

*" . . it has always been about the battle for the mind!"*

What / Who we love,

*. . determines our entire future!*

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*" . . it has always been about the battle for the mind!"*

**The Blessedness of Possessing Nothing** - A. W. Tozer [b1897-d1963]

*Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 5:3)*

Before the Lord God made man upon the earth He first prepared for him by creating a world of useful and pleasant things for his sustenance and delight. In the Genesis account of the creation these are called simply "things." They were made for man's uses, but they were meant always to be external to the man and subservient to him. In the deep heart of the man was a shrine where none but God was worthy to come. Within him was God; without, a thousand gifts which God had showered upon him.

But sin has introduced complications and has made those very gifts of God a potential source of ruin to the soul.

Our woes began when God was forced out of His central shrine and "things" were allowed to enter. Within the human heart "things" have taken over. Men have now by nature no peace within their hearts, for God is crowned there no longer, but there in the moral dusk stubborn and aggressive usurpers fight among themselves for first place on the throne.

This is not a mere metaphor, but an accurate analysis of our real spiritual trouble. There is within the human heart a tough fibrous root of fallen life whose nature is to possess, always to possess. It covets "things" with a deep and fierce passion. The pronouns "my" and "mine" look innocent enough in print, but their constant and universal use is significant. They express the real nature of the old Adamic man better than a thousand volumes of theology could do. They are verbal symptoms of our deep disease. The roots of our hearts have grown down into things, and we dare not pull up one rootlet lest we die. Things have become necessary to us, a development never originally intended. God's gifts now take the place of God, and the whole course of nature is upset by the monstrous substitution.

Our Lord referred to this tyranny of things when He said to His disciples, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever shall lose his life for my sake shall find it."

Breaking this truth into fragments for our better understanding, it would seem that there is within each of us an enemy which we tolerate at our peril. Jesus called it "life" and "self," or as we would say, the self-life. Its chief characteristic is its possessiveness: the words "gain" and "profit" suggest this. To allow this enemy to live is in the end to lose everything. To repudiate it and give up all for Christ's sake is to lose nothing at last, but to preserve everything unto life eternal. And possibly also a hint is given here as to the only effective way to destroy this foe: it is by the Cross. "Let him take up his cross and follow me."

The way to deeper knowledge of God is through the lonely valleys of soul poverty and abnegation of all things. The blessed ones who possess the Kingdom are they who have repudiated every external thing and have rooted from their hearts all sense of possessing. These are the "poor in spirit." They have reached an inward state paralleling the outward circumstances of the common beggar in the streets of Jerusalem; that is what the word "poor" as Christ used it actually means. These blessed poor are no longer slaves to the tyranny of things. They have broken the yoke of the oppressor; and this they have done not by fighting but by surrendering. Though free from all sense of possessing, they yet possess all things. "Theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

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Let me exhort you to take this seriously. It is not to be understood as mere Bible teaching to be stored away in the mind along with an inert mass of other doctrines. It is a marker on the road to greener pastures, a path chiseled against the steep sides of the mount of God. We dare not try to by-pass it if we would follow on in this holy pursuit. We must ascend a step at a time. If we refuse one step we bring our progress to an end.

As is frequently true, this New Testament principle of spiritual life finds its best illustration in the Old Testament. In the story of Abraham and Isaac we have a dramatic picture of the surrendered life as well as an excellent commentary on the first Beatitude.

Abraham was old when Isaac was born, old enough indeed to have been his grandfather, and the child became at once the delight and idol of his heart. From that moment when he first stooped to take the tiny form awkwardly in his arms he was an eager love slave of his son. God went out of His way to comment on the strength of this affection. And it is not hard to understand. The baby represented everything sacred to his father's heart: the promises of God, the covenants, the hopes of the years and the long messianic dream. As he watched him grow from babyhood to young manhood the heart of the old man was knit closer and closer with the life of his son, till at last the relationship bordered upon the perilous. It was then that God stepped in to save both father and son from the consequences of an uncleansed love.

"Take now thy son," said God to Abraham, "thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt-offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of." The sacred writer spares us a close-up of the agony that night on the slopes near Beersheba when the aged man had it out with his God, but respectful imagination may view in awe the bent form and convulsive wrestling alone under the stars. Possibly not again until a Greater than Abraham wrestled in the Garden of Gethsemane did such mortal pain visit a human soul. If only the man himself might have been allowed to die. That would have been easier a thousand times, for he was old now, and to die would have been no great ordeal for one who had walked so long with God. Besides, it would have been a last sweet pleasure to let his dimming vision rest upon the figure of his stalwart son who would live to carry on the Abrahamic line and fulfill in himself the promises of God made long before in Ur of the Chaldees.

How should he slay the lad! Even if he could get the consent of his wounded and protesting heart, how could he reconcile the act with the promise, "In Isaac shall thy seed be called"? This was Abraham's trial by fire, and he did not fail in the crucible. While the stars still shone like sharp white points above the tent where the sleeping Isaac lay, and long before the gray dawn had begun to lighten the east, the old saint had made up his mind. He would offer his son as God had directed him to do, and then trust God to raise him from the dead. This, says the writer to the Hebrews, was the solution his aching heart found sometime in the dark night, and he rose "early in the morning" to carry out the plan. It is beautiful to see that, while he erred as to God's method, he had correctly sensed the secret of His great heart. And the solution accords well with the New Testament Scripture, "Whosoever will lose for my sake shall find."

God let the suffering old man go through with it up to the point where He knew there would be no retreat, and then forbade him to lay a hand upon the boy. To the wondering patriarch He now says in effect, "It's all right, Abraham. I never intended that you should actually slay the lad. I only wanted to remove him from the temple of your heart that I might reign unchallenged there. I wanted to correct the perversion that existed in your love. Now you may

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have the boy, sound and well. Take him and go back to your tent. Now I know that thou fearest God, seeing that thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son, from me."

Then heaven opened and a voice was heard saying to him, "By myself have I sworn, saith the Lord, for because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son: that in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies; and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice.

The old man of God lifted his head to respond to the Voice, and stood there on the mount strong and pure and grand, a man marked out by the Lord for special treatment, a friend and favorite of the Most High. Now he was a man wholly surrendered, a man utterly obedient, a man who possessed nothing. He had concentrated his all in the person of his dear son, and God had taken it from him. God could have begun out on the margin of Abraham's life and worked inward to the center; He chose rather to cut quickly to the heart and have it over in one sharp act of separation. In dealing thus He practiced an economy of means and time. It hurt cruelly, but it was effective.

I have said that Abraham possessed nothing. Yet was not this poor man rich? Everything he had owned before was his still to enjoy: sheep, camels, herds, and goods of every sort. He had also his wife and his friends, and best of all he had his son Isaac safe by his side. He had everything, but he possessed nothing. There is the spiritual secret. There is the sweet theology of the heart which can be learned only in the school of renunciation. The books on systematic theology overlook this, but the wise will understand.

After that bitter and blessed experience I think the words "my" and "mine" never had again the same meaning for Abraham. The sense of possession which they connote was gone from his heart. Things had been cast out forever. They had now become external to the man. His inner heart was free from them. The world said, "Abraham is rich," but the aged patriarch only smiled. He could not explain it to them, but he knew that he owned nothing, that his real treasures were inward and eternal.

There can be no doubt that this possessive clinging to things is one of the most harmful habits in the life. Because it is so natural it is rarely recognized for the evil that it is; but its outworkings are tragic.

We are often hindered from giving up our treasures to the Lord out of fear for their safety; this is especially true when those treasures are loved relatives and friends. But we need have no such fears. Our Lord came not to destroy but to save. Everything is safe which we commit to Him, and nothing is really safe which is not so committed.

Our gifts and talents should also be turned over to Him. They should be recognized for what they are, God's loan to us, and should never be considered in any sense our own. We have no more right to claim credit for special abilities than for blue eyes or strong muscles. "For who maketh thee to differ from another? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive?"

The Christian who is alive enough to know himself even slightly will recognize the symptoms of this possession malady, and will grieve to find them in his own heart. If the longing

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after God is strong enough within him he will want to do something about the matter. Now, what should he do?

First of all he should put away all defense and make no attempt to excuse himself either in his own eyes or before the Lord. Whoever defends himself will have himself for his defense, and he will have no other; but let him come defenseless before the Lord and he will have for his defender no less than God Himself. Let the inquiring Christian trample under foot every slippery trick of his deceitful heart and insist upon frank and open relations with the Lord.

Then he should remember that this is holy business. No careless or casual dealings will suffice. Let him come to God in full determination to be heard. Let him insist that God accept his all, that He take things out of his heart and Himself reign there in power. It may be he will need to become specific, to name things and people by their names one by one. If he will become drastic enough he can shorten the time of his travail from years to minutes and enter the good land long before his slower brethren who coddle their feelings and insist upon caution in their dealings with God.

Let us never forget that such a truth as this cannot be learned by rote as one would learn the facts of physical science. They must be experienced before we can really know them. We must in our hearts live through Abraham's harsh and bitter experiences if we would know the blessedness which follows them. The ancient curse will not go out painlessly; the tough old miser within us will not lie down and die obedient to our command. He must be torn out of our heart like a plant from the soil; he must be extracted in agony and blood like a tooth from the jaw. He must be expelled from our soul by violence as Christ expelled the money changers from the temple. And we shall need to steel ourselves against his piteous begging, and to recognize it as springing out of self-pity, one of the most reprehensible sins of the human heart.

If we would indeed know God in growing intimacy we must go this way of renunciation. And if we are set upon the pursuit of God He will sooner or later bring us to this test. Abraham's testing was, at the time, not known to him as such, yet if he had taken some course other than the one he did, the whole history of the Old Testament would have been different. God would have found His man, no doubt, but the loss to Abraham would have been tragic beyond the telling. So we will be brought one by one to the testing place, and we may never know when we are there. At that testing place there will be no dozen possible choices for us; just one and an alternative, but our whole future will be conditioned by the choice we make.

*Father, I want to know Thee, but my coward heart fears to give up its toys.  
I cannot part with them without inward bleeding, and  
I do not try to hide from Thee the terror of the parting.  
I come trembling, but I do come.  
Please root from my heart all those things which I have cherished so long and  
which have become a very part of my living self,  
so that Thou mayest enter and dwell there without a rival.  
Then shalt Thou make the place of Thy feet glorious. Then shall my heart have  
no need of the sun to shine in it, for Thyself wilt be the light of it,  
and there shall be no night there.*

*In Jesus' Name, Amen.*

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What we fix our eyes upon,

*. . we go toward and become like!*

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Philippians 4:8

Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever **things** are just, whatever **things** are pure, whatever **things** are lovely, whatever **things** are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things.

Proverbs 23:7

For as he thinks in his heart, so is he.

1 John 2:15-17

Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world.

And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.

The “things” we fix our eyes upon,  
*. . we go toward and become like!*

**MarketWatch**

Published: Aug 4, 2018 5:09 p.m. ET

By Quentin Fottrell, Personal Finance Editor

Swipe. Click. Binge. Repeat.

Americans spend more time than ever watching videos, browsing social media and swiping their lives away on their tablets and smartphones.

American adults spend more than **11 hours per day** watching, reading, listening to or simply interacting with media, according to a new study by market-research group Nielsen.

That’s up from nine hours, 32 minutes just four years ago.

In the first quarter of the year, U.S. adults spent three hours and 48 minutes a day on computers, tablets and smartphones. This is a 13-minute increase from the previous quarter, and 62% of that time is attributed to app/web browsing on smartphones.

Television still accounts for most media usage, with **four hours and 46 minutes** spent watching TV **every day** in the first quarter of this year.

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Why is it that our culture + churches are overwhelmed by,  
Malformed Relationships / Materialism / Debt & Entertainment?

Because the things we fix our eyes upon,  
*. . mold us into the likeness of what we see!*

**Media and Entertainment** - Decadent: Total absorption with unholy media, gaming, and pleasure-seeking. This entertainment contains some [or much] immorality, nudity, profanity, promotion of illicit relationships, violence and constant use of God's name ["OMG"] blasphemously . .

**crowding out time to be "alone with God."**

These day-by-day, hour-by-hour, choices corrupt the heart and mind, deadening the person to that which is holy.

*This truth is evidenced by the fruit produced by our corrupted loves*

**Malformed Relationships:** Pre-marital sex, fornication, abortion, adultery, divorce, homosexuality + lesbianism and the break-up of families.

**Materialism + Debt:** Buying bigger / multiple homes & automobiles, purchasing luxuries [items not paid for by cash] or paying for expensive vacations with money borrowed on credit cards. This allows living beyond the limitations of the husband's income, causing both parents to work. The crushing debt load leads to choosing bankruptcy which defrauds ones neighbor.

*Why do people have difficulty getting alone with God daily to read and pray?*

*It is not because we do not have time, training, teaching, or that we suffer great persecution, etc., it is simply a matter of . . .*

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Spiritual Revival requires first,

*. . the destruction of*

*idols in our hearts!*

The essence of idolatry is the entertainment of thoughts that are unworthy of Holy God.

Idolatry begins in the mind and may be present where no overt act of worship has yet taken place.

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## **2 Chronicles 15** -The Reforms of Asa

1 Now the Spirit of God came upon Azariah the son of Oded. 2 And he went out to meet Asa, and said to him: "Hear me, Asa, and all Judah and Benjamin. The Lord is with you while you are with Him. If you seek Him, He will be found by you; but if you forsake Him, He will forsake you.

3 For a long time Israel has been without the true God, without a teaching priest, and without law; 4 but when in their trouble they turned to the Lord God of Israel, and sought Him, He was found by them. 5 And in those times there was no peace to the one who went out, nor to the one who came in, but great turmoil was on all the inhabitants of the lands.

6 So nation was destroyed by nation, and city by city, for God troubled them with every adversity. 7 But you, be strong and do not let your hands be weak, for your work shall be rewarded!"

8 And when Asa heard these words and the prophecy of Oded the prophet, he took courage, and **removed** the **abominable idols** from all the land of Judah and Benjamin

Then they entered into a covenant  
to seek the Lord God,  
*. . with all their heart and their soul.*

10 So they gathered together at Jerusalem in the third month, in the fifteenth year of the reign of Asa. 12 Then they **entered** into a **covenant** to seek the Lord God of their fathers with all their heart and with all their soul; 13 and whoever would not seek the Lord God of Israel was to be put to death, whether small or great, whether man or woman.

14 Then they took an oath before the Lord with a loud voice, with shouting and trumpets and rams' horns. 15 And all Judah rejoiced at the oath, for they had sworn with all their heart and sought Him with all their soul; and He was found by them, and the Lord gave them rest all around.

16 Also he removed Maachah, the mother of Asa the king, from being queen mother, because she had made an obscene image of Asherah; and Asa cut down her obscene image, then crushed and burned it by the Brook Kidron.

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1 Corinthians 10

1 Moreover, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea, 2 all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, 3 all ate the same spiritual food, 4 and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ. 5 But with most of them God was not well pleased, or their bodies were scattered in the wilderness.

6 Now these things became our examples, to the intent that we should not lust after evil **things** as they also lusted. 7 And do not become idolaters as were some of them. As it is written, *"The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play."*

14 Therefore, my beloved, **flee** from idolatry.

Then they entered into a covenant  
and to seek the Lord God,

*. . with all their heart and their soul.*

Colossians 3:5

Therefore, put to death what belongs to your worldly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desire, and greed, which is idolatry. 6 Because of these, God's wrath comes on the disobedient.

[A similar repentance like the Ninevites in Jonah 3:4,7-10]

*Father, I want to know You, but my coward heart fears to give up its toys.  
I cannot part with them without inward bleeding, and  
I do not try to hide from You the terror of the parting.  
I come trembling, but I do come.*

*Please root from my heart all those things which I have cherished so long and  
which have become a very part of my living self, so that You may enter and dwell there  
without a rival. Then shalt You make the place of Your feet glorious. Then shall my heart have  
no need of the sun to shine in it, for You will be the light of it,  
and there shall be no night there.  
In Jesus' Name, Amen.*

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name: Sign above / Print below

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Date:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Hour:

Please email us a copy when this is completed, and we will regularly pray for you. Tell Somebody!

Email to: [WasItForMeRom832@gmail.com](mailto:WasItForMeRom832@gmail.com)

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**R. ALBERT MOHLER, JR.** - The Briefing - April 8, 2020

## **PART I**

“We Turn Our Minds Over to Them” — The Power of the Electronic Screen

As humanity continues to confront the COVID-19 crisis, Christians need to observe some very interesting patterns that are now emerging in human behavior—some old, some new, but all of them now seen in a new light. Now, just consider the fact that many human beings are now spending much more time with electronic devices than they ever might have imagined possible, not to mention acceptable or advisable. If you look at media coverage, even leading right up to the dawn of the COVID-19 crisis, it's interesting how many of those headlines were warning that human beings are spending too much time with their screens. Screen time is a major problem for American children, American adolescents, young adults, not to mention the rest of us.

But now almost every news story seems to accept the inevitability of more screen time. That's an interesting pattern for us to think about. For one thing, there was an article that ran in the New York Times a few days ago by A.O. Scott, and the issue of entertainment itself was raised in such a way that it ought to have our attention because it tells us that even in the midst of a pandemic, what many people want, indeed what they demand, is to be well entertained. Scott wrote this, "What do we do now? It's a big question. As a matter of policy, national purpose and social cohesion, it's the big question," he said, "made up of a knot of local, individual practical decisions. What actions can each of us take to stay healthy, connected, and sane to fight the dangerous secondary infections of boredom, selfishness, and panic?" Notice how that particular lead took a significant U-turn from where you thought it was going. Scott then asked the question, "How are we going to stay busy? How are we going to keep ourselves entertained?"

Now, as much as that might appear to be an irrelevant question, it's not. What it reveals is the fact that there really is a human urge in the midst of this pandemic to be entertained. Even as a significant number of Americans are working harder than they've ever worked before, another significant portion of Americans now has more time than had been previously imagined. Scott refers to the very question he asked, "How are we going to keep ourselves entertained?" Then he writes, "That last one may seem like a trivial problem with an easy solution. Lives and livelihoods are at stake and there's still plenty to watch on television." Well, of course, there is still plenty to watch on television, but one of the interesting things is that as you're talking about television, there has been this massive transformation from what was required in sitting before a big television set just some years ago to what is now almost an anachronism with most people watching whatever they're watching and being entertained however they are being entertained on much smaller screens and furthermore, with entertainment that is more often than not streamed rather than broadcast.

When it comes to movies, there are huge questions about the future survival of cinemas and movie theaters, especially the larger chains, precisely because once human behavior changes in a certain direction, it often does not return to where it was in the beginning. It often does not, as the statisticians would say, revert to the mean. But one of the things we recognize is that there is a distinction between watching something in the fellowship of others and watching something privately. One of the interesting questions is psychological and that is when will human beings feel safe sitting that close to people once again, as was once the norm in a movie theater or you might say on an airplane.

Alyssa Rosenberg, writing in Tuesday's edition of the Washington Post, raise the issue this way: "One question for Hollywood is how soon theaters can reopen. A related issue is whether audiences will have the confidence to sit in close proximity to strangers for an extended period of time." There was another interesting angle in the article by Alyssa

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Rosenberg. After all, the headline was, "COVID-19 Brings Us a Summer Without a Superhero." Of course, she's writing about the absence of a major release of a superhero movie in theaters, but there is a theological overtone to what she's writing about here. She begins the article this way: "The superhero movie formula is simple. Hero appears to be riding high, hero is temporarily humbled by super villain, hero regains the advantage and saves the day, but now," writes Rosenberg, "the real world has delivered a twist. The coronavirus pandemic makes these costumed heroes seem powerless." Well, indeed, the COVID-19 virus does make those so-called superheroes look powerless. The reason is, of course, they are powerless. All this raises some very interesting background issues also with a lot of worldview significance. If you go back to the period, for example, of World War Two when many of the superhero myths really began to explode in the comic books and eventually on the big screens, it had much to do if not everything to do with the ideological context of the time, the enormous life struggle against Nazi Germany, the fact that Western civilization was in a great battle against fascism and totalitarianism. Those themes continued after the second World War, but they took on different kinds of tones, especially coming from Japan. Understandably, technological issues became a great threat, especially nuclear warfare. Just think of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. But then, of course, the Cold War was another background and even more recently, the comic books and the superhero movies have taken on a new theme of political correctness.

But one of the things we need to note, and it's in the background of what Alyssa Rosenberg is writing about Tuesday in the Washington Post, is the idea that in the midst of a pandemic, superheroes can't save us and no movie that would portray such would be even credible. The great threat that human beings face right now is not cinemagraphic, it is biological.

But this incessant demand to be entertained, especially in the context of the shelter at home orders and the current context of the COVID-19 crisis revealed something about human beings. We have to fill our intellectual and experiential space with something. If we're not filling it with something other than entertainment, then the desire for entertainment only grows exponentially. But also, what we see is that human beings are giving themselves permission to watch things and to give themselves to entertainment when they would not have given themselves as much permission in the past.

Interesting article that appeared in the Wall Street Journal about many parents bending their own rules with their children and teenagers, at least in the beginning of the shelter at home orders, precisely because entertainment seemed to be something like comfort food. It was something that could be done in order to fill the time. But clearly, the Christian worldview understands there are limitations to entertainment. This reminds us of Neil Postman, we've cited often on The Briefing, whose book a full generation ago entitled *Amusing Ourselves To Death* indicated the fact that Americans in the midst of all kinds of genuine problems were finding escapism in entertainment, which was also basically trivializing the American mind. But Neil Postman was of course writing in the heyday of broadcast television. He could not have imagined the hunger for, the market for, and the availability of entertainment in the year 2020. He also did not see the age in which entertainment devices could be carried in the palm or in the pocket, where the viewing process would become ever more individualistic.

Amanda Hess, writing also at the New York Times, wrote about the fact that we are increasingly surrendering to these devices. As she writes, "In fact, a slavish devotion to our devices has come to feel like a practical necessity." She continues, "Social media platforms have been unexpectedly reliable in spreading information about the pandemic and in a time of social isolation, they have spontaneously delivered on their promise of community connectivity." She then writes this: "But they have also ensnared our attention with an alarming grip. The virus has clarified the dark bargain of these devices. We look to them to protect our bodies and soothe our nerves and in return, we hand over our minds."

That's one of those statements in the mainstream media that really does deserve repeating. As she writes, there's a bargain that human beings have now arranged with these

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electronic devices. "We look to them to protect our bodies and soothe our nerves and in return, we hand over our minds." There's a sense in which we recognize that is exactly right. The bargain we make with those devices is that to some degree greater or lesser, greater if we are honest, we are turning over our minds.

## **PART II**

ABC's 'Modern Family' Airs Its Final Episode Tonight: A Media Milestone Deserving of Christian Attention and Analysis

But then next, this takes us to a media milestone that certainly deserves very close Christian attention. I refer to the fact that tonight on ABC will be broadcast the very last episode of the series Modern Family. After 11 years and 250 episodes, the entire series comes tonight to an end. The final program is going to be preceded by a retrospective, but there is no doubt that by now most Americans have at least some knowledge of Modern Family, the television program, and it's important for us to recognize how that program entitled Modern Family has indeed indicated changes and even driven changes in the modern family as we know it in the United States of America.

Bill Keveney, media reporter for USA Today, noted yesterday the fact that this development, this last episode of modern family, is indeed a milestone. He cited Steven Levitan and Christopher Lloyd, the co-creators of the series, as saying that they intended the series to reflect "the changing make-up of families and the relationships they enjoyed." The co-creators had worked on other family based programs before, adult siblings in Frazier and Wings and an older father in Frazier and the program Just Shoot Me. Levitan said, "Once we came up with this notion of how families have changed, that brought us right to a gay couple." He said, "I was interested in telling a story that felt like my family, the way lives are changing with technology and social media." He then said, "We got very lucky in casting some excellent actors and we were fortunate to bring on a lot of very senior writers after the 2008 writers' strike." The article also cited Ed O'Neill, the actor who plays the character Jay, who said, "Like every hit show, I always think it has to be the timing, what the country wants to see at a certain time."

Well, here is where we look at the relationship between Hollywood and America and come to understand that it's a two-way relationship, but all the product and messaging is sent by Hollywood, not by the viewership. So let's think about that statement made by the actor Ed O'Neill. He said that the success of Modern Family had a good deal to do with timing, "what the country wants to see at a certain time." But it wasn't clear at all back in 2009 when Modern Family began that it was a storyline that Americans wanted to see. Back in 2009, that was still four years before even the Windsor decision about same sex marriage in 2013 not to mention the Obergefell decision legalizing same sex marriage that came in 2015. So the program emerged six years before the legalization of same sex marriage by action of the Supreme Court nationwide. When Cam and Mitchell, the gay couple featured on Modern Family as a married couple, when they were introduced, the vast majority of Americans said survey after survey poll after poll that they did not believe that same sex relationships were on a moral balance with heterosexual marriage, nor did they believe that same sex marriage should be legalized. But as we've noted within a seven year window, all of that changed and you can look at that seven-year window basically from the turn of the decade to about the end of the decade. Somewhere in there, in a seven-year period, the polling indicates that Americans shifted from a majority believing that same sex marriage should not be legalized to almost the same exact majority saying that same sex marriage should be legalized. All of this requires the huge question. How could that happen? How could such a moral transformation take place in such a short amount of time? Furthermore, you're looking at public opinion of a public that was basically the very same public separated only by seven years of experience. Well, you can't turn to the television program, Modern Family, and say we're going to credit or blame that

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program for having such a massive transformative effect on American morality but the fact is it probably did have more effect than we would like to think.

This is where Christians had better think very hard, very carefully. For example, in my book on these issues entitled *We Cannot Be Silent* published in 2017, I cited another USA Today article, this one by Marco de la Cava that was published at the end of June in 2013, just days after the Supreme Court had handed down the Windsor decision which struck down the federal Defense of Marriage act. De la Cava wrote, "Not long after the Supreme Court ruled in favor of gay marriage, Wednesday," so it was Wednesday of that very week, "Ellen DeGeneres," says de la Cava, "tweeted a simple congratulations to everyone and I mean everyone," she said, but de la Cava rightly says she could have added, "in Hollywood." The memorable headline of this article in USA Today was this, "Hollywood: Gay Marriage's Best Man." It was put differently in other versions of the headline, but it all came down to the fact that Hollywood deserved credit as being the best man at the legalization of same sex marriage. De la Cava asked the question, how could this happen? He writes, "The nation's pop culture machine has for decades now chipped away at once taboo topic so as to render it utterly familiar. Whether it's the antics of two gay men in the hit ABC comedy *Modern Family* or the brazen but heartfelt sexuality on display in HBO's *Behind The Candelabra*, same sex unions seem, at least on screen and on stage, to be an entrenched part of our federal union." Dustin Lance Black, identified as a 2009 Oscar winner, said, "Storytelling is the only way to dispel myths. Hollywood has had a rather important role in that. We are the world's storytellers." Well, that's an amazing statement and this milestone with the last episode of *Modern Family* is a good time for Christians to consider just how true these claims actually turn out to be. Here you have a screenwriter who won his Oscar for the film *Milk*, which was about San Francisco gay rights advocate Harvey Milk. He's the one who said that we are the world's storytellers, and to the extent that Hollywood is the world's storytellers, we need to consider the fact that that is a very, very powerful role that we've basically handed to Hollywood and it is a very, very powerful role that Hollywood is using and extending for a particular purpose with a particular agenda.

The interesting thing about this article published all the way back in 2013, almost seven years ago, is that Hollywood was not only bragging about its power and influence but was seeking to demonstrate it concretely through programs such as *Modern Family*, which at that point had only been around for less than four years. It is worth noting that the *Modern Family* program, by its very title, again, *Modern Family*, was insinuating that the family now is something different than the family had been in the past. And it was not only about normalizing a same sex couple and their adopted child as a family, it was also about looking at three different families all linked together in an extended family and only one of those families was a traditional two parent, husband and wife home, with the children living in the home. Otherwise, it was a post dual divorce blended family, as they are known, or it was the same sex couple and the household that they had established.

But as we're thinking about the same sex couple, Cam and Mitchell, in the program, we need to note not only that they were presented as very much in a same sex relationship, but they were also presented as very winsome people. They were very positive people. They were fun to watch on television. The acting was good, the writing was excellent, the storytelling was compelling. They were very interesting to watch. One of the purposes in that precise kind of portrayal, remember that the program began before the normalization or legalization of same sex marriage nationwide, they were particularly constructed as characters so as to normalize the idea of a same sex couple, two men married to one another, on television first and in real life second.

Steven Levitan, the co-creator of the program, said, "We've heard from many gay people and families of gay people that watching *Modern Family* has opened the door to those conversations and made parents more accepting of their gay children. Making Mitch and Cam's trials so normal," said Levitan, "helps change minds and hearts." So again, here you have the co-creator of the program telling us right up front, back in 2013, that the goal of the

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program was to change minds and hearts. And undoubtedly it did. It certainly had some role in that transformation.

Even two years before that article in which Hollywood was being bragged about as the best man at the same sex wedding, Bruce Feiler wrote an article at the New York Times with the headline, "What Modern Family Says about Modern Families." At that point, by the way, the show had already garnered six Emmys. It would eventually win at least 22 including outstanding comedy series. It won one of those Emmy's five years in a row. Feiler then ask the question, what does modern family say about modern families? He writes then, "From the beginning, the creators, Steve Levitan and Christopher Lloyd, conceived their show around a newfangled family tree. Jay Pritchett, the patriarch, his Colombian trophy wife, Gloria and their son Manny; Jay's grown son Mitchell, his partner Cam and their adopted Vietnamese daughter; Jay's high-strung daughter Claire, her goofball husband Phil and their three suburban children."

But one of the most interesting things to consider as we're understanding the historical role of the program, Modern Family—again, it began in 2009 it ends tonight—one of the things to understand is that at least some of the early controversy about the program had indeed to do with the two men who were in a same sex relationship. But the interesting thing is that many in what would become known as the LGBTQ community accused the program of a certain form of homophobia by making them appear to be so apparently traditionalist and normal. In other words, one of the interesting criticisms came from the gay rights community arguing that Cam and Mitchell were not gay enough. They were not typical or indicative of the LGBTQ experience but of course, even using those letters, let me just remind you that no one would really have known what LGBTQ meant in 2009 and the T was hardly even on the horizon. But before leaving this development, the last episode of Modern Family and its meaning, we need to consider a couple of other dimensions that might have escaped notice. One of them is the fact that the program came just as the ubiquity of these electronic devices and the development of social media began to mushroom in American culture. It was one of the first programs to break one of Hollywood's rules, which was that no one on a television program was supposed to be watching anything. But instead, the characters on Modern Family were often watching something. They were often portrayed with smartphone in hand or Phil's iPad. They were shown being entertained and in a new way, in a solitary way unlike previous generations of the American family that had to gather around that television set communally. As Bruce Feiler wrote all the way back almost a decade ago, "The characters in Modern Family are so immersed in technology that nearly every scene is refracted through a digital funhouse, an iPad screen, a cell phone camera, a baby monitor, a YouTube video. Characters," he wrote, "spend half their time glancing past one another rather than communicating directly." That was intended to be both humorous and ironic in Modern Family in 2009 but given the changes in America, they turned out not to be so ironic after all but rather incredibly predictive, even prophetic.

### **PART III**

Say Goodbye to Television as You Knew It: The Transformation of America's Media Ecology

But there's still two other dimensions that are of interest here. One of them has to do with the fact that Modern Family ending tonight almost assuredly brings an end to an entire industry. That was the broadcast sitcom, because so much of the audience is no longer watching broadcast television. When Modern Family emerged so popularly, it in many ways rescued the channel ABC from its doldrums. It then led to spinoffs and further energy for ABC and it became a massive moneymaker for ABC. And as the program ends tonight, it brings to an end the idea of the big budget ensemble sitcom as a broadcast entity.

One of the things to recognize is that Modern Family was fabulously expensive. Networks could do that when they could be guaranteed a sizable audience and the advertising

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revenue that would come. But in the day of all these technological devices, streaming entertainment, and individual choice, it's not going to be a winning economic proposition to try to spend that much money on any one program. The world has changed so much that no program like that, especially on broadcast television, is going to attract that much advertising revenue. That age is over. In one sense, it ends tonight.

A couple of other issues. One of them has to do with breaking the fourth wall. Modern Family was one of the first programs in which the actors would routinely at some point turn to the audience and refer to the audience, specifically address the audience, not just each other. Now, there's some very interesting worldview analysis just about this point. Why would it be called breaking the fourth wall? Well, it has to do with even ancient drama and the scenery for that drama. On a stage, you could have three walls but not four. You could look into a house, but that required one wall to be missing. You could have a back wall and two side walls looking into a house, but you couldn't have the front wall, otherwise the audience wouldn't be able to see the drama. Breaking the fourth wall, or as the actors would say, breaking the proscenium, meant speaking to the audience directly.

Why would that be important from worldview analysis? It is because once the actors address the audience, the audience becomes a part of the story. Early in the 20th century, this became an innovation on the stage where, for example, in the dramatic presentation of Peter Pan, Peter Pan turned at one point to the audience and asked them to applaud if they wanted to save Tinkerbell. Once the audience is a part of the story, there's a certain kind of wink and nod and that's exactly what was going on in Modern Family. Breaking that fourth wall in which the actors would address the audience was a way of saying, "This is about our families, but let's be real. It's about your family as well."

The most famous French playwright of all times, Molière, he also thought about this convention of breaking the fourth wall, but the classic dramatist understood that it would have to be done extremely sparingly. That's not the case with Modern Family, in which every episode had at least one major scene in which the actors broke that fourth wall. Molière understood that that would imply a certain form of intimacy, which when you think about it is exactly what the producers of Modern Family intended to imply.

#### **PART IV**

Every Television Family Runs Out of Story: Not So in a Real Family Marked by Real Faithfulness  
But as we bring The Briefing to a close today, one final issue, it's important to recognize that one of the reasons that Modern Family comes to an end tonight is that they ran out of storyline. What does that tell us? It tells us that no family, real or invented, no three families put together in an extended family, no family is this interesting to watch all the time from the outside. From the outside, we tire of watching almost everyone who becomes extremely predictable. The parents' irritations aren't that funny anymore, the kids aren't that cute anymore, and the storylines aren't that revolutionary or interesting anymore. That's one of the reasons that every major dramatic program, whether it's a sitcom or otherwise, has to come to an end, especially when it has to do with the family—ancient, medieval, or modern.

What does this tell us for Christians? It tells us that God intended family life not to be lived from the outside, but from the inside, and that the strength of family life doesn't depend upon moments of absolute exhilarating drama, nothing even that might be interesting to outsiders. The reality of God's gift of the family, the family based in the covenant marriage of a mother and father and their children, extended family, yes—he awesome power of that family is understood from the inside out, not from the outside in. And it's based upon absolute unconditional commitment when the storyline is interesting and perhaps even more importantly, when it's not.

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## How To Have a Personal Revival

By **A. W. Tozer** (b. 1897 - d. 1963)

Any Christian who desires to may at any time experience a radical spiritual renaissance, and this altogether independent of the attitude of his fellow Christians.

The important question now is, How? Well, here are some suggestions which anyone can follow and which, I am convinced, will result in a wonderfully improved Christian life.

**1. Get thoroughly dissatisfied with yourself.** Complacency is the deadly enemy of spiritual progress. The contented soul is the stagnant soul. When speaking of earthly goods Paul could say, *"for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content"* (Philippians 4:11); but when referring to his spiritual life he testified, *"I press toward the mark"* (3:14). *"Thou stir up the gift of God, which is in thee"* (2 Timothy 1:6).

**2. Set your face like a flint toward a sweeping transformation of your life.** Timid experimenters are tagged for failure before they start. We must throw our whole soul into our desire for God. *"The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force"* (Matthew 11:12).

**3. Put yourself in the way of the blessing.** It is a mistake to look for grace to visit us as a kind of benign magic, or to expect God's help to come as a windfall apart from conditions known and met. There are plainly marked paths which lead straight to the green pastures; let us walk in them. To desire revival, for instance, and at the same time to neglect prayer and devotion is to wish one way and walk another.

**4. Do a thorough job of repenting.** Do not hurry to get it over with. Hasty repentance means shallow spiritual experience and lack of certainty in the whole life. Let godly sorrow do her healing work. Until we allow the consciousness of sin to wound us, we will never develop a fear of evil. It is our wretched habit of tolerating sin that keeps us in our half-dead condition.

**5. Make restitution whenever possible.** If you owe a debt, pay it, or at least have a frank understanding with your creditor about your intention to pay, so your honesty will be above question. If you have quarreled with anyone, go as far as you can in an effort to achieve reconciliation. As fully as possible make the crooked things straight.

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**6. Bring your life into accord with the Sermon on the Mount** and such other New Testament Scriptures as are designed to instruct us in the way of righteousness. An honest man with an open Bible and a pad and pencil is sure to find out what is wrong with him very quickly. I recommend that the self-examination be made on our knees, rising to obey God's commandments as they are revealed to us from the Word. There is nothing romantic or colorful about this plain, downright way of dealing with ourselves, but it gets the work done. Isaac's workmen did not look like heroic figures as they dug in the valley, but they got the wells open, and that was what they had set out to do.

**7. Be serious-minded.** You can well afford to see fewer comedy shows on TV. Unless you break away from the funny boys, every spiritual impression will continue to be lost to your heart, and that right in your own living room. The people of the world used to go to the movies to escape serious thinking about God and religion. You would not join them there, but you now **enjoy spiritual communion with them in your own home.** The devil's ideals, moral standards and mental attitudes **are being accepted by you without your knowing it.** And you wonder why you can make no progress in your Christian life. Your interior climate is not favorable to the growth of spiritual graces. There must be a radical change in **your habits** or there **will not be any permanent improvement** in your interior life.

**[Editor's Comment:** This was written in the 1950's when TV was just getting firmly rooted in all American homes. After 70 years of review, the evidence is irrefutable. The greatest moral decline and victory of the devil has been the near total captivity of this country by his worldview gained through electronic warfare. It is this editor's firm opinion that it is too late to try and "manage" TV / Media control in our homes. This necessitates "radical surgery" to save us. The only safe avenue open to us is to totally remove TV / Movies / Unrestricted Internet access from our homes and lives. It is poison to the mind, especially of our children and grandchildren who are being taught, image by image, an anti-God worldview and belief system. These are, indeed, very perilous times. The question is very real, "Is the patient too infected with this poison, to be saved at all? Is it too late, will even this radical surgery save them?]

**[2 Chronicles 15:7** But you, be strong and do not let your hands be weak, for your work shall be rewarded!" **8** And when Asa heard these words and the prophecy of Oded the prophet, he took courage, and **removed the abominable idols** from all the land of Judah and Benjamin and from the cities which he had taken in the mountains of Ephraim; and he restored the altar of the Lord that was before the vestibule of the Lord. **9** Then he gathered all Judah and Benjamin, and those who dwelt with them from Ephraim, Manasseh, and Simeon, for they came over to him in great numbers from Israel when they saw that the Lord his God was with him].

Jon Hileman, editor].

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**8. Deliberately narrow your interests.** The jack-of-all-trades is the master of none. The Christian life requires that we be specialists. Too many projects use up time and energy without bringing us nearer to God. If you will narrow your interests, God will enlarge your heart. "Jesus only" seems to the unconverted man to be the motto of death, but a great company of happy men and women can testify that it became to them a way into a world infinitely wider and richer than anything they had ever known before. Christ is the essence of all wisdom, beauty and virtue. To know Him in growing intimacy is to increase in appreciation of all things good and beautiful. The mansions of the heart will become larger when their doors are thrown open to Christ and closed against the world and sin. Try it.

**9. Begin to witness.** Find something to do for God and your fellow men. Refuse to rust out. Make yourself available to your pastor and do anything you are asked to do. Do not insist upon a place of leadership. Learn to obey. Take the low place until such time as God sees fit to set you in a higher one. Back your new intentions with your money and your gifts, such as they are.

**10. Have faith in God.** Begin to expect. Look up toward the throne where your Advocate sits at the right hand of God. All heaven is on your side. God will not disappoint you. If you will follow these suggestions you will most surely experience revival in your own heart. And who can tell how far it may spread? God knows how **desperately** the church needs a spiritual resurrection. And it can only come through the revived individual.

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Jonah Preaches at Nineveh

Jonah 3

1 Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah the second time, saying, 2 *"Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and preach to it the message that I tell you."* 3 So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the Lord.

Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, a three-day journey in extent. 4 And Jonah began to enter the city on the first day's walk.

Then he cried out and said, *"Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!"*

*God* saw their works, that they turned from their evil way;

*. . God relented from the disaster . .*

*. . and He did not do it.*

The People of Nineveh Believe

5 So the people of Nineveh believed God, proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest to the least of them.

6 Then word came to the king of Nineveh; and he arose from his throne and laid aside his robe, covered himself with sackcloth and sat in ashes. 7 And he caused it to be proclaimed and published throughout Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles, saying,

Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything; do not let them eat, or drink water. 8 But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily to God; yes, let every one turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands.

9 Who can tell if God will turn and relent, and turn away from His fierce anger, so that we may not perish?

10 Then God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way;

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and God relented from the disaster that He had said He would bring upon them, and He did not do it.

To the Church in Laodicea  
Revelation 3:14-22

“And to the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write,  
‘These things says the Amen, the Faithful and  
True Witness, the Beginning of the creation  
of God: “I know your works, that you are  
neither cold nor hot. I could wish you  
were cold or hot.

”I stand at the door and knock”

*. . will you let Jesus in?*

So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth.

Because you say,

I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing’—and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked—

I counsel you

to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, *that* the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see.

As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent. Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me.

To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.

“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

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*"Lord Jesus Christ, up until this very moment, all of my life has been completely wrapped up in 'me' . . . my wants, my desires, my will, my way, my timing.*

*I now see that all that produced was sin. I have offended You, Almighty God, and harmed others by my self-centeredness.*

*I am broken-hearted and devastated by the truth that I have withheld from You what is rightfully Yours, all that I am and all that You have placed in my hands.*

*I now understand that everything belongs to You for Your control and not for my control.*

*I have rebelled against Your will and have chosen to take my own way to my hurt and to the hurt of those around me.*

*I solemnly choose to let go of everything in my life and give all completely to You, the rightful Sovereign Owner.*

*My Prayer, expressing my desire to say "Yes"  
.. to Jesus when he knocked on the door of my heart!*

*Would You please draw me now to Yourself,  
forgive me and give me Your life?*

*Please send the Holy Spirit to give me the promised  
new birth and seal me as Your very own  
purchased possession for all eternity.*

*Please give me Your supernatural joy and peace which  
You promised and that confirms that You  
have accepted my plea.*

*Dear Lord and Savior, I have counted the cost,  
knowing this requires all of me forever.*

*I am so very thankful that You are always pleased to receive  
and accept any and every person that comes to You  
on these terms of absolute surrender of self.*

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