

# Because

...for anyone who's ever asked, 'why?'

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## Pokémon Go...ing Where?

by Richard Fowler



**M**obile in hand and head down...

Yes, this body position is fast becoming the new international posture, one that is both cross-cultural and generational. But why this new fixed hand-head pose? Welcome to Pokémon Go! The augmented reality game that is taking the world by storm.

Weirdly, this new marriage between the virtual world and the real world has been seized upon by an earthquake hit area in Japan as an opportunity to turn things around. It is augmented reality to the rescue for four prefectures in Japan. But what has finding virtual Pokémon characters got to do with an area recovering from an earthquake?

Well, the answer lies within the addictive (for some) nature of the game. For me and you, our free time may be spent knocking back a glass of wine whilst indulging in our national week-day highlight, the Great British Bake Off. This, however, is not the case for an

increasing number of people who like to look for virtual ingredients in the form of Pokémon to battle, not for supremacy of the kitchen, but, rather, for supremacy of their beloved Pokémon characters in the form of a virtual beat-them-up contest.

And where do they get these Pokémon characters from? Well, actually, anywhere! If you have recently witnessed any bizarre or dangerous behaviour it may just be that someone has spotted a rare Pokémon character, courtesy of GPS (Global Positioning System), and thought the dash across the motorway was worth it. You see, Pokémon characters have been placed everywhere, and to pick one up you just have to go looking for them. Turn the game on on your phone, walk around, and soon you will see one come up on your screen. Get close enough and you effectively 'pick it up' – it's yours. These cartoon-like Kung Fu hybrids with what can only be described as having a bipolar-like leaning to their personality (that is cute out of the ring and aggressive in it) are collectors' items!

In fact, some Pokémon characters are highly prized due to their fighting capability and power. You may quite possibly be sitting very close to one right now. But before you go for your mobile device to satisfy your curiosity and become another person to enter the virtual world of futile pursuits, let's get back to why four prefectures are seeing this kind of global game of finders' keepers as an opportunity to fix their failing tourist industry.

Due to the earthquakes in 2011 and of April this year, prefectures of Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima, and Kumamoto in the country's south have seen a decrease of visitors to the area.

Solution...

Throw a large amount of Pokémon characters in the region and watch mildly obsessed Pokémon Go players descend on the area with phones at the ready. The formula is simple: players want to find more Pokémon (and will go to great lengths to do so), therefore, they will come to the earthquake damaged areas in hot pursuit.

The world is fast becoming a very different place from when I grew up and I'm still, proverbially, 'wet behind the ears', whatever that means! Steadily, in an ever increasingly technologically induced society, our global affections are turning to the virtual world in search of characters that don't even exist but with some virtual capability of helping you win your Pokémon battles.

Don't get me wrong, I like playing games too, especially ones where you have to find things. But when I play the seeking game, I would like

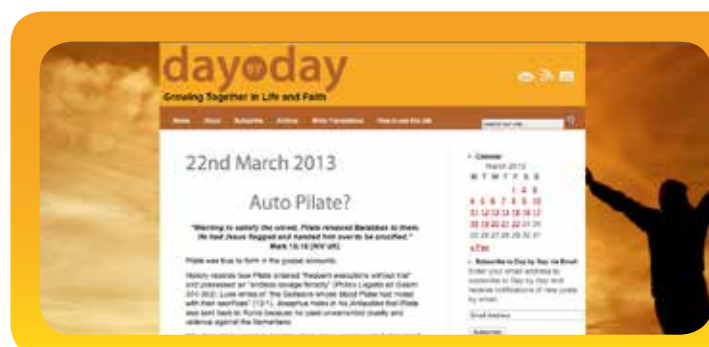
to find something that is real at the end of the day, something that won't help me win a virtual battle, but the battles I face each day of my life. And, in fact, I do play a game just like that. One where I am not using GPS to find things, but rather, one where I'm finding the GPS: God's Personal Saviour. And this character, this saviour, is called Jesus. He will not be found using a phone, but will be found using prayer and a book called the Bible.

Remember: *"Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened."* (Matthew 7:7-8, NKJV)

And after the fad of Pokémon has gone, Jesus will still be around helping you fight the battles and struggles you face in the real world.

Reference:

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/blogs-news-from-elsewhere-37048250>



# day BY day

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# From Dust to Brilliant Light

by Cliff Neill

Carbon is a very common commodity on this planet. It is a non-metallic element with the symbol C and is so common that everything that lives or has ever lived contains it!

We might be excused for thinking that something so common would cost virtually nothing. But take this basic substance and subject it to enough heat (2732 degrees F), and enough pressure (975,000 pounds per sq. inch), for a long enough period of time, probably millions of years, and it becomes a diamond! The diamond story is a success story—from black dust to brilliant light.

In November last year it was reported from Botswana that the second largest gem-quality diamond ever found had been unearthed in this southern African country. The 1,111-carat stone, nearly as big as a tennis ball was dug up at the Karowe mine, owned by the Vancouver-based Lucara Diamond Corporation. This is the largest gemstone to be unearthed for more than a century.

The biggest gem-quality stone ever discovered is the Cullinan, its size was 3106 carats and there is an amazing story on how it was discovered. It was found by Mr. Fredrick Wells, manager of the de Beers Premier mine in South Africa. Walking through the mine he saw what he took to be of crystal protruding from the rock-face; he actually dug it out with his walking stick. It was so large that he couldn't believe it was a diamond, so he took it to Sir Thomas Cullinan, president of de Beers. Bursting into his office he yelled, "Look what I've found!" Sir Thomas looked up from his writing and said, "Wells, either that is the largest diamond in the world or you are fired." This huge gem stone was cut into four pieces, the largest being the Star of Africa of 530 carats; the largest cut diamond in the world was incorporated in the Royal Sceptre and most of the other pieces are also in the British Crown Jewels; so much for this lowly carbon, it ends up in the crowns and sceptres of monarchs – wow!

Diamond, as you know, is the hardest natural substance known to man; it is five times harder than corundum,

which is the next hardest mineral on earth. During the middle ages diamonds were worn, not for decoration but as magical amulets; thought to endow the wearer with corresponding hardness, so they adorned sword hilts and armour.

It's interesting that the word diamond comes from the Greek *adamas* which means unconquerable. A brilliant gemstone is produced by a polishing process during which facets are cut into the stone; usually 58 in each, as you can probably guess, because diamond is the hardest substance on earth – these facets can only be cut by using diamond dust and oil.

I'm sure that all ladies who wear diamonds are very aware of the brilliance that these gems produce as they take in the light and push it out in brilliant, shimmering fire.

As Christians we also need to be bright lights in our world, allowing that radiance of God's spirit to enhance the lives of others by its presence in us. You might ask; "So why is this necessary?" And I believe the answer is, because Jesus came as the Light of the world; he came to reveal his Father and the amazing love that he has for mankind – remember; "For God so loved the world." The glory of the Light of God came to a nation in the Middle East, a nation groaning under the occupation of Rome, longing and hungering for freedom.

And now that light dwells in a people who have been handed that torch; a people whom Jesus called, "The light of the world" – the sun has risen and the Light has come. We proclaim him as Lord and allow his light to shine out from us even though we are simply very fragile earthen vessels; through his love, we explode with the light and love of our Father.

I believe that the Christian story has a parallel with the birth of a gemstone. It is from darkness to light, it is about those who are the dust of the earth but who become the brilliant fire – the light of the world – in a Saviour who came to make a difference and light the way!



# Bait-and-Switch?

by Joseph Tkach

**B***ait-and-switch* is a commonly used sales tactic in the US. It is also used worldwide, including the British Isles. It is sometimes called *Bait Advertising*. Typically, the customer is drawn to a store or website with promises of very low prices. Once inside, they find different items at higher prices. Sadly, some churches and ministries use bait-and-switch tactics in marketing a gospel that turns out to be no gospel at all.

A friend of mine shared a conversation he had on an airplane returning home from a trip to India. A young Indian woman sitting next to him asked what he had been doing in India. He explained he had been there for mission and ministry. She asked if he was Christian, and he said he was, so she asked, “Tell me about this Jesus!” He began by asking what she had heard. “Well, I’ve heard Christians and missionaries talk about a God who loves everyone and sent Jesus as a gift to save us. They then encourage people to become Christian so they can have a better life.” Then she paused – “But my friends who go to Christian churches say they find out it is not that easy. You have to give money to the church, work hard to keep the gift, and if you don’t do what the priest says, the God who is supposed to love you will send you to hell to burn forever!”

Fortunately, it was a long flight and by the time it was over, the Indian woman had heard the gospel message that God, who uses no bait-and-switch tactics, sent his Son, in love, to save the world by grace.

Unfortunately, some churches proclaim a false gospel

that God won’t save people until they overcome this or that. Or they proclaim that God saves us by grace but then it’s up to us to maintain our salvation by works (using, of course, their programs). These unfortunate messages present salvation as a *transaction* rather than the freely-given, enduring *relationship* with God that it is.

The gospel that uses bait-and-switch tactics is far different than the one presented in Scripture. There we find that Jesus, who is truth personified (John 14:6), presents the gospel truth that God, who always is for us, came to us and lives among us by his Spirit. Jesus doesn’t call us to himself, then say, “Now change or be damned!” He draws us to himself unconditionally, through love and for love. As we get to know him more and more, we respond to his love with all we are and in all we do. We *want* to change because we want to be like him and involved in what he is doing. We want to enjoy as close a relationship with him as we can – a relationship in which we become like the one we love.

Perhaps the biggest change that we encounter in this relationship with God is learning to love others the way God loves them. As our perfectly loving heavenly Father, God is for all people and against all that is against them. He is for all that brings his children true life in ever-deepening relationship with himself. He desires that his children live in a way that reflects the glory of who he is – the glory we see in God’s incarnate Son, Jesus Christ, who is the Way, the Truth and the Life.

The gospel tells us that God is a triune being: Father, Son and Holy Spirit existing eternally in a relationship of love. God created us to share in this tri-personal relationship, and since he is perfect and complete without us, he does not need bait-and-switch tactics to trick us into anything. Though he doesn't need us, in love and for love he desires that we experience and enjoy the loving relationship he is and has for us.

One of the biggest changes we face is learning to embrace and live out of our relationship with God. This is tough because most of us have grown up loving the darkness of self-love rather than the light of God's love. Many seem unaware that God created us for relationship with him and with others. These relationships are based on the new commandment given by Jesus to his disciples the evening before he died for us: "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another" (John 13:34-35).

When Jesus makes something new, he makes it better than the old. There is more to Jesus' new command than many realize. It's about loving God and others the way Jesus loves us and his Father. Jesus gave himself completely for the sake of his Father and all the world. Jesus was God's plan to bring us into an eternal relationship of love with himself. God, who is an eternal, relational being, invites all to respond to his love. His intent is made clear in the passage that is often called "the Bible in a nutshell": "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him" (John 3:16-17).

There is no bait-and-switch here. Jesus did not come to condemn and punish; he came to save. In the four Gospels we find Jesus telling people about his Father, about the Holy Spirit, about his Father's kingdom, and about himself. Through acts of healing, helping, correcting and warning, we find him establishing the reality of who he is and why he came. All of this he did freely and even joyfully, out of the fullness of his relationship with the Father and in the Holy Spirit.

In Scripture we find Jesus serving, not asking to be served. He doesn't draw people in, then drop the

hammer. With Jesus there is no "gotcha," bait-and-switch catch. Jesus is pure, consistent love. His love is based on who he is, not on what we do. The apostle Paul put it this way: "God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). Notice, there are no conditions placed here on God's love for us. God doesn't say, "I'll love you as soon as you clean up your act." He doesn't say, "I'll sacrifice my Son if you promise to love me." The Bible tells us that God's love is always unconditional – there is no bait-and-switch here. God's grace, by definition, is freely given – unearned and undeserved. There is nothing we must do or can do to cause or enable God to give it. Grace is truly the ultimate expression of love, which is the essence of God's being.



"Sir, I suggest we issue restrictive contracts, announce products that don't yet exist, link them to other products our customers don't want but are compelled to buy, and deliberately make our products incompatible with those of our competitors. Or is that too Microsoft?"

God, who is love, never stops loving his creation. His anger (wrath) arises from seeing his beloved hurting themselves and others. When we embrace our relationship with God, his love works from inside our being by his Spirit to restore and transform us. Note Jesus' prayer for his followers: "Righteous Father, though the world does not know you, I know you, and they know that you have sent me. I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them" (John 17:25-26). Rest assured, Jesus never uses bait-and-switch tactics with us, and such tactics are never part of co-ministering with him. We are called to know Jesus and his love, and to make him known by freely sharing his love with others.

# Grow Where You Are Planted

by Irene Tibbenham

I dare say few people know of Madeline Hill outside the US.

Herb pioneer, she is revered as the ‘Grand Dame of Herbs’ by her southern fans and followers. Her lifelong quest was to teach people to use herbs. Rather radically for her time (1913-2009), she used herbs in her cooking ... something we perhaps take for granted today.

The oldest daughter of thirteen children in a Texas rice farming family, she learned the value of hard work early on. Her industrious and unremitting attitude to life in the face of adversity led her to be the first female office manager for IBM, despite the lack of formal education after age 16. With her husband Jim, she set up a rural herb-growing enterprise; fed locals with herb-flavoured lunches; set up a restaurant business which attracted food connoisseurs from far and wide; then went on to lecture and write books and articles on herbs. Past president of the Herb Society of America, by the early 1980’s she had facilitated the introduction of herbs for both culinary and landscape purposes to the American public at large. Tragically and shortly following the death of her beloved spouse, a tornado destroyed the restaurant they built together. Yet she didn’t give up. She continued her hard work and dedication to herbs, eventually becoming curator of the Susan McAshan Gardens, which she expanded into a world class garden venue.<sup>1</sup>

Whenever autographing a book, she would write “Grow where you are planted,” a philosophy she lived by. What did she mean? Broadly interpreted, we can’t always choose the cards we are dealt, but we can learn to play them.

Interestingly the Bible’s New Testament touches upon this same principle. In 1 Corinthians 7 Paul addresses various groups, ie singletons, the married, circumcised Jews, uncircumcised Gentiles and slaves. His point?

1. Vs 17 ‘Each one of you has what the Lord has given to you. So, each of you should continue to live as God has chosen for you to live....’
2. Vs 20 ‘At a certain time, God chose to speak to you so that you came to Christ. So, each of you should continue as you were then.’
3. Vs. 24 ‘... He put you where you were. Then he spoke to you. So, each of you should continue as you were then....’

(Easy English version)

Does this mean we should not try to change our circumstances? Absolutely not! Read the rest of what Paul wrote. Or consider the advice of theologian Reinhold Niebuhr (1892-1971) who said, “God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.”

God gives each of us choice; but life is unfair with some having more choices than others; and sometimes circumstances are simply outside our control. Ecclesiastes 9:11 touches on this

concept, “I have observed something else under the sun. The fastest runner doesn’t always win the race, and the strongest warrior doesn’t always win the battle. The wise sometimes go hungry, and the skilful are not necessarily wealthy. And those who are educated don’t always lead successful lives.” But note the preceding advice ... ‘Whatever you do, do well.’ (New Living Translation version)



A self-seeded petunia; these plants need lots of mollycoddling to grow well in the British climate, rich soil, plenty of fertiliser and water etc. Here is a self-sown seedling that is flowering its’ heart out in a crack in our stone patio ... growing where it was planted (or rather accidentally landed as a seed).

God has called each and every one of us where we are to preach His gospel. Why? Because Jesus Christ calls us to participate in His work where He is working, and for most of us that isn't a carefree life located on a beach in the Bahamas.

Madeline Hill had more than her share of 'life event' hurdles yet still her actions preached the gospel of giving. Perhaps she read Paul's writing to the Philippians in 4:11-13 which says '*... I have learned to be content, whatever the circumstances may be .... I am ready for anything through the strength of the one who lives within me.*' (Phillips translation). She never

had the opportunity to undergo formal education, yet people from across the country would consult her as an authority on herbs. She was given many medals and awards for her achievements and several gardens were named in her honour, yet she remained humble. Let's take a leaf from her book and let's grow where we are planted!

References:

<sup>1</sup> Lake, Susan, October 24, 2012. Madeline Hill. [www.herbsocietypioneer.org/category/history](http://www.herbsocietypioneer.org/category/history)

# Fiat 500 & Minis

by Keith Hartrick

Two of the most iconic cars on the road today are the Fiat 500 and the Mini. Both have a well known shape that is recognised even by people who are not interested in cars. Interestingly both manufactures have dramatically expanded the range of both cars, while ensuring they retain their stylish core identity.

The Fiat 500 was launched in 1957 as a cheap and practical town car with the basic shape and style we know today. In 1959 when the Mini was launched all the models were offered with the same basic shape.

But both cars models have been expanded and improved, so there are now 6 different Fiat 500 models and 7 different Mini models. Within each range there are, of course, many other choices of colour, interior trim and other extras. So the choice is enormous, even confusing!

But there is a comparison with Christian churches which can also be confusing! There are Roman Catholic, Baptist, Methodist, Anglian, Quakers, Evangelicals and various versions of them plus others too numerous to list.

*Can they all be right? Is God involved in all of them? Why is there not one true church?* All interesting questions and understandable. But here's another thought, *is your image of Christianity rooted and static in the past?* Just as the Fiat 500 and Mini of today are very different to the original models launched back in the 1950's, so much has changed in many of the churches of today.

Christianity is also not static and God increases our

understanding as the years go by. Today many churches understand that Christianity is not about following a set of rules, but about having a relationship with God.

***God already knows each of us individually but do we know God?***

If your concept of God is rooted in the past, maybe from school RE lessons, or Sunday school or being forced to attend church by your parents, perhaps it's time to update your thinking. The way to begin is to start by praying, ask God to reveal himself to you, ask God those questions about which church is right for you?

*Christianity is not like cars which are regularly updated and improved. The basic truths remain constant but our understanding of them grows and improves over time – has yours?*



# Speaking of Life:



## Take Up Your Cross

Recently, filmmakers gathered with a cast of hundreds to create a fully immersive virtual reality experience called JESUS VR. They're trying to do something that's never been done before – put the viewer right next to Christ during his ministry, passion and resurrection. Now, with the right technology, audience members will be able to follow our Incarnate Lord and digitally take up your cross. But what does that mean?

We know that in the Bible, Christ instructs his disciples to take up their crosses and follow him. It's interesting that he chose the metaphor of the cross, a symbol of pain and suffering, to paint a picture of what a life following him actually looks like. But it shouldn't come as a surprise. We know that the disciples who heard and received this message were transformed. But even in that transformation, they lived a life in this present evil age. Today as Christians, we face some of the same hardships. But sometimes that difficult truth can get lost in the shuffle. Listen to how Christian author Flannery O'Connor puts it: **"What people don't realize is how much religion costs. They think faith is a big electric blanket, when of course it is the cross"** (O'Connor, *The Habit of Being: Letters of Flannery O'Connor*).



Now don't get me wrong – I'm not saying that God's grace isn't freely given. It absolutely is. We can't earn it and we never could. Instead, Christ calls us to receive his grace, love and forgiveness and share in his peace, joy and hope. As we receive his grace, we enter into a lifetime of sanctification. Through our ongoing relationship with him we leave things behind, we repent and turn to him in trust, in faith to receive more of his life. We die to ourselves and come alive in Christ. So while God's grace is freely given, it will "cost" us to

leave behind what hinders us from receiving his grace and following him wherever he leads.

Christ has offered us a totally immersive divine relationship with him, one that doesn't require virtual reality. I hope you'll join me in faith and hope as we walk in this divine life with our faithful Savior.

***Speaking of Life* is now on TV! It is used by UCB (United Christian Broadcasters) in between longer programmes and is aired on UCB on Thursdays and Fridays between 7.15 - 7.30 am and between 1.45 and 2.00pm, on Saturdays between 6.45 and 7.00 am., and on Sundays between 1.45 and 2.00 pm. These timings may vary.**

Photo: istockphoto.com



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