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TO A DISTRACTED WORLD: Spectators

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Colossians 3:1-4

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Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

Who here saw the Twin Towers go down?... Now, it's possible some of you were in New York, but were any of you there? Or were you in your living room? Or work? Or school? We have been trained to process information differently. There is a word for how you and I process information. It's not a new word, but it's affected every area of life: it's how teachers must teach, salesmen must sell, merchandise must be displayed, and all forms of communication must be shared: **That's Entertainment! Entertainment has impacted how we think, how we see ourselves, and how we live.** Entertainment has oozed its way into every inch of our lives. Even into our cars. How many of you have a form of *visual* media in your car? (I do too). And I admit I like it - on long trips, a lot!. But do you know what the problem with entertainment is? It's not just in the way it makes us think (which can be devastating); it's in the way it *keeps* us from thinking.

Today we take our bearings, most of our worldview, not from the Bible, not from the physical world, but from the little (and big!) screens around our house. TV, radio, and the internet have become our main source of perspective, providing a safe, convenient window onto our messy lives. "They" decide for us who is important, what to think about, even how to dress each day. We orient ourselves to the world through what we see and experience on the screen.

It didn't start out as mass media. It started in the 1800s with the telegraph and the camera. Those inventions moved us from focusing on words to focusing on images. The other product of the 1800s came from the industrial revolution: boredom. Rather than people's rhythm of life being work & relax, work & relax, factory work moved the rhythm to boredom & escape, boredom & escape. (It's not just factories. I was in a long check out line at Meijer's yesterday...) So, entertainment grew, as our society needed more and more distraction from life. In the 1900s came the cinema, then radio, then television, (and in the 1940's, the perfect chair: the La-Z-Boy). Interesting it's called "Reality TV." The reality is...

- Our homes are built around it: Entertainment centers, large screen TVs, family rooms become nothing more than multimedia entertainment rooms.
- Our schedules are built around it: Monday Night Football. The Apprentice. ER. 24 Hours. CSI. Even reruns!
- Our mealtimes are planned around it: How many of us who call our kids to dinner (or anywhere) wait until *after* the show they're watching is over?

The average American watches over 4 hours per day. Here's a scary one: If you watched any shows this week, you spent more time with it, than the average dad spent face to face with his children in a week! (and that even means one ½ hour shows.) Freaky. That makes even the top 5 shows: C-S-I: Crime Scene Investigation, 60 Minutes, Monday Night Football, Law & Order: Criminal Intent, and Everybody Loves Raymond seem less innocent than we thought at first.)

Entertainment comes from 2 French words that mean "to hold between". We are between active engagement and complete uninvolvedness. We're thinking, but we're not. We're amused, and that's about it. And it's basically private: Have you ever tried to start a meaningful conversation while someone was watching TV? (*When was the last time you saw an actor in mid-movie say to the camera "Listen, we're just gonna take a break up here and stop the action. Why*

don't you guys just turn your chairs, face each other, and talk among yourselves?) Multimedia also shifts our minds into low gear, a passive mode. The message from it all? All we need to do is be spectators, watching without getting involved.

(Remember, I'm not even talking about WHAT the junk is that we're watching on TV or surfing the internet for! Even with the good stuff – we're just watching...spectating.)

Have you ever thought about what all this media does to us?! It turns us into spuds.

First, it distracts us from deeper thoughts. Billions of dollars are spent on analyzing us to see what we want. And the screens never give us a chance to get ahead of it. TV and now websites will do anything to keep us fixed on the screen. Part of the reason multimedia evolved into multiple plots, new camera angles, advanced soundtracks, and liquid television, (where the camera moves – a lot) is to *keep* us hooked. We have let slip our ability to think - clearly, deeply, intentionally, or daringly. We've lost the knack for personal reflection or even conversation. It takes away a piece of our souls. It's easier just to escape.

Second, it makes us expect entertainment in all of life. Let's face it: much of what's on TV is so good, that ordinary life feels a bit boring. We *need* to be swept along. We like and want the excitement, unceasing motion, the noise, twists, and turns. It's a great set of earplugs. No wonder it's so hard to turn off! But it creates pressure on any one and everyone to vie for my attention.

Now I'm not advocating a TV burning at 3:00 today. There's nothing wrong with a little. But research shows we often flip the TV on when we have nothing else to do, or we're bored, or lonely, or depressed.

Third, it fosters an artificial view of life. It's fiction. Not only fiction, but it doesn't square well with life from God's perspective. One writer described "TV's view of God is like Jack Benny: a slightly eccentric, amusing old man who used to show up on TV from time to time, but no longer, because he passed away a few years back." On TV, we are accountable to no one. There's no thought of sin (only failure), of commitment (only getting needs met), of death (only the present), of duty (only opportunity). Only our self and our needs and desires loom large. Little else exists. Happiness has nothing to do with finding fulfillment in God's acceptance of us. It's mostly about material accumulation and how good you look: prestige and products. Our worth is determined by fame and fortune. TV basically invites us to find happiness secondhand through people who seem to have it all.

And if you feel it, please know that I feel it too, especially the dad-quote. I can't even think about the good I could do doing with all the extra time I could have. Do I have your attention? Nothing fancy. This isn't an infomercial for God. But **hear the good news: God has a much bigger plan for His Ultimate Reality** – and it includes you. It's far bigger than the biggest screen you could fit in your house. You don't have to live second hand. You can experience life and God. *Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.*

I want the rest of my life to be **Moving from Reality TV to God's Ultimate Reality**. Here's how you move from the oxymoron of Reality TV to God's Ultimate Reality: **Adjust your Antenna**. (Kids today are like "huh?") **Realize God is absent in 99% of what you watch, though evidence of the quest for God is everywhere**.

But for you and your life – allow God, the ultimate reality, to define your life. Not Bart Simpson. Or Paige Davis. Or Blockbuster. It's so easy to allow all the readily available things to influence what you think. So instead, "*set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.*" If you're serious about living this new resurrection life with Christ, act like it. Pursue the things over which Christ presides. Don't shuffle along, eyes glued to the screen, absorbed in the things right in front of you. Look up, be alert to what is going on around Christ – that's where the action is. See things from his perspective.

Your old life is dead. Your new life, which is your real life – even though invisible to spectators – is with Christ in God. He is your life. When Christ (your real life, remember) shows up again on this earth, you'll show up, too – the real you, the glorious you. Meanwhile, be content with obscurity, like Christ.

No matter what your feelings are telling you, you are not obscure to God. No matter what other people are telling you, you are not obscure to God! God is viewing you. God is always tuned in to your life. And he doesn't watch you "from a distance." He passionately desires to be a part of things. You are not obscure to God. And how He views you and how you view Him are the only things that matter. If your focal point is something other than God, the center of the universe, you're going to be stuck in your old life, not the new one He's promised you through Christ. Are you getting this message from any other source? Probably not from a screen. Remember – the media is fiction.

Jesus offers life, not escape from life. Don't settle for passive distraction, being just a spectator. God is calling you into the game! Go for the full life that God has offered. Jesus himself said "*I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.*" John 10:10. Abundant life! God calls us to embrace reality, not shrink from it. TV says "I have come to take you out of life." Jesus says "I have come to give you full life and to redeem your life! TV says I can pull you out of the emptiness of ordinary life. Jesus says follow me and I can help you invest your daily life with meaning and purpose."

The message of Christianity is this: Life is only genuinely satisfying and fulfilling when it is lived for God, because God made us to live for him. NLT Ephesians 2:10 "*For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so that we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.*" Proverbs says "*It's God's purpose that prevails.*" God never created us to be only spectators. We were planned for God's pleasure, created to become like Christ, formed for his family, shaped for service to others, and made for a mission. *That's* God's game plan. None of it is detached spectating, although that's the perception isn't it?) And we buy in. And sometimes it's been too true. The church hasn't helped. But reality is God has created us solely for the good things he planned. Doing anything short of that means we are not doing the very thing we were made to do.

God's Ultimate Reality moves us to real worship. Your life can be worship. But when God is not at the center of our lives, it means we are. No wonder we feel shallow, bored, and disconnected. After all, you and I make great people, but lousy gods. No wonder we want to escape our lives! If I was my own god I'd want to escape my life too. But hear this: escape, second-hand living, and fantasy is not salvation. Salvation involves freeing us from sin, growing to be like Christ, and living out God's image of creativity and transformation.

The Good News Brings You Complete Coverage. Jesus doesn't remove us from life. He IS life. He redeems life. He doesn't offer us a life free from hardship. He promises to bring good out of the hardships we face. Romans 8:28 "*All things work together for good for those that love the Lord.*" He offers us forgiveness, healing, and a new life. And because God is crazy about us, (one of our core values), He redeems it all – our boredom, our fears, our pain, our loss, our work, our struggles. He turns them into something precious. One of our prayer songs says: "Jesus makes beautiful, the things in my life."

Ultimate Reality moves me to face the tough things, not avoid them. TV says run. But God says "My promise is to redeem your hardships. Share them with me, and experience these two things: deeper trust in Me, and My strength in your life. "*Count it all joy when you face various trials, because the testing of your faith produces endurance.*"

Lights, No Camera, and Action! The Ultimate Reality of a Christian is active, a leap into the adventure God puts before us, laying hold of the life God offers. It's not 144 channels of the same bland stuff that leaves you feeling empty. It contains mystery. Spirituality. Connection. Even if your main ministry is prayer. To the world, it looks like torture. But to the believer, prayer can be an adventure, sometimes even a battle.

Tune in for the Face off. You live face to face. Ultimate Reality calls me to authentic relationships. We go from isolation to community. God deals with us individually, but he doesn't allow us to walk alone. So take off your headphones, ear plugs, and personal DVD players. We are now a member of His body, joined together in Christ. That's why you need to join a small group. Try Discipleship 201 next week. Get to know each other.

The Extreme Makeover: Ultimate Reality forms the image of Christ in us. When we get sucked in to living as a spectator of entertainment, spending hours and hours of uncritical TV watching, surfing, or video game playing, it can't help but be counter productive to forming the image of Christ in us. Paul coaches us to "*Pursue the things over which Christ presides. Don't shuffle along, eyes to the ground, absorbed in the things right in front of you. Look up, be alert to what is going on around Christ – that's where the action is. See things from his perspective.*"

Philippians 4:8 *“Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable-- if anything is excellent or praiseworthy-- think about such things.”* That’s hard to do when, for 4 hours a night (or day), we fill our minds with whatever is suggestive, whatever is graphic, whatever is distracting, whatever is on. Realize we’re being set up to be spectators. Don’t live life in escape mode. Don’t think God wants you to experience happiness second-hand. You can claim his abundant life right now. Let His strength move you; save you; **Maybe God has opened your eyes this morning**