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# Evangelicals

Magazine | Winter 2016/17 | Vol. 2 No. 3

I AM ENTERTAINED,  
THEREFORE I AM

KAREN SWALLOW PRIOR

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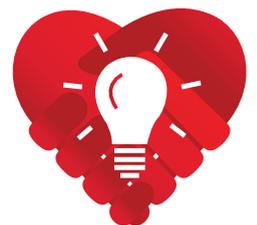


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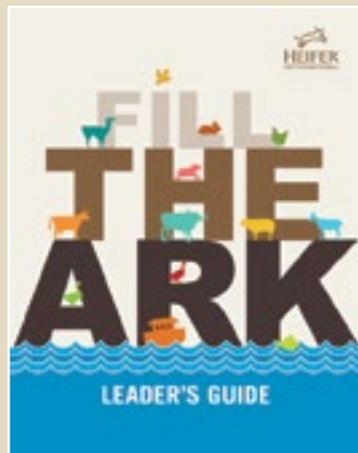
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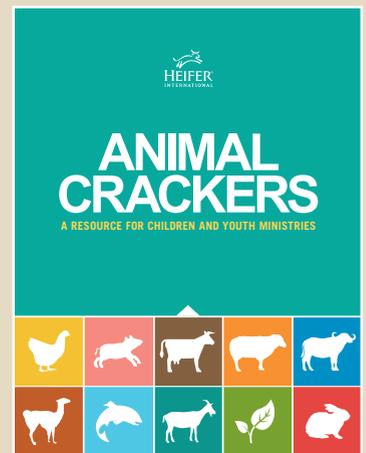
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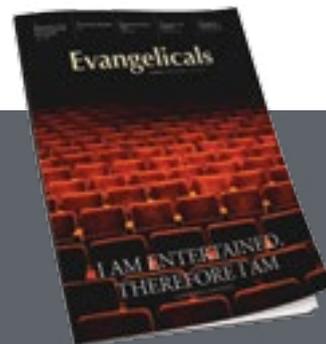
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# Evangelicals

The Magazine of the National Association of Evangelicals



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## CONTEXT



The first entertainer we encounter in the Bible is Jubal. He was the great great great great grandson of Cain, the son of Lamech. He was the “father of all who play stringed instruments and pipes.” And that’s about all we get. Yet it’s interesting to note that the name “Jubal” is connected with being productive.

It’s not clear whether we are meant to put great significance in that semantic connection, but how often do we think of entertainment as having anything to do with being productive? Our culture often pits work and entertainment against each other (e.g., “work hard to play hard”).

But as NAE President Leith Anderson points out in his column (p. 26), entertainment isn’t necessarily unthinking. We don’t turn off our minds the moment we turn on a screen. Many evangelicals who want Jesus to be Lord over all aspects of their lives ask “What kind of entertainment is acceptable for me? What is acceptable for my children?”

This issue of *Evangelicals* magazine offers insight from thinkers and innovators in entertainment and pastoral guidance on practical issues. Together we consider how to personally engage with the onslaught of entertainment options available in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and to help others navigate these questions. While there is a particular focus on movies and TV shows, the principles that permeate the articles in this issue can be applied to other forms of entertainment, such as music, books, sports, video games, etc.

Thoughtful consumption, critique and creation of entertainment provide evangelicals with an opportunity to present a narrative to others who consume, critique and create entertainment (which is just about everyone!). If we do it well, others will be drawn to the greatest story of all. Armed with wisdom and discernment, may even our entertainment be productive for the kingdom!

## Election Reflections

“ Let’s not forget Jesus, whose revolution started in a manger with teenage refugee parents, continued with a loss of religious freedom on a cross atop a Roman trash heap, and culminated in resurrection and a government and Kingdom that will always increase and that will know no end. Indeed, our Jesus did not come to take office or to take sides. He came to take over.

Therefore, if you are despairing over the outcome of this election, pause and exhale. We only need, and we already have, one Messiah. And he did not lose this election. And if you are breathing a deep sigh of relief over the outcome of this election, keep perspective. We only need, and we already have, one Messiah. And he did not win this election. He is still on his throne.”

**Scott Sauls, Senior Pastor of Christ Presbyterian Church in Nashville, Tennessee**

“ It’s hard to draw issue-specific lessons from something as complex as a federal election, but there is no doubt that many Christians voted for a candidate about whom they had misgivings because they believe their religious freedom faces grave threats. It would be a mistake to become complacent: Those who concur with the recent U.S. Civil Rights Commission Report equating religious freedom with bigotry will have less political power but the same ambitions. I’m also worried that religious freedom supporters will feel that this election gives space for a strategy of one-sided overreach that ignores concerns of religious minorities or efforts by the LGBT community to end unjust discrimination. We should be genuinely in favor of pluralism and seeking the good of everyone, no matter what our present political position is.”

**Tim Schultz, President of the 1st Amendment Partnership, in National Review**

## Responding to the Refugee Crisis

“ Refugee resettlement has always received bipartisan support because the quest for freedom and safety embodied in refugees’ stories represents the values that make America great, and because our national security is actually strengthened when we respond with wisdom and compassion. Jihadists hate our compassion for refugees, because it disproves the claims about Americans they use to sow hatred and violence.”

**Scott Arbeiter, President of World Relief, in The New York Times**

Learn to control the controllables and leave the uncontrollables to God.  
 Kay Warren on Being a Pastor’s Wife in Today’s Conversation podcast  
 at [NAE.net/warrenpodcast](http://NAE.net/warrenpodcast)

I’m grateful for the ways that @NAEvangelicals represents my views,  
 particularly in standing for refugees and other immigrants.  
 Matthew Soerens @MatthewSoerens

Meeting with other @NAEvangelicals leaders in Boston today. Learning of great  
 ministry of historic Park Street Church spreading the Gospel.  
 Carl Nelson @theCARLNelson



## Caring for Creation

“ The majority of Americans have experienced God in nature. Whether at Christian camp or on a hike in the wild, we’ve had a ‘mountaintop’ encounter ... In over 500 sermons or presentations in churches across America in the past six years, I received nearly 100 percent affirmation when I asked, ‘How many have encountered Jesus in nature?’

It’s almost incredulous that we meet God in creation but haven’t made the connection that caring for creation nurtures our relationship with him. Creation care is a part of loving God. Throughout the Christian and Hebrew Scriptures, the Bible clearly states that the entire world, all creation, belongs to God, and we (humans) are stewards or caretakers of this marvelous and wonderful creation. As the Rev. Dr. Christopher Wright states in his seminal work, “The Mission of God,” we cannot have a relationship with God if we fail to care for what belongs to him.”

**Mitch Hescox, President of the Evangelical Environmental Network, in “Caring for Creation”**



## On Fear

“ And you fears? You may think you can make us cynical about dreams and apathetic about hope and dubious about possibility and people and prospects. But we’re all over you: Fear isn’t meant to drive our lives — it’s meant to teach us something about our lives. Fear’s a chameleon that wears a thousand different masks and there are ways to see the realest, truest, surest things.”

**Ann Voskamp, author, in “Dear Fears Trying to Break Us All” at A Holy Experience**



## Temple Mount in Jerusalem

“ Please recognize this site for what it is — a place that is revered by followers of Islam, Judaism and Christianity, which should be available for people of all faiths and none to appreciate ... With shared access — including improved collaboration on archeological projects that would enhance understanding and preserve priceless artifacts — we believe that this site can be a center for peace and understanding rather than division.”

**Leith Anderson, NAE President, in a letter to members of UNESCO World Heritage Committee urging them not to classify the Temple Mount in Jerusalem as a holy site for Islam alone**



Benjamin Fernandez (center) came from Tanzania to study business. He's now developing new opportunities for young people in his home country. See his story at [unwsp.edu/NAE](http://unwsp.edu/NAE)



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# EVANGELICAL CALENDAR

Please join the evangelical community at these events hosted by the NAE and its members. **Your prayers are welcome too.**

Many of these events include downloadable resources for promotion and participation.

FEBRUARY 7-14, 2017

## National Marriage Week

[NationalMarriageWeekUSA.org](http://NationalMarriageWeekUSA.org)

Join with others across the country and organize a local marriage event during the week leading up to Valentine's Day. Focus on practical ways to strengthen marriages in your church and community.



FEBRUARY 8-10, 2017

## The Church Near & Far, Past & Present

**Orlando, FL**

Association for Biblical Higher Education  
[ABHE.org/annual-meeting](http://ABHE.org/annual-meeting)

This annual meeting serves as the rallying point for 200 institutions of biblical higher education in North America. Leaders in biblical higher education gather to confer and sharpen their gifts and abilities.

MARCH 8, 2017

## NAE Talk

**Falls Church, VA**

National Association of Evangelicals  
[NAE.net/naetalk](http://NAE.net/naetalk)

The NAE Talk offers a safe space for high-level evangelical leaders to dialogue and resource on practical challenges they face as they minister in today's culture.

MARCH 17, 2017

## Grow!

**Litchfield, MN**

Cornerstone Church  
[GrowMN.org](http://GrowMN.org)

God has strategically placed churches in rural areas and small towns in order to impact our culture for the kingdom of God. This leadership conference focuses on equipping pastors and board members of these churches to minister effectively and to see their unique role in God's plan.



APRIL 4, 2017

## Church Leader Summit

**Dallas, TX**

Christianity Today  
[ChristianityToday.com/go/summit](http://ChristianityToday.com/go/summit)

Held in conjunction with The Outcomes Conference, Christianity Today will host a one-day event to provide a model for Christian faithfulness, help you lead with hope and love, and equip your team and organization to model beautiful orthodoxy.



APRIL 26-28, 2017

## Q Conference

**Nashville, TN**

Q Ideas  
[Conference.QIdeas.org](http://Conference.QIdeas.org)

The Q Conference offers 30 curated 9 or 18 minute talks, featuring the state of American culture and ways Christians can navigate the complexity of our changing society. Education by thought leaders and stories from change-makers will inspire a hopeful way forward.

MAY 31-JUNE 3, 2017

## Strong Tower

**Dallas, TX**

Association of Gospel Rescue Missions  
[AGRM.org](http://AGRM.org)

This annual convention helps rescue mission leaders from across North America minister from a position of strength by providing a place of refuge — a bastion where they can go to regroup, rearm and strategize, and find cover and strength in God.



## ✓ For All God's Children

### NAE Adds Education Equity Resolution

The Board of Directors of the National Association of Evangelicals issues resolutions to speak to and offer guidance on a variety of topics. At its October meeting, the NAE board tackled education inequity in the United States and offered specific steps for churches and policy makers to address the gap.

The resolution states, "While there is much to celebrate in American education — and the Church has made significant contributions to its flourishing — the benefits are not equitably distributed among all children and communities. Violating both biblical justice and the American dream, educational opportunities are provided in abundance to some and substantially denied to others."

NAE President Leith Anderson said, "Students from disadvantaged backgrounds who most need the best schools rarely have access to them. This is unacceptable to evangelicals who recognize God's love and concern for all children."

The divergence in education outcomes skews along racial and income lines. "Due to our continuing patterns of residential segregation and neighborhood schools, a child's zip code has become a more powerful predictor of academic success and lifetime income than either intelligence or hard work," the resolution states.



#### For More Information on Education Equity

Read the NAE resolution at [NAE.net/educationequity](https://nae.net/educationequity).

Download The Expectations Project's eBook featuring NAE voices on education at [bit.ly/NAEEbook](https://bit.ly/NAEEbook).

Listen to Today's Conversation podcast with Nicole Baker Fulgham at [NAE.net/fulghampodcast](https://nae.net/fulghampodcast).



## ✓ Hurricane Matthew Takes on Haiti

Nearly seven years after an earthquake killed around 200,000 people and while in the midst of a cholera epidemic, Haiti was hit by Hurricane Matthew leaving 1,000 dead. In some neighborhoods, 80 to 90 percent of homes were severely damaged or destroyed.

Some Haitians found shelter and continue to sleep in caves, as reported by The New York Times. Destine Jean, one of the villagers, said, "It is our house that God created when we most needed it. Without this cave, a lot of people would have died. This is the only shelter we have."

For nearly 30 years, World Relief, the NAE's humanitarian arm, has partnered with churches in Haiti to meet the physical, spiritual and development needs of local communities. While some efforts simply deliver aid on the Haitians' behalf, World Relief includes local churches in leading their response.

Another NAE member nonprofit, World Vision has been in Haiti for 48 years, sponsoring over 56,000 children. World Vision distributed supplies to 45,800 families as an immediate response to the hurricane, and is also working toward long-term solutions including seed distribution, agricultural support and water system repairs, among other initiatives.

## ✓ An Affront to Christian Colleges

In August, California was set to consider legislation (S.B. 1146) that would have constituted a major threat to religious freedom in the United States, particularly impacting faith-based colleges and universities and the students who choose to attend them. But after a groundswell of religious leaders and organizations pointed out its negative implications through meetings, opinion articles, letters and media interviews, the controversial provision was dropped.

NAE leaders advocated against the bill and were relieved when the provision was dropped. "This is great news for our evangelical colleges, and we hope it leads to meaningful dialogue to find mutually beneficial solutions to concerns in California and across the country," said Galen Carey, NAE vice president of government relations.

The provision would have eliminated the religious exemption in California that gives its faith-based institutions the opportunity to operate in ways that are consistent with their beliefs, including on issues of sexuality as articulated in student and faculty conduct policies.

## ✓ Immigrant Denomination Joins NAE

Royalhouse Chapel International, an African denomination headquartered in Ghana, has over 5,000 members in the United States. The U.S. fellowship of Royalhouse Chapel churches recently joined the National Association of Evangelicals as a denomination.



"Immigrants are quick to settle into the United States — joining civic groups, attending public schools, establishing places of worship," said Leith Anderson, NAE president. "We're grateful that Royalhouse Chapel, a Christian denomination from Ghana, desires to partner with us in the gospel."

Royalhouse Chapel joins with nearly 40 other denominations, as well as thousands of churches, schools, nonprofits, businesses and individuals who comprise the NAE community. While the denomination's roots are in Ghana, the U.S. fellowship is based in Hyattsville, Maryland.

## ✓ Guidance on Biotechnology and Bioethics

While developments in biotechnology hold immense legitimate promise for medicine and the greater good, they also raise profound moral questions. In a resolution approved at its October meeting, the NAE board offered biblical principles to guide the research and application of biotechnology:

- All human beings are made in the image of God and therefore have intrinsic dignity that should be respected and honored.
- Life in all human beings is a gift from God and thus inherently holy.
- Biotechnological developments should be motivated by a desire for advancing the health and flourishing of human life and not primarily for financial gain.
- Our faith requires that we act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with God. Biotechnological research and interventions must never discriminate against, mistreat, or otherwise take advantage of vulnerable populations.

Terri Traudt, a communications consultant specializing in bioethics and an NAE board member, said, "We may not know how the biotechnology field will develop in coming years or decades, but we do know that God is over all and never changing. This resolution speaks to the biblical principles that can be applied in bioethics for years to come."



Check out the Biotechnology and Bioethics 2016 resolution at [NAE.net/biotechnology](http://NAE.net/biotechnology).



**Tom Correll** is global church representative of the National Association of Evangelicals.

# Churches Serving Refugees

For over a year now, the media has been calling attention to the growing refugee crisis. The statistics are overwhelming — 60 million displaced persons globally, half of all Syrians forced from their homes, the average stay in a refugee camp greater than 15 years and many with no hope of ever getting out.

**T**hese communications call us to welcome, advocate for and aid refugees. For Christ-followers, there is the biblical mandate to serve the widow, orphan, homeless and destitute. We also have an opportunity to share the good news with those from countries closed to Western missionaries.

Evangelical churches are responding to this call. World Relief, the NAE’s humanitarian arm, is seeing more U.S. churches partner with them to help settle refugees than they have since 1999. This article tells the stories of three evangelical churches that are serving refugees with great creativity and compassion.

## Grace Fellowship Church – Community Gardens and Welcome Teams

Picture yourself as a peasant farmer who is suddenly transported to a high-density urban environment. Imagine not having enough money to buy food, let alone fresh fruits and vegetables and some of the “exotic” foods that were part of your daily diet.

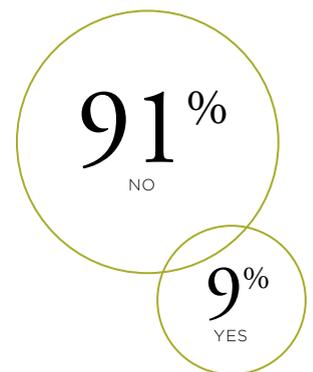
Now imagine that a church offers you a plot of land to grow your own food. This is the experience at Grace Fellowship Church in Brooklyn Park, Minnesota, where over 100 refugee families now have their own gardens. The church does not just provide a plot of land, church members also garden alongside the refugees and often provide them with transportation to and from the garden.

Church volunteers offer gardening advice, as Minnesota’s climate is much different than tropical Southeast Asia. Working side-by-side produces friendships in which refugees feel more comfortable asking for help with other areas of adjusting to life in the United States. The gardeners and greater church community celebrate an annual Harvest Festival. Last year 1,365 pounds of surplus food were donated to a local food shelf.



While some U.S. political leaders have called for banning resettlement of all Muslim refugees, leaders in the evangelical community affirm that refugees should not be rejected based on their religious identity, according to the **January 2016 Evangelical Leaders Survey**.

**Should the United States bar entry to all refugees affiliated with certain religions?**



One refugee from Laos said, “I’m very thankful that Grace Fellowship is able to give me a plot. It reminds me of home. I’m able to garden like I used to. Working in the garden makes me feel good. It reduces my stress and isolation. I can cook for my family and share the food with friends and neighbors. I am happy to be here.”

Grace Fellowship also formed a refugee welcoming team to support a family arriving from the Middle East. The church, a Converge Worldwide congregation, was connected to the family through Arrive Minnesota, a local World Relief affiliate.

In preparation for the family’s arrival, team members prayed for the family, collected household items for them, and welcomed them at the airport. Team members also provided transportation and sat in with the family on appointments with medical and government officials. Team members called or visited the family daily and regularly invited them to their homes for meals and fellowship.

### **Rose Hill Alliance Church – Classroom Space**

Rose Hill Alliance Church, a Christian and Missionary Alliance congregation in St. Paul, Minnesota, has welcomed refugees with welcome teams and community gardens for several years. Through this outreach, the church leadership developed good relationships within the local Bhutanese Community Organization of Minnesota.

During a meeting with them, a Rose Hill Alliance leader asked, “In what other ways can we help you when we are not in the gardens?” After some hesitation the community leader shared that they needed a place to host their English Language Learning and citizenship classes. The church jumped at the chance to provide rooms and transportation for immigrants for the classes.

Ministry leader Rick Wallace said, “In many ways it seems like we are just getting started as God shows us next

steps. I’m not sure how God may want you to serve, but if you are willing to listen and look at the resources God has given you, opportunities will become obvious.” And now there is a new congregation of Nepali believers who meet regularly at Rose Hill.

### **College Church – Lending a Hand**

College Church in Wheaton, Illinois, started small by allowing World Relief to use their building for English as a Second Language (ESL) classes. That quickly blossomed to several projects and most recently led to a College Church team that travelled to Greece where they helped people off rafts as they arrived from Turkey.

Hosting the ESL classes led to developing a preschool program for children while parents were in class. Church members volunteered for the program and then added optional adult and family Bible story times — a great opportunity for refugees to practice English and make new friends. College Church’s outreach expanded to providing welcome kits for new arrivals, forming welcome teams, and providing one-on-one tutoring in English and academic subjects. One College Church member started a nonprofit called Re:new Project, which teaches sewing skills to refugee women and sells the crafts and products to fund the center.

Last summer College Church members met refugees on the shore of Lesbos, Greece, with smiles, food and water, and compassion. The church members felt like they were literally “giving a cup of water in [Jesus’] name.”

In each of these churches, church leaders and volunteers share that they have been blessed as they are able to serve “the least of these.” **E**





Karen Swallow Prior is professor of English at Liberty University in Lynchburg, Virginia.

# I AM ENTERTAINED, THEREFORE I AM

KAREN SWALLOW PRIOR





Scripture calls believers to regular, temporary cessation from our labors. It is clear, then, that in God’s economy, leisure and entertainment are as necessary as work to human flourishing.

Yet, American Christians are drowning in entertainment choices: According to the U.S. Department of Commerce, revenue within the United States, media and entertainment industry reached an estimated \$546 billion in 2014. The U. S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that the average American spent \$2,605 on entertainment in 2012, when those age 15 and over averaged 5.3 hours in leisure and sports activities on a typical day. Clearly, we value our entertainment.

### **Family Friendly or Blind Consumption**

Both research and anecdotal evidence suggest that Christians today tend to fall into one of two categories of entertainment consumers: either “faith driven consumers” who prefer faith- and family-friendly entertainment and use their consumer clout to demand more of this fare, or believers whose entertainment habits differ little from those of the general public.

Only decades ago, many Christians avoided “worldly” entertainment such as television, secular music, and, movies. Seen as a mark of holiness, such outward separation could easily be confused for inward sanctification.

A less superficial approach to entertainment and culture seems to prevail today, yet it’s all too easy to swing from blanket critique to the opposite extreme of blind consumption. Approaching entertainment and recreation mindfully is surely a mark of maturity in both the Church and the individual believer.

Entertainment that is mere fluff may fail this test just as much as forms drenched in self-indulgent sensation. Both extremes of entertainment — those that avoid sin and those that swim in it — discourage viewers from active engagement that goes beyond the superficial.

The thoughtfulness and care with which we consume, critique and cultivate entertainment is a reflection of our Christian character and our theology. In this respect, we ought, in some ways, to take fun seriously.

We begin by going beyond careless, surface-level criticism. To paraphrase Proverbs 23:7, as a person watches, so is she. (Note, not merely what a person watches, but as — or how.) Let us entertain (“give attention to or consider”) even our entertainment.

### **Hollow Criticism**

The default lens of criticism for most people, especially Christians, is moral criticism, an approach that focuses on the “message” of a work, its moral content, and the presence or absence of objectionable material. A number of popular Christian resources offer reviews based on these criteria, such as Plugged In, The Dove Foundation and Movieguide. Tallies of curse words and sexually-charged scenes is, ironically, the approach used by both family-friendly guides and the Hollywood ratings system. These can be helpful. Yet, content doesn’t tell the whole story.

This is because how a story is told is often more important than what the story tells. To focus on content at the expense of form is to overlook the real impact of a work, according to Alissa Wilkinson, film critic at Vox.com and associate professor of English and humanities at The King’s College.





Wilkinson explains that “artistic mediums also connect with our guts, our emotions, our hearts through aesthetic means.” However, she cautioned, not enough Christians engage with “what’s actually on the screen: the images, the music, the narrative structure, the editing, and so on” and this lack of attention to form produces “hollow criticism.”

The aesthetic aspect of entertainment makes it an embodied experience, not merely intellectual or emotive, but captivating the whole person. Wilkinson said this understanding counters the Gnostic idea that the brain and the mind are more important than the body. She explains,

We’re made to respond to the meaning of art, film, and stories through more than just our brains. We delight in their beauty. We cry. We jump in fear. We feel pain and suffering alongside others, even fictional characters. The way art works on us is to help us to see the rest of the material world around us in a new way. So Christians ought to be good at looking at the aesthetics of a work and talking about them.

### **Understanding the Story**

Christians must understand a story first, before critiquing it, according to Mike Cospers, director of the Harbor Institute for Faith and Culture and author of “The Stories We Tell.” This means learning some of the basics of literary criticism (which applies to all stories, including those conveyed through film and television).

“We sometimes get so lost in content that we miss basic concepts like theme, plot and character,” Cospers explained. “Understanding what an artifact says and means is the only honest way to engage it. It’s also how we understand its power over our imaginations. What is it holding out as the source of hope, happiness and human flourishing?”

Cospers said this means that many of the “squeaky clean,” family-friendly works many Christians prefer may be more problematic than they appear on the surface. On the other hand, “grittier” works with “objectionable content” that accurately depict the consequences of human sin are too quickly criticized and dismissed. Cospers advised,

Christian liberty gives us great freedom in the media we consume, but I don’t think we have the freedom to consume anything mindlessly. If you’re going to take time to watch something, you ought also to take the time to think about, understand what “the good life” is that it’s holding out, and ask yourself how that vision is pulling at your own heart. I would love to see pastors and leaders cultivating this kind liberty.

Thoughtful, intentional participation in culture is, of course, harder and riskier than either complete separatism or utter immersion. It requires wisdom and discernment, whether Christians come to entertainment as consumers, critics or creators.





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### Engaging the Arts

In his essay, “A Call to Evangelical Engagement in the Arts,” Barrett Duke, executive director of the Montana State Baptist Convention, acknowledges this difficulty, but issues a challenge to Christians. “The easy course is to withdraw and build our own counter-culture and watch as the culture around us dies. But such a response is wrong for a whole host of reasons.”

Duke cautions that attempts to insulate Christians from “the lure of the secularizing culture” are doomed. Retreat will simply foster further cultural decay. However, the essay continues, “If we engage, we can help our fellow Christians who embrace the culture to their detriment understand better the value of the biblical worldview for their own decision-making.”

One need not be an artist or writer or filmmaker to participate in the making of culture. Simply adopting more thoughtful and intentional approaches to entertainment — whether labeled “Christian” or “secular” — can contribute to making culture, the call Andy Crouch offers the church in his important book, “Culture Making.”

Thoughtful, active participation by Christians in entertainment is helpful not only to fellow believers, but to the entire culture. Cosper described today’s world of entertainment as “much like the Areopagus in Acts 17.” Entertainment culture is “the pluralistic religious experience of our day, and if you want to love your neighbors, if you want

to understand what they believe and why they believe it, you would want to begin with the stories they’re telling and the stories they’re consuming,” he said.

Wilkinson echoed this idea in characterizing popular culture as the “common text” of our time, which suggests that it is more important than ever for Christians to be skillful consumers and critics of entertainment.

As “people of the book,” Wilkinson explained, Christians are “already trained to read stories and understand them, and to understand ourselves as part of a story.” Moreover, she said, Christians “worship a God who is the Word Become Flesh, which is a whole lot of what art does: put ‘flesh’ (whatever a particular artistic medium does) to ‘words’ and experiences.” This means that Christians “ought to be experts at looking at the whole work of art, not just the ‘word’ part. ... You can’t tell me what a sunset ‘means.’”

Even entertainment has meaning. It is not something to be cordoned off from the rest of our lives as if it were only and merely “a break.” Our rest and our re-creations are part of our whole lives and reflect (whether poorly or well) the holism of the gospel.

When we thoughtfully interact with the entertainment of our day, we remind ourselves and signal to the rest of the world that we are neither afraid of the world nor consumed by it, and that we, with the power of the Holy Spirit, have the best story to tell that is good news for all. **E**



**Jim Daly** is president of Focus on the Family and host of its daily radio broadcast.

# Making Wise Movie and TV Choices for Our Families

It's tough to raise kids today. We all know it. As a father of two boys, I feel that pressure constantly. We want to make the best decisions possible for our children. But today — especially in the bewildering world of 21<sup>st</sup> century entertainment choices — those decisions are tougher than ever.

I'll admit, it can seem overwhelming. Some of us grew up with just a handful of channels. Now, everyone — from Amazon to Netflix to broadcast networks to movie studios — wants a piece of the action. Cartoons were a Saturday-morning treat back in my day, not something you could watch 24/7 on half-a-dozen cable channels.

So how are we to respond to this explosion in entertainment options? I think it needs to start with a commitment to engage media wisely and intentionally. Here are some concrete principles you can put into practice today to help your family make good entertainment choices.

## **Establish Your Family's Media Boundaries**

A good starting point here is establishing the boundaries on your family's movie and TV habits. In the home, this means deciding what your family watches, where you'll watch it, and for how long. It's good to decide ahead of time what kinds of content are out of bounds. What level of violence are you comfortable with your kids watching? What about sexual innuendo? Can you work through the occasional minor profanity, or are they all off limits? Answering these questions means that if something pops up unexpectedly, everyone knows that you've agreed as a family not to watch it.

Also, make sure that your children engage with entertainment where you can see them. Child development experts suggest that children shouldn't have televisions in their rooms or be free to spend unsupervised screen time on

other devices alone, either. And the American Academy of Pediatrics suggests a total daily limit of screen time for kids of two hours.

## **Do Your Homework**

There was a time when we wouldn't know what to expect in a TV show or a movie. These days, however, there are resources available to help you know ahead of time what to expect. Focus on the Family's own media discernment website, *Plugged In*, offers detailed content reviews of both movies and TV shows (as well as video games and music), and there are other similar services out there as well.

## **Consider Each Child's Personality**

Different kids respond differently to images and ideas. One can watch an old episode of "Scooby-Doo" without a problem, while another might have nightmares for weeks. One doesn't seem to notice what characters say while another picks up on everything ... and begins repeating it immediately.

Sometimes a show can even be a catalyst for good healthy fun — like turning your living room into a spontaneous "American Ninja Warrior" gym. Other times, though, we might notice that an intense TV series or movie seems to have had a negative influence, sparking behavior we'd rather not see in our children. As we carefully observe how our kids engage with media, it will help us to adjust our boundaries in positive ways.



### **Be Willing to Turn It Off or Walk Out**

Sometimes, despite our best efforts to do our homework and set healthy boundaries, uncomfortable content sneaks through. The best response may simply be to turn it off or even walk out of a movie theater. Most theater chains will happily refund your money if you ask them, so don't let what you've spent already be the determining factor here.

### **Talk. Talk. Talk.**

We live in a culture of passive consumption. But God longs for us to grow in wisdom, discernment and understanding of our world. In Ephesians 5:15-16, Paul writes, "Be very careful, then, how you live — not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil." Because of that reality, we need to engage with entertainment purposefully and actively, not as mindless consumers.

The easiest way to model this kind of critical engagement is to talk about what you're watching. You can ask basic questions like these: Which character did you relate to? What part of the story did you like? Did anything make you uncomfortable, and why? What decisions did characters make? What were the consequences? What would you say the overall message was?

Questions like these, when asked consistently, help our children learn to observe and then evaluate, not to just subconsciously swallow whatever worldview a TV show or movie lobs our way.

### **Reset and Try Again**

Even when we set healthy limits, sometimes bad habits creep in, and we don't get it quite right. We have a busy week — or month — and realize that the kids have been watching TV for three hours a night. It's easy to feel guilty or to feel like we're somehow "bad parents." But the good news is that stumbling doesn't mean we have to give up. Instead, look for a natural reset point to move back to the screen-time boundaries you've established. A weekend, a holiday, the end of the school year, the end of summer, etc., all can offer natural reset points.

As we strive to set good boundaries with our children's entertainment, remember, the goal isn't perfection, but intentionality and relationship. We're not going to get it exactly right all the time. But if we're nurturing relationship with our kids, setting and striving to live within healthy boundaries, and talking intentionally together about what we're seeing, it will shape the way our kids relate to entertainment in a way that pays dividends for years to come. **E**



# On Christian Hip-Hop: KB

**K**evin Burgess, now better known by his stage name KB, is a hip-hop artist and head of HGA, a group of young rappers, poets, missionaries and students committed to His Glory Alone. KB spent four years at Trinity College of Florida studying theology and occasionally guest preaches at his home church, Living Faith Bible Fellowship, which is a Coverage Worldwide congregation in Tampa, Florida. His latest EP 100 debuted at #1 on Billboard's Christian Album Chart, #4 on Billboard's Rap Chart and #22 on Billboard's coveted Top 200 Album Chart. KB has also won a Dove Award.

## HOW DID YOU COME TO FAITH?

I came to faith through music, which is why I'm passionate about the gospel and the arts. As a teenager, I was in a dark situation. I lived in an under-resourced, underprivileged and under-protected neighborhood. I was able to do well in school and got accepted into a program where I could finish half of college before I turned 18. With that kind of setup, I thought, "This is my ticket out. I might be the next Barack Obama. I am secure." But I found that education and the opportunities that afforded me would not be enough to itch the irritation of a soul that needed God. Then I received a Christian hip-hop CD that was light in the darkness. That CD had a man on the cover who looked like most the people in my neighborhood. I never associated Christian ministry with someone that looks like me. I put the CD in, and loved every song. The last song had a gospel presentation, and I believed the gospel that day. I've been walking with Jesus ever since.



**WHAT WAS YOUR PATH TO THE CHRISTIAN MUSIC INDUSTRY?**

My path to the Christian music industry was through missions and theology. I never had a vision for being a musician. I wanted to be a missionary and church planter and went to theology school. But there were gifts in me that I hadn't developed. There was an ability to put words to music, an ear for what was current, and a way to articulate with outsiders what I was about and what I stood for. I began to make music, and this sort of camaraderie of other brothers that were making music and sisters that were doing poetry started. We came together as a group in Tampa, called HGA, which stands for His Glory Alone. We met in my apartment as a Bible study of seven people. Before we knew it, the two-bedroom apartment was packed out. And we would go into the districts of the city that Christians typically didn't go into, and we would share the gospel and have Bible studies and pray with people. We were also putting into play those gifts of music and artistry through concerts. Some were recorded and put online. It was through that that Lecrae and his record label, Reach Records, became interested in what HGA was doing, and I was invited to join them.

**MAINSTREAM HIP-HOP IS OFTEN KNOWN FOR MUSIC THAT OBJECTIFIES WOMEN AND GLORIFIES GUN VIOLENCE AND DRUGS. HOW DO YOU OPERATE IN THIS WORLD WHILE MAINTAINING YOUR CHRISTIAN IDENTITY AND VALUES?**

As a missionary, I try to find ways to penetrate into the worlds of Christ rejection — where Christ is not glorified. I want to be in it, but not of it. But where in mainstream hip-hop darkness is embraced and celebrated, light will not be accepted. We find ourselves swimming in our own ponds when it comes to industry, which turns out to be pretty powerful. Though we aren't regularly playing in the main market, we are able to empower fans to go into their workplaces, schools and communities, because fans of the main market artists are regular people just like our fans are. The interaction with the mainstream happens in a non-publicized way when our fans are empowered to go into their communities.

**WHERE DO YOU FIND INSPIRATION FOR YOUR LYRICS?**

Life in general. One of the things HGA is very serious about is submitting to a local assembly and to discipleship. Leaders must be led. And having that, you pull from the wisdom of those who have gone before you, and it produces much inspiration and material. In addition when I'm at home, I'm in my community. I'm at the hospital. I'm in the funeral home. I'm in the streets, trying to make sure that I'm a shepherd that smells like the sheep.

**WHAT ROLE DOES CHRISTIAN HIP-HOP PLAY IN THE CHURCH?**

The Church, which by and large embraces Christian hip-hop as a legitimate arm of God's mission in the world, benefits greatly from its ministry because it's supplemental, encouraging and inspiring. It helps people do the work of the Church.

**WHO DO YOU THINK OF AS YOUR TARGET AUDIENCE: CHRISTIANS, NON-CHRISTIANS OR BOTH?**

Who do we want to buy what we do? Who is supporting this and funding this and being blessed by this the most? It's going to be our people — those that resonate the most with what we are talking about. However the music has another target that isn't in the world of marketing but is in the world of ministry, and that's the nonbeliever. We try to set a table that has room for people from all walks of life to come and be nourished and changed by what we do.

**WHERE IS THE CHRISTIAN HIP-HOP MOVEMENT HEADED?**

Movements start when something is counter culture, and they are sometimes unmanageable. Soon movements turn into organization, where people bring boundaries into who the movement is and where it's going. But sometimes the counter culture goes into corporate culture where it turns into a business. And that's going to happen. But what I hope is that Christian hip-hop, by God's grace, will always remember where it came from and that counter culture will harmonize with the corporate culture and make something greater together. **E**

 Learn more about KB and listen to his music at [WholsKB.com](http://WholsKB.com).



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**Bob Beltz** is senior pastor of Highline Community Church in Greenwood Village, Colorado. As a part of Walden Media's leadership team for several years, he advised on major films such as *Amazing Grace*, *The Lion*, *the Witch and the Wardrobe* and *Prince Caspian*.

# Hollywood's Elusive Hope

Frederick Buechner tells the story of how his aunt responded to the report that he was going into the ministry by asking whether he had come to the decision on his own or was following someone else's bad advice. I would say the same about someone hoping to become involved in the Hollywood film industry. Since I've done both, I'm not sure what that says about me.

**A**ndy Warhol observed, "It's the movies that have really been running things in America, ever since they were invented. They show you what to do; how to do it; when to do it; how to feel about it; and how to look when you feel about it." He said this in 1966, and if anything, Hollywood's influence is greater today than it was in Warhol's time.

So it would seem to make sense that Christians should be attempting to invade Hollywood to influence culture for Christ. I certainly felt that way when I had the opportunity to become involved. But making a difference in Hollywood is a lot more difficult than it would seem.

Hollywood is tough. S.J. Perelman made the following observation in the early days of the industry:

Hollywood was a dreary industrial town controlled by hoodlums of enormous wealth, the ethical sense of a pack of jackals, and taste so degraded that it befouled everything it touched.

And that was from a Hollywood insider! Don't get me wrong, there are some great people in the industry that really want to make a difference. The people behind Walden Media, and the work of Mark Burnett and Roma Downey are two examples. But the overwhelming majority of those in power in the industry are not good people. Good people rarely get very far in Hollywood.

After 16 years, I've come to the following conclusion: The only real hope of the world is the Church. Even in the most difficult of situations, the impact a person can have in the ministry of the local church, or as missional church planter or evangelist, will eclipse the futile efforts many invest in pursuing a Hollywood career.

I've come to the following conclusion: The only real hope of the world is the Church.





# Cultivation and Creation

Tonight I will cook dinner for my family. Over high heat I will sauté onions and green peppers until they begin to caramelize and turn golden brown. I will add coriander and chili powder, mixing up a fragrant and spicy paste, then — when the whole glorious mess is just short of smoking — pour chopped tomatoes into the pot.

As steam rises from the rapidly cooling pan, I will deglaze it with a wooden spatula, then add red kidney beans, black beans, corn and bulgur wheat cooked in tomato juice. When the whole mixture has returned to a boil, I will turn down the heat to a barely visible simmering flame. I will have spent less than 30 minutes, a good thing on a busy weeknight in autumn.

Then I will light the candles on our table, the little votive lights and the lantern, and — if I'm in the mood — the six candles in the chandelier overhead. I will set out cloth napkins, plates, glasses and silverware. I will call the family from the corners of the house, we will sit down, and I will bring the pot to the table. We will say our prayer of thanks, adapted from a Jewish blessing that has served God's people for several millennia: "Blessed are you, Lord God, King of the Universe, who gives us this food to eat." And then we will have our chili.

Actually that is not quite right. Because my children do not like chili.

They particularly protest whenever they see a green pepper looming in the bowl, and they don't much care for the tomatoes, even though — as Catherine and I have pointed out to them over and over — they are perfectly happy when those same ingredients are served in spaghetti sauce.

In a few years, when my children are older, they will probably like chili, green peppers and all. But suppose they don't — suppose that this part of our family culture still strikes them as a violation of their taste buds and the Law of Not Combining Green and Red Things. What are their options?

They could protest more and more vociferously until Catherine and I give up on making chili altogether. The problem with this is that Catherine and I love, deeply love, our chili. When autumn comes around each year, we'll be making chili until we are too old to chop the onions. And we are not particularly indulgent parents — what is served for dinner is what's for dinner.

Instead of simply protesting, our children could increase the sophistication of their critique of the chili, explaining in more detail why the green peppers are too sour, why tomatoes are appealing when puréed but appalling when chunky.

Alternatively, our children could just give up, consuming whatever we serve. They might even grow to tolerate, if not like, the green peppers and chunky tomatoes. Or, at the other extreme, when they are old enough they could simply stop coming to dinner altogether. Once they leave the house they will be able to cook their chili any way they want.

For the moment, however, they are stuck — no chili, no dinner until tomorrow night. As far as my children are concerned, our dinner is the only game in town. And none of these strategies is likely to change the menu on a crisp fall night when time is short and we are looking for something hearty and filling to serve.



There is one thing our children could do, though, that could have a decisive effect on our family's culture of the table. If I come home on a Tuesday night a few years from now (when they are old enough that I can trust them with the knives) and find dinner already simmering on the stove, even if it's not chili, I will likely be delighted. Especially if the food being prepared is a substantial improvement on our usual fare, just as tasty and even more creative than I would have prepared myself.

Consider this a parable of cultural change, illustrating this fundamental rule: The only way to change culture is to create more of it. This simple but elusive reality follows from observations we've already made about culture. First, culture is the accumulation of very tangible things — the stuff people make of the world. This is obscured when people talk about culture as something vague and ethereal — such as the common comparison between human beings in culture and fish in water. The fish, we suppose, are completely unaware of the existence of water, let alone all the ways that water both enables and constrains their fishy lives. While it's certainly true that culture can have effects on us that we're not aware of, culture itself is anything but invisible. We hear it, we smell it, we taste it, we touch it, and we see it. Culture presents itself to our five senses — or it is not culture at all. If culture is to change, it will be because some new tangible (or audible or visible or olfactory) thing is presented to a wide enough public that it begins to

reshape their world.

Second, as the philosopher Albert Borgmann has observed, human cultures have the strange yet fortunate property of always being full. No culture experiences itself as thin or incomplete. Consider language. No human language seems to its speakers to lack the capacity to describe everything they experience — or, at least, all our languages fail at the same limits of mystery. Even though our languages divide up the color spectrum very differently from one another, for example, every human language has a name for every color its speakers can see. No one is waiting for a new word to come along so they can begin talking about yellow. Consequently, cultural change will only happen when something new displaces, to some extent, existing culture in a very tangible way. Our family eats dinner every night and, if our country's prosperity continues, we will go on eating dinner every night. Our dinner-table culture will only change if someone offers us something sufficiently new and compelling to displace the current items on our menu.

So if we seek to change culture, we will have to create something new, something that will persuade our neighbors to set aside some existing set of cultural goods for our new proposal. And note well that there are a number of other possible strategies, none of which, by themselves will have any effect on culture at all. **E**



It is not enough to condemn culture. Nor is it sufficient merely to critique culture or to copy culture. According to Andy Crouch, the only way to change culture is to create culture and calls Christians to be culture makers. This excerpt from *Culture Making* © 2008 by Andy Crouch is used by permission of InterVarsity Press. Order at [IVPress.com](http://IVPress.com).





# Theology of Entertainment

It's funny the way we vividly remember some quotes from childhood and totally forget most others. For forgotten reasons I recall my father explaining the etymology of the word "amusement."

He said that "muse" means to think and the "a" means "not" (in college I learned that's a privative alpha negation). In other words, amusements are non-thinking. My father's point was probably to avoid popular entertainment, because it is thoughtless. I've mused about this random parental lesson and decided that there are times when I like not thinking. Sometimes I think too much.

Entertainment isn't necessarily unthinking. Actually it can make us think old thoughts in new ways or think new thoughts for the first time. Or, it can be an opportunity for leisure that gives us a break from the intensity of brainwork in our complicated and conflicted generation.

What once seemed wrong has been later adopted as right.

Jesus was the ultimate thinker but quite entertaining. Most Americans would grab a ticket to hear a preacher who could keep the crowd's attention for hours, especially if there were some miracles spliced in. Jesus caused his listeners to laugh and think at the same time when he talked about camels going through a needle's eye or challenged his critics with innovative proposals about taxes by holding up a Roman coin. Not all in his audiences believed or followed him, but they had to be amazed at miracles healing the disabled, walking on water and catering a meal for thousands with a boy's bag lunch.

So, our theology of entertainment should recognize that entertainment is a gift from God that was powerfully and persuasively used by Jesus. Entertainment is good if aligned with the purposes of God and provided for the benefit of Christians and non-Christians alike. But, like all of God's good gifts there is potential for sinful abuse.

The challenge is to figure out which entertainment is good and which is evil. Hebrews were modest in dress and opposed to graven images; Greeks ran naked in their Olympics and prized naked statues in their art. Christians have changed their minds through the generations with avoidance or acceptance of alcoholic beverages, movie theaters and co-ed swimming pools. We have argued against all appearances of evil and argued for engaging the secular culture to advance the gospel. What once seemed wrong has been later adopted as right.

It comes to spiritual discernment. Individually and together we discern what is acceptable and unacceptable for ourselves, the Church and society. "And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ" (Philippians 1:9-10). 

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