by our Father... a gift that doesn't last forever. Let's take a moment today to celebrate His love and provision, even if it is not received in the exact manner or amount we would have preferred. The worst day of life on earth is still a day of LIFE, and not everyone received that gift today. Let's give thanks for this gift today!

Philippians 4:11-13

I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things, I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

November 26

Games are so immersive that we can easily forget that the concept of “light” in a video game is just a visual construct by the designer... the light doesn’t “technically” exist. Lines of code determine what appears to be brightly rendered versus what is shadowed or hidden, and additional lines of code create the illusion of dynamic lighting based on our current point of view. Items such as flashlights and torches don’t actually illuminate the game environment... it is the code of the developer that transforms those items into reflectors of light to guide us through the dark places.

Sometimes it may feel like we are responsible for generating a light that we don’t always feel inside... but we must remember that we are not the source of the light. We are not expected to CREATE it, only to SHINE it. We are merely the conduit, reflecting the light we receive and absorb from the Lord and freely sharing it with others. If our light feels dim, it doesn’t mean we need to try harder or “fake it” ... it means we need to spend time with Christ to reconnect with our Source, download some updates, realign with our purpose, and get recharged.

Matthew 5:16

Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.

November 27

Have you ever fallen down the “team-killing” vortex before? To my shame, I certainly have... a member of my team INTENTIONALLY pushes me off a ledge or throws a grenade at me, so when I respawn, I return the favor. Of course, they do it back... then I chase them down and eliminate them, then one of us boots the other from the game. Next thing you know our team is down by twenty points and has no hope of victory... just because of this idiotic crusade of vengeance between me and another member of our squad. All we achieved was hurting our own teammates who had absolutely nothing to do with our pointless, prideful, private war.

It is challenging to avoid retaliating when we have been hurt, but fighting fire with fire will always create collateral damage that impacts innocent people, not just our intended target. Let’s be patient and show kindness, even when others are not kind... the Lord is our avenger, and in His infinite wisdom He will fight those battles at the right time and in a better way. Our opposition would love to see us destroy each other and ourselves... let’s resist the urge to seek our own justice and trust in Christ.

1 Thessalonians 5:14-15

Now we exhort you, brethren, warn those who are unruly, comfort the fainthearted, uphold the weak, be patient with all. See that no one renders evil for evil to anyone, but always pursue what is good both for yourselves and for all.

November 28

Many of my favorite gaming experiences were released on the same console responsible for delivering some of my least favorite titles. But if I had thrown my console away the moment I played something on it that disappointed me, I would have missed out on a simple truth... it still possessed the ability to play some of the greatest games of all time, once it was given an opportunity to redeem itself. Sure, my memories of the last game were still there, but the moment I deleted those terrible games off my hard drive and replaced them, the old game was completely GONE, never to return.

Despite Christ's redemptive work on the cross, we may still struggle with seeing the version of ourselves that disappointed others in the mirror... making us feel too broken, damaged, or flawed to have any remaining value. But the Lord didn't give His life so we could live ours as second-class children... our best moments are still ahead of us with brand new masterpieces waiting to be released. When Christ cleanses us, we are fully restored to "factory default" settings and ready to start fresh... and nothing can ever diminish who we are in His eyes.

Acts 10:15 (NIV)

The voice spoke to him a second time, "Do not call anything impure that God has made clean."

Romans 8:1

There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.

November 29

I have a confession to make... I'm not a big fan of these "create your own level" games like Super Mario Maker or even modes like Halo's Forge. I'm not very good at them, and I really don't enjoy the process. I'm a fan of games because I enjoy PLAYING them, reaping the benefits of a more talented individual's hard work, creativity, and dedication. If I was responsible for building every game I planned on playing, gaming wouldn't even be a hobby of mine. It's not that I haven't tried... it's just not my gift. My very best effort always turns out to be embarrassingly unplayable garbage.

We don't have to make our own way into the Lord's favor or build our own access to Christ... which is fortunate, because we could never accomplish either one of those things through our own abilities or efforts. He has given us unearned grace that we must simply choose to embrace... and in the act of reaching out to Him in faith, we perform the only part of this that we were ever qualified to do. Let's remind ourselves of this truth as often as we need to... Jesus is the Master Builder, and He is the Way to the Father. Our role is to trust and follow.

Ephesians 2:8-9

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.

John 14:6

Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me."

November 30

Perpetually stoic and silent protagonists are pretty common in our video games, and many of our most beloved characters like John-117 are known more for their heroic actions than their stirring speeches. While I enjoy hearing what my character has to say, sometimes less is more... I don't think Halo would be quite as iconic if the Chief expressed himself as loudly, annoyingly, and immaturely as a character like Tidus from FFX. As much as I want my gaming characters to be relatable, I also count on their spoken dialogue to maintain my immersion in the game, even in the midst of their conflicts.

Our voices and words are powerful... they can be used to build up and inspire others, or they can become an inadvertent distraction from our intended purpose. Just as the primary character on the game cover represents the game we are about to play, each of us are ambassadors of Christ, representing Him in all we do. We are responsible for using our words to help and to heal, never to hurt. Let's use whatever platforms we possess to intentionally share words of encouragement, love, hope and grace... even in the middle of our own storms.

Proverbs 17:27-28

He who has knowledge spares his words, and a man of understanding is of a calm spirit. Even a fool is counted wise when he holds his peace; when he shuts his lips, he is considered perceptive.

Colossians 4:6

Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one.

December 1

When we start a new game, we are choosing more than just the world we are about to inhabit... we are also selecting the character we will be experiencing this story with. We know going into it that we are going to take them on a challenging road that they may not have preferred to take... one that is full of battles that will push them to their limits and force them to grow. But we are not sending them on this adventure as some form of punishment... we are choosing to take this voyage alongside them, hand in hand, and are committed to getting them to the finish line.

The Lord has chosen each of us for the specific adventure we are on, with full knowledge of all the challenges we will face. But He doesn't send us into these battles alone... He actively works in us and through us to accomplish the victories we could never achieve on our own, using our unique position to help save others along the way. Christ is with us through this entire journey... He also held this controller in His nail-scarred hands and endured the same pain and sorrow we feel. And He will not let go of our hands until we reach the other side.

Isaiah 41:9b-10

You are My servant, I have chosen you and have not cast you away: fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, yes, I will help you, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand.

December 2

As much as I enjoy video games that introduce me to powerful new friends and allies, I find that they tend to disappear from the game RIGHT when I feel like I need them most. They helped me through a few tough battles, and then they took off to go complete some random quest when I was just starting to get used to having them around. I feel like the game would have been a lot easier if we had stuck together. But as suddenly as they left, they tend to show back up just in time to save the day... and that previous side-mission turned out to be critical to ensuring my survival.

Many times, we may feel that the Lord seems distant from our problems, but that is not due to His ABSENCE from our battles, but His active PRESENCE in building our solutions. His answers to our prayers have a perfect timing that cannot be rushed... not just regarding our own lives, but for the benefit of everyone else who will be impacted as well. Let's trust in Christ and His promise that He hears all our prayers and is already crafting a path through our struggles ... a path that will bring each of us to the place He has been preparing for us.

John 14:2-3

In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.

December 3

Success in a video game is rarely achieved by accident... there are many components that must work together in unison for me to finally reach the “Mission Complete” screen. I must take the time to intentionally level up my character, learn new techniques, develop specific skills, and find the right combination of equipment and armor for the battles I’m going to face. And once all those preparations are complete, I still have to go fight those battles... the creator of the game gave me the power to stand victorious, but I still have to do my part.

As nice as it would be to say, “Jesus, take the wheel” when it comes to facing our battles, it is actually a combination of the Lord’s power and our preparation that leads to victory in our lives. David had to supply his own slingshot and stones to defeat Goliath, and even Christ had to prepare His heart through prayer before He faced His cross. The Lord is present in our struggles, and it is through Him that we have the strength to carry these crosses and slay these giants... but we have a part to play as well. Let’s intentionally prepare our hearts and minds to serve Him... today’s battles await!

Proverbs 16:1

The preparations of the heart belong to man, but the answer of the tongue is from the Lord.

December 4

If you play a video game with someone long enough, they are inevitably going to make some mistakes... some that are amusing, and others that may cause actual irritation. Once a mistake occurs, we have a choice to make... do we drop it and move on? Or do we continue to remind them over and over again that we would've already WON if they hadn't been so careless? While it can be frustrating at the moment, our gaming partnerships are going to involve some speed bumps... and we must move past them if we want to move forward.

One of the greatest gifts we can give someone is freeing them from the burdens of guilt and shame they are carrying for mistakes they have made. Christ entrusted us with the ministry of reconciliation... not just to reconcile people with the Father, but also with each other. Let's use the power of forgiveness today with those who have wronged us, firmly placing their mistakes in the forgotten past and fully restoring them, just as the Lord has faithfully restored every one of us. It's time to press "Continue" and move forward on that game we left paused... together.

Proverbs 17:9

He who covers a transgression seeks love, but he who repeats a matter separates friends.

December 5

Most games provide us with “difficulty setting” options during the initial game setup, allowing us to determine the level of challenge we want to face during our play through. Whether we prefer a casual experience or a heightened degree of difficulty to truly put our gaming skills to the test, we can choose to turn that dial as high or low as we feel comfortable with. But having this degree of control can also be problematic... the reason beating a game feels so exhilarating is because a great game deftly threads the needle between a healthy level of challenge and providing a path to victory.

If I was given the ability to choose my difficulty setting in life, I would probably drop that dial down to zero on a regular basis, building a comfortable path to the finish that allows me to lean on my own strength instead of the Lord's. While that sounds great, it doesn't help me grow or do anyone else any good. It is only through the difficult and draining daily battles that we each face that His power to save is revealed, perfectly balancing our brokenness with Christ's strength... and shining His light to guide others to Him in their moments of need.

2 Corinthians 4:8-10

We are hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed — always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body.

December 6

Gaming adversaries typically have very unique “weak points” ... some are stopped in their tracks by simply jumping on their head, while others are immune to these tactics and must be defeated with fireballs or the use of specific environmental solutions. Running around bopping the opposition on the head may work just fine for lower-level challenges, but the “Bowzers” we face are rarely defeated by brute strength... they require us to patiently learn and submit to the specific method the developer designed to defeat these foes.

We may be able to push through some of the challenges in our lives through a combination of our own personal strength, effort, and skills, but the larger strongholds that we face cannot be defeated through sheer grit and willpower alone. Trying to solve spiritual problems solely through our mental and physical capabilities only leads to feelings of hopelessness and frustration. These boss battles were designed with only one possible solution... a child of God patiently submitting to the Lord’s will and allowing His strength and wisdom to achieve victory through us, not the other way around.

2 Corinthians 10:3-4

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds.

December 7

Video game villains have evolved a LOT over the years... gone are the days where these antagonists would wreak havoc on the planet simply because they COULD. In our modern games, these characters have incredibly complex backstories that almost makes us feel sorry for them... ALMOST. Even if we relate to parts of their suffering and pain, we still head into battle with an arsenal of weapons and a strategy to take them down... and the more challenging that fight is, the less sympathetic we become. By the time they have unveiled their THIRD full health bar, we are pretty much over their story and ready to advance our own.

The antagonists in our lives don't make it easy on us, but Christ didn't ask us to "tolerate" our enemies or simply coexist with them... we are commanded to LOVE them and PRAY for them. Sure, they may behave like irredeemable scoundrels... but so did WE. We advance His mission by demonstrating love and praying for Christ to break their chains just as He once broke ours. Let's pray for our enemies today... the same way that somebody, somewhere prayed for us when we were just as unlovable.

Luke 6:27-28

But I say to you who hear: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, and pray for those who spitefully use you.

December 8

Open world adventure games often overwhelm me with options... different classes to choose from, multiple branching pathways to explore, and SO many equipment choices. Determining what is best for my specific character and play style is part of the fun... but this freedom also allows me to create my own problems. I can travel to places that are far above my current skill level, or waste time acquiring items and skills that were designed for a different class. The developer crafted the game to support many different players... so there are choices that may be great for others, but not for me.

Choices that are “good” for others may not be good for US... we are each on a unique path. Yes, the Scriptures tell us that “whatever we pray for in Christ’s name in faith we’ll receive”, but our desires must be fully aligned with His will for those prayers to come to pass. Our most well-intentioned and unselfish prayers must still match up with the specific plan the Lord has for our lives as well as the souls who will be impacted by them. Let’s not lose hope if our prayers haven’t been answered yet... the Lord may have something even better in mind.

1 John 5:14-15

Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him.

Proverbs 16:2-3

All the ways of a man are pure in his own eyes, But the Lord weighs the spirits. Commit your works to the Lord, and your thoughts will be established.

December 9

When I load a new game that requires me to craft my player, it can be quite a while before I start playing the game. I have always taken the act of creating my character very seriously... after all, they will be representing me for the duration of this story. From the big things like the skill proficiencies, they possess to the smaller details like the style of their hair and the name they will answer to, this isn't just "A" character... this is now MY character. And this is OUR story that we are going to start and finish together... two beings operating as one.

The Lord has lovingly and carefully crafted each of us for our respective journeys, from the colorful starburst of our eyes to our unique fingerprints. Even the design choices we don't agree with or understand serve a purpose... the details matter to Him, because He expertly and intentionally created us to walk a specific path in life, hand in hand with Him. Anytime we feel like we are in the wrong place at the wrong time with the wrong skills, remember that He doesn't just KNOW us, He MADE us. And if we are following Him, we can trust that we are who and where we are meant to be.

Isaiah 43:1

But now, thus says the Lord, who created you, O Jacob, and He who formed you, O Israel: "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by your name; you are Mine."

Psalms 139:14

I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Marvelous are Your works, **and** that my soul knows very well.

December 10

After playing any game for a moderate length of time, I tend to fall into a comfortable pattern with my style of play. Sure, there are more combos to learn and higher-level tactics to master... but as long as I can still get by with a simple leg sweep and an uppercut, I default to what is easy, familiar, and safe. Fortunately, the game won't let me get away with that. As new challenges arrive and the difficulty level ramps up, I am pushed out of my comfort zone to learn new skills I would've never acquired on my own... until the game developer forced me to grow through these unwanted battles.

Personal and spiritual growth doesn't come by cheerfully bouncing from one mountaintop to another... it comes through navigating the complexities of an ever-changing battlefield. The Lord doesn't push us out of our comfort zones to be unkind... He sees what skills we will need later down the road and develops them in us BEFORE we will need to have them mastered. His thoughts and His ways are higher than ours, and they see the WHOLE picture, including the final frame. Let's fully trust Him in this battle... He knows how it ends.

Isaiah 55:8-9

"For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways," says the Lord. "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts."

December 11

Games are full of items that serve very specific purposes... the key to the water temple is of no use when we are trying to enter the fire temple, and we don't tend to unlock the slingshot until we reach the part of the game that requires it in order to advance. The developer has a specific path that has been designed for us to reach the endgame, and despite the seemingly "open world" we have been given to explore, many areas and items are restricted until we have progressed to a certain level. If the game isn't designed to ensure we get what we need exactly when we need it, even a great game can easily become an unplayable nightmare.

Our definition of "good" and the Lord's are often two very different things... many of the directions we would like to pursue may be incompatible with our specific mission or fail to align with His timing. But what feels restricting right now may be Him narrowing our path to align with our calling, ensuring that we receive exactly what we need at the time we are ready to receive it... and when our path requires it. He always has our "good" in mind, and His provision will always align with His purpose.

Romans 8:28

And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.

December 12

Crafting items in games brings an entirely new value to components that we may not have ever cared about otherwise. Often the most relatable part of my heroic character's journey is when they are forced to pause their grand destiny to save the world to hunt down some sticks, locate some plastic tubing, or go fill some empty jars up with water to continue their story. It's kind of the equivalent of watching Master Chief go grocery shopping. But without seeking out and finding these seemingly lower value items, these important missions will not continue, and critical items of exceptional value will never be created.

In a world that places an exceptional value on impossible expectations, we can all fall victim to feeling discouraged, common, weak, or unworthy... even in the body of Christ. But the Lord has INTENTIONALLY chosen each of us, no matter how insignificant we feel, to do His will here on earth. Each of us are critical and valuable components who combine with His Spirit to create the most powerful and rare weapon against evil on this planet... His voice, hands, and arms of love in this world.

1 Corinthians 1:27-29

But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence.

December 13

Entering a dark dungeon or cave for the first time in a video game is both nerve-wracking and exciting... I know that I am about to explore a new place that typically holds upgraded items and unique rewards, but it is also unfamiliar and uncomfortable. The darkness is NOT my friend, as the same darkness that hides new treasure also obscures the new enemies, traps, and pitfalls this level contains. The darkness is exceptionally dangerous... unless I bring a source of light with me to illuminate this space and safely identify the secrets it contains.

Even as believers in Christ, we may experience moments when we feel like we are fumbling around in the dark looking for answers, but we don't have to stay in that place. During those dark times we must press ourselves even closer to the light of Christ, spending time with Him in prayer and intently exploring the Scriptures for guidance. He will light up every unfamiliar place that He is invited into, and when we are in His presence the path ahead will begin to become clear... revealing the reason He sent us to light up this dark room in the first place.

John 12:46

I have come as a light into the world, that whoever believes in Me should not abide in darkness.

December 14

All games are designed to be beaten... there is a solution for every puzzle, a weakness to exploit in every boss fight, and a path to the ending for those diligent enough to pursue it. But even though my character is the one who has been chosen for this specific journey and destined to finish the fight, I still have to actually go and DO it. And the more advanced the battles are, the more advanced the techniques are that are required for me to proceed. It is only through my commitment to learn and apply these deeper skills that the most challenging enemies are defeated.

Our prayers of faith can absolutely move the mountains that we face in life, but some of them may require a higher level of commitment through prayer, fasting, and intensely seeking the Lord. These mountains force us to press deeper in our faith... not because the mountain is too big, but because the Lord is using that mountain to grow our relationship with Him. Let's not be discouraged by the stubbornness of the mountain... it is merely an indication that we are being called to an even deeper place in our walk with Christ if we want to see it move.

Matthew 17:20-21

So Jesus said to them, "Because of your unbelief; for assuredly, I say to you, if you have faith as a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you. However, this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting."

December 15

Over the years, most games have replaced “med-packs” and health pickups with a much simpler form of health regeneration... seek out a quiet place, hold still for a few seconds, and allow our health bar to replenish. But this action that heals us can still feel frustrating, as we must withdraw from the action and patiently wait for our health to be restored before we re-enter the war zone. The seconds we spend waiting are excruciating, as we’re anxious to get back into the action and help our team... but healing only comes when we rest and wait.

The Lord’s will is all about TIMING... just like in our video games, there are many moving parts all around us, most of which we are unaware of. His plans frequently involve periods of time in which nothing appears to be happening, but these quiet moments of growth in Christ are critical to successfully enduring the battles that lie ahead. If we are currently in a “recharge” period, let’s fully embrace this time of waiting with Him. The battle will call for us soon enough... and we’ll need every bit of the strength, knowledge, and power He is giving us during this brief oasis to face what is next.

Isaiah 40:31

But those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.

December 16

Awareness of our virtual surroundings is critical for success in our gaming adventures... from knowing the exact placement of our adversaries, identifying the locations where we can take cover, knowing how much health and ammo we have, and of course our position relative to any environmental dangers (such as accidentally falling off a cliff). Most games feature a “heads up display” to ensure we always have this information available ... while our enemies may seem to have infinite ammo and utilize “cheap tactics” to fight us, we can’t play the same way. We manage our resources, remain vigilant, and play SMART.

The Lord has not called us to be naive to the dangers and challenges that surround us... we must have our “heads up” display on and be aware at all times. Our enemy is a real and present spiritual adversary who must be confronted, but our combat tactics are NOT the same. As followers of Christ, we don’t fight fire with fire... we overcome evil with GOOD. We never lower our tactics to match our opposition... we show love, we pray for those who persecute us, and we choose His ways.

Matthew 10:16

Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves. Therefore be wise as serpents and harmless as doves.

Romans 12:21

Do not be overcome by evil but overcome evil with good.

December 17

Honest confession... if you happen to get matched up with me in an online game, it is unlikely that I can hear you. I rarely turn on the team chat or bother wearing a headset unless I am playing with gamers I know and trust. It's not optimal, but the amount of unpleasant and toxic communication that erupts in online gaming sessions has made me very selective of what is permitted to access my ears and who I communicate with. While this obviously limits my ability to strategize with my team, it is more important for me to keep my peace and enjoy my gaming session than to win a match.

While we can't always choose every aspect of the environment we are placed in, we CAN choose what we listen to and meditate on. What we hear and continue to dwell on either lifts us up or tears us down... if we are listening to harmful and toxic things, our personal peace and faith will be negatively impacted as well. Let's fill the conscious meditation of our hearts and minds with faith-building verses and uplifting reminders of Christ's love and mercy towards us... and discipline ourselves to turn off anything that contradicts those truths.

Romans 10:17

So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.

Philippians 4:8

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.

December 18

To cope with many of the darkest times in my personal life, I turned to the world of video games for comfort... the predictability of these programmed adventures gave me a temporary feeling of stability in a world that had fallen into chaos. But once I shut the game off, all my problems reappeared... I needed a peace that still worked even when the lights went out.

Jesus was neither immune nor unbothered by the sorrows of this planet... He came to heal the broken-hearted and comfort all who are suffering. But He also promised His followers a peace beyond our understanding... a peace that is not based on what we are experiencing, but one that comes from the knowledge that He is still in complete control regardless of the ferocity of the storm we are in. The peace that this world offers is fickle and fleeting... only the peace found exclusively in Christ lasts through both the dark times and the joyous ones.

John 14:27

Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.

John 16:33

These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.

December 19

While I enjoy a dominating, landslide victory over my opponents as much as anyone, those aren't the most satisfying matches that I've experienced... they aren't even the moments I talk about the next day. The most exhilarating and memorable wins are when my team pulls off an unbelievable comeback, snatching victory from the jaws of certain defeat just as the final seconds on the clock tick down. And when I'm trying to convince someone new to join me and try the game for themselves, these are the stories that I share... my personal, authentic, real-life stories of near disaster that are now a part of my personal highlight reel.

The most compelling and relatable parts of our Christian testimonies are found in how the Lord took the utter hopelessness of our situation and forged an unexpected and previously impossible victory from the broken pieces of our lives.

His saving power is most powerfully demonstrated through our weakness... stories we don't tend to appreciate while we are still living in them. Let's look at our current battles with fresh eyes... today's trials are tomorrow's testimonies to share His strength with others!

2 Corinthians 12:10

Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

December 20

Do you remember that feeling of surprise you had the first time you found a hidden “secret” in a video game? Maybe it was the moment you bumped your head on an invisible block and received a new and exciting power-up, or discovered an item that unlocked a valuable shortcut... suddenly, our view of how to play the game shifted as we realized that we had been walking past countless incredible secrets the entire time. The best rewards were hidden in plain sight, waiting for us to become aware of them, pursue them, and unlock the game-changing treasures that they contained.

The Lord is willing and able to be found by all who search for Him, but He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek after Him... if we are running through these levels in life without dedicating our time and attention to moving beyond a superficial relationship with Him we will miss out on the deeper rewards He offers. Our Father has more in store for us than what we can physically see, both in this life and the life to come... but we must actively pursue Him each and every day if we want to enjoy the fullness of all that He has prepared for us.

Jeremiah 29:13

And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart.

1 Corinthians 2:9

Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him.

December 21

Most gaming protagonists are designed as underdogs... massively outnumbered, woefully outgunned, and facing an overpowered and seemingly unstoppable opponent. But that's what makes our co-dependent journey with them so rewarding... this epic adventure we're taking will require us to work together, as I lead them into situations they wouldn't have chosen so I can grow and build them into a conqueror. My gaming avatar may not always appreciate my choices, as my plan will often make them tired or uncomfortable. But I'm actually their biggest fan, and even my unpopular decisions are designed to prepare them for what's next.

Sometimes the things that God permits to exist or chooses not to remove from our lives can be hard to understand, and the way He prepares and develops us may feel uncomfortable or unnecessary. But the Lord knows the battles we are about to face, and He is training and equipping us for the path that lies ahead. It is in our trusting dependence on Him that these unbeatable challenges will be conquered, and it's only through the combination of His power and our obedience that these giants will fall.

2 Corinthians 12:8-9

Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. And He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

December 22

I have a feeling that most of my favorite game characters wouldn't like me very much if they met me... not me as a human being, but me as the player who has been holding the controller throughout their journey. Think about it... it was my hands that led them into some tough battles and continued to press them forward when it would've been more comfortable to stop. But my concern for them was present the entire time... I ensured they got the rest, recovery, and healing they needed even while I developed them into the best version of themselves. And because they listened to my input and submitted to my control, we crossed the finish line together in victory as a team.

It can be hard to remain humbly submissive to the Lord when He directs us in ways that we would prefer not to go... but it is only in yielding full control of our lives to Him that we will get to enjoy the victory He has designed for us. We can't mistake His willingness to guide us through the valley of the shadow of death as a lack of care or concern... He is walking through it WITH us, protecting us and even carrying us when we need it, all the way to the finish line.

1 Peter 5:6-7

Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you.

Psalms 23:4

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.

December 23

As much as I enjoy games that give me the ability to choose my own path and make my own dialogue decisions, it's a bit of a double-edged sword. I always wonder if I made the right choice... not just for my character, but for achieving the best possible ending to the game as well. If I am being honest, I tend to create a new game save right before those choices so I can go back and see how each would've played out. It would be nice if we could pull a move like "Dr. Strange" from Infinity War and see all 14,000,605 possible outcomes before making a critical decision...

We all have unlimited access to a living source of knowledge, and while the Bible may not always tell us the specific answers to all our questions, it will always help us divide between what our flesh desires and what our spirit truly needs. If we humbly and prayerfully approach these challenging and confusing decisions in life by searching His Word for insight and guidance first, He will be faithful to use the Scriptures to reveal our true motives and align our hearts with His purpose. His Word always shines the light on the right doors to open.

Hebrews 4:12

For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

December 24

In theory, being a video game protagonist sounds like fun... but if I added up everything I put them through, it doesn't sound like a very compelling job offer.

"Do you like absorbing massive amounts of damage, being dropped from great heights, and taking long walks in the dark through dangerous forests? Then this adventure is for you!" ... it's a bit of a tough sell. My favorite characters often go through less than favorable circumstances, but it's not because I'm punishing them... it's quite the opposite. It's because I know I can count on them.

Even Mary, the mother of Christ, wasn't sure what to think of her "good news" at first... her pregnancy was certainly filled with drama (potential scandal, Joseph almost withdrawing from the engagement, and a fun-filled trip to pay taxes on her due date). But the reason she was chosen for this destiny is the same as ours... because she found FAVOR with God. The mission He placed us on may not always "feel" like favor... it may be full of hardships and complications. But just like Mary, the "good news" we have been given to deliver will change someone's world... and ours as well.

Luke 1:28-30

And having come in, the angel said to her, "Rejoice, highly favored one, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women!". But when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and considered what manner of greeting this was. Then the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God.

December 25

Here is a Christmas question for you... if you could somehow insert yourself into ANY game and become the main character, who would you choose? Think carefully... sure, you would receive all their powers and capabilities, but you would also take on all the burdens, the risk, the pain, and the reality that “Game Over” is only one mistimed jump away. Would we still willingly trade places with our virtual avatar, knowing all the challenges we are going to have to face? I honestly can’t think of one character I would be willing to trade places with, because I know what lies ahead for them.

Jesus KNEW what He was taking on when He came down here... but He also knew He was the ONLY one who could accomplish this mission. He came to bring joy and peace, but to do that He had to willingly choose to absorb a level of unearned pain and suffering behind our comprehension. He enacted “Plan 99”, choosing to accept our human limitations and took our place... knowing in advance what it would cost. And because He chose to walk every mile we will ever walk in our shoes; we can fully trust Him every step of the way today.

Hebrews 12:2

Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Luke 2:10-11

Then the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.

December 26

Protagonists in video games don't always have a backstory that indicates what their future destiny will contain... who would have ever expected that a simple plumber named Mario would embark on a life-long journey to save a princess, an outcast named Aloy would bear the burden of restoring her world, or a spiky-haired boy in over-sized shorts named Sora would be responsible for saving a multi-verse? Their background may not look the part, but they were chosen based on the developer's plan, the needs of the story they're in, and the specific people they were designed to save.

When we look back at who we were, who we currently are, and what we perceive as our "limitations" we can get a distorted view of how God views us and His plans to use us. The Lord does not call us according to our "works" ... He crafted a destiny that is uniquely ours, one that was written before we entered the scene. No matter how common, rejected, limited, or out-of-place we may feel in our storyline, He isn't surprised by any parts of our backstory... and there are no accidents in His selection of us or our place in His divine plan.

2 Timothy 1:8-9

Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me His prisoner, but share with me in the sufferings for the gospel according to the power of God, who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began.

December 27

Almost all games feature some form of linear progression as we play them, no matter how “open world” they claim they are. Even these games with a “go wherever you want” style still have objectives they require us to complete before we can move on to the next phase of that mission. From finding the right key to open a door to unlocking a specific skill to move forward, there are always going to be prerequisites we must complete before we can take on larger challenges... keeping us from getting in over our head and ensuring we are at the correct skill level before moving forward.

If we are being honest, loving our neighbor doesn't always come easy to us. It isn't just difficult to do this without the Lord's help... it is impossible. Loving the Lord with our entire mind, soul, and strength is the prerequisite that enables us to love our neighbor with Christ's love. If we are struggling to fulfill the second great commandment, perhaps we are actually needing to go back to the FIRST one and complete it before trying to move forward. When we love Him fully, we see it differently... and then we can love others the way He does.

Mark 12:29-31

Jesus answered him, “The first of all the commandments is: ‘Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ This is the first commandment. And the second, like it, is this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.”

December 28

I have found through experience that when a game provides items such as armor, helmets, or boots they aren't simply a recommendation... they are the only way to survive. Don't believe me? Go ahead and load up Skyrim or Fallout and try running through a cave without them... I tend to find myself out of commission in mere minutes walking into a dungeon that I would have easily conquered if I had armor equipped. Does armor prevent these battles or make me completely invincible? No, but it makes these inevitable struggles survivable in a way that my own limited physical strength never could.

Trusting in our own physical strength and capabilities to face our battles in life is a fool's errand... we will only end up frustrated and defeated. Trusting in Christ doesn't make us immune to hardships and struggles, but He DOES provide us with the strength to endure these battles and continue to produce fruit while we are still in the midst of them. Let's hold onto our hope in Him and continue to trust in the Lord through the storms we are facing... He is more than a recommendation. He is our strength and our light in this present darkness.

Jeremiah 17:5; 7-8

Thus says the Lord: "Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his strength, whose heart departs from the Lord. Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, and whose hope is the Lord. For he shall be like a tree planted by the waters, which spreads out its roots by the river, and will not fear when heat comes; but its leaf will be green and will not be anxious in the year of drought, nor will cease from yielding fruit."

December 29

An in-game narrator plays a HUGE part in our ability to enjoy a game, adding color to the world we are playing in. Some games feature an external narrator, and other times it's our character's voice... but either way, they set the tone for the entire experience. The narrator's voice can be helpful, pointing us in the right direction and enriching the game, or they can be hurtful, reminding us of mistakes we're trying to move past. The voices we listen to matter... and only some are truly beneficial.

Narration occurs in life more often than we think... we narrate our lives in our thoughts, we allow others to provide narration during our interactions, and we act as "guest narrators" in the lives of others. We have a responsibility to speak life to others as well as in our own internal monologues... through Christ, we can stop replaying negative thoughts in our mind, cease repeating hurtful language, and avoid toxic conversations, replacing them with the Lord's words of hope, forgiveness, and mercy. We're all a guest narrator for someone today... let's speak love, joy, and peace, and choose our own soundtracks with the same in mind.

Proverbs 18:21

Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruit.

James 3:10

Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be so.

December 30

Video game antagonists talk a LOT of trash, considering that they were only created for the purpose of being defeated. Throughout the game we are forced to endure their verbal mockery as they belittle us and make every effort to ensure our lives are as miserable as possible. But, in a fun twist of fate, their long-winded rants tend to provide the exposition that tells us exactly how to defeat them, turning their verbal attacks into a blessing in disguise. Maybe next time they will learn they shouldn't taunt us by explaining how incredibly impenetrable their hidden shield generator is... you know, the one that's hiding over there.

The Lord never promised that we wouldn't face opposition... He actually guaranteed we would. And in Israel's case, this attack even came from someone who claimed to work for God. But the Lord turned Balaam's curses into blessings for His people, and He will do the same for us. All the negativity, hate speech, internet trolling, or other attempts to curse us only exposes their fears and weaknesses. Let's not allow their words to affect us... let's trust the Lord to redirect them into blessings.

Deuteronomy 23:5

Nevertheless the Lord your God would not listen to Balaam, but the Lord your God turned the curse into a blessing for you, because the Lord your God loves you.

John 16:33

These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.

December 31

There have been several times in my gaming history when I reached the horrific realization that I needed a fresh start... and I don't mean simply resetting a checkpoint or restarting the mission. I'm talking about starting completely from scratch with a new save file. Maybe the character I created doesn't fit my play style, or I realize too late that I have invested all my experience points into developing the wrong skills. At times I have regretted the dialogue choices I've made, and now my progression is limited by these poor decisions. The only thing left to do is to stop, admit I have gone the wrong way, and start over with a clean slate.

We all reach points in life where we would love to start fresh... and through Christ we CAN. No matter how far we have gone the wrong way, He forgives, refreshes, and restores. Saving people is kind of His thing. It's what He came here to do. We don't have to continue down the path of pain and regret... we can choose to allow Him to make us a new creation and start over again. And if others have hurt us, let's offer them this same clean start as well. Let's press start on a new save file today!

2 Corinthians 5:17

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.

Colossians 3:13

Bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do.

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“Finding God in Video Games” has been our labor of love for almost ten years, blending our personal appreciation for video games with our heartfelt desire to reach this generation with the Gospel of Christ. The mission of our devotions, articles, and videos is to encourage both Christians and non-believers alike of the relevance and necessity of a daily, personal walk with Jesus Christ while challenging some of our perspectives and pre-conceived notions along the way.

The world of gaming is an incredible way to experience an emotional journey, spend time with family, or simply stay connected with friends around the world. It gives us a rich, common language that is shared across all ages, nationalities, and backgrounds in every walk of life. And the reality of God is so much more than what we often give Him credit for because our mortal minds struggle to comprehend Him.

Through our gaming anecdotes, favorite video game narratives, and our passion for all things “nerdy”, we aim to uncover the deep truths of God in our day-to-day adventures in the vibrant world of gaming. These devotions are meant to take the experiences we have had in the world of video games and relate those to the Biblical truths we have found through our own study of the Bible and the inspiration of the Spirit of God. |