

Entertainment Media and the Good Life: An Analysis and a Christian Response

We are surrounded by persuasive stories from popular culture, where happiness is portrayed as the good life. Such media stories usually emphasize pleasure, image, possessions, experiences, and personal worldview explorations. These key values reflect that consumerism, materialism, and individualism are influential idols in our contemporary Western culture. At the same time, the media stories also express deep longings for true identity, real community, deep joy, and authentic freedom. This session will explore how we may respond appropriately to these strong idols and deep longings from the perspective of a holistic biblical worldview. Such a response has significant implications for our communication and our everyday life as Christ's disciples and witnesses. Case studies from popular media stories will be included in the session.

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I. INTRODUCTION

A. Setting the scene

1. Five impressions of happiness as the good life – from media stories
 - a. pleasure, image, possessions, experiences, and personal worldview explorations
2. Definitions of 'happiness' and 'the good life'
3. A biblical perspective on 'the good life'

B. A biblical perspective on cultural engagement

1. "The Acts 17 model"
 - a. identifying and utilizing points of contact and continuity
 - b. identifying and challenging points of tension and discontinuity

2. “Double listening – to the Word and the World” (John Stott)
3. “The process of contextualization” (Tim Keller)
4. “The dilemma pole and the diversion pole” (Os Guinness)
5. An integrated worldview approach inspired by James Sire.

II. IMAGES OF HAPPINESS IN MEDIA STORIES: POINTS OF CONTACT

A. Introducing the case studies

B. Exploring the case studies

1. Expressions of deep longings for true identity, real community, deep joy and authentic freedom
2. The open hand: Affirming deep longings – and the invitation to explore how a holistic biblical worldview fulfils these longings.

III. IMAGES OF HAPPINESS IN MEDIA STORIES: POINTS OF TENSION

A. Introducing the case studies

B. Exploring the case studies

1. Key values reflecting consumerism, materialism, and individualism as influential contemporary idols.
2. The closed fist: Challenging contemporary views / lifestyles of happiness and the underlying idolatry with the biblical Gospel.

IV. FINAL REFLECTIONS

A. Being equipped – as disciples and witnesses of Christ in a media-saturated world

B. Living authentically – as disciples and witnesses of Christ in a media-saturated world

V. Q & A / Discussion

Suggested Resources:

Brennhovd, Anne Solfrid. *Shame, Youth Culture, and the Gospel* (ELF 2017)
<https://foclonline.org/talk/shame-youth-culture-and-gospel>

Dahle, Margunn Serigstad. *Understanding the Tweens Media World* (ELF 2014)
<http://foclonline.org/talk/understanding-tweens-media-world>

Dahle, Margunn Serigstad. *Media Engagement in Youth Ministry: The Disney Universe as a Case Study* (ELF 2016) <https://foclonline.org/talk/media-engagement-youth-ministry-disney-universe-case-study>

Dahle, Margunn Serigstad. *Story and Meaning Making: A Multilevel Approach to Film in Faith Education* in Cloete, Anita (ed.) *Interdisciplinary Reflections on the Interplay between Religion, Film and Youth*. (Sun Press, 2019).

Harrison, Glynn. *The Big Ego Trip: Finding true significance in a culture of self-esteem* (InterVarsity Press, 2013).

Johnston, Robert K. et al. *Deep Focus: Film and Theology in Dialogue* (Baker Academic, 2019)

McGrath, Alister E. *Double Listening: John Stott on Cultural Translation and Apologetics*. The John Stott London Lecture 2014. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6XBmcAZl4mA>

Sire, James W. *Naming the Elephant: Worldview as a Concept* (IVP Books, 2015; 2nd ed.).

Strange, Daniel. *Plugged In: Connecting your Faith with What You Watch, Read, and Play* (The Good Book Company, 2019).

Turnau, Ted et al. *The Pop Culture Parent: Helping Kids Engage Their World for Christ* (New Growth Press, 2020).

Turner, Steve. *Popcultured: Thinking Christianly About Style, Media, and Entertainment* (IVP Books, 2013).

Vitz, Paul C. *Psychology as Religion: The Cult of Self-Worship* (Eerdmans, 1994).

Ward, Pete. *Celebrity Worship*. (Routledge, 2020).