

Media Overload

Rethink how much you use the media, and then reprioritize your time.

As a preacher's kid growing up in the South during the 1950s and 1960s, I was in church every time the doors were open. I went to Sunday school, worship service, Sunday night prayer meeting, Wednesday evening Bible study and Thursday night choir practice. And that didn't include youth activities I was involved in such as church camp and vacation Bible school. I knew the inside of our church better than I knew my own home.

But today churches are dropping worship services left and right. They have cut out Sunday night service, and many have eliminated Bible study. And what about Sunday school? That was replaced years ago with "children's church" so families would have to spend only an hour in church.

As a result, the number of hours we spend listening to preaching or Bible teaching has dropped dramatically in the last 50 years. Even the most hard-core, serious Christians are exposed to the gospel less than one hour per week.

On the other hand, media exposure has dramatically increased. Both adults and children consume everything from educational videos created for infants to sexually explicit movies and online chat rooms. In fact, the statistics are sobering.

The average American family watches TV and surfs the Internet an average of four to five hours per day, and children less than 2 years old watch television daily. By the time the average teenager is 18, he has been exposed to as many as 100,000 beer commercials, and that's not including the

violence, coarse language and sexual innuendoes that typify prime-time television.

And the flood continues. The U.S. Census Bureau reports that teenagers will spend the equivalent of five and a half months next year listening to digital music players, working on computers and watching television. And as entertainment moves to cell phones it will get only worse. These statistics make me wonder, in our media-driven pop culture, What's influencing you?

Most people would agree that we are influenced by people, media and the things we spend our time doing. So how much time do you really spend each day in prayer, reading the Scriptures or learning the things of God? We wonder why people of faith aren't making more of an impact in the culture, when the answer clearly lies in how we spend our time.

Somewhere along the line, the church substituted "events" for "discipleship." Flip through the pages of a typical Christian magazine or watch Christian TV, and you'll find plenty of church happenings.

I love events myself. But they don't make disciples of people. Relationships do.

I love the media, but we'll never develop relationships or deepen our walk with Christ if we don't put limits on what we do. Rethink how much you use the media, and then prioritize your time in the context of your Christian life. Computers, the Internet, e-mail, and TV and radio are great tools, and churches and ministries of all kinds are using them to reach a nonbelieving culture.

But media is ultimately about influence, and, clearly, what we choose to expose ourselves to will have the dominant power in our lives. Because the truth is—at the end of your days, when you stand in front of your Creator, how important will it be that you never missed an episode of Oprah?

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