

**Children and the Idol of Entertainment:  
How to Counsel Christian Parents Seeking to Shepherd Children on the Issue of  
Entertainment**

Cheyne L. McLean

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## Abstract

Title: Children and the Idol of Entertainment: How to Counsel Christian Parents Seeking to Shepherd Children on the Issue of Entertainment  
Author: Cheyne McLean  
Degree: Master of Arts in Biblical Counseling  
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Advisor: Todd Sorrell

God designed mankind to experience pleasure. This fact is evidenced by the enjoyment of food, consensual sexual contact, laughter, and beautiful landscapes. True and ultimate pleasure, however, is found in God and Christ, experiencing fulfillment in Him forever (Ps. 16:11). Nevertheless, since the Fall of mankind, people have looked away from God and to the things of the world to satisfy their selfish desires (Rom. 3:23; 5:12). The entertainment industry, in particular, provides many avenues of self-indulgent pleasure and is a major temptation in the lives of children. Modern technology provides children instant pleasure and indulgence through the Internet, television, smartphones, activity centers, toys, and other forms of entertainment. When children are raised in this environment without responsible, biblical guidance, they are primed to desire pleasure on an idolatrous scale. When a child has an idolatrous desire for pleasure it will lead to all kinds of other heart and behavior problems that parents may not realize are related.

Parents (and other caregivers of young children) need to recognize this danger and be challenged to faithfulness from God's perspective as revealed in Scripture. Biblical diligence not only involves studious attention to Scripture (2 Tim 2:15) but also to the children God has placed under one's care (Prov. 22:6; 22:15; Eph. 6:4; Deu. 6:7). Practically speaking, parents must address the heart of a child, establish wise parameters, and provide alternatives to entertainment, all in an effort to direct a child's longing to God and a life that is pleasing to Him .

As stated above, pleasure is not sinful in and of itself and there may be nothing wrong with a certain amount or kinds of entertainment. The danger is in becoming lackadaisical in the rearing of a child, failing to realize that the entertainment industry and all that it offers is competing with the child's relationship with God. Parents must be active in shepherding a child's heart to find pleasure in God and Christ (Ps. 34:8). Accordingly, the idolatrous, sinful desire for selfish pleasure in the heart and life of a child is the intended focus of this project (2 Tim. 3:4). This project is intended to assist biblical counselors with how to counsel believing parents who are seeking help with a child that has a perceived addiction to worldly entertainment. I have four daughters, so this will be a challenge to help me as I seek to bring up my own children in this area. Ultimately, it is my hope and prayer that this will be an edifying resource that will influence the church towards sanctification, holiness, and the glory of God in parenting.

## I. Introduction

### A. Purpose Statement

1. Purpose: To provide a resource for counselors to counsel parents who need help in navigating a child's relationship with entertainment. This is a common issue that most every parent will have to face. I have observed that children are allowed to experience an inordinate amount of entertainment, to their own detriment, to the detriment of the family, and to the detriment of the church. I want to address the the root motivations that drive a child's desire in pursuing a self-centered relationship with entertainment. There are very few resources on this specific topic, so this is designed to assist biblical counselors as they seek to give godly wisdom to parents who need help in this area. I will seek to do this by addressing the topic of entertainment, in general, and focus in on a specific form of entertainment. I will focus in on internet gaming and provide a counseling plan utilizing the Eight I's counseling model.<sup>1</sup>
2. Children are easily influenced and they often do not have internal restraints to wisely interact with entertainment in a way that protects them from sinful overindulgence (Prov. 22:15).
3. The twenty-first century offers an almost unlimited supply of entertainment options that directs partakers to isolation, self-centeredness, and consumption. With smartphones, video streaming,

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<sup>1</sup> The Eight I's were obtained from the "Methods of Biblical Change" graduate course instructed by Dr. Stuart Scott at The Master's University, 2018.

virtual reality, inexpensive movie subscriptions, television, and the like, it is easier than ever before to have constant, instantaneous fulfillment of entertainment at one's fingertips.

4. Along with this supply of entertainment, Satan is actively at work, utilizing these avenues to influence children to bow to the idol of pleasure.
5. Parental lifestyle is a major shaping influence.
  - a) Children learn from watching parents and the example that is set forth will overflow into and influence a child's life.
  - b) The best-meaning parents can be tempted to relax a bit by plopping a child in front of a video game or some other source of entertainment.
6. Parents lack wisdom and need practical guidance regarding the day-to-day family involvement with entertainment.
7. Secular diagnoses will seek to categorize the problems that children face as a disorder in some way, shape, or form, but Scripture is the only resource that can reveal the most important thing a parent needs to know as it relates to a child's desire for pleasure in entertainment.
8. Children do not have to be ruled by a desire for entertainment and should be evangelized and shepherded with a primary goal to cultivate pleasures in God. God is the greatest source of pleasure and delight found in all the universe (Ps. 16:11). This is a matter of worship and the

root of the problem. This is an area that biblical counselors must faithfully help parents to understand.

#### B. Intended Audience and Scope

1. This is for biblical counselors seeking to counsel believing parents who need help with a child on the issue of entertainment (ages 1-12).<sup>2</sup>
2. There are various means by which a parent or child can find pleasure, but the scope of this project will be focused on a child's desire for self-centered pleasure that is fulfilled particularly through entertainment.

#### C. Terminology

1. Addiction - engaging in a behavior where the rewarding effects provide a compelling incentive to repeat the activity despite detrimental consequences.<sup>3</sup>
2. Idolatry - anything or anyone that captures our hearts, minds, and affections more than God.<sup>4</sup>
3. Entertainment - a form of activity that holds the attention and interest of an audience, or gives pleasure and delight.<sup>5</sup>
4. Pleasure – deep satisfaction, joy, or delight.

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<sup>2</sup> I chose the 1-12 age range since it is perhaps the time when children are most susceptible to developing habits yet are still young enough to be disciplined into godly habits through direct parental intervention. That said, the information discussed in this project can also be applied to other age ranges with minor modifications.

<sup>3</sup> "Addiction," *Psychology Today*, accessed February 10, 2022, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/basics/addiction>.

<sup>4</sup> Brad Bigney, *Gospel Treason: Betraying The Gospel With Hidden Idols* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2012), 24.

<sup>5</sup> "Definition of Entertainment," *ScienceDaily*, accessed February 8, 2022, <https://www.sciencedaily.com/terms/entertainment.htm>.

## D. Research Methodology

1. My research presupposes Scripture as the only source for knowing truth with certainty and that it is the final authority of all truth claims (Prov. 1:7; Jn. 17:17).
2. My extrabiblical sources include library sources, Internet sources, and journal articles.

## II. Defining the Problem

### A. Empirical Studies

1. According to the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, “On average, children ages 8-12 in the United States spend 4-6 hours a day watching or using screens, and teens spend up to 9 hours.”<sup>6</sup>
2. Research has shown that the amount of dopamine released by certain forms of entertainment can be similar to what is seen after intravenous injection of the stimulant drugs amphetamine or methylphenidate.<sup>7</sup>
3. Scientists describe dopamine as a pleasure hormone that stimulates a person to want more of the activity that its release is associated with.

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<sup>6</sup> “Screen Time and Children,” *American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*, last modified February 2020, accessed February 24, 2022, [https://www.aacap.org/AACAP/Families and Youth/Facts for Families/FFF-Guide/Children-And-Watching-TV-054.aspx](https://www.aacap.org/AACAP/Families_and_Youth/Facts_for_Families/FFF-Guide/Children-And-Watching-TV-054.aspx).

<sup>7</sup> Amy Paturel, “Game Theory: The Effects of Video Games on the Brain,” last modified July 2014, accessed April 19, 2022, <https://www.brainandlife.org/articles/how-do-video-games-affect-the-developing-brains-of-children>.

4. Big tech companies understand this scientific reality and design their entertainment platforms in such a way to strategically target this stimuli in people to keep them coming back for more.<sup>8</sup>
5. The craving for more leads to behaviors that are similar to that of drug addicts.
  - a) Isolation is common among entertainment junkies and is highly attributed to depression.<sup>9</sup>
  - b) Neglect of normal obligations in life such as school, work, and family.<sup>10</sup>
6. One study states, “individuals are seeking professional help for these problems, and in some countries, entire psychiatric centers are dedicated to treating gaming and internet addictions.”<sup>11</sup>
7. This research evidences the Bible’s claim that we should expect destructive consequences when something earthly becomes the ultimate source of pleasure (Eccl. 2:1-11).

## B. The Secular View

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<sup>8</sup> Trevor Haynes, “Dopamine, Smartphones & You: A Battle for Your Time,” *Science in the News*, May 1, 2018, accessed April 19, 2022, <https://sitn.hms.harvard.edu/flash/2018/dopamine-smartphones-battle-time/>.

<sup>9</sup> Trent Nguyen and Susan Landau, “Effects of Gaming on Children’s Brains: Depression and Social Isolation,” *Advances in Social Sciences Research Journal* 6, no. 9 (September 28, 2019): 291–302.

<sup>10</sup> American Psychiatric Association, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, 796-797.

<sup>11</sup> Kristyn Zajac et al., “Treatments for Internet Gaming Disorder and Internet Addiction: A Systematic Review,” *Psychology of Addictive Behaviors: Journal of The Society of Psychologists in Addictive Behaviors* 31, no. 8 (December 2017): 981.

1. Secular practitioners approach the problems people face with presuppositions based upon a naturalistic anthropology.
  - a) Within this worldview, man consists only of the material aspects that can be observed with the human senses.
  - b) Man is only a human body made up of atoms, chemicals, hormones, bones, skin, brain, etc.
2. The naturalistic worldview does not take into account the immaterial, supernatural realities.
  - a) There is no human soul because it is immaterial and unobservable.
  - b) There is no God because God is a spirit.
3. If there is no soul or God, then problems are not understood in light of one's relationship with God.
  - a) Sin is not considered a related problem.
  - b) If there is no sin against God, repentance and sanctification are not considered as a solution to the problem.
  - c) God is not pursued as a better source of pleasure or refuge.
4. Based upon secular definitions, a child is considered to be addicted to entertainment when there is a craving or strong desire to engage in the activity.<sup>12</sup>
  - a) Addiction is a considered to be a disease or mental disorder.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> "Addiction," *Psychology Today*.

<sup>13</sup> Anna Ciulla, "How Addiction Is a Brain Disorder," *Mental Health First Aid*, last modified November 8, 2017, accessed March 22, 2022, <https://www.mentalhealthfirstaid.org/external/2017/11/addiction-brain-disorder/>.

- b) “A mental disorder is a syndrome characterized by clinically significant disturbance in an individual’s cognition, emotion regulation, or behavior that reflects a dysfunction in the psychological, biological, or developmental processes underlying mental functioning.”<sup>14</sup>
5. The problem is limited to biological, psychological, and environmental factors.
    - a) These limitations create boundaries that exclude spiritual realities that are presented in Scripture.
    - b) Spiritual realities include the heart, soul, sin, idolatry, God, Satan, etc.
  6. The disordered behaviors and emotions are symptoms of an underlying dysfunction in the psychological, biological, or developmental processes.
  7. If an addiction is a disease or disorder that is caused by a dysfunction, it is not a matter of sin or moral failure.
  8. The implications of this view of the problem are significant. If a child’s entertainment addiction is a disorder or developmental dysfunction, how can a parent justify the behavior as being morally wrong?
  9. One specific secular diagnosis related to entertainment addiction is “Internet Gaming Disorder” found in the Diagnostic and Statistical

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<sup>14</sup> American Psychiatric Association, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, 5th ed. (American Psychiatric Association, 2013), 20.

Manual for Mental Disorders V.<sup>15</sup> The diagnosis and the criteria for this diagnosis reflects the secular view of the problem and will be further explored in this paper.

10. The secular view dominates the quick-access, pop-psychology literature that is consumed by the general public and parents as they seek help on this issue. In the U.S., an average of 971,000 users per week browse the Psychology Today online directory for mental therapy. The Psychology Today online directory appears as the top Google result for therapy-seekers 96.2% of the time.<sup>16</sup>

### C. The Biblical View

1. Biblical counselors approach the problems people face presupposing a biblical anthropology.
  - a) Man is created by God in a supernatural way, with both material (body) and immaterial (soul) components (Matt. 10:28; 2 Cor. 4:16).<sup>17</sup>
  - b) Man is made in the image of God (Gen. 1:27). Like God, man is rational, relational, moral, and spiritual.
2. The fall of Adam propelled men to live according to their sinful desires rather than according to God's will that is prescribed for their life (Jer. 17:9; Jn. 3:19; Rom. 3:9-18; 6:16).

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<sup>15</sup> American Psychiatric Association, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, 795-798.

<sup>16</sup> "Psychology Today," accessed April 12, 2022, <https://join.psychologytoday.com/us/signup>.

<sup>17</sup> Soul, spirit, heart, and mind are all used in Scripture to refer to the inner, immaterial aspect of man.

3. Due to the fall, children have the self-centered inclination to live according to the desires of the heart rather than to please God. This is a form of idolatry and until a child is freed from the enslavement of sin, he will continue to live according to his sinful desires and passions (Prov. 22:15, Rom. 6:16; 8:5; Tit. 3:3).
4. Children are created to be in relationship with God and to find their ultimate pleasure in Him (Ps. 4:7; 16:11).
5. Because children are fallen by nature, they will be inclined to find pleasure in entertainment more than God.
6. At this point, entertainment is competing with who the child will worship.
  - a) If a child's pleasures are ruled by his entertainment-of-choice, then he is engaging in false worship (Isa. 58:13-14; Matt. 6:24; 2 Tim. 3:4).
  - b) If a child's relationship with entertainment has been elevated to idolatrous proportions, sinful responses will be exhibited if he is not able to indulge in the activity. "Detrimental" emotional responses (anxiety, depression, anger, etc.) and behaviors (outbursts, isolation, violence, etc.) are indicators of what a child wants most in life and ultimately what he worships.
7. According to a biblical view, sinful responses are symptomatic of a root issue that is found in the heart (Matt. 15:19), the place where desires rule and pleasures are inculcated (Luke 6:45; Prov. 4:23).

### III. Secular Treatment Versus Biblical Solutions

#### A. Secular Treatment

1. Secular diagnoses are based upon the subjective symptoms and experiences of the people they are seeking to diagnose.<sup>18</sup>
2. Parents who seek help for children from secular practitioners will often do so because of detrimental emotions and/or behavior.
3. Behavioral change that leads to a healthier well-being (healthy emotional-social life) is the end goal that secular practitioners pursue when helping people with their problems.<sup>19</sup>
4. Likewise, parents will often have ultimate goals that are primarily focused on having happy, successful, and well-behaved children.
5. To achieve these goals, clinical treatments are utilized. Treatments for Internet Gaming Disorder may include medicated and non-medicated interventions.<sup>20</sup>
  - a) Medications that are prescribed can include antidepressants such as Bupropion or stimulants such as Ritalin.
  - b) Non-medicated treatments include Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, family therapy, and other eclectic forms of therapy to achieve these goals.

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<sup>18</sup> David Susman, "How Do You Diagnose a Mental Illness?," April 17, 2018, accessed March 22, 2022, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the-recovery-coach/201804/how-do-you-diagnose-mental-illness>.

<sup>19</sup> Kendra Cherry, "The Major Goals of Psychology," *Verywell Mind*, last modified October 28, 2019, accessed March 15, 2022, <https://www.verywellmind.com/what-are-the-four-major-goals-of-psychology-2795603>.

<sup>20</sup> Zajac et al., 983–989.

6. There is no consensus in the secular field on how treatments ought to be prescribed and is, therefore, eclectic in its approach to helping patients. Not only are treatments eclectic, but there is a lot of controversy among secular practitioners with regards to how Internet Gaming Disorder should be treated.<sup>21</sup>
7. Due to the controversy and lack of consensus, there is a lot of confusion with what one ought to do for help. This is to be expected when seeking to understand an issue of life without the wisdom of God (1 Cor. 1:25).
8. Because secular psychology has adopted naturalistic views of man, it is limited in its understanding and ability to treat the root of the problem, which includes the heart in relation to God. Dr. John Street states, “Using psychology for soul-care is like dressing a cancer with Band-Aids. It may temporarily relieve the pain or even mask the symptoms, but it will never penetrate the issues of the heart like God’s Word.”<sup>22</sup>

## B. Biblical Solutions

1. Biblical counselors seek to understand the whole person (body and soul) as it relates to the problem.
  - a) Physical factors (e.g., brain diseases, cancer, etc.) are diagnosed by physicians through medical exams.

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<sup>21</sup> Zajac et al., 990.

<sup>22</sup> John MacArthur and Master’s College Faculty, *Counseling: How to Counsel Biblically* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2022), 44.

- b) Soul issues (e.g., lust, anger, fear, etc.) are understood in light of the teaching of Scripture.
  - c) All problems people face, physical or spiritual, should be understood in light of their relationship with God (2 Cor. 4:16).
2. From a biblical perspective, the ultimate goal for a person engaging in any activity is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever (Ps. 15:5-11; 1 Cor. 10:31; Rev. 21:3-4).<sup>23</sup>
- a) If this is the ultimate goal of a person's life, then this should be the ultimate goal for parents in bringing up children (Eph. 6:4).
  - b) The God-centered goal must overtake a parent's desire that his child simply be happy, healthy, and well-mannered. Although these can be legitimate desires, they are secondary and subordinate to pleasing God.
3. King Solomon gives a vivid example of what it is like to indulge in earthly pleasures apart from and to the neglect of God (Eccl. 2:1-11).
- a) Earthly pleasures are temporarily satisfying (Eccl. 2:10) but they are fleeting and have no eternal value in and of themselves. The yield for such a manner of life is vanity and meaninglessness. According to Solomon, this is a grievous thing!

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<sup>23</sup> Presbyterian Church in America, *The Westminster Confession of Faith and* (Lawrenceville, Ga.: PCA Christian Education and Publications, 2007), 153.

- b) Anger, bitterness, and depression tend to characterize a person's life who is seeking sensual pleasure in gaming.<sup>24</sup> Biblical counselors understand this reality and the destructiveness of engaging in any activity to the neglect of God.
- 4. Biblical counselors should focus on helping a person incline their desires and pleasures toward God, up and above all other earthly things (Col. 3:1). This goes beyond behavioristic goals that do not deal with the heart (Matt. 15:19).
- 5. The goals can be broken into two categories:
  - a) Protection: Children need to be guarded from a detrimental use of entertainment. This involves protecting the child from harmful, sinful content and from establishing bad habits early in life through over-exposure to entertainment that leads to idolatry.
  - b) Pursuit and Guidance: Children need to be shepherded and called to find pleasure in God by loving Him and serving others for Him. This involves instructing, influencing, and persuading the child through God's Word on how to find pleasure in a relationship with God.

#### IV. Biblical and Theological Considerations

##### A. Pleasure

- 1. Desire for pleasure is not always sinful. Pursuit of pleasure is righteous if the object of pleasure is placed upon the right thing (Ps. 16:11).

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<sup>24</sup> Mark E. Shaw, *Hope & Help for Video Game, TV & Internet "Addiction"* (Bemidji, Minn.: Focus Publishing, 2008), 16.

2. Christians are commanded to find pleasure in God (Ps. 32:11; 97:12; 100:2; Phil. 4:4).
3. Glorifying God and *enjoying* Him forever is the chief end of man (Ps. 16:5-11; 73:25).<sup>25</sup>
4. It is sin to find greater pleasure in the creation than in God (Isa. 58:13-14; 2 Tim. 3:4).
5. Everlasting fulfillment of pleasure is found in God alone, not in created things (Ps. 16:11; 27:4; 42:1-2; 34:8; 119:103).
  - a) Pleasure in God may feel different than worldly, self-centered pleasures.
    - i. A method that is often adopted by parents and churches is to make God fun and pleasurable in the ways that are appealing to the flesh to influence children to desire God. This is not how God has revealed Himself in His Word. Tim Challies states, “There is nothing wrong with fun and entertainment, but when we become so addicted to them that we extend them to even our worship of God, so that the way we relate to God is nearly indistinguishable from the way we are entertained, we have made an idol of ourselves – an idol of our desire for entertainment.”<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Presbyterian Church in America, *The Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms*, 153.

<sup>26</sup> Tim Challies, “Be Thou My Television,” *Challies*, n.d., accessed April 7, 2022, <https://www.challies.com/general-news/be-thou-my-television/>.

- ii. People should find pleasure in God for who He is and how He has revealed Himself in His Word—He is glorious, He is praiseworthy, He is satisfying, He is comforting, He is loving, etc. (Acts 17:29).
6. King Solomon pursued every earthly pleasure his heart desired and described it as vanity and meaninglessness apart from God (Eccl. 2:1-11).
  7. God has pleasure. John Piper has explored the Scriptures to find all the ways God has pleasure—He has pleasure in His Son, in all He does, in His creation, in His fame, in election, in bruising the Son, in doing good to all who hope in Him, in the prayers of the upright, in personal obedience, and public justice.<sup>27</sup>
  8. Since a child must find his greatest pleasure in God, it is the duty of a parent to direct his attention to Him that he may “taste and see that the LORD is good” (Ps. 34:8).
  9. Desire for pleasure becomes sinful and idolatrous when it is desired more than God (2 Tim. 3:4; Isaiah 58:13-14).
  10. Idolatrous desires manifest as lustful cravings satisfied only through indulgence (Eph. 2:3).
  11. A person with an idolatrous desire for pleasure can find fulfillment through various avenues such as entertainment, sex, hobbies, etc.

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<sup>27</sup> John Piper, *The Pleasures of God: Meditations on God's Delight in Being God* (Sisters, Or: Multnomah, 2000).

12. Not all forms of entertainment are sinful or ungodly.
  - a) Entertainment that contains ungodly content should be avoided by adults and children.
  - b) If the entertainment does not contain ungodly content, the parent must understand that a good thing can still become an idol.
13. Since there can be a righteous interaction with entertainment, it should not be viewed as the root problem, but as an occasion whereby the underlying sinful desire can be fulfilled. That being said, the state of a child's heart should be approached as the greatest problem.<sup>28</sup>

#### B. Shaping Influences

1. The fallen world is under the sway of Satan who is actively opposed to God (Eph. 2:2; 1 Jn. 5:19). Because the world is in opposition to God, it is actively influencing children to worship things of the world. Avenues for entertainment are immersed with evil influences that can lure children to worship their desires for pleasure rather than God.
2. The church is vulnerable to falling prey to the influence of the world.
  - a) Many Sunday morning worship services can be compared to going to a movie theatre or attending the Grammy Awards Show. Lights, smoke machines, and other props are utilized to create a certain kind of atmosphere that appeals to the sinful flesh and makes for a memorable entertaining experience.

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<sup>28</sup> John MacArthur, *Successful Christian Parenting* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1998), 27-44.

- b) Worship music is often led by people who look and sound like Hollywood's latest boy bands.
- c) Youth and children ministries are often designed to appeal to entertainment-minded young people.

### C. Lack of Wisdom and Discernment by Parents

1. Christian parents who lack wisdom and discernment will be vulnerable and highly influenced by the unbiblical, secular views that dominate the main-stream literature that is accessible to the general public (See II.B.10 above).
2. A counselor will need to give practical guidance in specific areas that they will most certainly struggle with.
  - a) Parents need to be taught how a child's self-centeredness will propel them to love pleasure rather than God (Rom. 3:11). If parents are not instructed, they will tend to consider only the child's behavior and not deal with the underlying heart issue of a selfish pleasure-seeker. If the underlying sin is not dealt with, counterfeit lifestyles (e.g., legalism, asceticism) will be cultivated.<sup>29</sup>
  - b) Parents need to be exhorted regarding the evil influences in the world and the fact that these influences are actively seeking to lure children to lust after entertainment (1 Jn. 5:19).

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<sup>29</sup> Stuart Scott and Zondra Scott, *Killing Sin Habits: Conquering Sin with Radical Faith* (Focus Publishing, 2013), 51-55.

c) Parents need to know alternatives to entertainment that will help them avoid immersing children in entertainment and cultivating one-dimensional, self-centered pleasures (Eccl. 3:1-10).

Specifically, if a child's time with entertainment is limited, what will occupy that time?

V. Counseling Plan (Illustrative plan utilizing the Eight I's with a parent who seeks counseling for a child that is "addicted" to internet gaming)<sup>30</sup>

#### A. Involvement

1. When a child is consumed with a desire for a specific form of entertainment, this can be a very difficult issue for a Christian parent. If a child is consumed with an internet game and it is removed, the child is likely to respond with extreme anger or sadness.<sup>31</sup>
2. Reactions from the child can be exhibited through tantrums, outbursts, isolation, lying, depression, anxiety, etc.
3. A parent may feel hopeless, especially if attempts have been made to rectify the problem with no lasting results.
4. The counselor must be compassionate toward the parent with a genuine desire to help in time of need (Matt. 9:36; Lk. 7:13).

#### B. Inspiration

1. Though a child may be consumed with internet gaming, a parent can have hope if he turns to God and His Word for help (Rom. 15:4-5).

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<sup>30</sup> I have chosen internet gaming as simply one example to use for this plan due to the fact that it is a common form of entertainment among young people and is described as a mental disorder in the DSM V.

<sup>31</sup> American Psychiatric Association, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, 795.

2. A parent needs to be assured that God has answers for all issues of life, including a child that is consumed with internet gaming (2 Pet. 2:1-3).
3. Biblical hope will involve guiding a parent away from false refuges and placing hope in God with a seemingly hopeless situation. False refuges will include quick fixes such as medication or methods that are oriented to make the child happy (Ps. 146:5).

### C. Inventory

1. Sufficient data will need to be gathered in the first few sessions so the counselor will have an accurate view of the problem in order to understand the driving motivations related to why the child is consumed with internet gaming. (Prov. 18:13). These motivations or at least how they are articulated may vary according to age.
2. Data gathering needs to include the issues related to the problem and the whole person. The whole person will include physical data (outer man), and non-physical data (inner man) (2 Cor. 4:16).
  - a) Physical data will include any organic illness that may be present.
    - i. Example: A child who has a severe speech impediment or hearing loss will be limited in how he can interact in the world compared to children that do not have such impediments.
    - ii. Internet gaming and modern technology can provide a world where his speech impediment or hearing loss is not a

factor, thus creating *the* place where he feels welcome and finds pleasure.

- iii. Organic illness should not be understood as a cause of the problem but as a factor that can exacerbate the problem.
- iv. If there are indicators of an organic illness that has not been diagnosed, a physical exam performed by a physician should be recommended to the parent.

b) Non-physical data will include matters that are going on in the inner man and is understood only by the Scriptures (Heb. 4:12).

- i. The inner man will include matters of the heart. The heart is where desires, thoughts, and behaviors proceed from (Prov. 4:23; Matt. 6:21, 15:19; Heb. 4:12). This is where the root of the problem will be found.
- ii. Data gathering on the heart will involve taking inventory on the child's desires, emotions, thoughts, and behaviors. For example, what is it that the child loves about internet gaming? Why is it so satisfying?
- iii. Data specifically related to the child's heart in relationship to God will need to be gathered as well. Is he a believer? What does he think about God? What does he think God is like?

3. If the child is a believer the approach will look more like discipleship and if the child is a non-believer the counseling will be more

evangelistic, though God's standards are applicable regardless of the child's faith status (Gal. 3:24).<sup>32</sup> But it must be understood that things of God are foolishness to unbelievers (1 Cor. 2:14).

#### D. Interpretation

1. Once sufficient data has been gathered, the counselor should begin to make an interpretation of the information.
2. The Scriptures will be the authority by which the interpretation is made (2 Tim. 3:16-17; Heb. 4:12). Human "wisdom" should be avoided when attempting to make an interpretation of the data.
3. Biblical categorization should be made of data.
  - a) If a child is preoccupied or dominated by internet gaming, this should be understood as an idolatrous lust rather than a disorder (Matt. 6:24; 10:37; 22:37; Rom. 1:25; 2 Tim. 3:41; Jn. 2:15-17). (Compare DSM-V criteria nos. 1, 5, 6, identifying this as a disorder.)
  - b) If a child is dominated by internet gaming, he will have emotional and behavioral reactions when he is not able to play or when he is required to stop playing. Reactions such as irritability (1 Cor. 13:5), anxiety (Phil. 4:6), sadness<sup>33</sup> (Gen. 4:6-7), and lying (Lev. 19:11) should be understood as sinful reactions to having an idolatrous lust taken away rather than withdrawal symptoms.

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<sup>32</sup> Tedd Tripp, *Shepherding a Child's Heart* (Wapwallopen, Pa.: Shepherd Press, 1995), 55-56.

<sup>33</sup> There is a sadness that is not sinful but I take this to mean a depressed state that has come about due to not being able to satisfy a sinful lust, such as internet gaming.

(Compare DSM-V criteria nos. 2, 7, identifying them as withdrawal symptoms.)

- c) Feelings of helplessness and guilt should be understood as realities rather than negative moods. Helplessness and guilt are realities or facts due to our sin against God that are not to be reduced to a mere mood. If a person feels helpless or guilty, data gathering needs to be made to determine if he *is* guilty or in a helpless state before God (Ps. 32:3-4; Rom. 5:6). (Compare DSM-V criteria no. 8, identifying this as a mood issue.)
- d) Responsibilities that are neglected and lost (e.g., school work, family relationships) due to the preoccupation with internet games should be understood as a matter of sin or foolishness as described in Scripture (Prov. 10:4; 18:1; Eph. 6:1-2). (Compare DSM-V criteria no. 9.)

#### E. Instruction

1. Once the data has been interpreted accurately, the counselor should begin giving instruction from the Scriptures as it relates to the problem.
2. This should be conducted so as to give God's perspective of the problem as revealed from the Scriptures.
3. Utilizing The Big Picture Diagram,<sup>34</sup> the data can be categorized using biblical terminology of heat, root, and fruit (Jer. 17: 5-8; Matt. 12:33-34), and used as a visual aid with the counselee.

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<sup>34</sup> The Big Picture was obtained from the "Methods of Biblical Change" graduate course instructed by Dr. Stuart Scott at The Master's University, 2018.

- a) Heat
    - i. Heat should be understood as the circumstances and trials in life that exacerbate the real problem (root).
    - ii. This includes life pressures such as responsibilities (e.g., school work, chores), and relationships (e.g., lack of friends, bullying).
  - b) Fruit
    - i. The fruit is brought forth from the heart (Matt. 15:19) and is a symptom of what is taking place at the root.
    - ii. This includes behaviors and emotions such as lying, outbursts, and anxiety which are all to be categorized as the fruit.
  - c) Root (Heart Issues)
    - i. The heart is what God looks at and is where the root cause of the problem is found (Sam. 16:7; Ps. 139:23-24).
    - ii. This has to do with what a person is desiring, and where a person has placed their hope and trust.
4. Assuming a child's greatest pleasure is found in internet gaming, then this should be understood as a worship problem that calls for change on the heart level. The heart is often an area that is neglected by parents, thus resulting in too much focus being placed on the heat and fruit categories.

5. Once the root problem has been understood by the parent, he needs to understand how to shepherd and bring the child up as it relates to this specific problem (Eph. 6:4).
  - a) The child needs discipline and instruction (Prov. 29:15; Eph. 6:4).  
Bringing up a child in the discipline and instruction of the Lord is God's way of lovingly raising a child to choose His ways and follow in the footsteps of Christ (See the "Implementation" phase for homework assignments below).
  - b) The parent must lovingly shepherd the child's heart to put off self-centered, idolatrous pleasures in earthly things and put on pleasures in Christ and serving others (Matt. 22:37-39; Eph. 4:20-24).<sup>35</sup>

#### F. Inducement

1. Both the parent and the child need motivation for the change that needs to take place in their lives.
2. The parent's motivation needs to be centered upon glorifying God and parenting in a way that is pleasing to Him (1 Cor. 10:31).
3. The parent can be motivated by understanding the negative consequences for allowing a child to be consumed with internet gaming (Prov. 18:1; 29:15; Jas. 1:14-15). Likewise, the parent can be motivated

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<sup>35</sup> The put off/put on dynamic is a matter of sanctification and can only be carried out by believing children. Parenting the unbelieving child should have an evangelistic appeal when applying God's standards. This distinction is important so as to avoid false converts.

by knowing the positive rewards for a child making God the object of his pleasure (Ps. 37:4; 147:11).

4. The child can and should be motivated through persuasion by the parent to influence the child to follow God's ways by regularly presenting him with the blessings in finding pleasure in God and the negative consequences (including strong warnings) of giving his heart over to self-centered pleasures in internet gaming (Prov. 4:20-27).

#### G. Implementation

1. Homework assignments for the parent will be how the counselor helps him apply God's truth in the day-to-day aspects of the problems he is facing with the child.
2. It will be important for the parent to know that as he seeks to help the child find pleasure in God that the journey will be more of a marathon than a sprint. Because foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child (Prov. 22:15), one cannot expect a child to find more delight in God than in internet games overnight. The goal is to implement a lifestyle and environment that seek to train and cultivate godly pleasures in the heart of the child over time (Prov. 22:6).
3. The ordinary means of grace that God has given His people need to be implemented into the life of the child on a regular basis.
  - a) Regular church attendance and involvement
    - i. The parent should have the child involved in Bible a believing/teaching church.

- ii. This is the primary place the child will regularly be among a community of believers whose focus is on God and serving others.

b) Bible Reading

- i. The parent should have the child read the Bible regularly. This is how God has revealed Himself.
- ii. The goal here is to teach the child who God is in the way that He has revealed Himself. Utilizing an age-appropriate book or study on the attributes of God can also be very effective in this area.

c) Prayer

- i. Individually, with the church, and family time.
- ii. Explain the concept of “pray without ceasing” (1 Thess. 5:17). This will include finding and considering God’s involvement and presence in all aspects of life.

d) Worship

- i. Help and influence children to be worshipers.
- ii. Attending church, prayer, and reading the Bible is for the purpose of worship, not to just be a good, moral person.

4. Regular family devotions are an invaluable way for parents to implement certain elements of worship into the life of the child outside of the corporate church gatherings.

5. Activities other than internet games need to be implemented into the daily life of the child. Real life in a fallen world is not always pleasurable or fun, so a child's life needs to be diversified with pleasurable and non-pleasurable activities (Eccl. 3:1-8).
  - a) Pleasurable experiences could include measured play time with peers, sports, crafts, baking and cooking. This will help the child avoid idolatry with internet games as his heart experiences pleasure in other ways.
  - b) Non-pleasurable experiences could include service projects such as doing yard work for an elderly person, chores, attending a funeral, etc.<sup>36</sup> The goal in such activities is to glorify God but also to cultivate an attitude that actually finds pleasure in things that do not appear "pleasurable" at first glance. Finding such pleasure is only possible when doing them for the glory of God.
6. Appropriate consequences need to be given for sinful behavior; rewards should be given for good behavior.
  - a) When the child responds in sinful ways, negative consequences should be given (Prov. 22:15). This discourages bad behavior.
  - b) When the child responds in righteous ways, positive rewards should be given. This encourages good behavior.

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<sup>36</sup> Some of these activities can be pleasurable but the point is to have activities in the child's life that he may not necessarily find pleasurable or fun.

- c) Both consequences (positive and negative) should be administered in love, with patience, and with the explanation that God disciplines those He loves and He rewards those who serve Him.

#### H. Integration

1. The parent will be released from counseling once it is apparent that he understands the problem rightly and is applying God's solutions to his situation with his child.
  - a) The parent will understand the child's greatest need is heart change. This means the parent is shepherding the child's heart and not just focused on correcting behavior.
  - b) The parent is faithfully disciplining and training the child in a way that points the child to God.
  - c) The child should be integrated into the ordinary means by which God reveals Himself (see section V.G.3 above) with a focus of cultivating pleasures in God and serving others.
  - d) The parent should have the child involved in a variety of activities that include pleasurable and non-pleasurable experiences (See section V.G.5 above).
  - e) The parent should be consistent in giving consequences for bad behavior and rewards for good behavior.
  - f) The parent should be ministering to other parents by exhorting and encouraging them in the same ways God is helping him.

2. When it is evident that the parent is faithfully applying and growing in these areas the counselor can release him into the normal life of the church body.

## VI. Conclusion

- A. Unfortunately, due to the influence of the world and lack of discernment, Christian parents often consult the secular practitioners for guidance when a child is exhibiting concerning behaviors. This is certainly the case with entertainment “addictions”.
  1. Secular ideologies will lead parents away from the truth that is contained in Scripture, and prescribe treatments that can make the problem worse.
  2. Children who have a perceived entertainment addiction will likely be diagnosed with a disorder and prescribed treatment that does not address the heart (Prov. 4:23; Matt. 15:19).
  3. Counselors should avoid and expose secular ideologies that are in opposition to Scripture while bringing clarity through ministering God’s truth to parents seeking counsel (2 Tim. 3:16-17).
- B. Scripture is not silent on the issue of entertainment or pleasure, and provides the most important information a parent needs to handle a child that is consumed with worldly entertainment.
  1. An entertainment addiction ought to be understood as an idolatrous lust. A child that is finding ultimate pleasure in some form of worldly entertainment is allowing an earthly thing to become more important than God (2 Tim. 3:4).

2. A parent needs to shepherd a child in such a way that directs his heart to find pleasure in God and not allow him to overindulge in sensual pleasures that will lead him to enslavement (Prov. 22:6; Tit. 3:3).
  3. The child's heart must be addressed with the gospel and biblical truth to direct the child to love God more than entertainment (2 Tim. 3:4).
- C. With a counseling methodology that is firmly rooted in Scripture, counselors will shed light upon the most important issues that are associated with a child who is an entertainment junkie. Christian families will be re-oriented to find hope in God's truth; and the church, as a result, will be more prepared to glorify God and enjoy Him forever (Ps. 16:5-11).

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