

Double-barrelled toys

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Now that it's summer, I'm on the lookout for nonviolent water toys. They're a lot harder to find than one might think. If you look past the brightly colored plastic, all you're left with is mock weapons: rapid-firing automatics, pistols, double-barreled rifles, AK-47s and M-16s.

The mixing of fun and violence makes my head hurt. In the aisle of the toy store, I hear Jesus' soft (or was it harsh?) voice saying, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God."

I know: they're just toys. Playing with guns as a child doesn't necessarily lead to violent behavior as an adult. Still, it breaks my heart to think about putting a "double-barreled stream-soaking machine" into my son's hands at the tender age of five, or nine--or 19.

In Kandahar, Afghanistan, off-duty soldiers gather around large, flat-screen televisions to play what *USA Today* calls "first person shoot'em up war games" like *Call of Duty: Black Ops*. Soldiers challenge each other with guns and explosive devices on four-way split screens to pass the time, relieve stress and have fun.

And it's not just soldiers playing. It's all of us. According to Activision, the franchise has sold more than 100 million copies--and the average customer spends 58 minutes playing the game each day. That's more time than the average person spends on Facebook.

I believe that following Jesus means taking some sort of stand against these cultural forces. But they are formidable, and taking a stand is almost impossible to do alone. We need each other for advice, ideas, accountability, support and especially prayer.

I don't know what I'll come up with for nonviolent water toys. I do know that I'm going to pray for the young women and men of our country who are still at war, who miss their families back home, who have been wounded in body, mind and spirit. And I'm going to pray for our country, for our everyday culture of brightly colored plastic guns--and for all of us who so effortlessly mix violence and entertainment.