SO, CAN I WATCH IT OR NOT?

There are good reasons why the Church doesn't just have a list of approved things to watch, read, and listen to.

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Church Magazines

Here's an imaginary conversation. See if it feels familiar.

"Hey, Joe. How's it going?"

"Hey, Tyler. I'm doing all right."

"Did you see that episode of *Junior Varsity Superspy* last night?"

"Uh, no . . ." *[Joe starts to feel a little uncomfortable because he always thought that show had content that was against Church standards, and Tyler is his quorum president.]*

"It was awesome. I love that show. It's way better than *Rich Kids with Issues*. That just

has way too much swearing and too many bad scenes. Don't you think so?"

"Uh, well . . ." *[Joe feels even more uncomfortable because that show is actually one of his favorites and he never thought it had that much bad stuff in it.]*

If you can relate to any of this, then you may be able to see why some teens kind of wish the Church would just come out with a regularly updated list of approved media so that it's clear to everybody what's OK and what's not OK.

There are a few reasons why this would never happen. First of all, keeping up a list of TV shows, movies, songs, books, and so on, everywhere and in every language, would be pretty much impossible. But more importantly, the Church is following a fundamental rule that the Prophet Joseph Smith expressed this way: "I teach them correct principles, and they govern themselves" (*Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith* [2007], 284). Correct principles, not hyper-detailed lists of do's and don'ts, allow us to exercise our agency and become familiar with how the Spirit guides us. There are greater blessings in this than in being "compelled in all things" (see D&C 58:26–29).

In addition, a list of approved media would distract us from the heart of the gospel, where our focus should be. In other words, it would be *pharisaical*—meaning "like the Pharisees," the people in Jesus's day who "[paid] tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and . . . omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith" (Matthew 23:23). They were so caught up in the outward minutiae of what they considered to be God's law that they gave no thought to the "weightier matters"—the true principles that can sink into our hearts and help us draw near to God and make good decisions.

So, what are *principles,* anyway? Elder Richard G. Scott of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles has explained: "Principles are concentrated truth, packaged for application to a wide variety of circumstances. A true principle makes decisions clear even under the most confusing and compelling circumstances. It is worth great effort to organize the truth we gather to simple statements of principle" ("Acquiring Spiritual Knowledge," *Ensign,* Nov. 1993, 86).

For instance, *For the Strength of Youth* says this about entertainment and media:

"Choose wisely when using media because whatever you read, listen to, or look at has an effect on you. Select only media that uplifts you.

"Satan uses media to deceive you by making what is wrong and evil look normal, humorous, or exciting. He tries to mislead you into thinking that breaking God's commandments is acceptable and has no negative consequences for you or others. Do not attend, view, or participate in anything that is vulgar, immoral, violent, or pornographic in any way. Do not participate in anything that presents immorality or violence as acceptable" ([2011], 11).

These are principles you can apply when you're thinking about whether to download a song or watch a movie. "But," you may ask, "if I haven't seen it or listened to it yet, how can I know if it's OK?" Well, that's one of the great things about the information age, actually. There are lots of websites, apps, and other resources that can give you the relevant information about the content of movies, songs, books, or other media. So do just a little bit of homework and you'll be able to make an informed choice in line with these principles.

So, instead of thinking, "Does the Church disapprove of *Vampires in Lust II?*" you might instead think, "How will this affect me? Does it invite the Spirit? Is it uplifting? Does it make evil look normal? Is it vulgar or violent?" and so on. These guiding principles can place your focus on the "weightier matters" and help you govern yourself by making good decisions. And there's power in that. **NE**

Note: Back to that conversation between Tyler and Joe—when you're in a situation like that, you may be tempted to criticize the media choices of others. But it's probably best to hold off on doing so unless the Spirit prompts you to.