



Christian Reflection
A Series in Faith and Ethics

Christian Reflection
Center for Christian Ethics
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Study Guides for **Virtual Lives**

These guides integrate Bible study, prayer, and worship to help us examine new information technologies – computers, smartphones, interactive television, and more – and the roles they play in our discipleship. Use them individually or in a series. You may reproduce them for personal or group use.

- Curiosity and Smartphones** 2
Mobile connectivity is both compelling and unsettling. Whether or not our time in virtual reality runs contrary to the soul's deep need for the love of God and others depends on why we pursue virtual lives, what they teach us to desire, and how we cherish the things they provide.
- Technological Prudence:**
What the Amish Can Teach Us 4
The Amish have managed for a century to keep phone technology in check to foster a sense of community that we yearn for in our electronically tethered and frenetically paced lives. How might we leverage this power of the air and subject it to the purposes of God's kingdom?
- Faithful Criticism of Popular Media Technologies** 6
What values and biases are inherent in each communication technology? How do they affect our relationship with God, ourselves, others, and the environment? These questions help us understand the relationship between the content we consume and the delivery systems that bring it to us.
- Religious Authority and the Age of the Internet** 8
As the Internet changes how we interact with one another, it transforms our understanding of authority by creating positions of power, flattening traditional hierarchies, and providing platforms that give voice to the voiceless. How is it reshaping Christian leadership and institutions of authority?
- Making Moral Choices in Video Games** 10
Video games can provide immersive experiences in fantasy stories of good and evil. As we become agents in their complex narrative arcs, we develop skills of moral perception and decision-making. More importantly, we may experience what J. R. R. Tolkien calls "eucatastrophe."



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Focus Article:

📖 Curiosity and Smartphones
(*Virtual Lives*, pp. 11-19)

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Curiosity and Smartphones

Mobile connectivity is both compelling and unsettling. Whether or not our time in virtual reality runs contrary to the soul's deep need for the love of God and others depends on why we pursue virtual lives, what they teach us to desire, and how we cherish the things they provide.

Prayer

Scripture Reading: Luke 11:29-32

Meditation¹

Jesus Christ, who is the same yesterday and today and tomorrow, calls his disciples "friends." His earthly ministry was in a different day — before friendship across continents was possible and "friending" became a casual verb. In our techno-savvy world we face new ways of living, yet life is still about relationships with God, our neighbors, and the creation.

So we examine our virtual lives in light of God's call to virtuous living. May God open our eyes to see, our ears to hear, and our hearts to understand as we pray, reflect, and sing together as his friends.

Anne Bell Worley

Reflection

Androids, Blackberries, and iPhones can provide instant access to an amazing amount of information, significant and trivial alike. This is a great blessing, Doug Henry avows, yet he worries that "living in a world of perpetual mobile connectivity can be spiritually distracting, and even deforming, for those who succumb to its inducements." Wait a minute — could we really be deformed by our smartphones? Henry believes their impact on us depends in part on the kind of intellectual appetite, or desire for knowledge, that we indulge and nurture when we use them.

In the Christian tradition, *curiositas* names a sinful form of intellectual appetite and *studiositas* identifies a praiseworthy appetite for knowledge. Henry explains how these "have different purposes, seek different things, and occupy different worlds."

- ▶ *Why we desire knowledge.* The curious want "to possess, conquer, own, and sequester for private purposes an intellectual good that could benefit others." The studios seek "participatory intimacy" with knowledge. They "delight in the joy of creaturely proximity to truth, regarding it as an inexhaustible good not diminished in the least when others share in it."
- ▶ *What knowledge we seek.* While the curious think the world consists of mere objects to be taken as one's own, the studios experience it as filled with God's good gifts to receive. "Conquerors do not receive or celebrate gifts, and neither do the merely curious," notes Henry. "They can feel important in owning or in knowing something that nobody else possesses. For them, though, delighting in something that is graciously shared comes, if at all, with difficulty."
- ▶ *How we are oriented toward knowledge.* The curious seek novelty. They want to be the first one to know things, and want to tell others what they know, because sharing their information, news,



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or gossip marks them as a step ahead of their competition. Most of all, the curious can savor a spectacle—an attention-grabbing, merely entertaining glimpse of violence, damage, or distortion. Once Jesus rebuked the swelling, but shallow crowd of followers for “seeking a sign” —or as *The Message* puts it, “something to titillate your curiosity.”² They wanted some sort of spectacle, rather than a relationship with Christ (Luke 11:29-32; cf. Matthew 12:38-42; 16:1-4).

“*Studiositas* differs in every relevant way in how it orients us toward knowledge,” Henry says. “The studious prefer repeated, deepening encounters with what they can always know only partially.... In addition, because the studious have little concern to be known as knowers, they have no cause to broadcast their grip on the truth.” Rather than spectacles, the studious prefer the deep beauty that (in the words of Paul Griffiths) “beckons the gaze into something deeper than itself by opening its surface beauties...into something much more beautiful than itself,” ultimately the life of God.

Henry concludes, “By developing habits of *studiositas* rather than *curiositas*—especially when wielding potent tools such as smartphones—we can see God’s love more clearly in the graciously given gifts that we receive, seek to understand, and embrace as goods that direct us back to delight in God alone.”

Study Questions

1. Discuss the differences between *curiositas* and *studiositas*. How have you experienced each of these appetites?
2. Doug Henry writes, “A smartphone connected to the Internet is the ideal technology for cultivating and satisfying *curiositas*.” Do you agree?
3. On the other hand, how can we use mobile communication technologies to encourage and satisfy *studiositas*?
4. When should we turn our smartphones off?

Departing Hymn: “Full of Love and Christian Virtue”

Full of love and Christian virtue, may God’s people always be living out the new creation with faith, hope, and charity, prudence to discern the truth, justice to give all their due, fortitude to conquer fear, temperance toward earthly goods.

In a world that’s ever-changing, you, O God, are constant still. Help us in each age and season, your high purpose to fulfill: dare us to embrace new boundaries, grounded in your liberty; teach us how to be good neighbors, building true community.

Let us be a mindful people, walking in the way of Christ; keep us from the base and shallow of a merely virtual life. Meet us in our work and worship, at the table, with our friends; usher us to life abundant with your love that never ends.

Ann Bell Worley (2010)

Tune: RUSTINGTON

1 From Ann Bell Worley’s worship service, *Virtual Lives*, *Christian Reflection: A Series in Faith and Ethics*, 37 (Waco, TX: The Center for Christian Ethics), 53.

2 Scripture taken from *The Message*. Copyright © 1993, 1994, 1995, 1996, 2000, 2001, 2002. Used by permission of NavPress Publishing Group.



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Focus Article:

📖 Technological Prudence:
What the Amish Can
Teach Us
(*Virtual Lives*, pp. 20-28)

Suggested Article:

📖 Putting Ourselves Out
There: Making Our
Virtual Lives Virtuous
(*Virtual Lives*, pp. 78-81)

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Technological Prudence: What the Amish Can Teach Us

The Amish have managed for a century to keep phone technology in check to foster a sense of community that we yearn for in our electronically tethered and frenetically paced lives. How might we leverage this power of the air and subject it to the purposes of God's kingdom?

Prayer

Scripture Reading: 3 John 1:13-15

Meditation[†]

And so the question of the desirability of adopting any technological innovation is a question with two possible answers – not one, as has been commonly assumed. If one's motives are money, ease, and haste to arrive in a technologically determined future, then the answer is foregone, and there is, in fact, no question, and no thought. If one's motive is the love of family, community, country, and God, then one will have to think, and one may have to decide that the proposed innovation is undesirable.

Wendell Berry

Reflection

Sometimes when we are sharing with friends words of encouragement (or correction), we experience what John expresses: "I would rather not write with pen and ink" but prefer to "talk together face to face" (3 John 1:13-14). Well, maybe not that detail about "write with pen and ink." But we realize that our email, text message, or even phone conversation is a very inadequate medium to convey our thought and emotion, which leaves us feeling more disconnected than connected.

Reflecting on the varied ways the Amish have grappled for years to make telephones serve their communities rather than sever them, Kevin Miller wonders what we might learn from their efforts. The Amish show "a steadfast determination to make technology fit what anthropologists call relational time," he notes. They slow down for *kairos* time – to enjoy the meaning of life and appreciate its divine narrative structure – rather than obey *chronos* time that measures efficiency by the clock. Miller concludes, "the less *kairos* wholeness that we experience in our relationships and schedules and the more we are in tutelage to the god *chronos* (and its cousin mammon), the more our life stories feel plot-less, which is to say, pointless."

We must not fall "into a common false dichotomy – to either romanticize as ideal, or dismiss as hopelessly compromised, the accommodation... Amish communities have struck with modern technologies like the telephone in all its permutations," Miller warns. "A more fruitful line of conversation begins by asking what we moderns might learn from the Amish and their attempts to control technology, and then re-contextualize those principles for our habitus." Thus he reviews the "Amish values and positions" identified by sociologist Donald Kraybill "that have allowed them to control technology rather than letting it control them." Unlike moderns, the Amish:



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- ▶ *keep birth, work, play, education, worship, friendship, and death in (or close to) the home* and do not create separate institutions for these.
- ▶ *emphasize commonality* in dress and patterns of daily life.
- ▶ *nurture “local, enduring, and stable” relationships* and resist the discontinuity in modern social life.
- ▶ *order their church districts as loose federations and shun artificial approaches to planning families or careers.* They avoid the tendency in “highly rationalized and future-oriented modernity” to control “physical and social relationships through hierarchical bureaucracies.”
- ▶ *free individuals from choice* by following an *Ordnung* (an oral tradition of community rules and practices) and making exceptional choices together by congregational discernment. Kraybill says the Amish try to maintain “the predictability that undergirds traditional cultures, which are regulated by seasonal routines, customary norms, and fatalistic views.”

“These principles are abstract enough to allow for varied applications, not only within plain communities but also modernist ones,” Miller concludes. He sees hopeful “signs of our own worldly *Ordnung* forming to protect our online identity and humanity in its more meaningful, narrative forms.”

Study Questions

1. How have various Amish groups used telephones since their invention? Discuss Kevin Miller’s observation that “Flexible traditionalism, as opposed to a rigid dogmatism, kept their traditions and communities alive and pliable.”
2. Of the Amish values that Donald Kraybill identifies, which do you admire most? Which would you question or modify?
3. How do smartphones lure us into lives that are structured by *chronos* time? How might we tame them to enjoy *kairos* time?
4. For Amy Grizzle Kane, how can online social media threaten community? What response might we learn from the Amish?

Departing Hymn: “Full of Love and Christian Virtue”

Full of love and Christian virtue, may God’s people always be living out the new creation with faith, hope, and charity, prudence to discern the truth, justice to give all their due, fortitude to conquer fear, temperance toward earthly goods.

In a world that’s ever-changing, you, O God, are constant still. Help us in each age and season, your high purpose to fulfill: dare us to embrace new boundaries, grounded in your liberty; teach us how to be good neighbors, building true community.

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Ann Bell Worley (2010)

Tune: RUSTINGTON

† Wendell Berry, “Feminism, the Body and the Machine,” in *What Are People For?* (New York: North Point Press, 1990), 188.



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Focus Article:

📖 Faithful Criticism
of Popular Media
Technologies
(*Virtual Lives*, pp. 29-36)

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Faithful Criticism of Popular Media Technologies

What values and biases are inherent in each communication technology? How do they affect our relationship with God, ourselves, others, and the environment? These questions help us understand the relationship between the content we consume and the delivery systems that bring it to us.

Prayer

Creator God, the universe and all that it contains are yours. You formed us in your image, giving us the ability and responsibility to continue your work of creating. We celebrate the ingenuity behind the ever-evolving technologies that have given birth to the virtual worlds that are part of our common life.

We seek your guidance in their use. Give us clarity to examine the virtual lives that they make possible, and holy desire to live virtuously in and through them. In Christ's name and through the Holy Spirit we pray. Amen.

Scripture Reading: Psalm 8:3-5

Reflection

Often we ignore media technologies. We object to violence in certain films or sexting on smartphones, but fail to examine the nature of films and phones. We act like "what makes a particular technology good or bad is the actual use to which it is directed," observe Robert Woods and Paul Patton, as though "it is good in the hands of good people and bad in the hands of bad people." But it is a mistake to think technology is neutral in this way.

Because popular media technologies—like television, film, paperback books, magazines, smartphones, computers, and video games—are human creations, they express and nurture the values and biases of their human inventors. Woods and Patton give an example: "personal computers were created by people like Bill Gates, who valued organizing vast amounts of information, sending messages (at high speeds), and connecting individuals and businesses worldwide. Thus, regardless of the actual messages sent, computers nurture efficiency, information sharing, speed, and globalization."

Further, each communication technology has a "language"—"its own unique way of capturing and presenting reality to audiences that involves a structural bias in its communication," they note. "In this sense, the potential of any technology is limited not just by social institutions or by its human operators, but by the very language of the technology itself."

Faithful media criticism should address not only the *content* of media and how it affects individuals, groups, and organizations in society, but also the communication *technology*. Woods and Patton illustrate the latter process by examining television's inherent values and biases, and the nature of its language.

- ▶ *Television inherently values or favors images over words* (doing the imagining of things for us and making us think seeing—more than reading or hearing—is believing), *visual interruption* (rather than sustained reflection), *interpersonal distraction* (drawing our attention



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to its flashing images, away from family members and friends in the room), and *physical inactivity*. “Over time, these values can subtly influence our interactions with others, including our desire for face-to-face interaction in community and the world around us.”

- ▶ *Television’s language is inherently intimate and immediate*. This intimacy is evident in how the medium accentuates character’s faces and personalities over ideas and propositions. Television “often creates the illusion of face-to-face interaction between individual viewers and people on the screen... a phenomenon that researchers refer to as para-social interaction (PSI).” Some viewers may come to prefer TV personas to real-life characters. And television celebrities may promote their own personality cults, whether they intend to or not.

The immediacy of television is evident in live programming like President John F. Kennedy’s funeral, the moonwalk, O. J. Simpson’s trial, 9/11, the Iraq War, and Barack Obama’s inauguration. “Celebrities and activist groups alike regularly leverage live media coverage of staged events not only to spread the word about their causes but to connect immediately and emotionally with potential supporters.”

“Each technology comes with benefits and burdens apart from the content it delivers,” conclude Woods and Patton. “To the extent that we understand the inherent potential and limits of any particular technology, we open up its redemptive possibilities – whether as critics, consumers, or creators of popular media and technology.”

Study Questions

1. According to Robert Woods and Paul Patton, media technologies reflect the “values and biases” of their creators. What inherent values and biases of television do they identify? Select another popular new communication technology – for example, laptop computers, portable music players, smartphones, or video games – and discuss its inherent values and biases.
2. How do Wood and Patton characterize television’s “language”? Continue your critique of the media technology you chose in the previous question by examining its language.
3. The *Rule of St. Benedict* (sixth century) prescribed that each year a monk in the community be given one book to read for the entire year – meditatively, over and over. What are the values and language of that technology and practice?

Departing Hymn: “Dear Lord, Take Up Our Tangled Strands” (vv. 1 and 4)

Dear Lord, take up our tangled strands
where we have worked in vain,
that by the skill of your own hands
some beauty may remain.

Take all the failures, each mistake
of our poor human ways,
then, Savior, for your own dear sake,
make them show forth your praise.

Mrs. F. G. Burroughs (1920), alt.
Tune: DUNDEE



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Focus Article:

📖 Ties that Bind: Sharing a Common Rule of Life
(*Virtual Lives*, pp. 59-68)

Suggested Article:

📖 Virtual Reality Comes to the Church
(*Virtual Lives*, pp. 88-93)

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Religious Authority in the Age of the Internet

As the Internet changes how we interact with one another, it transforms our understanding of authority by creating positions of power, flattening traditional hierarchies, and providing platforms that give voice to the voiceless. How is it reshaping Christian leadership and institutions of authority?

Responsive Prayer

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer for all who find their livelihood and leisure in virtual technologies,
that they may have the wisdom and will to use them properly, in service of human life and creativity;
for all who hunger for friendship and community, and for all who feel alone,
that they may find the love and acceptance they seek in the presence of God and the communion of saints;
for all who seek to follow the way of Christ and dwell meaningfully with others in the virtual realm,
that they might be gracious and discerning, witnessing to the faith through their life and practice.

Ever-living and ever-loving God, breathe your life into us that we might live the words we pray and be signs of your great love and presence in the world. **Amen.**

Scripture Reading: Jude 1:20-25

Reflection

If we think the earliest Christians who lived so close to the time of Jesus and in the presence of his apostles always knew whom to trust and follow, we would be wrong. Jude warns them of “certain intruders” who are morally shameless and deny the authority of Christ (4). Those leaders are full of themselves, and their pretentious and flattering speeches are misleading some believers (16). In this crisis of authority Jude instructs Christians as they faithfully “contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints” (3), to be merciful toward the errant leaders, their confused followers, and others whose faith is wavering. Jude’s recipe of discernment and mercy to restore faithfulness would seem to be wise counsel for us today as we face new and complex challenges to religious authority in the Internet age.

Before Heidi Campbell and Paul Teusner focus specifically on how the Internet challenges religious authority, they remind us to put its impact into the context of other societal changes. “Even before the rise of the Internet,” they note, “people’s lifestyles were becoming increasingly mobile and they tended to identify less with a local congregation or Christian denomination. Increasingly their religious identities are tied to personalized networks of friends and acquaintances they know through telecommunication technologies, rather than to local religious communities bound together by geographic and family ties.”

Campbell and Teusner identify three ways that the Internet is transforming the authority of religious leaders and institutions.



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- ▶ *The Internet is changing how we understand Christian community and, therefore, how we gain and maintain religious identity.* It “fuels a challenge to the traditional hierarchical and familial understanding of community,” they note. “As people connect online and form networks of relationships that extend beyond connections within congregations, the organizational structures of traditional denominations have less power in determining religious identities.”
- ▶ *The words and actions of religious leaders are increasingly susceptible to scrutiny by alternative voices online.* With snippets of text, videos, and hyperlinks – the preferred discourse of social media platforms – more and more people are challenging sermons they hear and religious essays they read. “In the online media era, anyone with a camera and access to YouTube is empowered to expose and criticize public figures.”
- ▶ *Internet culture is challenging traditional Christian structures, especially those that appraise and correct theological knowledge.* For instance, Web sites, blogs, and Facebook pages can provide new “spaces for people to re-examine the doctrines, symbols, and practices of religious tradition” that are “free from the constraints and control of religious authority.”

“The Internet not only increases access to alternative sources of religious information, but empowers people to contribute information, opinions, and experiences to public debates and conversations,” Campbell and Teusner conclude. “Christians must develop new skills in technological literacy. They also need new skills of discernment to see how the Internet has created a new social sphere that facilitates spiritual interactions, establishes new authorities, and legitimizes practices for their community.”

Study Questions

1. How is the Internet directly impacting the ministries of your congregation and Christian denomination? Discuss some ways it has enhanced their work. Consider how it is impacting the authority of local and denominational leaders.
2. When congregations assess how to use new technologies, Roger Owens says they should start from the conviction that “the Church is God’s own technology – the medium through which God makes the gospel available to the world.” What does Owens mean by this? Do you agree?
3. How will congregations and denominations be different in fifty years due to the Internet? Will those changes be good?

Departing Hymn: “You Alone Are Holy”

You alone are holy,
you alone, O Lord;
truth, mercy, and judgment
shine forth in your Word.

You alone are holy,
O Ancient of days,
your boundless creation
is filled with your praise.

Fanny Crosby (1909), alt.

Suggested Tunes: WYE VALLEY or EUDOXIA



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Focus Article:

📖 Making Moral Choices
in Video Games
(*Virtual Lives*, pp. 69-77)

Suggested Article:

📖 The Field of Experience
and Sensation
(*Virtual Lives*, pp. 40-45)

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Making Moral Choices in Video Games

Video games can provide immersive experiences in fantasy stories of good and evil. As we become agents in their complex narrative arcs, we develop skills of moral perception and decision-making. More importantly, we may experience what J. R. R. Tolkien calls “eucatastrophe.”

Responsive Prayer

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer for all who find their
livelihood and leisure in virtual technologies,
**that they may have the wisdom and will to use them properly,
in service of human life and creativity;**

for all who suffer from addiction, who are drawn away from the
world you created to a world of screens and images,

that they may rediscover the joys of life in flesh and blood;

for all who are lost in our wired world, who have grown passive,
reactive, and detached,

**that they might reconnect to the Source of life and find a
renewed sense of purpose serving God and neighbor;**

Ever-living and ever-loving God, breathe your life into us that we
might live the words we pray and be signs of your great love
and presence in the world. **Amen.**

Scripture Reading: Philippians 4:8-9

Reflection

We tend to dismiss video games as mere commercialized entertainments. When they appear at all in serious moral reflection, it is because we fear they have nurtured prurient appetites for violence or colossally wasted their players’ time. There is not much commendable, we think, and little of the gospel in games.

Yet Cameron Moore invites us to consider some video games “as works of art that express and explore philosophical ideas,” especially those games that “create elaborately imagined other worlds in which characters pursue intricate plot-paths that require important moral choices.”

Because such video games are close in structure and content to literary fantasy, Moore employs Christian theories about the fantastic imagination—most fully developed by George MacDonald, G. K. Chesterton, C. S. Lewis, and J. R. R. Tolkien—to appreciate and evaluate them. These theories “offer a perspective from which we can articulate these video games’ potential as an art form and critique particular examples and trends,” he writes. These four writers, despite their differences, agree on three fundamental principles of fantastic imagination.

- ▶ *Fantasy lets us participate in secondary creation.* “Fantastic artists do not create *ex nihilo*,” Moore notes, but “they take up elements of the actual world created by God and refashion them to make coherent secondary worlds.” This creativity continues when readers or video game players imaginatively enter these fantastic worlds in a consistent, believable way.
- ▶ *Fantastic secondary worlds help us engage the primary world with renewed appreciation.* “[Fairy] tales say that apples were golden,”



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Chesterton notes, “only to refresh the forgotten moment when we found that they were green.” Returning to the primary world, things are no longer mundane, but filled with wonder. Lewis says that our “excursion into the preposterous sends us back with renewed pleasure to the actual.”

The best fantasy allows us to experience what Tolkien calls “eucatastrophe” – the unexpected, final defeat of evil and victory of the good, which is an echo of the gospel. With eyes renewed by this encounter, we can notice God’s gracious activity in the primary world.

- ▶ *Fantasy helps us notice the moral fabric of the universe that holds everywhere.* “While the fantastic imagination legitimately imagines cities floating in mid-air and populated with rational creatures quite different from humans and angels, it must not imagine that the good is evil or an injustice is just,” notes Moore. “Since we make by the moral ‘law’ in which we are made, our creations ought to accord with the law that governs our own beings.” Or, as MacDonald once put it, the fantastic artist “must not meddle with the relations of live souls. The laws of the spirit of man must hold, alike in this world and in any world he may invent.”

Admittedly, Tolkien believed fantasy is more successful in stories than visual art, because the former require more imagination from the audience. However, Moore notes that role-playing games require players to make significant moral choices that help shape their unfolding narrative. “The right sorts of games provide opportunities for significant artistic expression and meaningful engagement of the intellect and will,” he concludes.

Study Questions

1. Do these three principles of fantastic imagination help you appreciate fantasy in general? Discuss how Cameron Moore uses them to critique particular video games.
2. “In deciding which fantastic video games to play and which to leave alone, we should examine their presentation of good and evil,” Moore writes. What should we be looking for?
3. Select Edward Hopper’s *New York Movie* or *Sunlight in a Cafeteria* and draft a three-line story based on the painting. How does your act of imagination compare with playing an immersive video game? Or with reading a short story?

Departing Hymn: “Creation’s Lord, We Give You Thanks” (vv. 1 and 5)

Creation’s Lord, we give you thanks
that this your world is incomplete,
that we may join creators’ ranks,
that work awaits our hands and feet.

Since what we choose is what we are
and what we love we yet shall be,
your kingdom ever shines afar –
the will to win it makes us free.

William D. Hyde (1903), alt.
Tune: WINCHESTER NEW

Appendix: Optional Lesson Plans for Teachers

For each study guide we offer two or three optional lesson plans followed by detailed suggestions on using the material in the study guide:

- ▶ An *abridged lesson plan* outlines a lesson suitable for a beginning Bible study class or a brief group session.
- ▶ A *standard lesson plan* outlines a more thorough study.
- ▶ For some guides a *dual session lesson plan* divides the study guide material so that the group can explore the topic in two meetings.

Each lesson plan is for a 30- to 45-minute meeting, with about one-third of the time being set aside for worship.

Curiosity and Smartphones

Lesson Plans

<i>Abridged Plan</i>	<i>Standard Plan</i>
Prayer	Prayer
Scripture Reading	Scripture Reading
Meditation	Meditation
Reflection (skim all)	Reflection (all sections)
Questions 1 and 2	Questions (selected)
Departing Hymn	Departing Hymn

Teaching Goals

1. To distinguish two forms of intellectual appetite, or desires for knowledge, in the Christian tradition – a sinful desire called *curiositas* and a praiseworthy desire named *studiositas*.
2. To consider how mobile information technologies like smartphones can be temptations to *curiositas* or tools to cultivate *studiositas*.

Before the Group Meeting

Distribute copies of the study guide on pp. 2-3 and ask members to read the Bible passage in the guide. Distribute copies of *Virtual Lives (Christian Reflection)* and ask members to read the focus article before the group meeting.

Begin with a Story

For several years it has been my privilege to share a coffee break with Doug Henry and other friends at Baylor University a few mornings each week. We are often glad that Doug is so “wired.” With his smartphone he can quickly access the Internet to settle a debate about the basketball team’s shooting percentage, read a key passage from an editorial we are discussing, or simply share a YouTube gem that one of us has discovered. Doug knows what he is talking about when he says, “These pocket-sized gadgets provide easy access to new knowledge on demand.” Yet he worries, “Androids, Blackberries, and iPhones also present ample opportunity to be known as in the loop, so much so that simply sporting one implies the possession of knowledge. Someone carrying the latest smartphone model, after all, must be smart – right? Around my workplace, dueling iPhone users are ubiquitous, each one reporting to the other the *even more recently posted* Facebook entry, blog comment, or random news item. Smartphone savants, by and large, cannot keep silent about what they know” (*Virtual Lives*, 17).

Doug would rather be completely present to us in our conversation than go surfing the Web. The sort of love and focus on others that he demonstrates every day is what he reflects on here.

Prayer

Invite members to share their personal celebrations and concerns with the group. Provide time for each person to pray silently. Conclude by asking God for discernment to use our interactive gadgets wisely – to love God and others.

Scripture Reading

Ask a group member to read Luke 11:29-32 from a modern translation.

Meditation

Invite members to reflect on the meditation during a period of silence.

Reflection

In this study Doug Henry explores how we are using new technologies of mobile connectivity – Androids, Blackberries, iPhones, and the like – to either cultivate or deform our heart’s desire to love God and to love others in God. Since smartphones provide quick access to vast amounts of information, he focuses especially on how they are shaping our intellectual appetites, or types of desire for knowledge. Today we do not think

curiosity is an unalloyed good – after all, we say that it “killed the cat” – but members may be surprised to learn this trait has long been called a vice in Christian moral thought. Don’t get sidetracked into a debate about the proper usage of this word (which might be an example of *curiositas*); it is much more important to be clear about the form of intellectual appetite that undermines our love of God and others.

Study Questions

1. Doug Henry discusses three aspects of *curiositas* and *studiositas* – the why, what, and how of these desires for knowledge. The curious (1) want knowledge as something they can possess for themselves, (2) experience the world of knowing as things that can be taken, and thus (3) they want to be the first to know things, want to let others people know that they were the first to know them, and can really only savor the meaningless spectacle that takes them no deeper into reality. The studious on the other hand (1’) seek a joy of participation with the truth that is sharable with others, (2’) see their intellect and the knowledge they gain from it as gifts from God to be shared, and thus (3’) they prefer the beauty of knowledge that can be revisited and which draws them ever deeper into relationship with it.

Some things, like the mere spectacle, are always lures for curiosity and are too superficial or distorted to sustain the studious gaze. Other things, like a person or significant idea or natural system, can be approached with *curiositas* or *studiositas*. Encourage members to give specific examples of each of these intellectual appetites from their experience.

2. Smartphones often cultivate several aspects of *curiositas*, Henry writes. They feed the hunger for novelty by providing “easy access to new knowledge on demand ... inadequate though it is for real intellectual sustenance.” Simply carrying one is a statement that one is fashionably in possession of knowledge. “Smartphone savants, by and large, cannot keep silent about what they know.” And they readily tempt us with “heartbreaking images of desecration and desolation ... [that are] spectacles”

Ask members to prayerfully reflect on *why* they like their smartphones, *what* they use them for, and *how* they have become oriented toward knowledge and other people as they use their smartphones.

3. Henry says he uses technology to nourish and satisfy *studiositas*. “Especially when traveling, I use my iPad to search, read, and study Scripture. It can access virtually anything on the Internet, including the issue of *Christian Reflection* containing these very words. It gives me pictures of nature and works of art that, under the aegis of *studiositas*, inspire my contemplative gratitude to God. In tandem with a Dropbox account, my iPad allows me to review my lecture notes, read my colleagues’ work, and make progress on my latest scholarly article.”

Let members add to Henry’s list some examples of how they use mobile connectivity to better love God, other people, and the creation.

4. Henry offers some general guidelines: “Because we long for the right ordering of all our loves, we must pay attention to our intellectual appetites. We should desire to know certain things but not others. We should cherish knowledge for particular reasons but not others. We should take satisfaction in fulfilling some intellectual appetites but not others.”

Divide members into groups to draw up three lists: (1) of *things* we could find on the Internet with our smartphones, but we should not seek to know them at all; (2) of *occasions* when we should be so present to God and others that smartphones could only be a distraction; and (3) of inappropriate *motivations* for knowing things (which we might resist by turning off the technology that could satisfy them).

Departing Hymn

“Full of Love and Christian Virtue” can be found on pp. 50-51 of *Virtual Lives*. If you choose not to sing the hymn, you may read the text in unison or silently and meditatively as a prayer.

Technological Prudence: What the Amish Can Teach Us

Lesson Plans

<i>Abridged Plan</i>	<i>Standard Plan</i>
Prayer	Prayer
Scripture Reading	Scripture Reading
Meditation	Meditation
Reflection (skim all)	Reflection (all sections)
Questions 1 and 2	Questions (selected)
Departing Hymn	Departing Hymn

Teaching Goals

1. To review the remarkable variety of responses by Amish communities to the telephone.
2. To distinguish *kairos* time from *chronos* time in our relationships, and explore how these modes of time are expressed in how we use communication technologies.
3. To explore what the Amish can teach us about leveraging communication technologies to serve the just and good purposes of God's kingdom.

Before the Group Meeting

Distribute copies of the study guide on pp. 4-5 and ask members to read the Bible passage in the guide. Distribute copies of *Virtual Lives (Christian Reflection)* and ask members to read the focus article and suggested article before the group meeting.

Begin with a Story

"Nathan Yoder, an Amish farmer in his thirties near Grantsville, Maryland, milks cows and drives a horse and buggy," Kevin Miller writes. "He does not own a car, a computer, or a cell phone. But he does own a tractor for some operations, shares a landline telephone with two other nearby Amish families (located two walking minutes from his house), and even hires an 'English' neighbor with a van to 'hull' his young family to other states to visit relatives and friends." In his article Miller seeks the logic behind his apparently "selective use of technology [that] can seem maddeningly inconsistent to outsiders."

Part of Miller's interest is personal: "Nathan Yoder is my third cousin," he notes. But he also recognizes "Whatever the apparent inconsistencies, the Amish have managed to keep technology in check, and in doing so they have fostered a sense of community that many of us yearn for in our electronically tethered and frenetically paced lives." (*Virtual Lives*, 20).

Prayer

Invite members to share their personal celebrations and concerns with the group. Provide time for each person to pray silently. Conclude by asking God to help members discern how to use new communication technologies for the just and good purposes of God's kingdom.

Scripture Reading

Ask a group member to read 3 John 1:13-15 from a modern translation.

Meditation

Invite members to reflect on the meditation during a period of silence.

Reflection

This discussion explores technological prudence—which is guiding our virtual lives through wise choices about how to use technology for just and good purposes of God's kingdom—by sifting through how one

Christian tradition, the Amish, have used telephones. (The more than 200,000 Amish in North America live in close-knit communities that trace their heritage to the leadership of Jacob Ammon, who divided from Swiss Mennonites in 1693. The Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online [www.gameo.org] and the Young Center's Amish Studies website [www2.etsu.edu/amishstudies] are trustworthy sources of information about the Amish.) Kevin Miller, whose ancestors were Amish, wonders "Given the huge cultural and religious gap between these pre-moderns and us postmoderns, what of true relevance can be learned from them in our ultra-wired lives?" In the end, he suggests, quite a lot.

Study Questions

1. While some Amish were early adopters in 1891 of the telephone (creating the Conestoga Telegraph and Telegraph Company by 1902), their communities have never been uncritical of its temptations and abuses. Kevin Miller briefly outlines how various Amish groups have used the telephone. (1) The Old Order Amish banned phones in 1910, but by 1950 had changed their Ordnung to allow families to share a landline phone, if it was located away from the house. Cell phones are used today when needed – e.g., by tradesmen for business, or by the elderly for access to 911 emergency services. (2) The New Order Amish from their beginning in the 1960s allowed members to have phones in their homes. (3) Old Order Mennonites – horse-and-buggy Mennonites, but direct descendents in the Menno Simons line and not from the Jacob Ammon tradition – prohibited only ministers from owning phones, but this restriction was lifted in the 1990s in most communities.

Encourage members to think about the reasons behind these various rules. How would they distinguish "flexible traditionalism" from "rigid dogmatism"?

2. Kevin Miller predicts that we will find the commonality of dress and patterns of life, and the freeing of individuals from choice (which run counter to the pluralist and individualist ethos of modern society) to be the most difficult Amish values to understand and embrace. Nevertheless, members may share their experiences of working in organizations, living among friends, or belonging to groups where similar values were welcome.

Divide members into groups to select one of the values and brainstorm how it might reshape their use of smartphones, computers, and similar communication technologies.

3. Miller says "Cell phones and laptops and iPads, and the very mobility of these devices – the constancy and immediacy of their demand for our attention and their parasitic attendance on our very persons" quickly draw us into "the tutelage to the god *chronos* (and its cousin *mammon*)" and "leave us feeling lost in the moral topography of our lives. We do not feel Sabbath or shalom or whole."

Yet he commends the prudent use of phones by the Old Amish and of Facebook by his grandmother to stay in touch with family members. He notes, "Cell phones have been used to photograph and instantly transmit abuses by police in Iranian street protests. In developing countries, poor people employ cell phones to gain information and as a form of currency for the first time. Social networking sites are being used to connect grandmas with their families and to organize for the good. These are indicators of how the modern permutations of the telephone can foster not alienation, but community." Amy Grizzle Kane agrees that "Online social media can be a wonderful resource to stay connected with friends and family across the miles. Those who travel overseas for business, missionary work, or military service can stay in touch with loved ones in wonderful and life-giving ways. Church families are tweeting and blogging about the ways God is at work in the life of their congregation and community. Senior and young adults alike are using e-book readers to read several versions of the Bible on one device that makes the print as large as readers need it to be."

4. Amy Grizzle Kane is concerned about using online social media to air grievances, gossip, and cyber-bully others. When these activities are done anonymously, they can become especially vicious. Often they are done quickly and carelessly. Brainstorm on how each of the Amish values that Kraybill identifies might reshape our online behaviors.

Departing Hymn

"Full of Love and Christian Virtue" can be found on pp. 50-51 of *Virtual Lives*. If you choose not to sing the hymn, you may read the text in unison or silently and meditatively as a prayer.

Faithful Criticism of Popular Media Technologies

Lesson Plans

<i>Abridged Plan</i>	<i>Standard Plan</i>
Prayer	Prayer
Scripture Reading	Scripture Reading
Reflection (skim all)	Reflection (all sections)
Questions 1 and 2	Questions (selected)
Departing Hymn	Departing Hymn

Teaching Goals

1. To consider the need to faithfully critique not only popular media *content*, but also the *technology* that delivers it.
2. To identify the inherent values and biases as well as the “language” of television.
3. To practice applying this form of critique to other popular media technologies.

Before the Group Meeting

Distribute copies of the study guide on pp. 6-7 and ask members to read the Bible passage in the guide. Distribute copies of *Virtual Lives (Christian Reflection)* and ask members to read the focus article before the group meeting. For the departing hymn “Dear Lord, Take Up Our Tangled Strands” locate the familiar tune DUNDEE in your church’s hymnal or on the Web in the Cyber Hymnal™ (www.hymntime.com/tch/).

Begin with a Story

“The Sherpas know intimately the face of Mount Everest, but only as seen from their home valley. Sometimes when climbers show them a different side of the mountain, they refuse at first to believe. How could it possibly be the same mountain from a different angle? But they are moved emotionally, and their disbelief eventually turns to amazement at the revelation that their timeworn mountain can open to them in a new way.”

Robert Woods and Paul Patton draw an analogy with how we typically evaluate popular television shows, movies, Internet sites, and so on. “Christian critiques of media focus only on one side of the mountain. On this side, popular media *content* matters most when it comes to influencing our culture. They think that media technologies (or channels that carry communication) are neutral – albeit powerful – channels of communication that simply transmit news and entertainment to eager audiences,” they write. “But from the other side of the mountain, media technologies are seen as...value-laden human constructions that send their own messages in addition to the actual news or entertainment they carry. Each technology influences the way people think about themselves and interact with others and institutions in society. On this new side of the mountain, media technology, as well as media content, is a cultural creation and therefore falls within the critic’s scope of analysis.” (*Virtual Lives*, 30)

Using television as an example because it is a familiar and powerful technology, Woods and Patton lead us to “the other side of the mountain” for a more adequate way of examining popular media technologies.

Prayer

Invite members to share their personal celebrations and concerns with the group. Provide time for each person to pray silently. Conclude by reading together the prayer in the study guide.

Scripture Reading

Ask a group member to read Psalm 8:3-5 from a modern translation.

Reflection

This study introduces the view that the communication technologies that make our virtual lives possible are not morally neutral. Each one has inherent biases and values from its human creators and its own “language” that

gives shape to its messages. Or, as communication theorist Marshall McLuhan (1911-1980) famously put it, “the medium is the message.” The next two study guides in this series, “Religious Authority in the Age of the Internet” and “Making Moral Choices in Video Games,” apply this form of faithful criticism to the Internet and video games.

Study Questions

1. The *technology* of television is designed to bring an eye-catching spectator experience into the home. Robert Woods and Paul Patton note that this favors “image over word, visual interruption, interpersonal distraction, and physical inactivity.”

Encourage members to follow Woods and Patton’s lead by examining the inherent values of another popular media technology. (These values and biases are more obvious when you compare a new technology with one that it competes with or replaces.) For example, members may suggest that while computers favor “efficiency, information sharing, speed, and globalization,” laptop computers and smartphones are designed to add the value of mobility, or disconnection from fixed place of usage. Portable music players (in contrast to radio, record and CD players, etc.) favor personal preferences over a shared canon of music. Video games (in contrast to fantasy novels) favor preset images over imagination; and so on. In each case, evaluate the new technology’s inherent values and biases from the perspective of Christian discipleship.

2. Woods and Patton say that *intimacy* and *immediacy* characterize television’s language or “way of capturing and presenting reality.” These features depend on the structural limitations of television: intimacy is a function of the low resolution and size of the television screen; immediacy is made possible by smaller cameras and satellite technology.

Invite members to make a similar analysis of the language of the media technologies they discussed above. In addition to structural features of the technology, consider how costly it is to own, complex it is to operate, difficult it is to maintain and repair, and other factors will determine how the technology will be distributed in the world, among social and economic classes, and so on.

3. Encourage members to consider first the technology of reading a book—it must be done by the individual; requires and nurtures the reader’s concentration, memory, and imagination; builds a common vocabulary and experiences with others; depends upon private or shared ownership of the book; and so on. These values are the same across social contexts. Some salient features of the “language” of this media technology are that the reading experience is quite variable (a reader may skip around the book, go back and reread a passage, or stop reading), it unfolds at the reader’s chosen pace, and can be focused or casual. Again, this language of book-reading is the same across social contexts.

Consider next the social context. By using its books according to the Rule, the religious community is highlighting some values and features of the language of book reading and discouraging others. A certain relationship of readers to their books, to the knowledge they gain from them, and so on, is being fostered. Virtues of obedience, discipline, attention, and personal involvement are fostered, while vices like laziness, casualness, and vanity are corrected. Shared experiences are being developed among members of the community.

Departing Hymn

If you choose not to sing the hymn, you may read the hymn text in unison or silently and meditatively as a prayer.

Religious Authority in the Age of the Internet

Lesson Plans

<i>Abridged Plan</i>	<i>Standard Plan</i>
Responsive Prayer	Responsive Prayer
Scripture Reading	Scripture Reading
Reflection (skim all)	Reflection (all sections)
Question 1	Questions (selected)
Departing Hymn	Departing Hymn

Teaching Goals

1. To identify ways that the Internet is transforming the religious authority of congregational and denominational leaders and institutions.
2. To anticipate how congregations and denominations will be different in the future because of the Internet.
3. To discuss how congregations should evaluate the use of new technologies.

Before the Group Meeting

Distribute copies of the study guide on pp. 8-9 and ask members to read the Bible passage in the guide. Distribute copies of *Virtual Lives (Christian Reflection)* and ask members to read the focus article and suggested article before the group meeting. For the departing hymn “You Alone Are Holy” locate one of the suggested tunes WYE VALLEY or EUDOXIA in your church’s hymnal or on the Web in the Cyber Hymnal™ (www.hymntime.com/tch/). (Because the text is 65.65 and WYE VALLEY is 65.65.D, two verses are combined when sung with this tune.)

Begin with a Story

“Megan is a member of a conservative Christian community. Since going to university she has developed a keen interest in eco-feminism. She started a personal Web log where she journals her thoughts on the relationship between faith, politics, and the environment. Through her blog she has had many conversations with like-minded Christians and has formed a group called ‘Three Places,’ a small network of bloggers who discuss common topics and share links to each other’s sites. She is asked whether she feels more at home, or more supported in her faith development, at Three Places or in her local congregation. She answers, ‘I need both. My church makes me feel grounded, and the relationships are more real. But there are questions that I have that I can’t ask at that church. The people I have met at Three Places are great, and it’s really good to have that space to ask those questions. But all of our conversations are topic-based. It’s not really church.’” (*Virtual Lives*, 66)

Heidi Campbell and Paul Teusner offer this case study to highlight the challenge that the Internet culture presents to traditional Christian structures. Are there young adults with experiences similar to Megan’s in your congregation?

Responsive Prayer

Invite members to share their personal celebrations and concerns with the group. Provide time for each person to pray silently. Conclude by reading together the responsive prayer in the study guide. The leader begins and the group reads the lines in bold print.

Scripture Reading

Ask a group member to read Jude 1:20-25 from a modern translation.

Reflection

The third study in this series, “Faithful Criticism of Popular Media Technologies,” introduced the theme that technological innovations are not morally neutral. Each communication technology has its inherent biases and values or, as Marshall McLuhan (1911-1980) famously put it, “the medium is the message.” In this study Heidi Campbell and Paul Teusner focus on how an inherent value of the Internet – the “democratization of knowledge”

(i.e., the widespread access to information and opportunities to express opinions and interpretations of events) – is impacting the authority of religious leaders and institutions.

Study Questions

1. Divide members into three groups to review one of Heidi Campbell and Paul Teusner’s three key points: the Internet is changing our understanding of community, providing platforms for criticizing religious leaders, and offering resources for appraising theological claims. Encourage the groups to brainstorm specific ways the Internet enhances the work of the congregation and denomination, and others ways that it makes those ministries more difficult. Consider how it is impacting the authority of leaders and institutions.
2. Roger Owens gets the idea that the Church is God’s technology for making the gospel available to the world from reviewing Shane Hipps’s *Flickering Pixels: How Technology Shapes Your Faith*. Owens writes, “The gospel is not simply a proposition to be believed that can be tweeted in 142 characters or less. Rather, it is the gift of a people whose life together – the medium – is its own message.” He continues, “And if the Church, God’s enfleshed people in the world, whose life together is a sign and foretaste of God’s kingdom, is God’s medium, then in a virtual church the gospel itself has been erased. These baptized bodies that live and play, work and pray together are God’s message: in Jesus a new humanity is possible. Indeed it is more than possible, it is a reality. But it is a flesh and blood reality, not a virtual one.”

The question then becomes whether the Church can use technological innovations like the Internet to build stronger face-to-face communities of disciples that worship, work, live, and play together. “What we need,” Owens says, “is gospel wisdom, a way of navigating life in the world that is shaped by the life of this world’s incarnate Lord. Such wisdom can open our eyes to the powerful ways technology can shape and misshape our discipleship.”

For members who would like to pursue the topic of how the Internet and related technologies are impacting congregations, in “Virtual Reality comes to Church” Owens recommends these three books: Shane Hipps’s *Flickering Pixels: How Technology Shapes Your Faith*, Quentin J. Schultze’s *High-Tech Worship? Using Presentational Technologies Wisely*, and Jesse Rice’s *The Church of Facebook: How the Hyperconnected Are Redefining Community*.

3. In *The Great Emergence: How Christianity is Changing and Why* (2008), Phyllis Tickle suggests that “about every five hundred years the empowered structures of institutionalized Christianity, whatever they may be at that time, become an intolerable carapace that must be shattered in order that renewal and new growth may occur.” At each of these junctures, “a new, more vital form of Christianity” has emerged with reconstituted organizations that can spread the faith “dramatically into new geographic and demographic areas....” She continues, “It would, quite literally, be impossible to exaggerate the central importance to the Great Emergence of the Internet and the World Wide Web.”

Encourage members to do some futuristic thinking. For instance, the influence of many religious denominations is waning. Will denominational identity be more or less important in the future? Will some other sort of Christian identity replace it? Consider the role of the local congregation. Will congregational identity be more or less important in the future?

Do members foresee new and vibrant forms of congregations, denominations, Christian colleges, monasteries, and ministries forming, in part, due to the influence of the Internet? Do they think some Christians are taking false steps into the future by using the Internet in ways that threaten the community, leadership, and theological authority of the Church?

Departing Hymn

If you choose not to sing the hymn, you may read the hymn text in unison or silently and meditatively as a prayer.

Making Moral Choices in Video Games

Lesson Plans

<i>Abridged Plan</i>	<i>Standard Plan</i>
Responsive Prayer	Responsive Prayer
Scripture Reading	Scripture Reading
Reflection (skim all)	Reflection (all sections)
Questions 1 and 2	Questions (selected)
Departing Hymn	Departing Hymn

Teaching Goals

1. To articulate three fundamental principles of Christian theories of fantastic imagination.
2. To use these fundamental principles to appreciate immersive role-playing video games in general, and to critique specific examples.
3. To appreciate the role of fantasy more generally in Christian discipleship.

Before the Group Meeting

Distribute copies of the study guide on pp. 10-11 and ask members to read the Bible passage in the guide. Distribute copies of *Virtual Lives (Christian Reflection)* and ask members to read the focus article and suggested article before the group meeting. For the departing hymn “Creation’s Lord, We Give You Thanks” locate the familiar tune WINCHESTER NEW in your church’s hymnal or on the Web in the Cyber Hymnal™ (www.hymntime.com/tch/).

Begin with an Observation

According to an Associated Press/ America Online Gaming Study (April 28, 2006), 40% of adults in America play video games at home on a computer or electronic gaming console, and 45% play games online. 12% of gamers play the sort of role-playing games that Cameron Moore discusses in this study. About half of the adult players are younger than 35; most live in the south (37%) and are male (55%) (<http://surveys.ap.org/data/Ipsos/national/2006/2006-04-21%20Gaming%20Study%20topline.pdf>).

In this study Cameron Moore adapts Christian theories of the fantastic imagination to appreciate role-playing video games and critique specific trends and examples. He says the best games may help their players develop moral skills and perception that are important in the life of discipleship. Indeed, players return from their virtual forays in fantasy with a renewed appreciation of the world God created.

Responsive Prayer

Invite members to share their personal celebrations and concerns with the group. Provide time for each person to pray silently. Conclude by reading together the responsive prayer in the study guide. The leader begins and the group reads the lines in bold print.

Scripture Reading

Ask a group member to read Philippians 4:8-9 from a modern translation.

Reflection

The third study in this series, “Faithful Criticism of Popular Media Technologies,” introduced the theme that technological innovations are not morally neutral. Each communication technology has its inherent biases and values or, as Marshall McLuhan (1911-1980) famously put it, “the medium is the message.” In this study Cameron Moore focuses on how an inherent value of the immersive, role-playing video game – the exercise of fantastic imagination – can edify or deform its players. The best sort of video game gives its players the joy of secondary creation, returns them to the primary world with heightened awareness of God’s gracious activity and appreciation of the moral fabric of God’s creation, and forms the intellect and will through the moral choices players must make in the fantastic world of the game. He shows us how to evaluate games according to these standards.

Encourage group members who are avid video gamers to critique the games they play. Other members can employ Moore's analysis to evaluate the fantastic television shows, movies, books, and stories they enjoy.

Study Questions

1. Cameron Moore summarizes the three fundamental principles of Christian theories of fantastic imagination: "First, fantasy as an artistic endeavor allows us to participate in an act of secondary creation, which Tolkien calls 'sub-creation.' This art is so enjoyable precisely because sub-creation is proper to us as human beings. Second, as we enjoy fantastic sub-creation, our powers of perception and experience are broadened beyond normal reality. The best fantasy allows us to experience 'eucatastrophe,' the good ending drawn out of the midst of evil. This widened experience should lead us to greater appreciation of the actual world we inhabit. Finally...the same moral law holds in all worlds, created or sub-created."

Applying the first principle, Moore appreciates that the *Elder Scrolls* series of games has a free roam option that allows players "to participate in the central story line, or ignore it altogether and spend hours engaging in hundreds of other stories and quests." Regarding the second principle, he complains about *Fable 2* (and similar games) that "players' choices for good or evil in no way affect their participation in the final victory. As a result, every choice is morally insignificant or, worse, amoral. It does not matter in the end whether one chooses to murder the innocent villagers or save them. All that matters is the exercise of one's will." Applying the third principle, he praises *Final Fantasy VII* for providing players new insights and sympathy for moral acts that require self-sacrifice. "Ask most 20 or 30-something males about *Final Fantasy VII* and they are likely to bring up Aeris's sacrificial death as one of their most artistic experiences," he writes. "This carry-over effect is possible because the secondary world of the video game exemplifies the moral law that holds in the primary world."

2. Cameron Moore admits that "many role-playing video games blow it" because either (1) players' choices have "little effect on the narrative development in the game," or (2) players' participation in the eucatastrophe – "the ultimate triumph of good over evil which comes as an unexpected victory at the hour of apparent defeat" – is unrelated to whether their game character is good and has acted well, or is evil and has acted badly. In the second case, the amoral secondary world actually "destabilizes the distinction between good and evil."

"The best way to discern a game's presentation of good and evil is to play at least some of the game for yourself," he suggests. "If you are evaluating the game for children, try taking some evil actions, insofar as the game allows them, and see what happens in the secondary world." Reviewers should ask these questions: "Does the game offer choices between good and evil? Do these choices affect both the play experience and the narrative progression of the game? What view of good and evil does the game proffer as a guide for making these choices?"

3. Give each member a 4" x 6" index card on which to draft a brief narrative based on one of Hopper's paintings. (You can find color images of the paintings online.) Heidi Hornik notes that such a "scenario will be a personal narrative that is more indicative of the moment and emotional life of the viewer than of the artist and his painted figures. Thus, Hopper's image remains mysterious, an invitation for viewers into a virtual reality they imagine."

Encourage members to discuss and compare which elements of the paintings (figures, faces, lighting, clothing, building details, furniture, etc.) they incorporated into their stories, which they noted as mysterious, and which they simply ignored.

Consider Tolkien's view that literary fantasy is "more universal and more poignantly particular" than visual fantasy because readers must flesh out more details. On the other hand, stories and video games provide more unfolding narrative than do Hopper's images.

Departing Hymn

If you choose not to sing the hymn, you may read the hymn text in unison or silently and meditatively as a prayer.