



Lessons

From

ANGRY BIRDS

BY WALDO MALAN

I have been playing the mobile game, Angry Birds, for about two years now. It may be longer, but I cannot really be sure. Since my first pull on the slingshot to eradicate one of those pesky little pigs I was hooked. Currently I am busy studying, analysing, strategizing and working on perfecting the levels in Angry Birds 2™, the latest addition to the stable of games from the developers Rovio.

It was during one of the levels that I suddenly made a weird connection between the game and my own spiritual walk. The more I thought about it, the more I started making connections that seem to reflect my daily struggle with piglets that pop up all over the place.

For those of you not familiar with the game, allow me to give you a brief introduction. The basic strategy of the game is that the player gets a number of birds that are launched by way of a slingshot to kill off pigs of all shapes and sizes that are hiding behind walls of stone, glass and wood. Some of the pigs are clever and try to escape by way of air balloons or umbrellas. One also finds really huge pigs (chief pigs) that will require two or more direct hits from a bird to eventually be “popped!”

Each player gets different birds with different abilities: there is Red who has an awesome loud shout that can topple complex structures, Chuck with some super-speed abilities to crash through wood, Matilda who lays an explosive egg, Terrence whose strength lies in his size and can bulldoze just about through anything, the Bluebird triplets – Jay, Jake and Jim – who combines their abilities threefold, the exploding Blackbird who is a flying time bomb, Hal can reverse in mid-flight like an ace aviator, Bubbles who balloons up, pushing obstacles and threats aside when threatened, and lastly, the Mighty Eagle, who can clear every

single pig in a mighty swoop!

The player must use the birds strategically, aiming an accurate trajectory by launching the birds from a slingshot to kill off the pigs.

I think by now most of you have already seen the spiritual metaphor emerge just by looking at the game. We often quote the famous portion out of Paul’s letter to the Ephesians in which he describes the spiritual weapons at the disposal of believers. Let us pause briefly here and look at the description given to those who follow Christ: believers. It may seem like common sense, but a ‘believer’ must ‘believe!’ A belief is simply confidence in the truth or existence of something not immediately susceptible to rigorous proof. This means that even in the face of vigorous opposition or different opinions, a personal belief is unshakable. Therefore, if one is labeled as a ‘believer’ then in our spiritual context it means that Christ is immutable and unshakable.

Now, a result of a believer’s belief is an arsenal of spiritual weapons to help protect and preserve that belief – and the basic tenet of this belief is that Jesus is the Son of God and the Way and Door to the Creator Father. The most aggressive opposition to this belief comes from the chief enemy of God, Satan, who will use every sneaky strategy to infuse disbelief and doubt into the life of a believer. Since Satan is not omniscient or omnipresent, he employs other spirits in his army to assist him in spreading doubt, fear, hopelessness and despair. I never realized just how strong a competitive spirit I had until I tackled Angry Birds 2! Usually, playing games are meant to be relaxing and a ‘time-out’ from reality – in essence a simple means of escape from the doldrums of life. However, in my attempts to blast those little green pigs off the face of the game, I often find my blood pressure rising and my heart beating faster!

A Field Guide to Angry Birds

Games that lodge in the brain often have comical stars



The chubby white bird drops an egg bomb when players tap the screen after launching the creature from the slingshot.



Black birds act as bombs, which explode once they've landed on a target, obliterating pigs and buildings around them.



The first avian missile players encounter when they start the game, **the red bird** follows a simple trajectory when launched.



The blue bird splits into three smaller versions in mid-air when the screen is tapped.



Tapping the screen after launching **the yellow bird** gives the critter a speed boost that makes it more deadly.



The green bird turns into a boomerang that doubles back to strike targets in otherwise protected locations.



The big red bird is a flying wrecking ball that causes more damage than his smaller red cousin.

Often I will replay a level simply to see if I can work out a new strategy to more efficiently and quickly rid myself of the horrible sounds of pigs laughing! In the older version of the game each level was presented the same way each time, however, in version 2.0 each time the level is played the layout changes with the pigs in different places and in different sizes! Just like life, and just like every day we have to face, pigs can be lurking anywhere to foil our attempts at success.

A king pig is a character of another kind. Huge, monstrous and ugly, this character requires extreme skill from the player with multiple hits and ultimately a kick into an abyss to get rid of completely. Indeed a stronghold of note!

So I would like to encourage everyone to dust off the letter to the Ephesians, especially the part listing the spiritual arsenal available to believers, and employ these daily to kill off some pigs (Ephesians 6: 10-18). When all else fails and every bird is spent, call in the help of the Might Eagle who will whoosh away all opposition! Also know, that in strengthening our belief, we too can become like the Mighty Eagle (Isaiah 40:31).

Every game we play will require some practice to increase and ultimately perfect our skill at every level. Every game we play, if played by the rules of the developer, can be beat/won and will give a reward at the conclusion. Let us decide today that we will also play the game of life according to the rules of the developer! If we claim to be

believers, then our life become Life, and the strategies for success are pre-programmed in our 'game' and waiting to be discovered. When played with skill and accuracy, our success is guaranteed by the Creator, despite some moments during the game where we fail a level or two, or our blood pressure rises, or where we become despondent. Follow the rules and become a believing overcomer!

Anyone ready for a game of Angry Birds?

