Watch Your Media Diet

The mass media have more influence on us than we can imagine.
A Charisma reader recently asked: “Why write a column about the media and culture in a Christian magazine? I prefer to see articles on evangelism, the Bible or church life.” I understood her thinking, but the fact is, mass media such as radio, television, film, newspapers, magazines, books and the Internet have more influence on us than we can imagine.

We wake up to music or news on the clock radio, watch morning shows on TV, use headphones while exercising, read the newspaper over breakfast, listen to the radio on the way to work, use computers all day, watch the news after work, relax at night in front of the TV, read a magazine or two, and check the evening news or weather before bed. The typical American watches television and surfs the Internet as much as four hours or more every day.

How many of us spend that much time attending church, studying the Bible or praying? Most people don’t spend that much time with their own families and loved ones.

The media are the great yardstick of change in our culture. They tell us about the world, set trends and fashions throughout society, advertise products that influence our lives, and entertain us. Whether you like the media or not, if you’ll take the time to understand it you’ll begin to recognize the direction our culture and society are taking.

Learning about the media is critical, particularly for Christians, because the more we know about how they work the less we’ll be influenced-and the more we can begin to overcome

the stranglehold the media have on our lives. How can you start? Here are four ways.

1. Broaden your sources for news. Look for ones that reflect your worldview. Network television and major newspapers and news magazines have in most cases become remarkably political and carry a definite bias, often against traditional religious faith. Today you can get a broader perspective on the issues from other sources, such as regional newspapers, cable news, specialty magazines, Internet sites and blogs.

2. Limit the time you watch TV or surf the Web. Television is known as a "passive medium" because you don't interact with it-you just sit and stare. And although computers are fantastic tools, a recent study showed that constantly checking e-mails and voice mails temporarily lowers your IQ more than smoking marijuana. Apparently using e-mail too much can make you dumb!

3. Become aware of the media's wider influence. Advertisers spend billions of dollars in the media because they know that reading fashion magazines causes you to buy more clothes and watching TV commercials leads you to buy more products. The power of advertising is its influence to make millions of people (that would be us) desire things they don't need and often can't afford. You may think advertising doesn't affect you. Research proves otherwise.

4. Turn off the TV and find more quiet time. When Elijah sought the Lord in 1 Kings 19, he found that God was in a gentle whisper. When it comes to seeking the Lord, chances are you won't hear His voice over the din of the TV, radio or computer. Spend more time in a quiet place where you can actually hear yourself think, where God may be waiting to

speak to you.

I work in media because I believe in its power to reach people with a message of hope. But on the flip side, its negative influence can be devastating. A psychiatrist once told me that if you're concerned about being crazy then you're probably OK because truly crazy people don't think they're nuts. So, as long as you're concerned about the media's power in your life and aware of the effect they can have, their negative impact on you will always be limited.

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