

It's Time to Get Real

We need to be transparent in our quest to connect with the culture.

I've received mail from readers upset with me for sharing my opinion on issues such as Christian TV, ministry fundraising and prosperity preaching in Charisma and on my blog at [http://www.mattbell.com](#).

I'm grateful that people care enough to write because their questions and comments are incredibly important. But what we sometimes project to the world through mass media is equally important. So I thought if readers knew what motivates me to take a stand, it might help.

The stakes are too high. We live in a media-driven culture, and if people of faith are going to make an impact on the world, we have to consider and understand the strength of media. Other activist organizations know this and have seen its powerful effects in politics and culture. Media matters, and to ignore this fact as Christians is a serious mistake.

We must be truthful about our projects and their impact. It's been said that Hollywood studios make the fake look real but Christian media make what's real look fake. For decades, Christians have produced many radio, TV and movie projects that were frankly embarrassing.

It's not about judging people; it's about critiquing and evaluating the quality of our work. We need to scrutinize our projects in-house before the world does. In the church media family, we have a few crazy uncles we need to keep an eye on. It's about credibility and the need to be transparent in our quest to connect with the culture.

We must value creative strategies. In most cases, I don't question motives, intention or integrity. But I often question strategy. The decision to protest or boycott a movie may be driven by all the right reasons, but boycotting might be a foolish strategy. Communicating in a mass-media world requires new thinking. No matter how powerful our message, it doesn't matter if the audience isn't listening.

Style matters in mass media. Biblical truth packaged in a dumpy radio or TV program will usually fail. Of course God can speak to people through the worst circumstances. He spoke through a donkey, and He can cause the rocks to cry out in praise. But for us to not enhance biblical truths to make audiences more receptive to our message is wrong.

It's not about having a big budget and lots of great equipment. The truth is, the package matters. Pope Julius II could have painted the Sistine Chapel ceiling a nice solid color, but instead he made the decision to hire Michelangelo and let him do his thing. Today, we're all better for it.

We must be honest about our message. The Bible tells some pretty dark stories, and yet the mantra of most religious media organizations is to be "family safe." So how do we tell the explicit stories of rape, murder, incest, war, disease, suicide, sex, torture and more that fill the pages of the Bible?

Job went through some heavy-duty stuff. Israel's king David sanctioned the murder of an innocent man and then committed adultery. Paul was imprisoned in a sewer. David paid his dowry to Saul with the foreskins of 200 Philistines. Not exactly cartoon material.

If the world is going to believe our story, we need to stop sanding down the rough edges and be real. Authenticity is the cry of this generation, which has a natural repulsion to our dumbing down what it means to be a believer in Christ. We need to tell our stories with the same boldness the Bible does—honesty that can sometimes offend.

With Christian media, let's worry less about being "family safe" and more about being real.

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