

Kidpak Adventures

LEVEL UP

MONTHLY
DEVOTIONAL



DAY ONE

LEVEL UP

“And let us not give up meeting together. Some are in the habit of doing this. Instead, let us encourage one another with words of hope. Let us do this even more as you see Christ’s return approaching.” Hebrews 10:25 NIRV

These days, people play video games online against each other, which is a great opportunity. Imagine meeting a nice guy from Kanazawa, Japan... and then destroying him with an absolutely crushing spinning piledriver!

And while it’s probably a lot of fun playing games with people online, there used to be arcades all over this country where people met to play head-to-head. These were locations where people with similar interests got together, to talk about their favorite games, learn new moves and strategies, and of course enjoy each other’s company. There were celebrations and spontaneous moments of applause, as thirty or more people would gather around one arcade game, watching closely, encouraging players and letting them know how great they were doing.

Today’s video game culture doesn’t have much like this anymore. It is fun watching and getting involved from home, sure. But there’s absolutely nothing like meeting together in a larger setting.

You might see where this is going, especially when the topic of church is brought up. You see, a lot of people like to watch church from home, and that’s a fantastic opportunity. Some people have no choice, and can’t physically make it to church for whatever reasons. And it’s incredible to be able to experience the church community from your home.

But if you can travel to a church, there’s nothing like it in the world. No, there’s nothing like meeting together with likeminded people, cheering and celebrating, encouraging others and letting them know how great they are doing. And yes, you learn new moves and strategies, don’t you? And oh yes, there’s nothing like the huge collective cheer when someone gives the devil an absolutely crushing spinning piledriver!

The Bible tells us to not give up meeting together, encouraging one another with words of hope. And while it’s fantastic to do with an online community, there is simply nothing like physically getting out the door and heading to church.



DAY TWO

LEVEL UP

“So prepare your minds for action. Control yourselves. Put your hope completely in the grace that will be given to you when Jesus Christ returns.” 1 Peter 1:13 NIRV

There are a few things you need to get started when playing a video game: controllers, a television screen and a power source come to mind. Without these, you'll have no control, no power, and you'll be looking at things the wrong way.

This is pretty similar to our lives outside the video game grid. For example, ask yourself this question: Who has the controller in your life? You use the controllers to make your video game characters spring to action. But who's the one controlling you? Self-Control is a Fruit of the Spirit, and a powerful tool we need in order to win at life.

If you find yourself weak in that area, the best thing to do is get yourself plugged in! You need power to do anything, don't you? Get plugged in with prayer, church, and with reading God's Word. You'll be energized and ready with a charge attack in the game of life!

Once you've got power and control, take a look around. What's on your view screen? The Bible warns us to be careful what we look at. Take a moment then to consider the things you look at in your house, from television to the computer to the video games you may be playing. If Jesus were playing a game alongside you, what would it be? No matter what it is on your television screen, you have to be careful what you allow your eyes to see.

Take control today, and watch what you watch. If you need more power, the answer is simple: get plugged in! Get disciplined, and you'll be a championship level high scorer. Game on!



DAY THREE

LEVEL UP

“In all these things we will do even more than win! We owe it all to Christ, who has loved us.” Romans 8:37 NIRV

It’s a checklist of some of the biggest video game bosses ever: Andross, Dr. Robotnik, M Bison, Ganondorf, Abobo, Bowser, GLaDOS, Dr. Wily, and King K. Rool. If these names are familiar, then you know what a video game boss really is. Each of these guys is a major villain, ready to throw everything at you in order to keep you down.

Are you ready for the boss battle? These appear at dramatic times in a video game, where your character faces a huge fight. If this sounds familiar, it should: we face boss battles all the time. Each of us can suddenly face an overwhelming situation that appears impossible to beat. But here’s your insider gamer’s hint: Focus on the size of your God, instead of the size of your problems. That boss is going down!

If you slip up, don’t panic. Remember you’ve got an extra life. If you fail to do something in a game – it’s not too late! And as long as you’re breathing, it’s never too late with God. He has given us abundant life, and it isn’t over if you’ve made a mistake. Just hop up, and keep trying!

If all else fails, why not read the strategy guide? If a game has you stuck, there’s always a strategy guide to see you through. It shows the paths to success, the secrets along the way, and the way to victory. In this very way, our Bible is a strategy guide, isn’t it? It’s filled with gamer’s tips that will make you a winner.

Boss battles are a part of life. Just keep that strategy guide handy, and remember you’ve got an extra life. Step up and get ready for victory, because greater is He that is in you than he that is in the world. You can totally win the boss battle!



DAY FOUR

LEVEL UP

“God made us. He created us to belong to Christ Jesus. Now we can do good things. Long ago God prepared them for us to do.” Ephesians 2:10 NIRV

In the world of video games, there are good guys, and there are bad guys. But as we learn from the movie “Wreck-it Ralph,” just because you are a bad guy, this does not mean you are a “bad” guy. In fact, Ralph is ready for a change. He has been playing the part of a villain for thirty years now, and is pretty tired of it. He wants to have friends, do the right thing, and be a real hero.

Too bad the other characters in his video game are so judgmental. None of them want him around. Simply put, they may look like nice people in Niceville, but they’re bullies.

In fact, Ralph may play the part of a bad guy, but it was his companions that wrecked everything in Niceville. If only we all could see others as God views everyone, perhaps things would be different. But sadly, this sort of bad behavior can be found everywhere, and not just in the video game world. Worse than any nasty cybug is a bully, a person who treats others like a glitch.

Wreck-It Ralph just wants to be respected and valued. He wants them to see him not as a bad guy, but he goes about changing their minds the wrong way: Ralph goes on an unexpected adventure to actually steal a medal of honor from another game. He’s still got a lot to learn: you have to earn certain things in life. Trust, respect and friendship are things that take a longer time to win, but can be lost in just a few moments.

In the end, Wreck-it Ralph is given a chance to prove he is a real hero when he stands up for a misfit named Vanellope von Schweetz. Through her, we learn something important about each of us: no one is really a misfit! Like Vanellope, we’re all actually royalty – and programmed for something greater!

Ralph’s companions soon discover this for themselves, and learn he’s a very important part of the game. But do you know something? So are you! God made us all. He created us to belong to Him. And now, we can do good things and be a hero. Just like Wreck-it Ralph.

KIDPAK ADVENTURES

DAY FIVE

LEVEL UP

“In the paths of the wicked are snares and pitfalls, but those who would preserve their life stay far from them.” Proverbs 22:5 NIV

Adventurers have been running in video games for years. Pitfall Harry, Lara Croft and even Lego Indiana Jones have been making temple runs for treasure, taking us along for the thrills and excitement. There are a few things we can learn from these seasoned explorers, and they are all related to what these games have in common: the jungle, the treasure, and all that running!

Firstly, you’ve probably heard it’s a jungle out there. Pitfall Harry has his hands full, jumping over scorpions, swinging over crocodiles and dodging venomous vipers. But the world we live in can be tricky too, if we’re not careful. As Christians, we have to remember what Jesus told us: we are in this world, but not of it. Life is an adventure, but you have to be ready for pitfalls.

Make a temple run if you feel tempted to sin! If you want to stay safe, you have to be quick to jump, dodge and flee from doing those things God isn’t pleased with. The Bible tells us to run away from evil things: picture that fleeing adventurer in Temple Run. He’s doing everything he can to stay away from trouble. We should be no different!

The thing to remember is that treasure awaits us in heaven. You race for the prize. And you don’t have to be a tomb raider to find the real treasures that await us in heaven. At times we become distracted by the world around us, but we should never forget this: the richest treasures here on earth won’t be worth a thing at the end of the game. So think twice about what you’re running hard after.

You’ve got a lot in common with these adventurers. As you head into the jungle out there, be good to remember where that real treasure is – and watch out for pitfalls!



DAY SIX

LEVEL UP

“Fight the good fight along with all other believers. Take hold of eternal life. You were chosen for it when you openly told others what you believe. Many witnesses heard you.” 1 Timothy 6:12 NIRV

Are you a world warrior? As Christians, God has given us special moves to become a champion edition! This isn't a six-button hyper fighting match though. This is real life! We don't battle against flesh and blood – it's a battle of faith. There's an enemy out there wanting to do an ultimate psycho crusher on you, and if you're going to make it to the final round, you'd better be ready to fight the good fight of faith!

Your salvation is worth fighting for, and so is seeing your friends and family in heaven. The Alpha and Omega is ready to tag team with you, so get ready to go a few rounds – turbo style!

Round One! If you want to spar like a super street fighter, you have to be ready to block. Firstly, defense is huge in any match. The most important part of the battle is in the mind, where you have to be prepared, and disciplined. Block attacks of temptation by keeping away from sinful situations that can make you weak. The enemy uses guile, but you can stay on top of your game with prayer and reading God's Word!

Round Two! Give a vicious counterpunch! History is filled with Christian testimonies of those who took a heavy hit – but used their stories to give a monster counterpunch to the devil. If you find yourself reeling from an unexpected attack, don't just drop down for the KO. Rise up faster than a hadoken dragon punch, and let God use you and your story to make a major impact!

Round Three – Fight! Remember, it's a fight of faith, and you're in it to win it. Be ready to block and counterattack faster than a lightning kick, and you'll have what it takes to be a world warrior, and fight the good fight!



DAY SEVEN

LEVEL UP

“God, I will sing a new song to you. I will make music to you on a harp that has ten strings.” Psalm 144:9 NIRV

It’s time to praise the Rock! Some time ago, King David showed us all how to be a worship hero, getting the band together for an epic worship service dedicated to God, our Rock of Ages. From his early days as a simple shepherd, David was on a hot streak, playing worship with a setting on expert level – and hitting all the right notes with his Heavenly Father.

You too can be a worship hero yourself, of course. Take notes: it’s all about getting an instrument, being in one accord, and playing hard!

The first thing you’ve got to do is grab an instrument. You can use a guitar, but there are many others listed in the Bible too, from horns to reed instruments to drums and more. Your own voice even counts as an instrument! It doesn’t matter what you use, just don’t let that rock meter drop down low. Instead keep your praise levels amped for the Rock of Ages!

That’s right - play hard! God looks at what is in the heart, and is smiling if yours is filled with worship for Him. David danced for God wildly with all his heart, and promised to get even more undignified. Don’t let anything spoil your passion for the Rock! He’s waiting to see you praise.

So you’ve got your instrument and you’ve got your passion – do you think you’ve got what it takes to be a worship hero? If so, then perhaps it’s time to join the rock band! To win any video game with guitars in it, you have to play the right notes at the right time. That’s just the way it is on stage, and in the church too. There is an order to everything – even with worship. There’s incredible star power when God’s people play together in unison on the note highway. Worship invites God into the house, and when that happens, the atmosphere is electric!

Just ask King David. He was a warrior and a legend, and one of the greatest worship heroes in history. You too can join the Worship Hero World Tour yourself and throw up some praise to the Rock of Ages. Just grab an instrument, be in one accord, and play hard!

You rock!



DAY EIGHT

LEVEL UP

“The Lord gives me strength. He is like a shield that keeps me safe. My heart trusts in Him, and He helps me. My heart jumps for joy. I will sing and give thanks to Him.”
Psalms 28:7 NIRV

In 1981, a video game character jumped into our hearts and minds. His name was Mario, and his mission was simple: rescue his beloved Princess Peach. Many years later – and many different games later – he’s still doing the same exact thing, and taking us along for some of the most amazing, creative adventures ever created.

Here’s a simple question though: If she’s so important to Mario, why is Princess Peach always so easily kidnapped before every game? In life, we’re supposed to guard those things which are most important – like our hearts. It’s the most important thing we have, and yet many of us aren’t careful to watch over it. Picture your heart, right there in the middle of Peach’s castle. Is it well guarded? Be careful what you let in, and watch out for Bowsers!

If you find yourself facing trouble, why not approach life like Mario does? It’s all in the attitude. To begin with, before he was named Mario, he was actually called Jumpman. Throughout his history, he defeats many of his enemies by jumping up and putting them under his feet. Just like Mario, thanks to Jesus you have special shoes. Don’t let temptation and worldly thinking get on top of you. Put it under your feet!

But it’s not just about a positive attitude. Mario finds power in many different ways, gaining abilities to handle all sorts of tricky situations. In our lives, God doesn’t leave us without hope – He gives us power to handle situations that come our way. When you’re faced with a challenge, read His word, seek Him in prayer, and head to church for worship. Hit each of these for a surge of power, and the ability to deal with anything that comes your way.

Mario and his brother Luigi are some of the best, most favorite video game heroes for a reason. They know how to jump up and power up to victory. That’s just where you can find yourself as well. Just guard your heart, keep the enemy under your feet – and power up!

Here we go!



DAY NINE

LEVEL UP

“He has saved us from the kingdom of darkness. He has brought us into the kingdom of the Son He loves.” Colossians 1:13 NIRV

Wouldn't it be great to be a video game hero like Link, Sora, or any Warrior of Light? These are heroes on a quest, but the truth is that we're not much different: we're all Warriors of Light! If you have any doubts, consider your standard “quest video game” for a moment. They feature some of the same themes: a brave party of heroes traveling together, an epic quest, and a kingdom to defend – or one to conquer. And don't forget the whole bunch of bad guys standing in the way!

It's no secret that in life, we can see all of this, starting with the bad guys. Hopefully you're not a heartless like that. You're on a mission to save the world, but you can only be a real hero by putting God and others first. Don't be a villain, someone who shows no love at all. A self-centered life is one without real love. Don't be a heartless.

Another thing you'll see on these epic quests is a band of intrepid adventurers, staying together until the very end. As Christians, God wants us to stick with our party. God has put you with a special team of people with different abilities. This is your family, your church or your friends, and life is a co-op experience! You can't do it all alone. Get along, or don't get anywhere!

Together, you can finish the quest, but you must have a kingdom heart. It's all about gaining territory for Him – do you have God's heart for other people? God wants His kingdom advanced, and wants you to use the keys of authority He has given you. And use the Sword of the Spirit – that's His word. This is the authority we walk with, because with persistence, you can win every quest there is. Use the keys and blade, and become a true Warrior of Light, with a kingdom heart!



DAY TEN

LEVEL UP

“Pray without ceasing.” 1 Thessalonians 5:17 NIRV

One of the first movies to really incorporate computer animation was the movie “Tron.” This makes sense because most of the film takes place within a computer world. In the movie, a computer programmer named Kevin Flynn is considered a threat to the bad guys, and is suddenly zapped into a world of video games, programs and a menacing MCP computer system that has ideas of taking over all computers everywhere.

In his attempt to escape this incredible world, Flynn joins forces with a program named Tron, who is a force of good in this cyber world. Tron happens to be the ultimate warrior, but he must get all of his instructions from the person who created him. Risking everything, Flynn and Tron go to the secret place where Tron can communicate with his creator – and hopefully save their world.

It doesn’t take all that much for us to communicate with our Creator. We don’t have to risk our lives or fear being zapped by video game bad guys. Yet unfortunately, many of us don’t spend that much time talking to God in prayer. What a shame, too – because He has great plans for all of us, and wants to share with us information that can save our world. Today as you read, remember to set aside time to talk to God in prayer. With enough prayer, you too can be a strong warrior in this world.



DAY ELEVEN

LEVEL UP

“When these desires are allowed to remain, they lead to sin. And when sin is allowed to remain and grow, it leads to death.” James 1:15 NIRV

In the arcade shooter game “Jurassic Park,” two of you are on Isla Sonar, an island completely populated by newly created dinosaurs that seem to have one thought on their minds: eating you. Early in the game, things seem manageable, as smaller dinosaurs are fended off rather easily, especially for those with quick aim.

But then there’s the crash and roar of the T-Rex. In this arcade style game, you’re seated in a chair with a big screen directly in front of you, speakers all around, and already on edge from hearing the stomping sound of some large, approaching dinosaur. When this massive and terrifying creature steps out right in front of you, trust us: it’s time to go, go, go, go, go!

Like all other dinosaurs, the T-Rex starts out small. This isn’t unusual at all. But let’s just say you happen to have a baby Tyrannosaurus Rex around, and it looks hungry. Would you feed it, and keep it close as a pet?

As crazy as that sounds, many of us do something pretty similar. In fact, when we do things that don’t please God, it can get worse. When we invite sin into our lives, and keep disobeying God’s Word, it can be just like a T-Rex!

Firstly, it can get out of control. In movies where they try to keep a Tyrannosaurus Rex contained, it is inevitable: the mighty dinosaur escapes! It finds a way, and soon enough, there are all kinds of problems. But when we keep feeding our sinful lifestyle, we’ll find ourselves in a similar predicament! Sure, things may start out small and seemingly harmless. But sin has a bad habit of growing and growing, and soon enough, it’ll be stomping and roaring and causing all kinds of trouble for you - and others too.

Just like a T-Rex, sin can consume you. Even worse, it can consume others around you too. If that happens, just be still. Not because its vision is based on movement, but because the Bible tells us to be still and know that He is God. When we stop and go to our Heavenly Father, His love and grace will keep us safe. So when you’re in trouble, tell Him you’re sorry, and promise to not feed that creature any more. God can handle things from there. No matter how big that sin is in your life, He is way bigger.

Like with a T-Rex, the best strategy is to avoid sin at all costs. Be still, and spend more time with your Heavenly Father. And don’t feed the T-Rex!



DAY TWELVE

LEVEL UP

“When your words came, I ate them; they were my joy and my heart’s delight, for I bear your name, Lord God Almighty.” Jeremiah 15:16 NIV

Waka waka waka waka! When playing the classic arcade games “Pac-Man” and “Mrs. Pac-Man,” there’s one thing each player does, and it’s pretty simple: eat. Pac-Man eats all of these dots found within a maze, and that seems easy enough. That is, until you consider the fact that there are four not-so-friendly ghosts out there: Inky, Blinky, Pinky, and Clyde. These guys would love nothing more than to ruin Pac-Man’s day.

Fortunately, there’s something wonderful found within each maze: power pellets. When Pac-Man eats these, he isn’t chased around by these ghosts anymore. No, after Pac-Man eats a power pellet, *he’s* the one that does the chasing.

Do you ever feel lost, unsure of which way to go to, as if you’re in a maze? Do you ever feel like those bad decisions you made are haunting you, chasing you around like ghosts from your past? If so, why not follow Pac-Man’s plan: eat the right thing. Jeremiah talked about eating God’s Word, and of course he wasn’t really putting it into his mouth. He was talking about reading scriptures and hearing from God in prayer.

You see, the Word of God is more powerful than any energizer! When we take time to read and consume the words of God in the Bible, amazing things happen. We find direction, no longer lost or unsure of which way to turn. It’s much easier to see your way through a maze when you have a heavenly perspective. And furthermore, when we spend time with God’s Word, we’re empowered. We’re no longer chased around by problems – no, we’re the ones that do the chasing! Yes, we can move around in confidence, and be absolute winners!

Take it from Pac-Man, you can get energized eating the right thing. Or, to quote our famous yellow hero: “Waka waka waka waka!”

*“That comes as no surprise. Even Satan himself pretends to be an angel of light.”
2 Corinthians 11:14 NIRV*

Back in 1980, an arcade game called “Berzerk” was released, and the concept was simple: you were this stick figure character, and your goal was escaping room after room, each filled with robots that shot lasers at you and called out, “The humanoid must not escape!”

Those robots were easy enough to deal with. The scary part came if you took too long, and heard, “Intruder alert! Intruder alert!” When you hear that in the game, you know you’re in serious trouble. I shudder as I remember it even now: a bouncing smiley face appears on one side of the room, slowly bouncing towards you at first. It says nothing, just bouncing and smiling, and always getting closer and closer. Let’s put it this way: you’d better run from Evil Otto!

How ironic that a smiling face, the very symbol of happiness, was chosen in this game as a villain. Evil Otto is an indestructible smiley face, and he’s after you. I still shiver when I remember this as a kid. In fact, recently Evil Otto was ranked within the top 100 video game villains of all time.

Keep in mind there’s nothing really creepy about him: it’s just a bouncing smiley face that doesn’t say anything. It just keeps popping up in the game, smiling as if there’s nothing to be worried about at all. But those of us who’ve played “Berzerk” know this is far from the truth!

But sin is like that, isn’t it? Temptation pops in your life from time to time, smiling back at you, wanting to get closer and closer. After all, what’s so harmful about a bouncing smiley face? And perhaps that’s how we react ourselves to temptation. Even though there are so many warnings, sometimes we just see something that looks pretty harmless, and think what could it possibly hurt?

The answer is simple: it can hurt *a lot*. Sin is very harmful to your health. The Bible tells us to flee from it, and that’s the best advice you can have. Read the Word of God, pray and keep watch that you won’t fall into temptation. No matter how fun and happy it looks, the best strategy is to treat sin and temptation like Evil Otto. Get out of there, and get out of there as fast as you can!





DAY FOURTEEN

LEVEL UP

“Let us not become tired of doing good. At the right time we will gather a crop if we don’t give up.” Galatians 6:9 NIRV

The other day, my daughter was wanting to show me something she created with the game Minecraft, and like any good parent, I went with her to see this creation she built. I went to the television getting ready to say something like, “Gee, what a cool thing you built!”

Instead, my jaw dropped. What she showed me was the end result of months of work, this huge mansion carefully built and planned and completely furnished with balconies, chairs, tables, bathrooms, windows, hanging pictures, and so much more that it would be impossible to list here on this page. It went on and on and on, deep into the ground and way up into the stratosphere. This thing was gorgeous, and the biggest house I’d ever seen!

I couldn’t believe it. When I sit there with Minecraft, I put one brick down, and then another, and then another. And then I look at what I’ve created: just three blocks in a row. I don’t know if I can do something like what my daughter did. I mean, she created this huge, immense, ginormous mansion! How could this have happened?

The answer is simple: by putting one block down at a time. And that’s good advice, actually. A lot of things in life can look overwhelming. For example, reading the Bible is a big project, right? But if you just read one little bit at a time, it won’t be long before you’ve read a big part of it. It all adds up, just like blocks on Minecraft.

Sure, if you think about how big of a challenge something is, it can be kind of intimidating. For example, Minecraft worlds are pretty big. Imagine going from one side to the other! That would take a really long time if you did it on foot! But you can and will get from one side to the other, if you only just get started, and just start walking.

A huge Minecraft creation begins with putting one block in place. Saving up for a new video game system starts with setting aside the first dollar. Having a great year at school starts with doing your best on the first homework assignment you get and going from there. Reading the Bible starts with reading that first page. It all begins with the first step.

So take that first step today, wherever it is you’re thinking of going, or whatever it is you’re dreaming of building. You can and will get there – and it all starts by taking that first step.



DAY FIFTEEN

LEVEL UP

“So don’t worry about tomorrow. Tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.” Galatians 6:9 NIRV

Some time ago there was a game called Gauntlet in the arcades. It was a simple concept: four people could play at a time, all part of a team that had to fight off bad guys, find food and treasure, and get through a maze. When they got through that maze, the reward was this: another maze.

This sets up a true story from my college days, when a few of us set out to discover just how many levels there were in this game. It just kept going, and surely there was an end to it, right?

One day, destiny called! Somehow the folks in charge of the arcade made a mistake with the way they set up Gauntlet. The game was arranged in a way that we could get unlimited lives, without putting any quarters in it at all. Yes! Free gaming!

This was our chance to answer an important question: does Gauntlet have an ending? Our team of adventurers had a plan: when not in class, we would take shifts in playing this game.

For hours and hours and hours, there’d be teams of us playing this game, one maze after another, all day long. But the hour grew late. Would we endure to the end?

“Warrior needs food badly,” that game’s voice called out. We had to go home. But what about Gauntlet? Overnight, we knew that the characters slowly died without food.

That’s when we came up with a plan: we pressed the buttons that made it seem like we were putting in a whole lot of quarters. Yes! Now all the characters were full of life, and hopefully they’d survive overnight. After a fretful night of sleep, we all raced back to the college arcade that morning, in desperate hopes that our characters were still alive in that maze.

And yes, indeed, there was much rejoicing! They all did, and yes the marathon continued into the second day. And after that, the third day. Yes, we played this game day after day like this, shifts of people playing maze after maze, a team working together with purpose. We were moving on and on and on, wondering if the arcade game Gauntlet has an actual end. Level 500 was approaching – would this be the end of the game?

No. And hopefully I’m saving you some time if you ever try such an exploit! After a week of keeping the hope alive that we’d get to the end of this game, we found our answer: it is truly an Infinity Gauntlet. This game has no end.

And that brings us to the bottom of this page, and hopefully a point, which is this: life is really about the journey, and not just the destination. Sure, we didn’t quite end up exactly where we thought we would. But we had a great time getting there.

Don’t be so concerned about where you’re going that you miss out on where you are now. Jesus told us not to worry about tomorrow. He’s got it taken care of. Live for him each day, and fight the good fight of faith so that together we can live with Him in the place that truly has no end: heaven.



DAY SIXTEEN

LEVEL UP

“He makes the whole body grow and build itself up in love. Under the control of Christ, each part of the body does its work. It supports the other parts. In that way, the body is joined and held together.” Ephesians 4:16 NIRV

Not many people remember this, but the very first Street Fighter game in arcades did not have six buttons on it. Not like today, where there are six buttons for each character. No, instead, you moved your character with a controller, and how hard you hit your opponents was determined by how hard you slammed your fist down on two pads labeled “punch” and “kick.”

To this day, I remember one match we played at the arcade. I was in charge of the “punch” button, and one of my friends had the “kick” button, while the third friend moved the character around. For the entire match, I spent all my energy slamming my fists down on this “punch” pad randomly as hard as I could, while my friend was doing the same with the “kick” pad.

The end result was an easy loss: our character was flailing about in this really weird way, punching the air really hard, and kicking at nothing with all his might. Sure, if we ever hit anything, it probably would have been great. But no, we lost right away.

Why? The problem was obvious: we weren’t coordinated! Perhaps if we worked together we’d stand a better chance. Also, perhaps our hands wouldn’t be bruised and sore from all that pounding.

The point is this: we’re designed to work together. We’re all parts of the body. I was the hand, and one friend was the foot, while the third was the head. If we worked together as one body, we might have stood a chance.

We are all parts of the body, and God didn’t design us to go through life alone. You were made to work together with others, as one body. Don’t worry, you’ll have your chance to make an impact in life, and yes, it’s going to be huge. But there’s only one way to be a real world champion: it’s when we work together.



DAY SEVENTEEN

LEVEL UP

“His lord said unto him, Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.” Matthew 25:21 KJV

There is a game called “Harvest Moon 64,” and the idea behind it is simple: you inherited a farm, and you lived in a little town, grew crops and took care of the animals.

I know some of you might be thinking that this sounds like no fun whatsoever. Where are the lasers and spaceships and super soldiers? My friends and I thought the same thing initially, and yet soon enough, we were sucked in. Every night I would plug this game in and check on my crops, go feed and pet the cows, and possibly run into the village to see if anything was going on.

We always compared the game to having a low grade fever. You just had to ride it out until the end, and then you were back to normal. And there was somewhat of an end to this game: your character’s uncle returns eventually, and he sees all you’ve done. That part was always a disappointment, not just because it meant the game was over, but because the uncle was never really happy with all the things you’ve done with your life. I remember building this empire of vegetables and prize-winning animals, and yet that uncle just wasn’t that thrilled.

Still, it was an amazing run taking care of the farm. Later on, games like Farmville and Farming Simulator would hook other video game players, but not me: I learned to stay away from those, because I knew how addictive they were!

Why are these games so addictive? It might be because they are somewhat like real life in a way. In these games, you’re given a day to work with, and to see how much you can accomplish in that time. The days add up, and soon enough, you’ve grown from a little seed of a farm to something greater than you could possibly imagine.

I’m sure you know where this is going: that’s life! God has given us all different amounts of talents to begin with, and He’s also given us all something equally remarkable: today. The question hangs in the air: what will you do with today? In the game of “Harvest Moon 64,” I could just hang around the house or go to the bakery to visit Ellie. But if I just did that, my harvest would be smaller, wouldn’t it?

There’s a time and place for everything. Visiting Ellie was fine, but there was work that had to be done if you wanted a harvest. And that’s the balance we have in life too. Playing video games is fine, but there are also things that need to be done if we want to grow and grow to be something bigger and better.

Fortunately, we don’t have a mean uncle coming in at the end to judge us harshly. But God is watching to see what we do with our lives, and there will be a day where we get to explain all the choices we’ve made to Him, face to face. The best decision is this: use the talents you’ve been given, and grow each day, and then you’ll hear our Heavenly Father say, “Well done, my good and faithful servant.”



DAY EIGHTEEN

LEVEL UP

“So God created human beings in His own likeness. He created them to be like Himself. He created them as male and female.” Genesis 1:27 NIRV

The basic idea behind the game Disney Infinity is this: you bought a character for your game, a figure that you could hold in your hand, and stand up on a small platform. Your friend could bring one over to your house as well, and set it up on that same platform. When you turn on the video game, you can play those characters on the screen, and bring them to life!

There are games to play in the world of Disney Infinity, but one of the more fun things you can do is create your own world entirely from scratch. You can literally have characters like Chewbacca and Lightning McQueen visit the Magic Kingdom, team up Perry the Platypus with the Mad Hatter against an onslaught of Stormtroopers, or have Spider-man go under water to help Obi-Wan Kenobi in “Finding Nemo.”

Imagination is the fun part of the game, and it was super fun sharing these created worlds with other players all over. Each time you turned on the game, you could visit a whole new world, and yes, you could team up Aladdin and Jasmine to visit on a magic carpet!

Sounds fun, doesn't it? But creativity is a gift that God has given all of us. Some claim they're not that creative, but the truth is that we are all created in God's image. And God created the world just by speaking it out loud. We too speak things into existence, don't we? Say it right now: “I am creative.”

Because it's true! Each day you open your mouth, you begin to create something unique and hopefully wonderful. The big question is this: what are you saying each day, and are you creating a remarkable place that others would want to visit?

It is said that being creative is a like a muscle that grows stronger and stronger the more you use it. So today, make it a habit of speaking a world into existence that God would be proud of. Speak life, speak hope, speak wonder... and speak creativity!

KIDPAK ADVENTURES

DAY NINETEEN

LEVEL UP

“All who heard him were amazed. They asked, ‘Isn’t he the man who caused great trouble in Jerusalem? Didn’t he make trouble for those who worship Jesus? Hasn’t he come here to take them as prisoners to the chief priests?’” Acts 9:21 NIRV

It all began with Donkey Kong. In 1981, Shigeru Miyamoto came up with the idea for a game called Donkey Kong, which had a simple concept: a hero named Mario had to climb up all of these ramps and girders in order to rescue Princess Peach. The problem was that Donkey Kong was also there at the top, a large ape-like character who spends the entire game rolling barrels at Mario. Obviously, you’d better jump over those. This is why initially, Mario’s name was called Jumpman.

Since then, it’s difficult to count all the Mario games that have been released. It’s an entire new world populated by memorable characters like Princess Peach, Luigi, Bowser, Wario, Koopas, Thwomps, and much, much more. And yes, in many of those games you can find Donkey Kong as well.

In fact, Donkey Kong is the hero in many of the games, from Donkey Kong Country to Donkey Kong 64. Those are *great* games, by the way!

Wait a minute – how can the villain of the game turn out to be the heroic main character? Perhaps there was some misunderstanding? Or maybe everyone said they were sorry and just forgot about it. Regardless, you can see Donkey Kong right there today, alongside Mario and the others, playing golf, tennis, or even racing go-karts.

In our Bibles, there was a villain named Saul. He was much worse than Donkey Kong, because he did a lot more than throw barrels at Christians. He sentenced them to death, and traveled around the countryside, hunting for more to persecute.

But suddenly Saul had an unexpected conversation with Jesus, and everything changed. Saul changed his name to Paul, and went from being a terrible villain to being an unstoppable hero of the faith.

The point is this: be careful how you judge people you think are villains. All it takes is one moment with Jesus, and everything can change. You probably don’t know anyone that spends all his time throwing barrels at people, but you do probably know of a few people you consider bullies, or just not that nice.

Those people can change, and it can happen as quickly as it did with Paul – or it might be something gradual like with Donkey Kong. Either way, our job is pretty clear: pray for those who you think are villains. Continue being a light unto the world, because soon enough those villains can become heroes.



“Jesus answered, ‘I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.’” John 14:6 NIRV

Right about the time personal computers started becoming more popular, there was a game that was made for them called “Lemmings.”

The object of the game was simple: you had to get about ninety-nine or so lemmings safely from one place to another. The challenges came when you found obstacles in the way. You had to dig under some obstacles, or build bridges over others, and even use bombs to destroy certain areas. Once a path was found to safety, the lemmings followed their leader right over bridges through tunnels and over all sorts of weird objects towards their freedom.

There’s an expression we use to describe someone blindly following another. That person is called a lemming. Though they don’t look like they do in the video game, lemmings are real creatures. And it’s been proven that lemmings don’t actually do this, but for the longest time it was thought that a lemming would just follow other lemmings for no reason, even if those other lemmings were running straight off a cliff!

You can see how this is a bad idea. And yet, there are so many people these days that follow others, without even knowing where they’re going. In order to fit in, sometimes we try to do all the things that cool people do in school or work or wherever. But sometimes that’s a dark path that leads to dangerous places far worse than off a cliff. Drugs, alcohol, and a whole lot of other things are what the world tries to show are cool, and there’s this temptation to want to fit in.

But you’re not a lemming, are you? No, there’s only one person you follow. He’s Jesus, the Way, the Truth and the Life. He has shown us the way to live, the only path to safety, and the only path to life, really.

The bottom line here is to watch who you follow. In the game, there were some lemmings who were just a ticking time bomb waiting to go off and cause damage. You might run into some people like that in real life. Be careful around them, and be careful who you follow, because you never know where things might lead.

The best advice is to simply follow Jesus. We know where He’s leading us, and we know it is a path to victory. Keep marching along with that walk of faith, keep following Him onward, and lead as many others as you can in the right direction.

KIDPAK ADVENTURES

DAY TWENTY ONE

LEVEL UP

“God has breathed life into all Scripture. It is useful for teaching us what is true. It is useful for correcting our mistakes. It is useful for making our lives whole again. It is useful for training us to do what is right. By using Scripture, the servant of God can be completely prepared to do every good thing.” 2 Timothy 3:16-17 NIRV

In the earliest days of home video games, there was a game called “Adventure” for the Atari 2600. The goal of the game was to travel through other large rooms, mazes, and castles to find keys, swords and a chalice that you would return to your home castle. Oh, and yikes: along the way you’d have to fight dragons. The red one was the worst!

Like most games of the time, this one was simple. But if you played the game a lot more, like I did, you discovered a hidden secret. It’s something known as “the dot.” This was not an advertised thing, something not in the rule book, a secret that was passed along from player to player. Have you found “the dot” yet? What does it do?

By playing further, suddenly its purpose was discovered: you used the dot to get into a secret place, a room that had the game designer’s name in it. This is credited as the very first video game “Easter egg,” a term for something hidden within a game.

In our Bibles, there are so many hidden things waiting to be discovered that it is impossible to list them all. On the surface, you may be reading what you think is a simple story from the Bible that you thought you’ve always known. But when looking deeper, suddenly amazing things appear that you might not have noticed before.

In fact, the entire Bible is an amazing adventure filled with secrets to uncover, and it has God’s name not just in one room, but in fact written all over it! If you haven’t spent any time reading lately, you should. Pick a Bible up today, because unlike any other book, this one can take you to special places where God reveals Himself to us in wonderful, creative ways. The Bible says His Word is a key, and it is also like a sword. It’s one that prepares you to go forth, and live your greatest adventure.



DAY TWENTY TWO

LEVEL UP

“Faith is being sure of what we hope for. It is being sure of what we do not see. That is what the people of long ago were praised for.” Hebrews 11:1-2 NIRV

Every arcade game has one thing in common: a screen for high scores. Video games at home have these as well, especially if you’re playing online. Now *there’s* an accomplishment: having the best score at a game worldwide is a pretty awesome deal!

But in the early days, it was just great having the number one score on a game at the local arcade. The whole town just knew who the best player was. The scores are there on one big screen. What a great feeling to plug in your initials after getting a great score, and putting up those three letters, like “ZGG,” “MMC,” or “ARG.”

These scores would certainly challenge the other players that came around. Can you possibly beat that score? Surely you could, right? If you could do as well, you too could make it to the High Score screen for all to see.

Out of all the chapters of the Bible, there is one that is pretty much a high score screen. It’s chapter eleven in the book of Hebrews. Why? Because it’s there that you can find names with the highest scores in real life. If they could only leave three letters, you’d see initials like “NOA,” “MOS,” “ABR,” and “SAR” in that chapter. That’s right: Noah, Moses, Abraham and Sarah are just a few of the names we can find in the Hall of Faith. This is a chapter dedicated to some of the greatest names in the Bible. These heroes scored supernaturally big!

The people found in this chapter have stories that challenge us and our faith. Can we possibly do as well as they can? Can we ever hope to have our names alongside theirs? Yes, we can, because we all have that same hope. Also, we serve the same One who has a name that easily fits at the top of every high score screen: “GOD.”

Don’t be intimidated by those great names found on God’s High Score chapter. Instead, read their stories and learn some tips on how to do better in all you do. Be the best you can, and take your game to the next level. Keep the faith, and you too can put your initials there on the high score screen, right beside the other greatest names of all time.

“They kept asking him questions. So he stood up and said to them, ‘Has any one of you not sinned? Then you be the first to throw a stone at her.’” John 8:7 NIRV

Ah, to be a thwomp! Wait a minute, do you even know what a thwomp is? Mario, Luigi and his friends surely do: they’re ginormous rocks that hover in the air, just waiting for anyone to casually walk beneath. Thwomps are quite territorial, meaning if you try to walk underneath a floating thwomp, you’d best get ready to be flattened!

No one wants to be around a thwomp. But maybe we should be careful before getting too judgmental. That means this: some people act just like thwomps. Some folks look down upon others, and just don’t think they belong around anywhere. Maybe it is because those others have less money, don’t dress well, or even smell kind of funny. Or perhaps it’s because of something wrong that’s been done in the past.

It’s bad enough that some people think they’re better than others. What’s worse is when it is taken a step further. Talking bad about people behind their backs can be such a hurtful thing to do! Your words can be more crushing than a thwomp, and they can hurt for a very long time.

In our Bibles, Jesus saw the Pharisees about to come down on a woman they thought was beneath them. They too wanted to crush her, not just with words, but with actual stones.

That’s when Jesus did what he does best. He told them the truth: “Has any one of you not sinned?” Urg! You see, we’ve all sinned, and no one is perfect. Furthermore, God loves us all exactly the same. That’s why we need to be careful not to act like the Pharisees – or thwomps!

Mario and his friends know to stay clear of a thwomp, because nobody wants to be around a thwomp. And if you find yourself acting like a thwomp, you’d best be careful. Thinking others are beneath you is just not right. Crushing them by talking about them behind their backs? Wanting to hurt them? That’s also really bad.

Don’t look down on others, and don’t try to hurt them. Treat everyone with love, the kind Jesus would be proud of. In other words, don’t be a thwomp!





“The eye is like a lamp for the body. Suppose your eyes are healthy. Then your whole body will be full of light.” Matthew 6:22 NIRV

Some time ago I was invited to join several other friends for a day full of video games. That’s one thing guys love to do: sit around and play video games, eat food, play more video games, catch up with each other about our lives, and maybe play even more video games.

At one point, someone plugged in this one game, and keep in mind this was a while ago. We were playing for some time, and I’m not going to say which game it was, but I will say that I suddenly heard something I never thought would come from a video game: bad language.

Now I come from a generation of the Atari 2600, the Commodore 64, and Nintendo gaming systems. In all our years, the only thing our parents were upset about were these really super violent fighting games in the arcades. Those were bad, but that’s about it.

But this was crazy. And fast forwarding to today, it’s gotten much worse. Today, video games have gotten to this point where they actually have ratings on them, just like it is with movies. And clearly, just like there are movies we shouldn’t be watching, there are certain games that we should not be playing. There are good games out there, yes. But there are others that we shouldn’t be playing.

The problem is that many parents may be like I was at first, with no idea that there are games out there with really bad things in them. But you and I know better. We know we need to be careful what our eyes see, and what our ears hear.

Jesus told us to be cautious what we allowed our eyes to see and ears to hear. It’s been said that our eyes and ears are like a gateway, allowing things into our spirits, both good or bad. So what are you letting in?

You may be over at a friend’s house, as I was. Or maybe it’s a game that everyone is talking about, and you’re tempted to pick it up, or download it. Whatever it is, the first thing you need to think about is very important: is this a game that I could play with Jesus? Seriously, picture Jesus beside you with a controller, ready to chill for a few moments with you, playing some games. Would he be okay with the game you’ve chosen?

As I was playing that game for the first time, I heard a voice inside and knew something was wrong. I hope you listen to that same voice inside, telling you to do the right thing. Ignore the temptation to see what it is all about, and turn that garbage off. Trust me: there’s plenty of other better choices you can make.



“A person without self-control is like a city whose walls are broken through.”
Proverbs 25:28 NIRV

Growing up, we knew of a legendary place of mystery in New Mexico. It’s a landfill where supposedly three and a half million copies of one video game were dumped alongside millions of other pieces of video game history.

It started out as an urban legend. We all heard it at school that there’s this place where they buried three and a half million copies of an Atari video game, “E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial.”

At first, the kid in me was thinking of joining all the other kids in going out there to dig it all up, and maybe sell them or something. But that brings us to the reason the game was buried in the first place. *They would never sell.* “E.T.” is widely recognized as one of the worst video games in all of history.

I should know. I had a copy. And I still have it at home, although I wouldn’t dare plug it in to play it. It really is pretty dreadful.

How could a game based on such a beloved movie character fail so terribly? They made all these copies of the game because they knew the movie was so amazingly popular. And because this new game has “E.T.” himself in it, it should sell lots of copies, right?

“Ouch! Ouch!” Here’s where the problem started: the movie came out in the summer. And Atari wanted a game from it by that Christmas. They gave this one game designer *five weeks* to get it all done, from concept to finished product. Keep in mind, small games today take between two and six months, and larger games? They take as many as five years to make! This guy had only five weeks to come up with an idea, and have a finished product too. And he had only one assistant to help him!

You can see how impossible the task was. In the end, the final product was so hated that it meant the beginning of the end for the entire Atari gaming system. They lost a *lot* of money.

This one game is famous because it shows what happens when we rush into big things without thinking too much. Often times, the end results can be painful. Just ask Peter from the Bible: he often spoke before he thought. He said so many things to Jesus, and he probably looked back on those bold words with embarrassment. He probably wished he could bury his words somewhere out in New Mexico too.

Self-control is a Fruit of the Spirit, and it’s something Peter learned to use, and it’s probably something the people at Atari wished they had more of back then. And it’s something you should use too. Think before you speak, and look before you leap. With just a little self-control and careful thought, you can avoid falling into a ditch. Or even a landfill.



DAY TWENTY SIX

LEVEL UP

“Don’t let anyone look down on you because you are young. Set an example for the believers in what you say and in how you live. Also set an example in how you love and in what you believe. Show the believers how to be pure.” 1 Timothy 4:12 NIRV

The game of Katamari is pretty easy to understand. You’re a small guy pushing a ball around. If you run into something smaller than the ball you’re pushing, it becomes a part of the ball. If you run into something bigger than the ball, it bounces off. Obviously, if you keep running into smaller things, your ball is going to get bigger and bigger, right?

Sure enough, you start out the game of Katamari by picking up paper clips, erasers and car keys. But towards the end of the game, you’re picking up ferris wheels, cruise ships, and small islands!

This is a picture of where you are going in life. No, you’re not going to be rolling around over cars and school buses. But you are going to be doing things bigger and bigger in life. That’s what you’re dreaming for, right?

The Bible talks about not looking down on small beginnings, and there’s a lot of truth to that. For example, we see a young boy named Joseph in the Bible with nothing but a colorful coat and some dreams. There’s not much to read about, is there? But as things move along in his story, we see him later on, rolling up all of the Egyptian empire’s harvest, in order to use it and save the world.

And look at David! Like the father in the game Katamari, David’s own dad thought he was the least likely one in the family to become something that big. But sure enough, David was rolling up victory after victory, and in time found himself King of all Cosmos, or at least King of Israel.

The point is simple. You’ve got dreams and you’ll get to those places in time – it’s just that you might not be ready for them yet. Relax, and don’t worry. God is preparing you for something super awesome, so keep rolling along, building your experience, building your skills, and building your faith.

You’ve got a future brighter than a Royal Rainbow. Your Heavenly Father has wonderful plans for you, so don’t stay still too long. The clock is ticking, so let’s get rolling!



“Don’t pay back evil with evil. Don’t pay back unkind words with unkind words. Instead, pay back evil with kind words. This is what you have been chosen to do. You will receive a blessing by doing this.” 1 Peter 3:9 NIRV

“Why so snarky, sparky?” Elise Riggs meets up with Psymon Stark after a big snowboarding race, and gives him an earful.

If you know “SSX Tricky,” you know that this video game isn’t just about stunning air time, perfect snow, insane snowboarding tricks, beautiful views, and a thrilling race to the finish line. It also features some intense rivalries with characters like Elise and Psymon, as well as others like Eddie Wachowski, Mac Fraser, Moby Jones, Zoe Payne and Kaori Nishidake.

They’re in it to win it, and sometimes while going down these slopes, push does come to shove. To be the champion, you’ve got to be tough.

But ultimately, the choice is yours when it comes to pushing people back. If they try to knock you down, you can still win with just talent and skill. You don’t have to sink to that level, steamrolling your opponents to win. Some players go in and start shoving everyone else out of the way. That’s a real quick method to make enemies in the game. One interesting thing about “SSX Tricky” is that the other players remember how you acted during the race, and yes, that can come back to haunt you.

In our Bibles, Paul compared our Christian lives to a race. And just like with “SSX Tricky,” we have choices to make along the course. Do we take this lower track or the higher one? Do we try this new thing we’ve learned and try a leap of faith, or do we stick to the grind? And yes, do we try to get people back?

Along the way in life, it seems there’s always some other person that does something that will be super annoying. It could be even worse than that. Perhaps someone wants to bring you down. The choice is yours, but consider this: wanting to get others back is just going to slow you down. It makes you lose focus, and when that happens, you’re not winning anymore.

Forgive, forget and focus. When you do that, you’ll be waiting for everyone else at the finish line. Don’t let anger consume you. Just let it go. Or, as Elise Riggs puts it, don’t get so snarky, sparky!



“But God is faithful and fair. If we confess our sins, He will forgive our sins. He will forgive every wrong thing we have done. He will make us pure.” 1 John 1:9 NIRV

One of my favorite games growing up was one that involved one of my favorite subjects: pirates. In fact, the game was called, “Pirates!” This game was created for the Commodore 64, and it was an epic adventure. The entire Caribbean map was there for you – bring me that horizon! In fact, it would take a while, but you could sail from St. Augustine in Florida all the way down to Panama and South America.

What was the object of the game, you ask? That was the great thing. You could be a merchant, or you could go into politics, aspiring to be a governor of an island. You could sail your ship with the British, French, Spanish or Dutch navies, helping battle for control of the Caribbean. But who are we kidding? Most people that play this game just want to be a pirate!

Watch out if you fly that pirate flag. If you attack a Spanish galleon, from that point on, the Spanish fleet will be in the crow’s nest, looking out for you. Occasionally though, you’ll be offered a Letter of Marque. This was always unbelievable to me, but it’s an actual thing in pirate history.

A pirate could spend years giving a country headaches, sinking their ships, battling their navies and taking all their gold. Yet suddenly a governor from that country is sitting there, offering this Letter of Marque. It basically meant this: “We forgive you of everything, just as long as you join our side!”

Can you imagine how awesome that was to get as a pirate? That one piece of paper had to be something really valuable. No more death sentence, and no more price on your head. With this little piece of paper, you’re forgiven of everything you’ve ever done, and now suddenly fighting for a new team.

The great thing is this: we’ve all been handed a Letter of Marque, haven’t we? Of course, I’m not talking about an actual piece of paper. I’m talking about the grace that Jesus has given us. God is there, like the governor, and He’s offering you the same deal: “I forgive you of everything, just as long as you join our side!”

That’s a pretty amazing deal, friend. I’d best take it if I were you. Complete forgiveness, and a chance to join a winning team? Sign up with God’s crew today, and start collecting treasures in heaven. Your life is about to become an epic, swashbuckling adventure!



“Where there is arguing, there is pride. But those who take advice are wise.”
Proverbs 13:10 NIRV

Every year there’s a lot of excitement during the fall for some folks. Why is that? Because the next edition of the video game series “Madden” is released. It’s a football game named after NFL coach John Madden, who was so insistent that the game be as realistic as possible that it took *years* to create. The first game was released in 1988, and ever since 1990, there’s been a new version released each year before the football season.

Football fans and video game fans are crazy about this game. It has sold over 130 million copies over the years, and made over four billion dollars!

There are a lot of things you do leading up to the actual football games, but once the match starts, it’s fairly easy to get the hang of. You pick plays – or plans – for your players to follow on the field. Offense goes up against defense, and if you’ve got talented players that follow the best plans, you’ll find yourself dancing in the end zone.

But consider a moment if the players didn’t follow the game plan. What if they did their own thing? First of all, it wouldn’t be any fun. Secondly, that team would probably lose.

Even though you’re the one leading the charge, this game of football is a team sport. You’ve got fifty-three players on each NFL team, and if you’re going to win as a team, you’ve got to play as a team. Players can’t just go out there and do their own thing, thinking of themselves, promoting themselves and showing the world how great they think they are. No, they’ve got to think of other people, how they’re affecting their teammates and even how they’re affecting their sport.

But it’s like that in church too. Your church is very much a team, a part of the body of Christ. God has a game plan right there in the Bible, and all you have to do is read about Jesus to see it. He lived his life loving and serving others, and thinking about all of us first. Never once did he put himself before his team. And because of that, he scored the greatest victory in all history.

Are you a team player? Are you serving God first, and serving others, or are you doing things for yourself without thinking of how it will affect everyone around you? Follow the best playbook there is, the Bible. Squash that pride down, or you’ll never find victory. Only by working together, serving together, and showing love together will you find yourself really dancing in that end zone.



“In fact, he even counts every hair on your head! So don’t be afraid. You are worth more than many sparrows.” Luke 12:7 NIRV

We’ve been playing golf-themed video games for many years, going way back to even the Atari 2600. Believe it or not, that was my favorite game for that system.

But along came other games like Mario Golf, Waialae Country Club, Tee Off, Tiger Woods PGA Tour, and Golden Tee, and many more. It seems there will always be a new and fun golfing video game released as the years go by.

Golf is a game played one stroke at a time. And that’s just the way life works too. Many golfers have been in tricky situations, but the key to a good game is having a certain inner calm. As we play through life, we can find that peace too. It may take a bit of effort, but we can find peace when we wipe away worries, concerns, distractions and temptations.

Jesus shared some words that can help. For example, consider the birdie. At one point along the green, Jesus spoke of a sparrow. He used this birdie to explain something really important, and really simple: He said let it go. You see, worry won’t help you at all. Remember that God takes care of the birdies, so you can have peace in knowing He’ll take care of you too.

If you’re feeling condemnation or anger about something in the past, then join the club. We’ve all been there, and the wonderful thing is that God is ready to help us move to where the grass is greener. If you’ve asked Him for forgiveness in any area, just know your past is in the past. He’ll help you out of the rough.

One of the greatest ways to keep that peace inside is to keep serving Him. In golf, the lowest score wins. It’s odd to think about – and yet that’s the way we as Christians do our thing as well. We follow the example of Jesus, who came to serve and help others, and who said “Those who are last will be first.” In fact, the greatest satisfaction anyone can ever have in life is this: knowing his time and energy is being spent helping God and His kingdom.

And if things don’t go exactly right, don’t fly off the handle. Here’s your final golf tip: Just keep your head down, and keep serving the Lord – and keep trusting Him too! Because it says right there in the Bible that those who trust in the Lord will receive new strength. And yes, they will fly as high as eagles. In golf, and in life, that’s a good thing!



*“Two people are better than one. They can help each other in everything they do.”
Ecclesiastes 4:9 NIRV*

It is so hard to pick a favorite LEGO video game, because there are so many good ones! If I was pinned down and forced to choose one though, I think it'd be “LEGO Batman 2.” Have you played this one? It's amazing, and huge, and creative, and lots of fun. There's an awesome world to explore, but there's also a great story to this one as well.

There's one hero Gotham City deserves and needs, and that's LEGO Batman. We think he's super, and he thinks he's super too. It's pretty funny, but it is also the very thing that gets him into trouble on one adventure: he doesn't think he needs any help to get the job done. Ever.

As you can imagine, this is disappointing to his sidekick, Robin. But even worse, this bad attitude gets Batman into some serious trouble. He doesn't call for help when it is obvious he needs it, and as a result he finds himself in quite a desperate situation.

Pride will mess you up, and Batman was full of it. You should never be in a place where you won't ask for help. In the end, he winds up getting his friends in trouble too, all because he was too prideful to ask for a hand.

It takes a big disaster for him to call for assistance, and for a moment he doesn't think he can rely on anyone to help. But in swoop his friends to help save the day! Working together, they use their different gifts to stop the villains and become the heroes they were meant to be.

God made us all different, but when we connect as a team, there's no way villainy can stand a chance. The lesson is clear: we aren't designed to work alone throughout life. LEGO of your pride! Don't learn Batman's lesson the hard way: we're made to connect together, and working as one body, we can build a super team!