

Christian Gaming Company Starts Movement to Rescue Kids from Violent and Oversexed Culture

Read Time: 5 Minutes 19 Seconds

Depression, anxiety, crime, pornography and suicide. These are words that are frequently associated with children in America today, and they paint an ugly picture of the culture that has been forced upon them.

Ever searching for something—anything—to entertain them, children have often turned to the toxic environment of violent and provocative video games and television that pollute their minds with images of death, sex and other things that have drawn them away from biblical teaching and a relationship with their Creator.

And it's something that breaks the heart of Brent Dusing, the founder and CEO of TruPlay, a Christian entertainment company that has created transformative digital experiences for children in the form of games and products that embed a faith message into an engaging and interactive medium.

Dusing says his company is not only a business, but it's a movement to help draw children of all ages, including teens, to engage with Christ and with the Bible and to help set them on a path to a Christ-like life of love and encouragement instead of one of despair and destruction.

 "What we're doing is we're building a multimedia experience for families that is beautiful, fun and exciting, but that also contains God's Truth," Dusing says. "This is really a movement we've started to say, hey,

we've got to stand up for the next generation. We're the adults in the room. I know there is a lot of people out there that are passionate about our culture and what our responsibilities are to the next generation.

"We want to change lives for children—not just in America—but around the world. And we want to do our best to represent hope and God's truth and to be a voice that says, hey, God loves you. You're a special and wonderful creation, and yes, the Bible is true. There are a lot of wonderful things that God's Word contains, and we're telling them that they can have fun and entertained and participate in virtue."

And how is TruPlay going about it? In September, the company launched the first major NFT release by a Christian company with the release of 6,650 Genesis NFTs, which a press release says "minted out within 10 minutes" on Sept. 15.

Secondary sales of the NFTs on the day of the release yielded more than \$200,000 in volume within the first 24 hours on OpenSea, the world's largest web3 marketplace for NFTs and crypto collectibles.

A total of 7 million people played the first versions of TruPlay's Bible-based games. TruPlay's market research shows that millions of non-Christians parents also prefer faith-based games because they don't want their children playing games that feature dark and senseless violence.

According to Dusing and TruPlay's research:

- The average child is on screen 52.5 hours a week.
- Anxiety, suicide and depression rates are at all-time highs for children, precisely tracking with the use of social media on smartphones.
- Most secular games today feature violence and other illicit activities that are linked with depression and mental health problems.

TruPlay's Games

As for the logistics of the games themselves, the newly-released NFTs, according to TruPlay's press release, represent seven heroic characters, each unique in personality and purpose, who live in 'RhymVerse,' a gaming world where God is real, and the Bible is true. The heroic animal children have their own unique personalities and struggles. They use their giftings to restore truth and goodness to the many environments in RhymVerse. To face the various evils around them, the heroes must use all their weapons to win the fight, including their childlike faith and reliance on God."

RhymVerse is currently in development and will launch in 2023.

"Many people are often quoted as saying children are our most precious resource," Dusing says. "But if you were, say, an alien, and you came to earth, you wouldn't really see that right now."

But the games are not only for younger children, but for teens as well. TruPlay produces Bible-based games like "Stained Glass," a match-three game that was designed by two Apple Award winners and was the most popular and highest-rated Christian game in the App store.

"The Journey of Jesus" and "The Journey of Moses" each take players through the major story arcs of the Bible, incorporating Scripture and using digital animation and engaging gameplay.

Dusing Was a Gamer

A gamer himself as a kid, Dusing grew up on video gaming systems like Nintendo, and on individual games like, Zelda and Mario Brothers. He has pioneered game creation with Christian content through Lightside Games, a Christian gaming studio reaching more than 7 million game players worldwide. Engaged in a partnership with the Billy Graham Evangelistic

Association, that resulted in 25,000 decisions for Christ.

As the founder and CEO of Cellfire, Dusing created the nation's leading mobile coupon company used at grocers like Safeway and Kroger.

But products of Dusing's youth, mostly harmless ventures for kids during the 1980s and 1990s, have morphed into today's video games like video games like Dead Space 2, Mortal Kombat and Call of Duty: Black Ops. These are only three of 10 that labels as "10 Violent Video Games to Avoid."

Dusing acknowledges that, with today's technology, kids are going to gravitate toward their iPhone's and toward video games to keep themselves entertained, but that something more positive and more wholesome must be offered to them to keep them out of trouble. A 2018 study conducted by the National Academy of Sciences only confirmed the link between violent video games and physical aggression, yet the gaming companies continue to churn them out and to appeal to kids.

"It's just part of our cultural fabric," Dusing says. "But the reality is as Christians, we have to realize that, for most people 50 and under, we grew up with video games. Games are just as much of the cultural fabric as movies are. It's a massive form of the cultural conversation."

A Focus on the Family article revealed that, before the days of the Internet, "children were typically between the ages of 11 to 13 when they began by viewing soft-core pornography found in magazines. ... Some researchers have stated that the average age of exposure to pornography is down to eight."

In addition, Dusing says, the statistics on children's exposure to Jesus and the Bible are way down.

"The worst statistic of all is that, while 62% of Americans over 40 believe in God, only 32% of children believe in God in America," Dusing says. "That's inconceivable."

And that's what TruPlay games, based out of West Lake Hills, Texas, is all about—changing the culture for a safer world for our children. A full platform of other new games, videos and related content will release in 2023. The company says it has raised “over \$20 million in investor capital, which validates its vision to create safe, edifying content for children.”

“I would encourage people to go to our website and, even though we don't launch until next year, they can enter their email so they can get notifications of when it comes out,” Dusing says. “We're on social media—Twitter, Facebook, Discord. We would love to have people support us, but we're also doing tests with these games.

“And oh, we're hiring a lot of people. If anyone is interested in working with a very high-caliber, world-class team of technology experts and game makers and story tellers, we'd love to talk to you.” {eo}

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‘He Gets Us’ Phenomenon Radiates Bold Cultural Agenda

Read Time: 7 Minutes

One of the most frequent questions members of the He Gets Us movement receive are, “who is behind this, and is there an agenda?” In a culture that has become increasingly hostile to the kingdom of God, the suspicions run deep because the “He”

in that phrase just happens to be Jesus.

But Brad Hill, a spokesperson for the recent phenomenon that is sweeping not only the nation but globally as well, says He Gets Us has only a simple yet powerful mission: to point people to rediscover Jesus.

Two years ago, a group of believers who wanted to do exactly that had a question of their own about Jesus they wanted answered: "How did the world's greatest love story become known as a hate group?" It was a question that wouldn't leave the minds of the group's founders, and it was a question that needed to be answered—and quickly considering the rapid deterioration of our culture.

"At the root of this project is this simple but powerful idea that Jesus is an incredible figure, and those of us who follow Him know the fullness of why He came," Hill says. "But we also know that, in our culture today, there is a lot of misunderstanding. And, there are a lot of people that may not have ever seen a full picture of Him.

"So, from that question sprang up a fairly significant body of research. What we learned was that, and it's no surprise to anyone, that in our culture today we have some issues in terms of the way people view the churches and Christians. We sometimes carry some baggage in the way people view us.

"But when we get to the question of Jesus, even folks who would definitely not call themselves a Jesus follower or a religious person, we have found that people might say, 'Jesus gave us a good example to follow.' Some people, during this research even said things like, 'if the world followed the way Jesus taught, we'd be better off.' We couldn't shake that idea and we said that, if we lead with Jesus, we really believe that there is an opportunity here to reach people who may not be walking the walk but who are open spiritually enough and just curious enough to learn more about Jesus."

☒ And the message is working. With a \$100 million advertising campaign that includes spots on national television, on billboards nationwide, online ads and matrix boards in stadiums and arenas, He Gets Us is targeting millennials and Gen Zer's with a message that the Jesus of the Bible didn't lean left or right. He wasn't a Democrat or Republican.

He was someone that, during His time on earth, who struggled just like you do. He's someone that was judged, just like you are at times. He was fed up with politics, just as you might be right now.

But Jesus is also someone that simply loves you—a God that is no respecter of persons.

Made possible by a small group of donors from wealthy anonymous families, He Gets Us is also present on YouTube. In five months, its channel has grown to more than 8,000 subscribers, but it has also been viewed more than 350 million times.

"One of my favorite illustrations is something I call the 'water cooler moment,'" Hill says. "And this is happening every day from the stories we are receiving from people. If you're a pastor, for example, you would imagine someone in your church who works a job Monday to Friday to maybe go in to work on Monday and tell someone, 'Hey, I saw this Jesus commercial on the football game last night.'

"So, what illustrates the ads is that it's part of the strategy on the scale of He Gets Us, that the ads are part of the strategy to open doors to evangelize or introduce people to Jesus. The ads are helping to start that process for us. And, they are driving people toward the people who serve in your church. What I always ask pastors is, 'How do you get your people ready for those conversations when they happen?' That's a big driver for us, for a lot of the resources we

have.”

Many people come to He Gets Us with some tough questions, Hill says. Many have a sketchy background, and they wonder if they’re even redeemable in Jesus’ eyes. Some have been turned off by a negative reaction from “church” people, and they believe that they are “too far gone.”

But that’s where He Gets Us comes in, to dispel and debunk those naysayers.

“Some will come to us to share their story, and they may be ashamed of something they’ve done in their past,” Hill says. “They’ve been made to feel bad about it. But that’s far from what Jesus was about. They want to know if God still loves them, and is there a place where they can get closer to God. ‘Is it too late for me to explore Jesus?’ They need to know that Jesus was just like us.

“If there was one thing Jesus was clear on, it’ was His love for everyone. That has no exceptions. The first thing we want to do is love on these people. Maybe it’s just a simple text to say that, with Jesus, their slate gets wiped clean. The important thing is just to meet them where they are and help them know that Jesus loves them.”

There are several ways in which you as an individual can engage with He Gets Us. Upon visiting the company’s website, you can chat live with team members; you can text for prayer, you can sign up to join a small group with the global ministry Alpha, or you can find a Bible reading plan on the YouVersion app.

Churches can also find resources in which to equip members of their congregations to make disciples, to “go ye, therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost (Matt. 28:19).

“We have a high view of Scripture and a high view of Jesus,

and we believe in what the Bible says that we are the children of God and we have access to everything Jesus had," Hill says. "At the same time, the strategy of the campaign is what some might call pre-evangelistic, and we are trying to reach those folks that are a little further up the scale and are just discovering Jesus. We feel like those topics are conversations best handled by ministries and churches that partner with our camp.

"That's one of the reasons we're eager and we're hungry to have as many churches as are interested to join in. When people say they are ready to connect, conversations like that would be the kinds of things we think our churches and ministries would want to engage in."

So, does He Gets Us have an agenda? There is little question about that.

"We're very careful to point out that no single church or denomination is represented here," Hill says. "We want to work with as many as we can. We're not left or right. Just pointing people to Jesus, that's our goal and our plan. There has been a gradual erosion in how people view the church and Christians. But we hold fast to Scripture and we believe that the church is a critical part of God's plan in this campaign.

"People may not believe that Jesus was God, even if they believe He was a good person. ... We want people to take a fresh look at Jesus. One of the things we've heard is that some people feel like to get to Jesus, they have to go through Christians. We want to offer them the chance to learn about Him and what He said and did. We want them to read about Jesus in the Bible. But we also want them to know that there is no prerequisite that you have to pray a prayer, go to church or believe certain things before you can explore Jesus."

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What Do Pastors Think About Halloween? Study Reveals Surprising Results

Read Time: 3 Minutes 24 Seconds

It's a question that believers grapple with every year at this time. Should Christians avoid Halloween?

Some believers simply don't feel that it carries any spiritual implications, while others see it as a dangerous event to celebrate, especially for Christians.

But what do pastors think about Halloween and how members of their congregations should handle it? The results may be surprising.

A recent Lifeway study reveals that, while few pastors are refraining from influencing their church members' engagement in Halloween, only 13% of them say they encourage people to avoid Halloween altogether.

Christian alternatives to the events of Oct. 31 have become popular in recent years, with churches holding Fall festivals or engage in trunk-or-treat substitutes for handing out candy to children who dress up in costumes.

But deliverance minister Kathy DeGraw says that demonic doors can be opened even in these seemingly "innocent" variations, and that churches and pastors shouldn't give the enemy that opportunity.

"The Bible says to give no place to the devil," DeGraw says. "I think when we look at Halloween, what we have to look at is

how many doors we can close so that we give no place to the devil. The adversary goes around like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. And we need to make sure we are living a righteous, pure, clean, holy life so that we are not someone that he can come and devour or that he's even seeking."

Indeed, Ephesians 4:27-28 reads: "Do not give place to the devil. Let him who steals steal no more."

First Corinthians 10:21 also supports DeGraw's claim, "You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. You cannot be partakers of the Lord's table and of the table of demons."

"There will be people who will find different churches to go trunk-or-treating, but let's not have our church be that place, because when we allow our church to be that place, we're setting ourselves up—our church, our ministry—for spiritual warfare attack," DeGraw says. "Anton LaVey, the founder of Satanism, says he loves it when Christian parents dress their kids up for Halloween, because in the spiritual realm, there's just no differentiating between dressing them up as a spider or a goblin or dressing them up as an angel or a biblical character to the demonic realm that has made it [its] mission to curse us and wreak havoc on us."

"We are opening a door; we are opening a gateway when we allow that participation. That's why I really believe, that if you want to do something for Halloween, the best thing we should do is spend that time in prayer, and do evangelistic outreach 10 days later."

Remember pastors, that you are the gatekeepers and the shepherds here, and that your congregations lean on you for advice in these crucial spiritual matters—after consulting the ultimate word, the Bible, that is.

The Lifeway survey also revealed that only 8% of pastors said

they don't encourage their church members to participate in any of these alternatives.

"Few pastors simply ignore the fact that so many Americans participate in Halloween celebrations," Lifeway Research executive director Scott McConnell says. "Most pastors focus on the social nature of these celebrations, encouraging their congregations to engage with others outside their church."

Nearly three in five (58%) pastors say they want church members to build relationships with neighbors who trick-or-treat. More than one in three (34%) pastors encourage church members to hand out gospel tracts to trick-or-treaters.

The survey also reveals that older pastors, those older than 65, are those who are who are likely to encourage their churches to avoid Halloween completely (20%). They are most likely to not encourage their church members to respond to the annual event in any way (14%).

The Lifeway study showed other intriguing statistics. African American pastors are among the most likely to encourage their congregations to avoid Halloween (32%).

In terms of church size, pastors with congregations with less than 50 members are the most likely to encourage their congregations to avoid Halloween altogether (16%).

Here are more statistics from the survey:

- White pastors are the most likely to encourage congregations to build relationships with neighbors (61%) and invite neighbors to church events (73%)..
- Pastors in the South are among the most likely to encourage church members to hand out gospel tracts (38%)..
- Evangelical pastors (42%) are more likely than mainline pastors (28%) to encourage members to hand out gospel tracts. {eoa}

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Cindy Jacobs Says ‘God is Shaking the Nations,’ But Do Not Fear

Read Time: 2 Minutes 19 Seconds

Generals International’s Cindy Jacobs says we have arrived at a place in time where God is shaking the nations. The prophetic word for many, even believers, brings an overwhelming feeling of anxiety as we go deeper into the end times.

But Jacobs, in an interview with CBN’s Chris Mitchell in Jerusalem, says Christians shouldn’t fear what God is doing and to prepare for it by embracing the revival and awakenings that are taking place globally.

“God gave me the scripture when He says, ‘once again, I will shake the nations,’” Jacobs says. “So, we’re at that point where God indeed is shaking the nations. He’s shaking it so that people will get saved, and so that we as His children will let go of a lot of things we need to let go of so that we can move into a place of destiny.”

So how should believers prepare for this shaking?

“Number one, don’t be afraid,” Jacobs told Mitchell. “All of us have a measure of fear inside of us that maybe we’re not

aware of. So, we must trust God for provision. I remember one time when my husband got laid off and God said, 'you say you trust Me.' Well, He said, 'you trusted in your paycheck. Now you are going to trust me.' Whatever happens, the Holy Spirit is trying to get us ready.

"And then, in the natural, get out of debt. Don't pile up debt. The word I just preached here (in Jerusalem) is that God is establishing Goshen's. If you remember from the Old Testament, Goshen was the place that Joseph prepared for his family in Egypt. God is preparing Goshen's for us—places where we will feel safe and where we will have provision, where we will have what we need.

"We can trust Him. God is a good Father. God is going to do that, even in the midst of those who have been displaced. I just want to say to them that God is moving you into a place of blessing. Sometimes everything gets reset, everything gets torn up, but it's always toward a blessing for us in the end."

Jacobs says spiritual awakenings are taking place all over the world right now, even in the most unexpected places. It's an exciting time to live, she says, and we should rejoice in what is happening.

"Whether it's the stadiums in Europe that are being filled or the revivals that are happening in Amsterdam, Rotterdam and in Holland, He is bringing revival," Jacobs says. "I'm always receiving pictures of places in the Middle East where they are gathering in the midst of [a] huge crisis.

"We might not recognize it, but literally, millions are getting saved right now; millions in Iran. There is a huge move of God in Iran right now. ... So, keep your eye on the prize and not the problem." {eoa}

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