



*All the media
you consume has
an effect on you.
Is your choice of
media edifying,
purposeful, and
inspiring?*

By Katherine Nelson

When Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were brought to King Nebuchadnezzar’s court, they were told to eat the king’s meat and drink the king’s wine. But they decided to eat pulse (a food made of grain) and drink water instead. After 10 days, “their countenances appeared fairer and fatter in flesh than all the children which did eat the portion of the king’s meat. . . . [And] God gave them knowledge and skill in all learning and wisdom: and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams” (Daniel 1:15, 17).

Although we often use this story to illustrate important principles about the Word of Wisdom and the food we *literally* consume, it teaches other principles about what we *figuratively* consume. This includes the media we use for entertainment—anything from fine arts, books, dance, and music to digital and social media. Just as Daniel and his friends made a conscious decision to avoid the lavish, heavy foods that would not have given them the nourishment they needed—and might have distracted them from their training in the king’s court—so we must be discerning in selecting wholesome entertainment (see D&C 25:10).

The following suggestions can help us choose which entertainment is worth our valuable time in this probationary state.



Avoid Light-Mindedness

We turn to entertainment for relief from daily cares. It can be a time to relax and share laughter and good discussion with family and friends.¹ The refreshment we feel from these activities comes from the influence of the Holy Ghost, whose fruits are “love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, [and] temperance” (Galatians 5:22–23). In order to feel refreshed after our recreation, we must choose entertainment that keeps us open to the promptings and healing power of the Holy Ghost.

To avoid losing the Holy Ghost’s companionship and harming our spirits, we are counseled not to “attend, view, or participate in anything that is vulgar, immoral, violent, or pornographic in any way.”² But sometimes media that seems void of immoral content can be just as harmful by distracting us from our purpose in life.

While wholesome entertainment can help us feel lighthearted, other forms of entertainment can lead us to become light-minded. In the Doctrine and Covenants the Lord commands us: “Cease from all your light speeches, from all laughter, from all your lustful desires, [and] from

all your pride and light-mindedness” (88:121). Some entertainment distracts us from the purpose of the plan of salvation by occupying our minds with what Elder Dallin H. Oaks of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles described as idle thoughts and trivial things.³ Such light-minded entertainment can quickly ensnare us and become “deliberate irreverence that trivializes the sacred and at worst becomes sacrilege and blasphemy.”⁴

MEDIA WITH MERIT



Be an Active Agent

Although it can be easier to passively allow the entertainment we listen to, view, and read to enter our hearts and minds unchecked, an essential part of life is to learn how to become agents—to learn “to act for [ourselves] and not to be acted upon” (2 Nephi 2:26). Part of becoming a true agent is being judicious about the entertainment you use.

Rather than thoughtlessly consuming media for entertainment, we must become aware of how much time we’re spending with it and what messages—overt or covert—it is sending. Ryan Holmes, director of Digital Media Group at Brigham Young University, explains that we must make “deliberate use of technology” and carefully consider “all its consequences.”⁵ Amy Petersen Jensen, chair of the

department of Theatre and Media Arts at Brigham Young University, says that it's essential to "choose to engage in active media conversations and avoid passive media consumption."⁶



Spend Time Wisely

Part of being a more active agent is becoming conscious of how much time we spend on entertainment. With so much to choose from, it's easy to get caught up ingesting "whatever comes your way via text, email, data feeds, streams, and notifications."⁷ But when we do, we while away the "days of [our] probation" (2 Nephi 9:27) with time-wasting activities that do not help us become stronger, wiser, more charitable representatives of Jesus Christ.

Instead of wasting whole evenings on the latest viral video, hot new show, or status update, we could consciously carve out time to enjoy meaningful entertainment that rejuvenates us. Brother Holmes says, "Make a conscious choice. You decide what, when, and how you are going to interact digitally."⁸



Choose Media That Edifies

Another important part of carefully selecting our entertainment is being mindful of what messages the media is sending.

Every form of entertainment communicates something, whether its messages are intentional or not. While enjoying a film or a book, for example, ask yourself what messages it communicates to you through its symbols, characters, lyrics, and images. What are its values? What behaviors does it endorse? Most importantly, does it help you think about and reverence Jesus Christ? Does it help you understand His divinity? Does it teach you something about sacrifice? about love? about selflessness? Does it say something about the importance of families or the sanctity of marriage? If you can't glean some gospel-related truth from your entertainment's messages, it's not valuable and not worth your time.

Some might be tempted to say, "It's just entertainment—not school or church. I don't need to be learning something from it." But whether you are conscious of it or not, "whatever you read, listen to, or look at has an effect on you."⁹

When we engage our minds and hearts in evaluating the media we consume, we have moments of reflection. Professor Jensen calls these moments a "conversation": "an interchange—a back and forth or give and take in which we listen and respond. The best conversations that we have often become moments of private repentance, because it is often during conversations that we change our minds, find a new path, or decide to do better. The changes we make to our souls in these moments are usually small, simple, incremental, comforting, and productive."¹⁰

We seek after "anything virtuous, lovely, or of good report or praiseworthy"—even in our leisure time (Articles of Faith 1:13). As representatives of Jesus Christ we must insist "that everything [we] read or [watch] . . . teach something good or build something good in [ourselves] or [our families]." Our engagements with entertainment should be "purposeful, consecrated actions . . . that [help us] obtain and share the vision of our Heavenly Father."¹¹

We know that such virtuous, lovely, and praiseworthy entertainment—media with merit—edifies us, prepares us for life's challenges, and strengthens our discipleship. ■

The author lives in Utah, USA.

NOTES

1. See "The Family: A Proclamation to the World," *Ensign*, Nov. 2010, 129, which lists "wholesome recreational activities" as one of the principles that build a happy family.
2. *For the Strength of Youth* (2011), 11.
3. See Dallin H. Oaks, "Powerful Ideas," *Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 27.
4. Brad Wilcox, "If We Can Laugh at It, We Can Live with It," *Ensign*, Mar. 2000, 29.
5. Ryan Holmes, "The Truth of All Things" (Brigham Young University devotional, May 7, 2013), speeches.byu.edu.
6. Amy Petersen Jensen, "Some Hopeful Words on Media and Agency" (Brigham Young University devotional, Mar. 20, 2012), speeches.byu.edu.
7. Holmes, "The Truth of All Things," speeches.byu.edu.
8. Holmes, "The Truth of All Things," speeches.byu.edu.
9. *For the Strength of Youth*, 11.
10. Jensen, "Media and Agency," speeches.byu.edu.
11. Jensen, "Media and Agency," speeches.byu.edu.