

Why I Don't Have a Television and Rarely Go to Movies

by John Piper

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Now that the video of the Q&A at Advance 09 is available, I can look at it and feel bad all over again. Here's what I regret, indeed what I have apologized for to the person who asked the question.



The first question to me and Mark Driscoll was, "Piper says get rid of my TV, and Driscoll says buy extra DVRs. How do you reconcile this difference?"

I responded, "Get your sources right. . . . I never said that in my life."

Almost as soon as it was out of my mouth, I felt: "What a jerk, Piper!" A jerk is a person who nitpicks about the way a question is worded rather than taking the opportunity to address the issue in a serious way. I blew it at multiple levels.

So I was very glad when the person who asked the question wrote to me. I wrote back,

Be totally relieved that YOU did not ask a bad question. I gave a useless and unhelpful, and I think snide, answer and missed a GOLDEN opportunity to make plain the dangers of the triviality you referred to. . . . I don't know why I snapped about the wording of the question instead of using it for what it was intended for. It was foolish and I think sinful.

So let me see if I can do better now. I can't give an answer for what Mark means by "buy extra DVRs," but I can tell you why my advice sounds different. I suspect that Mark and I would not agree on the degree to which the average pastor *needs* to be movie-savvy in order to be relevant, and the degree to which we should expose ourselves to the world's entertainment.

I think relevance in preaching hangs very little on watching movies, and I think that much exposure to sensuality, banality, and God-absent entertainment does more to deaden our capacities for joy in Jesus than it does to make us spiritually powerful in the lives of the living dead. Sources of spiritual power—which are what we desperately need—are not in the cinema. You will not want your biographer to write: Prick him and he bleeds movies.

If you want to be relevant, say, for prostitutes, don't watch a movie with a lot of tumbles in a brothel. Immerse yourself in the gospel, which is tailor-made for prostitutes; then watch Jesus deal with them in the Bible; then go find a prostitute and talk to her. Listen to *her*, not the movie. Being entertained by sin does not increase compassion for sinners.

There are, perhaps, a few extraordinary men who can watch action-packed, suspenseful, sexually explicit films and come away more godly. But there are not many. And I am certainly not one of them.

I have a high tolerance for violence, high tolerance for bad language, and zero tolerance for nudity. There is a reason for these differences. The violence is make-believe. They don't really mean those bad words. But that lady is really naked, and I am really watching. And somewhere she has a brokenhearted father.

I'll put it bluntly. The only nude female body a guy should ever lay his eyes on is his wife's. The few exceptions include doctors, morticians, and fathers changing diapers. "I have made a covenant with my eyes; how then could I gaze at a virgin?" (Job 31:1). What the eyes see really matters. "Everyone who looks at a woman *to desire her* has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Matthew 5:28). Better to gouge your eye than go to hell (verse 29).

Brothers, *that* is serious. Really serious. Jesus is violent about this. What we do with our eyes can damn us. One reason is that it is virtually impossible to transition from being entertained by nudity to an act of "beholding the glory of the Lord." But this means the entire Christian life is threatened by the deadening effects of sexual titillation.

All Christ-exalting transformation comes from "beholding the glory of Christ." "Beholding the glory of the Lord, [we] are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another" (2 Corinthians 3:18). Whatever dulls the eyes of our mind from seeing Christ powerfully and purely is destroying us. There is not one man in a thousand whose spiritual eyes are more readily moved by the beauty of Christ because he has just seen a bare breast with his buddies.

But leave sex aside (as if that were possible for fifteen minutes on TV). It's the unremitting *triviality* that makes television so deadly. What we desperately need is help to enlarge our capacities to be moved by the immeasurable glories of Christ. Television takes us almost constantly in the opposite direction, lowering, shrinking, and deadening our capacities for worshiping Christ.

One more smaller concern with TV (besides its addictive tendencies, trivialization of life, and deadening effects): It takes time. I have so many things I want to accomplish in this one short life. *Don't waste your life* is not a catchphrase for me; it's a cliff I walk beside every day with trembling.

TV consumes more and more time for those who get used to watching it. You start to feel like it belongs. You wonder how you could get along without it. I am jealous for my evenings. There are so many things in life I want to accomplish. I simply could not do what I do if I watched

television. So we have never had a TV in 40 years of marriage (except in Germany, to help learn the language). I don't regret it.

Sorry again, for the bad answer. I hope this helps.

Pastor John

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