

# Pearls in the Media Muck

I used to get paid to watch movies. And sit in front of a TV. And listen to music. And play video games. In fact, if I were still at my previous workplace, my job would now include hanging out on Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and the like. Yep, I once earned a paycheck by consuming media all week long.

Sounds like a sweet gig, doesn't it? Trust me, it wasn't always. Don't get me wrong: I loved the people I worked with and the organization that hired me to help parents of teenagers navigate the waters of pop culture. And for a season, it wasn't just fun to review the latest movies, TV shows, CDs or video games; I knew I was part of an invaluable ministry for parents. I was a gatekeeper, helping them know what their teens were into—the good, bad and very ugly—so they didn't have to wade through the muck while searching for pearls in the entertainment world.

But immersing yourself in that arena 24/7 is anything but a blast. Try reviewing *Jersey Shore* or *Skins* without getting either nauseated or depressed over how far we've fallen. I'll never forget screening *Hostel* (a hard-R, ultra-depraved "torture porn" flick) the night before my first son was born. (Talk about scaling the heights and depths of humanity in a 24-hour period!)

Fortunately, I don't remember most of the filth I took in for others' sake. But that isn't the case for the average teen, child or adult who's now only a click away from having unlimited perversion in any form, delivered on any medium, embedded in their brains. Technology has always ushered in a wave of immorality, yet today we find a unique problem: a generation clueless as to why such depravity is even wrong in the first place.

Something's seriously amiss when male students at a Bible

college see nothing wrong with taking photos of their genitalia during class and texting them to female friends. That's a true story, and sadly not unlike others I've heard involving young Christians, many of whom have become walking reflections of whatever content is on their iPod, iPhone or iPad.

This isn't just a youth issue. As media consumption becomes ubiquitous for every age group, our appetite for entertainment grows more insatiable—and our morals continue to decline. We can blame Hollywood all we want, but it's no longer the core generator of content—we are. (Thank you, social media.)

I'm not pulling out the overused "evil media" card, nor am I advocating for believers to tune out pop culture. I am, however, begging us to develop the ability to discern right from wrong amid our being oversaturated with content. Remember, media—social or not—aren't the problem; they're just vehicles. It's the content *in* those media that's often not only problematic, it's mimicked to the extent of becoming the new cultural norm.

As "vehicles" for the Holy Spirit, we can present a different standard and culture: the kingdom of God. Jesus likened this kingdom to finding a pearl in a field of dirt. We know the fields of today's media world can be mucky. But rather than mindlessly wandering through the sludge, let's develop enough discernment to find the pearls.

While helping some of the largest nonprofits around the world and producing media programming in 40-plus countries, **Phil Cooke** has been shot at, threatened with prison, survived two military coups and fallen from a helicopter.

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If *Charisma* Online Editor **Felicia Mann** has more twinkle in her eyes these days, it's because the Tampa, Fla., native is

engaged. With her July wedding nearing, we just hope our website doesn't turn into an extension of *The Knot*.

*Movieguide* founder **Ted Baehr** believes his life's purpose is to be used by God to redeem the values of the media while educating audiences on how to use discernment in selecting their entertainment. We think that's pretty cool.

By the age of 10, **Chad Bonham** had already wrecked two of his friends' go-karts. Racing was clearly not in his future. So he took the next logical step and decided to write about it—and every other sport imaginable—instead.

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