



Virtual Reality

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At last month's Consumer Electronics Show (CES) in Las Vegas, the Oculus Rift "Crystal Cove" virtual reality gaming headset won "Best of Show." This Kickstarter-funded product seems to be close to bringing to market a very effective solution for simulating reality with software and electronics. As the tech experts at our churches, over the coming years we are likely to be asked our opinion about virtual reality. How should we think about this cutting edge technology?

What is virtual reality?

According to Google, virtual reality is "the computer-generated simulation of a three-dimensional image or environment that can be interacted with in a seemingly real or physical way by a person using special electronic equipment, such as a helmet with a screen inside or gloves fitted with sensors." For many of us, the ultimate vision for virtual reality comes from the Star Trek shows where the crew of the Starship Enterprise could enjoy time in the Holo-deck interacting with a computer generated environ-

ment that seemed incredibly real, including battles with computer generated enemies or interacting with characters from history or fictional literature.

I doubt that we are getting very close to the Holo-deck, but Oculus VR seems to be the first company to create a product that gives a realistic sense of being somewhere else. The company name comes from the Latin word for "eye." The developer kit version of the Oculus Rift headset began shipping in March of 2013, with the consumer version rumored to be available late this year or early in 2015.

The Oculus Rift headset is worn like oversized ski goggles that also cover the ears. A seven inch OLED display inches from your eyeballs places you in the middle of a computer generated environment. The motion sensing and positioning tracking systems cause the software to respond to your every move. Lean out the window seemingly in front of you and the software and display respond as you'd expect. In the past, virtual reality headsets were a fraction of a second too slow in responding, and rapid movements (like turning your head) were too much for the systems to keep up with, creating an unrealistic (and stomach turning) blur. Oculus has overcome these challenges, creating a very realistic representation of a virtual world through their headset.

How can virtual reality benefit Christians?

On their website, Oculus says "VR has the potential to revolutionize the way that we live, learn, play, communicate, and much more." While much of the focus in virtual reality has been on gaming, it's not hard for us to imagine ways to leverage the technology in education, healthcare, telecommunications, and many forms of entertainment.

Thanks to Star Trek, we can easily envision us-

ing this technology to virtually experience walking by the Sea of Galilee with Jesus, or sitting in the midst of the Areopagus as Paul gives his famous Mars Hill sermon. If you'd rather read of these events in Scripture than accepting a software developer's interpretation of them, you could simply use VR to get a very real sense for "walking in the footsteps of Jesus," without having to fly halfway around the world, deal with airport security, or fear potential terrorist attacks.

I can also imagine this technology becoming a potential blessing to those that are home-bound. Especially for those that once traveled the world serving the Lord, being able to once again seemingly walk down the streets that they loved and interact with those whom God has given them to serve would bring endless joy and the potential for tremendous glory to God.

What is dangerous about virtual reality?

Everytime I see a product like this, I'm reminded of my mother's constant admonition to move away from the TV screen. While I imagine there are very real health risks that need to be managed with this technology, I'm more concerned with the risks to our spiritual health.

A recent blog post on the Oculus website is titled "Onward to the Metaverse!" In that post, the company founders say "*One thing has remained constant: we're as dedicated to delivering on that vision — the promise of the Metaverse — as the day we started.*" So, what is the metaverse? According to Wikipedia "The **Metaverse** is a collective virtual shared space, created by the convergence of virtually enhanced physical reality and physically persistent virtual space,[1] including the sum of all [virtual worlds](#), [augmented reality](#), and the [internet](#)."

In many ways, the promise of virtual reality is the achievement of the postmodern promise. Postmodernism rejects truth as knowable and objective. The postmodern mantra is "that may be true for you, but it isn't true for me." VR enables each of us to create a "reality" that suits our desires while seem-



ingly denying the reality that God created.

“In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.” In [an article](#) from 2006, Dr. Jason Lisle summarizes the impact of this truth: “The universe obeys certain rules—laws to which all things must adhere. These laws are precise, and many of them are mathematical in nature. ... Natural laws exist because the universe has a Creator God who is logical and has imposed order on His universe.” We study these laws throughout our lives as physics, chemistry, mathematics, logic, and many other disciplines. But virtual reality enables developers to discard God’s natural laws and create worlds that violate God’s truth. Satan beckons us to deny God’s very existence and so immersing ourselves in God-less “reality” may become a very real temptation to many.

As Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 7:17 “Only let each person lead the life that the Lord has assigned to him, and to which God has called him” and in 1 Timothy 6:6-11 “Now there is great gain in godliness with contentment, for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world. But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content. But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs.”

It is my hope and prayer that these articles on the power and danger of technology will encourage you in your daily walk with Christ. Whether it is the printing press, radio, television, personal computers, the Internet, the Cloud, smartphones, or

even virtual reality, new technologies continue to advance our ability to know God and to serve Him, wherever we go.

Russ McGuire is an executive for a Fortune 100 company and the founder/co-founder of three technology start-ups. His latest entrepreneurial venture is CXfriends (<https://cxfriends.com>), a social network for Christian families.

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