

Amusing Ourselves to Death

We are amusing ourselves to death.

The phrase entered the American lexicon 34 years ago with Neil Postman's book, *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, critiquing the media. Yet here we are decades later, and culture is now *obsessed* with entertainment. For too many of us, entertainment rules our lives.

- Smartphones and tablets make it easy to watch shows, movies, sports events anywhere. Standing in the checkout line at the grocery store? Not a problem. I've got my music or show playing in my headphones.
- The biggest crime in America is to be bored. So we've got something playing constantly to amuse us. One of the big features in mini-vans is the rear seat entertainment system built into the front seat headrests. When my sons were growing up, we actually had to talk to each other in the van (until they became teenagers and then they slept constantly in the back seat). Now kids can entertain themselves.
- The average amount of time a person spends playing video games is two hours—every day.
- We even want our news to entertain us. The most popular news outlet for young adults is The Daily Show on Comedy Central. They want to be entertained while digesting the news.



OK. let's see a show of hands. How many of us have the TV on constantly when we're at home? We play it during breakfast. We have timers on the TVs so they will turn themselves off so we can fall asleep to the TV. And can I have a show of hands for how many TVs you have in your home? 2? 3? more?

Let me pause and tell you I am not opposed to entertainment. I love movies. I have a degree in TV and film. I play games on my iPad. And my house has two large flat-screen TVs. (Here's the embarrassing part: we have two more large flat-screen TVs stored in the attic.)

My concern is our *obsession* with entertainment. I have friends who go to the movies 2-3 times a week. I have friends who are constantly binge watching. I have friends

who, during college football, spend their entire Saturday parked in an easy chair watching game after game after game. And admittedly, I've made multiple trips to the theater in one week; I occasionally binge watch.

But I have to guard myself not to become obsessed with it.

For a time, King Solomon jumped into pleasure with both feet. He admitted it in Ecclesiastes:

I said to myself, "Come now, I will test you with pleasure to find out what is good." But that also proved to be meaningless. "Laughter," I said, "is madness. And what does pleasure accomplish?" I tried cheering myself with wine, and embracing folly—my mind still guiding me with wisdom. I wanted to see what was good for people to do under the heavens during the few days of their lives (Eccl. 2:1-3).

In the end, he found it futile. Empty.

Entertainment has its place in our lives—but not first place. It can be good to have a diversion after a busy day. It's good to laugh. It's good to enjoy being entertained, but we should never let it rule our lives.

- If my time being entertained is keeping me from Bible reading and prayer, it's ruling my life.
- If my time being entertained is keeping me from thoughtful meditation, it's ruling my life.
- If my time being entertained is taking away from time with my family, it's ruling my life.
- If my time being entertained is keeping me from serving through my church, it's ruling my life.
- If my time being entertained by media is keeping me from simple chores and responsibilities around the house, it's ruling my life.

What Jesus said about money could be said as a warning to us about entertainment: "No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and [entertainment]" (Matt. 6:24).

Join me in this: I want to serve Jesus. I want Him to be Lord of my life. I want Him to be *seen* as Lord of my life. There is no futility or emptiness in that.