

"Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour." – 1 Peter 5:8

vigilant*

A PARENT'S GUIDE TO WHAT'S GOING ON IN POPULAR CULTURE

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TOOLS YOU CAN USE

HOW DO I DISCERN WHAT IS GOOD AND BAD ABOUT MEDIA?

Because we live in a day and age where we are continually bombarded with images and sound, it is difficult to get away from the constant barrage of media that surrounds us. Silence is a rarity. In recent days, I have had numerous discussions with people regarding media choices. For many years, media was a tremendous part of my life. But there came a point when I began to seriously look at what it was that I was watching and listening to. Like so many, I believed that it was "only entertainment," and therefore, relatively harmless. Nothing could be further from the truth. In my study of media, I ventured across a man named Bob DeMoss who provided me with ten steps to critical thinking about the media that I was consuming. The word **THINK** is the key. The Bible is clear that as believers, we are to be on our guard. We are to think on things that edify and encourage us, and bring praise and glory to God. Bob DeMoss gives ten characteristics that define a critical thinker in his book *Learn to Discern*.

01 Has a firmly developed sense of right and wrong and prefers wisdom over foolish

thinking. The best defense is a good offense. The more we know God's word, the better prepared we are to discern dangerous messages. Psalm 119:97, 101, 104-105.

02 Understands that all music, media, and entertainment is not harmless fun. Eph. 6:10-13

03 Recognizes that those who are responsible for the creation and promotion of pop entertainment have values which, in most cases, are out of sync with the Judeo-Christian heritage of this country. Galatians 5:16, 19-21.

04 Doesn't laugh or enjoy it when his or her values are attacked, mocked or undermined by popular culture. "It is inconsistent for a critical thinker to laugh at and enjoy the very thing which prompts God's anger. Col. 3:1-2, 5-6.

05 Makes a habit of asking probing questions about the media he or she consumes. He doesn't accept an entertainment culture as inherently trustworthy. Jeremiah 17:9-10.

06 Desires to honor and please the Lord with the choices he or she makes. 1 Peter 1:17b-19, 1 Corinthians 6:19-20, Proverbs 4:23, 26.

07 Knows that God places a premium on proper communication.

Matthew 12:36-37.

08 Is willing to suffer the loss of a specific entertainment option rather than allow hostile ideas to dominate his or her mind.

What plays in the theater of your minds will shape the habits of your heart. Psalm 101:2-4.

09 Places a premium on his or her time. Ephesians 5:15-16.

10 Proceeds with caution when confronted with unfamiliar territory. Proverbs 2:11.

There are so many things I can say about each one of these points as they are all so impacting. Some are really hard though. For example, take **Number 8**. What that is saying is that I am willing to give up something rather than allow it to feed my mind! That is not an easy thing in our oversaturated media culture. So for example, if there is a TV show that I might like to watch, but it is full of sexual situations, or lots of violence, or lifestyles or dress (or lack thereof) that are obviously contrary to Biblical standards, then my choice must be to get rid of that show rather than feed my mind with stuff later on.

Number 4 is another one. How many times have we sat and laughed at something

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which is actually mocking what I believe or hold as sacred? Two TV shows that are crass, profane and vulgar, not to mention blasphemous – South Park and Family Guy – have blatantly mocked the Lord Jesus without apology. Popular culture is good at attacking, undermining and outright mocking the values found in the Bible. When we find ourselves cheering for the thieves stealing the money in Oceans 11 or getting pumped that a man took the law into his own hands and killed another man for "justice," it is then we realize that the Biblical values have been undermined.

Another big one is **Number 5**. Do we ask questions about what we are viewing or listening to – from YouTube to Facebook to movies to my iPod to the books on my shelf – are we actively engaged or are we passively and mindlessly sucking it all in?

These 10 characteristics can impact your life in a tremendous way. No longer can we sail along in blissful ignorance; we must realize now that we become what we behold. Indeed, our thoughts become evident in our actions and in turn, our actions shape our character — who we are.

RESOURCES FOR CLEAN MINDS

There are many resources out there for helping you think critically and for safeguarding your minds against the constant assault of the enemy. The key is to **BE INFORMED** so that you can make wise choices ahead of time for your family!

KIDSINMIND.COM is a great site that will give you all the information about a movie - what kind of profanity it has, violence, sexual situations, etc. That way, you can see what is in the movie BEFORE you go to the theatre or spend that cash at the RedBox.

SAFEYES.COM is a fantastic internet filter and accountability program. It is only \$54 a year and protects all the computers in your household. From time limits to specific filters, this is one of the best programs by far to keep the whole family clean and accountable. If you do struggle with looking at stuff you shouldn't be, there is the accountability aspect which sends a weekly report to the person of your choosing so they can view what you looked at during the week. If your child struggles with spending too much time online, this program will also shut it off at pre-arranged times or allow a certain amount of hours per day.

PLUGGEDINONLINE.COM is Focus on the Family's media site. From music reviews to TV shows to video game reviews, this site is very current with the latest trends in media culture.



HERE'S MY TAKE

"TURN YOUR EYES FROM LOOKING AT THE WORTHLESS. EVEN THE PERMISSABLE IS NOT BENEFICIAL."

They were singing that chorus recently at IHOP-KC and I was struck by it immediately. So often we waste time watching useless stuff that just ... wastes ... time. It might not even be bad, necessarily, but it is just worthless, meaningless. I have found myself doing that so many times – starting looking on the internet about some celebrity story and suddenly it is an hour later and I have really done nothing at all except put a bunch of stuff into my mind which has not edified me, has not done anything to feed my spirit... Permissible? Sure. Beneficial? Not at all. We've become a culture of trivia, having lots of information but on a shallow level. Too afraid to plunge the depths of spirituality, of God, of our destinies. And if not afraid, far too busy.

One day I was part of a group that was talking about fasting food and how difficult it was, but how important it was in moving the heart of God. I mentioned how it might be beneficial to fast Facebook, mostly as a joke, but the reaction of the room was so unanimous that it was almost funny. There were gasps and snorts – such an unthinkable thing! To not get on Facebook? Goodness. It was stated that fasting food would be easier and more preferable! Then I read a quote by John Piper which really struck me.

"ONE OF THE GREAT USES OF TWITTER AND FACEBOOK WILL BE TO PROVE AT THE LAST DAY THAT PRAYERLESSNESS WAS NOT FROM LACK OF TIME."

And it's not just those – they are easily picked on because they are popular right now. A friend of mine was quick to point out that there are many other things that can take similar places in our lives – like fiction books, movies, TV, etc. Of course, he's right, but the truth is that social networking sites can have a tendency to consume us – as we scroll through the hours of video, photos and conversations of daily life of our hundreds of friends. Books and media can do that, but I don't think to the same extent and are not quite as accessible as getting tweets on your phone and Facebook updates all day long. At what point do we stop and say, I need to get off this thing and live real life... not this virtual construct. I need to stop being bound to things which take me from places of prayer and study of the Word and become a man of prayer and of the Word.

So ... taking our eyes off worthless and shallow stuff that is not beneficial. It's a good thing to consider because the Christian life has to be about depth. It has to be about something more than the mundane and banal. James says to prove your faith by your actions. It's definitely what I am planning to continue to work toward. And thinking about what kind of stuff I am putting in my head... that is super important.

PRACTICAL RULES OF THE ONLINE ROAD

When it comes to the internet, there are definitely some areas of wisdom to understand. It is easy to post pictures and comments on Facebook or Twitter and not even think about it. We react or blurt things out online because it is easier than saying it to someone's face. Cyberbullying is on the rise. Commonsense media has some practical steps for driving on the online road.

1. **GUARD YOUR PRIVACY.** What people know about you is up to you.
2. **PROTECT YOUR REPUTATION.** Self-reflect before you self-reveal. What's funny or edgy today could cost you tomorrow.
3. **NOTHING IS PRIVATE ONLINE.** Anything you say or do can be copied, pasted, and sent to gazillions of people without your permission.'
4. **ASSUME EVERYONE IS WATCHING.** There's a huge, vast audience out there. If someone is your friend's friend, they can see everything.
5. **APPLY THE GOLDEN RULE.** If you don't want it done to you, don't do it to someone else.
6. **CHOOSE WISELY.** Not all content is appropriate. You know what we mean.
7. **DON'T HIDE.** Using anonymity to cloak your actions doesn't turn you into a trustworthy, responsible human being.
8. **THINK ABOUT WHAT YOU SEE.** Just because it's online doesn't make it true.
9. **BE SMART, BE SAFE.** Not everyone is who they say they are.

<http://www.common sense media.org/rules-road-kids>

*about vigilant

Vigilant is an informative newsletter of spiritual and social concern which is published monthly. Information is found through various studies, articles, online sources and life experience and is documented by footnotes. Contact Joshua Petrillo at Voice Ministries, 1610 S. Nappanee Street, Elkhart, IN 46516. vigilant@voiceministries.com. Vigilant is a part of Voice Ministries. ©2011

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