

# Play with Purpose

For teens ages 12–14 · about 45–60 minutes · Moral Issues for Teens · Media & Technology · game

Honor or Walk Away? · built on 1 Thessalonians 5:21–22, Philippians 4:8, and

1 Corinthians 6:12

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Your students grew up with controllers in their hands. For many, gaming is friendship, stress relief, competition, and creativity — not a villain in a sermon. Some play faith-based or educational games; others drift toward violence, crude humor, witchcraft themes, loot-box pressure, or sessions that swallow homework, sleep, and prayer. This session is not anti-fun. It is pro-wisdom: *test everything; hold fast what is good; abstain from every form of evil*. Games can honor God when they are chosen, timed, and played with a guarded heart.

## Before you teach anything, pray.

Some students game to escape pain; some feel judged every time a leader mentions screens; some are already ashamed of what they play when no one is watching. Ask the Spirit for clarity without shame — conviction that leads to freedom, not a guilt spiral. You are teaching discernment and self-control, not launching a war on every console.

## The heart of the lesson

Video games are a cultural reality, not a fringe hobby. The root issue is not pixels on a screen — it is what enters the mind, what masters the schedule, and what your testimony looks like when a younger sibling or unbelieving friend watches you play. Proverbs 4:23 says guard your heart, for from it flow the issues of life. Philippians 4:8 sets a filter: true, pure, lovely, commendable. Ephesians 5:11 warns against fellowship with unfruitful works of darkness. Galatians 5:19–21 lists flesh-works that many mainstream titles glorify without apology.

## *Test everything — don't let the game play you.*

Symptoms in a 12–14 life: rage when a parent says "time's up," grades slipping after "one more match," choosing titles you'd hide from your pastor, gaming instead of church or family time, and the hollow feeling after a four-hour session you cannot remember. Paul says all things may be lawful, but he will not be mastered by anything (1 Cor. 6:12). Ephesians 5:16 calls us to redeem the

time. Even neutral games become harmful when they eat the hours meant for Scripture, sleep, and real people.

*Would your light still shine if someone watched your screen? (Matt. 5:16)*

**1 THESSALONIANS 5:21-22**

**"Test everything; hold fast what is good. Abstain from every form of evil."**

**PHILIPPIANS 4:8**

"Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable... **think about these things.**"

## How the session flows

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| <b>1</b> | <b>Name the reality.</b> Gaming as gift, pressure, and escape. | ~8 min     |
| <b>2</b> | <b>Teach the test.</b> Heart, content, time, testimony.        | ~12 min    |
| <b>3</b> | <b>Play the game.</b> "Honor or Walk Away?" on screen.         | ~12-15 min |
| <b>4</b> | <b>Quiet honesty.</b> Reference card, private reflection.      | ~5 min     |
| <b>5</b> | <b>Worksheet.</b> In class or take-home practice.              | ~15 min    |
| <b>6</b> | <b>Close with a filter.</b> Prayer and one weekly boundary.    | ~8 min     |

Screen for the game, printed cards and worksheets, pens. You do not need to name every popular title — teach principles students can apply to any platform or genre.

## Leading it, part by part

### Name the reality

Ask: who here games? What do you like about it — teamwork, story, competition, relaxing? Let answers stay light. Then ask: when has gaming left you feeling worse — tired, angry, behind, or guilty? Land this: games are not automatically sin. Some build strategy, friendship, and problem-solving when used in moderation. The question is whether a game honors God, builds your spirit, and stays under your control — or stirs your flesh and starts mastering you.

### Teach the test

Walk through four filters from Scripture. **Heart and mind:** Proverbs 4:23; Philippians 4:8 — garbage in, garbage out is still a spiritual law. **Content:** Does the game glorify violence, sexual immorality, foul language, witchcraft, rebellion, or greed? Galatians 5:19–21; Ephesians 5:11 — have no fellowship with unfruitful works of darkness. **Time and mastery:** Ephesians 5:15–16; 1 Corinthians 6:12 — redeem time; refuse to be mastered. **Testimony:** Matthew 5:16; Romans 14:21 — let your light shine; do not be a stumbling block to younger kids or unbelievers watching you.

Teach Colossians 3:17 as the daily posture: whatever you do, in word or deed, do it in the name of the Lord Jesus. Close the loop with hope: healthy gaming is possible — set timers, choose better titles, play with friends who sharpen you, and walk away when the Spirit whispers *enough*. God's way out is Spirit-empowered self-control, Scripture renewal, honest accountability with parents, and repentance when play became escape.

### Play the game

Run "Honor or Walk Away?" twelve to fifteen minutes. Round 1 sorts choices that honor God from those you should walk away from; Round 2 anchors Bible principles; Round 3 tackles real scenarios — violent titles, all-nighters, loot boxes, younger siblings watching; Round 4 drills key verses. Bridge afterward: winning points is fun; winning a guarded heart and redeemed time is the actual goal.

### Quiet honesty

Hand out the reference card. Promise plainly that nobody is collecting it. Give five quiet minutes for students to name what they would be embarrassed for a leader to see on their screen — without saying it aloud to the room. Protect the silence.

### Worksheet

Reinforce 1 Thess. 5:21–22, Philippians 4:8, and 1 Cor. 6:12; T/F on mastery; one real-life application; one weekly boundary. Pairs or homework both work.

### **Close with a filter**

Invite each student to pick one game habit to honor God this week — a timer, a better title, a walk-away rule before bed, or telling a parent the truth about play time. Pray for students who feel owned by gaming and for parents negotiating limits. Offer leaders for compulsive patterns that need more than a pep talk.

## **Take it further**

- What does Proverbs 4:23 teach about guarding your heart when choosing entertainment?
- How does Philippians 4:8 work as a filter for games, music, and shows?
- What flesh-works in Galatians 5:19–21 might show up in popular game content?
- What does 1 Corinthians 6:12 mean when Paul says he will not be mastered by anything?
- Why is Ephesians 5:16 important when thinking about hours spent gaming?
- How does Romans 14:21 apply when younger kids or non-believers watch you play?
- What does Matthew 5:16 say about your influence and example?
- Would Jesus be honored by how, when, and what you play? Why or why not?

## **A final word**

Teens need permission to enjoy God's gifts and courage to walk away from what dirties the mind. Give them both. The goal is not a joyless ban on every controller — it is a life where gaming stays a servant, not a master, and where students can honestly say: I tested it; I held fast to what is good; I abstained from evil. When they learn that filter, they can still play — but play will not play them.