



REALITY TV, THE FAST LANE AND PRISON

by Donald Sommer

If you have been a regular reader of *PMA Outreach* you've noticed that many of the articles in recent years have been observations of how negative developments in our culture contribute to the phenomenally high incarceration rates in the United States. The social trends going on for more than a generation in which our moral values and standards of behavior have steadily declined have left us with a population that has, to a large extent, abandoned civil behavior and adopted hedonistic, self-centered lifestyles. Many of these cultural changes sprung out of a dramatic shift away from a biblical worldview. Absolute truth was replaced by relativistic philosophies that redefined right and wrong, leaving people wandering through life without a moral compass and desperate to find purpose and meaning. In their search for significance and inner peace far too many within our society have sought relief through drugs and alcohol, leading to criminal behavior that often results in incarceration.

Another factor that seems to contribute to the general lack of inner peace and tranquility in modern life is the idea that our existence is supposed to be a continuous string of high adventure, adrenaline filled experiences that keep us in a constant state of thrill and excitement. This was brought to my attention by a recent commentary by Chuck Colson that was presented on his daily

Breakpoint radio broadcast. A transcript of that commentary can be found at the end of this article.

The popular media presents life as needing to be filled with constant action and drama for it to be truly fulfilling. The most popular musical genre among youth today, hip-hop / rap, is full of verbal descriptions of unbridled raw sexuality, violence and personal rage combined with a pounding beat which feeds the perception that life is only satisfying if it is full of nonstop, high-energy stimuli that tantalize our senses and release powerful unrestrained emotions.

In the same way, visual media such as television and movies create the illusion that life is nothing but adventure and intense drama. This goes beyond simply the typical action or science fiction movie in which one can clearly distinguish between fantasy and reality. Rather the ubiquitous presence of reality TV with seemingly ordinary people placed in unrealistic, exotic situations blurs the line that divides fact from fiction.

Another dangerous phenomenon is the idolization of the public personas of celebrities combined with an obsession to know all the tawdry details of their sad and pathetic personal lives. It seems to leave many with the idea that a glamorous and exciting life includes a necessity for dysfunctional personal drama and self-destructive behavior.

Furthermore, the ability for modern Americans to escape the real world by immersion in parallel virtual lives through video games and online environments perpetuates the deception that thrill seeking and excitement



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KAREN'S KORNER

"Oh, how He loves us..." keeps echoing through my mind. I was privileged to attend a Beth Moore seminar at which she was there in person. I left the seminar energized and challenged because the topic could not have been any more appropriate for me personally. She spoke about three directives from the Word of God; *Stop, Yield and Go*.

STOP - Understanding God is truly with us, no matter what, brings glory to God and not to ourselves. We are to stop sinning before it becomes worse (1 Cor. 15:34). Life is full of choices. I need to stop doubting and believe God for what He says in His Word. Whenever God wants us to stop something it is because He wants to replace it with something else, something better.

Sometimes I've felt as if God has stopped working in my life. But I discovered God has just repositioned me. I have made, and continue to make a difference in other people's lives. Beth's statement was, "Rarely with milk and honey will we see signs and wonders. But when we go through the seasons of life we become the signs and wonders in other people's lives." God never stops doing His good



work. We have to live by faith not by sight.

YIELD - After we stop we need to yield our willingness to God. Let's face it; we live in a narcissistic society. Even in our "Christian circles" we can become so self-focused that we can de-friend anyone at any time and feel it is okay. It is a part of our excessive admiration of ourselves. No wonder the unchurched and de-churched see no difference between Christians and non-Christians.

James 3:17 talks about the wisdom of God and yielding to others. But many times it seems we don't want relationships to work. We need to exercise self-discipline with people. Gentleness is needed in the place of authority. God calls us to yield so someone else can go on. It's not easy to yield. But when someone is pushing us out of the way, we need to yield. Because God is for us we cannot lose when we willingly yield.

Jesus, Himself, yielded to those who desired to push Him out of the way. "Yielding up" means to forgive too. When we yield-up we take the position of "knees down and

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Reaching Out by Reaching In



Pat and Robert Kilgo using a BCF Lesson for personal devotions

Editor's Note: The Kilgo family, Pat, Michelle, Robert, Elizabeth, David and Anna, live near Atlanta, Georgia. Pat works as a teacher and researcher for Emory University. Recently the family has felt the Lord placing a burden for missionary service on their hearts. Pat has been using the BCF lessons to help give basic Bible instruction for his son, yet another way in which the lessons can be utilized.

Like many fathers, I am concerned about the negative impact that our society can have on my children. My oldest son is 12 years old and I have recently seen how the world's system is quietly starting to influence both his thinking and the way he relates to our family. Looking back to my own preteen years, I remember just how powerful the world's system was 25 years ago – it certainly is more powerful today! Because he is our oldest child, my wife and I don't have much experience in dealing with these issues but we know that the key to resisting the world's system lies in know-

ing God's Word.

To counteract these influences in their lives, we have our children actively involved in church and they attend Christian schools. Also, each evening we do a devotional study with our four children. Because of their wide age range (the youngest is 5 years old) it has become difficult to find devotional lessons that mutually benefit all of the children. My son has heard all of the children's Bible stories a dozen times and doesn't grow much from hearing them anymore.

Enter Tim and Judy Heath. Tim and Judy are missionary candidates through Things to Come Mission and are in the process of raising support to serve God in Malaysia. During a recent phone conversation they mentioned that they had mentored several couples using the PMA's Bible Correspondence Fellowship lessons that are available online. They

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THE SPANISH SIDE



This report comes from Arnie and Sally Selfors who direct the Spanish speaking ministry of Prison Mission Association. They live in Largo, Florida, and Arnie ministers weekly at the Pinellas County Jail to around 50 inmates.

Each week as we retrieve the mail from the post office, we not only receive many lessons returned to correct, but we spend hours reading and answering many letters that come to us. Let me give you an example:

"I just learned from a fellow prisoner about your ministry, and I would love to be included in the lessons you send out. Would it be possible for you to send them to me? I don't have a Bible, how could I get one? I am a Christian, but have failed my Lord, and now I need to get back into the study of His Word, and some of my fellow prisoners have told me about your lessons."

"I thank you for the lesson you sent me, which I am now returning. I am amazed that after my kind of behavior, the Lord would still hear my prayers and want me to be His child. I was thrilled with this lesson, and have a deep desire to renew my relationship with the Lord. Thank you for sending these lessons to me."

"Dear brothers in Christ. I am alone in this country, I have no one here who will even listen to me. Is there anyone there who would write a letter to me? I have made many foolish mistakes, and now am suffering for it. I know you people have Bible lessons that you send out. May I be put on your list? I would really appreciate it, but most of all, can someone write to me?" (Thankfully we were able to write to this man and encourage him.)

"Dear friends at EBB...(Spanish name for Bible Correspondence Fellowship), I have a definite prayer request, and know of no one to share it with. Will you pray for my family in Mexico? I have 3 children, and a wonderful wife, and they are now alone. I know they are suffering, for my wife is unable to work, and I have no parents, nor does she, to help in her physical needs. Will you please pray for my family?"

You see, these are continual requests, and by God's grace, we are not only able to pray for these dear souls, but share God's Word with them, in addition to writing them a short letter of encouragement. Will you not also pray with us for these many needs?

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suggested that I incorporate the lessons into my own ministry. I immediately thought of my son.

The next day I printed off the introductory lesson and he and I started working through one section per day, usually in about 15-20 minutes. One of us writes and one of us looks up verses and we alternate these jobs after each section. The lessons are written on a perfect level for him and he is grasping the truths quite well. In fact, after about one month of daily study he is "memorizing" Scripture without even realizing it. At times the lesson will direct us to a portion of Scripture that has been covered before and he will know what the verse says without even having to look it up. What a vast improvement over telling him the same stories from a children's book! He is learning so much truth and I have seen him apply it to his own life already in very real and tangible ways.

Having this devotional time with him has been beneficial in a number of ways. In addition to the learning, he and I are having quality time together. The importance of Bible study is being silently reinforced just by making it a daily priority. Last, but not least, I am learning a lot too!

I highly recommend using the PMA lessons for preteen children. They are fantastic and a great way to bond and grow in your Christian walk together.

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are natural and normal parts of ordinary existence.

Of course enthusiasm and high energy levels have always been a part of youthful behavior, but the need for life to be a continuous existential high seems to have become more intense in recent years. Moreover, it seems that living life on the edge, seeking for fulfillment in momentary endorphin saturated experiences is extending further and further into adulthood for many. Also we frequently see baby boomers in the midst of mid-life crisis attempting to restore excitement to life by behaving in much the same way as their adolescent grandchildren.

The problem arises when people are faced with the reality that our day to day existence primarily involves the commonplace business of earning a living, taking responsibility for our actions, paying bills, repeating routine activities and doing what needs to be done in order to maintain order and focus in life. However, when so many in our society have the attitude that excitement is an entitlement that they deserve simply for living, the disappointment can often be more than they are capable of dealing with. A population that is so psychologically ill equipped to deal with the mundane will seek to escape the ordinary and create a sense of elation through artificial means.

Some will find the feeling they are looking for in adventurous or thrill seeking activities, such as motorcycle riding, skiing, white water rafting, etc. For others, such wholesome and relatively benign pastimes are not enough. They may turn to riskier behaviors that

threaten their meaningful human relationships such as extramarital affairs, gambling, compulsive shopping, partying etc. For far too many in our society, the quickest and easiest way to create an intense feeling of exhilaration is through drugs or alcohol. With a quick pill, injection, snort or toke a person can create virtually any emotion one wishes to feel. It's so much simpler than going to the effort of creating an actual experience or developing a personal relationship which would give meaning and reality to the feeling.

A lesson which our culture needs to learn is that our lives don't need to be a constant series of high-intensity, mind-blowing events. Rather we need to find pleasure in the ordinary gifts of God that we find in everyday life. It's the lesson that the Apostle Paul spoke about when he told the Philippians that he had learned the secret of contentment in every situation (Philippians 4:12).

That lesson is something that the Lord had to teach me personally over a period of several years. As a young man I was anxious for adventure with a desire to journey into the unknown in order to feel the excitement that came with an action packed life. As a teenager I could hardly wait to break out from my very stable and ordinary middle-class American life with its predictable and mundane routines. To some degree it was that unsettled restlessness that drew me to commit my life to missionary service. Living in a foreign culture in which every day brought with it new and unfamiliar experiences had an exotic appeal that was very attractive to my curious and adven-

turesome personality. In fact, the life we lived as foreign missionaries did not disappoint me in that regard. It was new and different, full of interesting and stimulating events.

When it became necessary for our family to return to the U.S., moving into a typical American middle-class suburban lifestyle very similar to the one I sought so desperately to escape from as young person, I had to be taught about the importance of contentment with the circumstances in which the Lord places us. While the temptation of self-destructive behavior was never a problem for me, I did have to deal with overcoming feelings of disappointment, dissatisfaction and even depression. Over time, the Lord patiently impressed upon me the need to recognize the abundance of the blessings He had bestowed on me. Beside the unspeakable joy of eternal life and the blessing of being a child of God, I had been graciously given a wonderful loving family, the security to not worry about my next meal or where I would sleep at night, physical health and a clear mind. Eventually I was able to not only accept the situation in which I found myself but to truly appreciate an ordinary and routine life as a reminder of the graciousness of God's continual provision and care. Part of the process involved my ministry with inmates where I observed the devastation of those who were continually in search of the next euphoric high to ease their discontent and disappointment with their lives.

The need for personal contentment has implications beyond that of individual fulfillment, it

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contributes to the overall mental health of an entire culture. When God taught Paul how to be content in every situation, He did not mean we need to be satisfied with the status quo. Paul wrote those words while he was in prison. In other parts of the letter to the Philippians and his prison epistles Paul is clear that his desire was to be free and he would seek ways to accomplish that end. However, learning to accept our situation and find things in which to rejoice during any circumstance will be a key to learning peace and in turn experiencing healthier and happier lives. But that sense of tranquility will never come from the world which perpetuates dissatisfaction, but rather only through learning to soothe our troubled souls in the reality of God's love and care for us and resting in the abundance of His blessings.

The Romance of Domesticity

Taking Joy in the Ordinary
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Celebrities: We hear all the time about their money, lovers, homes, and jet-setting lifestyles. Yet they are among the unhappiest people on earth. Nothing seems to satisfy them for long. An article in *Touchstone* magazine hints at why this is so: They have lost any sense of wonder in the ordinary.

In a piece called "The Romance of Domesticity," philosopher Nathan Schlueter writes that to be human is to suffer the ravages of time, of change, of suffering, and ultimately, death. How we

respond to these experiences determines how happy we will be.

Christianity teaches us to see reality as it is. But many moderns live under the influence of what Schlueter calls "a dangerous heresy that twists both the truth and a good many lives." He says the heresy is Romanticism, by which he means "the impulse to escape, through passionate idealization and fancy, from the real world... of suffering and change," and biological limits.

Schlueter points to the French novel *Madame Bovary*, in which author Gustave Flaubert offers "the essential pattern" of this type of Romanticism. First, Schlueter writes, Flaubert "locates Romanticism in a *disordered imagination*." Flaubert understood the "connection between the imagination and desire, and the...power of art to shape the imagination." Reading the wrong kind of novels, Flaubert observes, shaped Emma Bovary's view of happiness, particularly in marriage.

A second aspect of the Romantic imagination is *itinerancy*. Emma Bovary, views her small-town life as deeply dull; she presses her husband to move elsewhere -Paris, for instance, where she is sure she will find happiness.

Consumerism is a third element of Romanticism, pandering, as it does, to the wish to constantly reinvent oneself. In *Madame Bovary*, consumerism takes the form of the merchant Lleureaux, who Schlueter writes, "profit[s] handsomely at every step of [Emma's] demise." But the consumerist promise-which today

includes not merely clothing and jewelry, but Botox and tummy tucks-is futile: These things can't re-make us; they can merely change us superficially.

A fourth feature of Romantic escapism is *adultery and promiscuity*. When Emma takes a lover, she believes that she will finally find true happiness. But in time, the affair becomes as stale as her marriage.

Romanticism is ultimately about *existential* escapism-"a revolt against... one's limits as an embodied soul and creature," Schlueter writes. And the end is ultimately unhappiness.

As humans made in God's image, we will always long for something better than this life: That of course is eternity with Him in Heaven. But we can find a measure of real satisfaction here on earth in the gifts and life that God has given us.

Schlueter suggests that we need to develop an imagination that "captures and reveals the extraordinary quality of ordinary life." We must learn the romance of domesticity: taking pleasure in the smell of baking bread, the sight of a sleeping baby, the sound of a fire crackling in the hearth, conversation with a friend.

So for the sake of our marriages, our relationships, and our spiritual lives, let's ignore the news about celebrities. Let's not imagine that somehow some *thing* will give us happiness. Instead, with grateful hearts, let's cultivate a sense of wonder and joy in the ordinary things of life.



Prison Mission Association
P O Box 2300
Port Orchard WA 98366-0690

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hands up.” We commit the situation into God’s hands, yielding to the wisdom of God. We don’t have to fear yielding, our work will be rewarded. One thing I have learned, there can be no forgiving and no healing without yielding. It is not easy to yield, but the greatest happiness comes when we yield to God who will bring us to the harvest He has prepared for us.

GO - After we stop and yield we must go. Every stop gets us to a go. It can’t be man’s go but a God kind of go. With God’s go the more we yield the more He fills. We can trust God. He will move us in the direction He wants.

We can then go in peace and in God’s power. I want what I do for God to count. We deal daily with men and women in prison and get the privilege of teaching God’s Word to them. These men and women get the idea of “stop, yield and go.” In John 8:11 Jesus told the woman at the well to “go and sin no more.” That is part of our message to those who have made bad decisions in life and are now in prison because of it.

We are blessed at PMA to have a great group of volunteers. We just added a new person last month to our volunteer staff. We’ve been in our new facility one year and we all love it! The organization we rent from is very happy to see our ministry in their building. We are not about buying new office “stuff.” We make do with what we have and feel blessed. Most of our money goes to paper, postage and taxes.

I’ve noticed many of our older supporters are dropping off because of age or lack of funds. We need to raise up new supporters. Please keep PMA in your prayers and possibly becoming a supporter if you are not already. We serve a big God.

by God’s grace,

Karen

Literature Needed

The PMA office sends thousands of pieces of Christian literature to inmates each year. Most of what is sent is supplied by churches and individuals. Ideally the material we send can fit in a 9”x6” envelope and is instructional, inspirational or devotional and biblically sound. If you have questions about whether material you have will be useful to PMA please contact Karen in the PMA office at 360-876-0918 or send email to pma@pmabcf.org
Literature can be mailed to PMA, PO Box 2300, Port Orchard, WA 98366