

The Art Of Redemption:
Entertainment In A Missional Hermeneutic

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Introduction

In March 2020, stay-at-home orders forced millions of people indoors. What many thought would be a few weeks of lockdown turned into over a year of restrictions on everything from work and recreation, to friendships, fitness and travel. Stripped of the usual sources of connection, intimacy and leisure, people were forced to find something else to fill the void. What did we do? Some turned to spirituality: Google searches for the word ‘prayer’ soared during the month of March 2020 when the lockdowns were first announced.¹ Some turned to online entertainment: millions of people resorted to watching streaming content on Netflix, Disney+ and Amazon Prime. Nielsen reported that time spent on streaming platforms grew by 34 percent over two weeks at the beginning of March,² and time spent on streaming services is expected to continue rising.³ Our culture’s streaming behaviour speaks to a deeper need for hope, meaning and a better reality. Tim Keller contends that “If we look to some created thing to give us the meaning, hope, and happiness that only God himself can give, it will eventually fail to deliver and break our hearts.”⁴ Webster Dictionary defines entertainment as “something affording pleasure, diversion, or amusement, especially a performance of some kind.”⁵ Modern entertainment magnifies our innate God-given gifts of imagination, pleasure, beauty and rest to

¹ David Roach, “Coronavirus Searches Lead Millions to Hear About Jesus,” News & Reporting (Christianity Today, April 7, 2020),

<https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2020/april/coronavirus-searches-online-converts-pray-cru-bgea-wmo.html>.

² Chuck Barney, “Coronavirus: Streaming Platforms See Big Surge during Pandemic,” The Mercury News (The Mercury News, April 7, 2020),

<https://www.mercurynews.com/2020/04/07/coronavirus-streaming-platforms-see-big-surge-during-pandemic/>.

³ “Streaming Services Have Accelerated during COVID-19. Will This Continue?,” RBC Wealth Management, accessed February 27, 2021, <https://www.rbcwealthmanagement.com/us/en/research-insights/streaming-services-have-accelerated-during-covid-19-will-this-continue/detail/>.

⁴ Timothy Keller, *Counterfeit Gods: The Empty Promises of Money, Sex, and Power, and the Only Hope That Matters*, Ebook (New York: Riverhead Books, 2011), 33.

⁵ “Entertainment,” Merriam-Webster Dictionary (Merriam-Webster), accessed February 27, 2021, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/entertainment>.

the point of distortion, by turning these qualities into amusement and ends in themselves. Entertainment today includes things such as the movie, television, performing arts, dance, fine arts, technology, music, fashion, food, travel. Yet none of these is inherently entertainment, each has educational and functional purposes; it is the use and the degree to which it becomes the sources of someone's joy or respite that turns it into entertainment. God has much to say about humanity's thirst for pleasure, diversion and amusement and this paper will explore the issue of entertainment through the lens of a missional hermeneutic of the Bible. The first part will look at God's ultimate mission for entertainment and unpack several principles of entertainment in the Bible: imagination, idolatry, beauty, emotion and rest. The second will outline a theology of entertainment and using dance as an example, we will see how the church has historically treated entertainment. The final part will explore practical applications for handling with entertainment the 21st century.

Entertainment In A Missional Hermeneutic

Bill Webb's book, *Slaves, Women and Homosexuals* provides a useful framework for assessing the topic of entertainment in the Bible. His $X \Rightarrow Y \Rightarrow Z$ principle illustrates how numerous aspects of the biblical text were not written to establish a "utopian society," but to move culture towards 'Z,' an ultimate ethic.⁶ He writes, "If a better ethic than the one expressed in the isolated words of the text is possible, and the biblical and canonical spirit is headed that direction, then that is where one ultimately wants to end up."⁷ Using Webb's $X \Rightarrow Y \Rightarrow Z$

⁶ William J. Webb, *Slaves, Women & Homosexuals: Exploring the Hermeneutics of Cultural Analysis* (Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 31, <https://search-ebSCOhost-com.ezproxy.mytyndale.ca:2443/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=684766&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

⁷ Webb, 36.

principles as a guide, a redemptive-missional hermeneutic of the Bible would rend this assessment of entertainment: The original culture (X) at the time of the Bible worshipped many gods. The creation of beauty and art was directed to at multiple gods. The Bible advocates (Y) for the worship one God, Yahweh, with total loyalty, trust and devotion to Him. The arts are to be used to magnify God's glory. Time of rest are holy times to remember God, and celebrate His presence and provision. Our culture today worships many gods, including pop stars, athletes and celebrities. Time of rest are filled with entertainment activities. Arts co-opted by entertainment industries. The ultimate ethic (Z) in the Bible is one of true rest, joy and delight found in ongoing communion and relationship with God. The arts are applied as extravagant and integral expressions of worship.

As we will see shortly, entertainment and the arts are closely linked in form and function. In North America, the term "entertainment industry" is already associated with the music, theatre, dance, acting and storytelling for the purposes of activating the imagination, magnifying beauty, expressing emotion or attracting attention. Paul M. Gould makes this compelling observation in his book *Cultural Apologetics*, "When we neglect or denigrate the human longing for beauty, we cut ourselves off from a source of blessing and shalom. We also miss out on one of God's powerful reminders of his purposes, our longing for home."⁸ The forms of entertainment that we have today, like video games, movies, virtual reality, amusement parks, vacations and countless leisure activities did not exist in the ancient near east. However, the principles that underly these activities and turn them into forms of entertainment are present in the Bible, and seen through a missional hermeneutic, they reveal God's true mission for human life: imagination, idolatry, rest, beauty and emotion.

⁸ Paul M. Gould, *Cultural Apologetics: Renewing the Christian Voice, Conscience, and Imagination in a Disenchanted World* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2019), 164.

Imagination

Christopher Wright points out in *The Mission of God* that “humanity was put on earth with a mission — to rule over, to keep and care for the rest of creation.”⁹ Humanity’s cultural mandate “is not license for abuse based on arrogant supremacy but a pattern that commits us to humble reflection on the character of God.”¹⁰ Fulfilling this mandate involved the use of imagination, a feature of human beings and a gift from God from the beginning. Genesis 2:19 reads, “Now the Lord God had formed out of the ground all the wild animals and all the birds in the sky. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name.”¹¹ It is evident that God expected Adam to use his imagination to extend and add to God’s original design: animals were given identities in the form of names, and Adam had creative freedom and ownership of this process.

God’s mission to bless humanity rests on the application of imagination. God’s mission to bless the world through Abraham is first heard in Genesis 12, “The Lord had said to Abram, ‘Go from your country, your people and your father’s household to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing.’”¹² This required the activation of Abraham’s imagination: he had to imagine the existence of a land he had not seen and a blessing bigger than he had dreamed. In other words, he had to believe that God could manifest something that he did not yet know existed. Wright comments, “the message of the combined halves of the text is that if Abraham does what he is told, and if God does what he says he will do, the result will be blessing all around.”¹³ The

⁹ Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible’s Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove, Ill: IVP Academic, 2006), 425.

¹⁰ Wright, 427.

¹¹ Genesis 2:15 NIV

¹² Genesis 12:1-2 NIV

¹³ Wright, *The Mission of God*, 201.

blessing hinges on a God who will do what can only be imagined at this point. In the Old Testament, imagination also plays into the role of the prophets and hope for a saviour. The prophets were used by God to name a reality that did not yet exist, especially in prophecies of a coming messiah.¹⁴ Moreover, the blessing God bestows on Abraham in Genesis 12 comes right after a climax of humanity's sin in the Pentateuch: the building of the tower of Babel. At the tower, it is clear that God had a purpose for human imagination, one that humans can co-opt for selfish purposes and distort to their own demise. When the people of God learned how to make bricks, they wanted to build a city that "reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves; otherwise we will be scattered over the face of the whole earth."¹⁵ God took issue with the project because of the motivation inside the human heart. They looked to the city as a source of security, identity, adoration and affection and God would not tolerate this.¹⁶ Immediately following this God promises Abraham, "I will make your name great,"¹⁷ Here, God echoes the desire of the tower builders, but now makes himself the distributor of the blessing. These passages reveal that God has an ultimate ethic for imagination: He invites humanity to dream, but for a world in line with God's good purposes.

Idolatry

Entertainment becomes idolatry when humans direct their trust and affection to something that is not God. Tim Keller explains, "When anything in life is an absolute requirement for your happiness and self-worth, it is essentially an 'idol,' something you are actually worshiping."¹⁸ One aspect of God's mission in the Bible and in our world is to confront

¹⁴ Deuteronomy 18:18 Jeremiah 31:31, Isaiah 53

¹⁵ Genesis 11:4 NIV

¹⁶ Genesis 11:5-9 NIV

¹⁷ Genesis 12:2 NIV

¹⁸ Keller, *Counterfeit Gods*, 102.

idolatry, as it dethrones God and enthrone creation, resulting in harmful personal and social consequences.¹⁹ In Number 14:11, God grieves Israel's idolatry, saying "How long will these people treat me with contempt? How long will they refuse to believe in me, in spite of all the signs I have performed among them?"²⁰ God wanted more than their obedience; he wanted their trust. The Psalms repeatedly warn us against investing hope for salvation in anywhere else.²¹ We see God's view on idolatry in how He relents to Israel's request for a King. "But when they said, 'Give us a king to lead us,' this displeased Samuel; so he prayed to the Lord. And the Lord told him, 'Listen to all that the people are saying to you; it is not you they have rejected, but they have rejected me as their king.'"²² The Israelites wanted a king to be like the neighbouring nations who had a human figure to embody the splendour, power and majesty they desired. The Jews's project of seeking someone to worship and to save them continued until Jesus showed up. They projected the same desire for splendour, power and majesty that they wanted in a king onto Jesus, and when He did not deliver, He was crucified. Modern entertainment continues humanity's tradition of idolatry in the the creation of celebrities. In fact, entertainment industries are especially good at enabling and reproducing idolatry through the production of pop stars, stadium events, red carpets, award shows, and celebrity endorsements, to name just a few of the industry's tactics. Wright posits, "Having alienated ourselves from the living God our creator, we have a tendency to worship whatever makes us tremble with awe as we feel our tiny insignificance in comparison with the great magnitudes that surround us."²³ Perhaps this is why beauty is so intertwined with modern entertainment: in the presence of beauty, we touch something that conjures up the awe and reverence that we long to feel in God's presence.

¹⁹ Wright, *The Mission of God*, 165.

²⁰ Number 14:11 NIV

²¹ Wright, *The Mission of God*, 169.

²² 1 Samuel 8:6-9

²³ Wright, *The Mission of God*, 171.

Beauty

God made the world beautiful. After each day of creation, he declared what he had created “good.”²⁴ The human heart’s affinity for beauty was something given to humanity before the fall. In Genesis, Eve sees that the fruit from the tree of knowledge of good and evil was “good for food and pleasant to the eyes.”²⁵ Beauty was something that God created for man to enjoy, but it was not to replace trust in God. Paul M. Gould puts it, “As God’s image bearers, we are called to be artists and gardeners after his image. We should be creators and cultivators of goodness, truth, and beauty in what we make and how we attribute meaning.”²⁶ God’s mission for beauty and artistry can be seen in his directions for the building of the tabernacle. He gives explicit attention to the aesthetic details, even gifting certain individuals with the artistic ability to craft materials. Exodus 28, The Lord commands, “Make sacred garments for your brother Aaron to give him dignity and honor. Tell all the skilled workers to whom I have given wisdom in such matters that they are to make garments for Aaron, for his consecration, so he may serve me as priest.”²⁷ Some translations of the same passage say the garments were created “for glory and for beauty.”²⁸ Beautifully crafted things were to serve a spiritual function, as objects and symbols that connected the people to God. Gould explains how beauty serves a missional purpose, “Art “infused with godly perception is intrinsically valuable and worthy, offering a glimpse of the divine that baptizes the imagination and functions to ‘prepare the way for the Lord’ ”²⁹ God has a function for art as an aid to worship, not *the* object of worship, as often happens in today’s entertainment industry, especially music and Hollywood. In modern

²⁴ Genesis 1:1-8 NIV

²⁵ Genesis 3:6 NIV

²⁶ Gould, *Cultural Apologetics*, 146.

²⁷ Exodus 28:2-3 NIV

²⁸ Exodus 28:2-3 NKJV

²⁹ Gould, *Cultural Apologetics*, 163.

entertainment, the things usually associated with entertainment are those that magnify beauty, often to the point of distortion. Movies and magazine are loaded with images of people who have been poked, prodded and covered with cosmetics to fit into a particular image of beauty. Porn takes the sacredness and beauty of sexual intimacy and magnifies sexual desire to the point of distortion.

The Bible tells the story again and again of how humans looked only to the exterior beauty. The Israelites wanted a king that was tall, handsome and looked physically strong, like Saul. Each time beauty and external glory is chosen over God and truth, humanity loses. In exacting His saving plan for the world, God chose a humble carpenter and a young virgin. Jesus avoided from the spotlight as much as possible, and modelled humility. Jesus also turned the message of beauty on its head. As Gould puts it, “A life of self-denial and service to God and neighbor is beautiful. It’s also startling. Christ-followers will ‘shine among them like stars in the sky’ (Phil. 2:15) in this disenchanted age, helping others see and understand the meaning of holiness.”³⁰ Still, the role of external beauty is not made void in Jesus. In Revelation, the New Jerusalem is described as having streets of gold,³¹ not because it is trying to prove something, but because that is how God's majesty is manifested. Beauty was not designed to be an end in itself; it is an arrow that points to the Source of ultimate beauty.

Emotions

Modern day entertainment can be characterized by expression of emotion. Whatever the activity, it is a means to stimulate, release or concur up certain emotions. Emotions on their own are not a bad thing, but activities considered modern entertainment often provide unhealthy ways

³⁰ Gould, 150.

³¹ Revelation 21:21

of dealing with our emotions, including suppressing it, amplifying it beyond normal ranges, manipulating it and directing it toward sinful ends. The worst entertainment turns our emotions into an end in themselves: to have pleasure for pleasure's sake, to feel fear or its own sake. The best, redemptive entertainment guides us to turn our emotions to God. Peter Scazzerro explains, "The issue is not, by any means, to blindly follow our feelings, but to acknowledge them as a part of the way God communicates to us."³²

The Old Testament gives us countless examples of humans expressing with their emotions and by examining God's reactions, it is evident that God has a mission for our emotions. The Psalms are filled with emotions: the full range from joy to despair are included and directed to God. Lament was a practice that shows how God wanted the Israelites to deal with the emotions that arise from loss, tragedy and pain. Lamentations was provided as "an aid, in dirge or lament form, to help the people of Judah emotionally process the destruction of their homeland and confess their own sin, so that through this experience they might recover hope."³³ God's mission for human emotion is further revealed in Acts. When the Holy Spirit comes upon the disciples in the upper room, they are filled with passion and boldness. The fresh influx of godly emotions enables them to preach boldly.³⁴ The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience. These connote, not a removal of human emotion, but a tempering, that naturally occurs as they are moderated through self-discipline by a larger love and desire for God.³⁵ Whereas entertainment may entice us to feel emotion simply for pleasure, God invites us to experience emotion in divine communion with him and for his purposes. Unfortunately, entertainment in

³² Peter Scazzerro, *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality: It's Impossible to Be Spiritually Mature, While Remaining Emotionally Immature*, 2014, 50.

³³ Fleming H. Revell Company, ed., *The Revell Bible Dictionary*, Deluxe color ed. (Old Tappan, N.J.: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1990), 620.

³⁴ Acts 2 NIV

³⁵ Galatians 5:22-25 NIV

modern culture is often associated with indulging in our emotions to the point that they become the seven deadly sins: pride, covetousness, lust, envy, gluttony, anger, sloth.

Rest

Humanity's original vocation was not only for work, but also for rest: God mandated rest for Himself and His creation. In Leviticus, the laws around rest are expanded, to the point that where Israel is set apart an entire year for resting the land.³⁶ Five times in the Pentateuch, the law to keep the Sabbath is repeated. In the New Testament, the principle of God-centered rest is seen multiple times in how Jesus took time away to rest and he invited his disciples to follow him and rest.³⁷ To take a holy rest is to allow our lives with God's created rhythm and his intended purpose for our lives. To malign rest is to move away from God's mission for humanity and the world.³⁸ Modern entertainment forms invite us to fill our sabbath with amusement, instead of deep rest. Over time, this results in a chronic inability to rest. Unable to stop, our minds are filled with the stories and subtexts in modern entertainment, and not being transformed by God. By definition entertainment is a thing we do in our times of rest. Instead of seeking true rest, Christians have become accustomed to settling for less. Swoboda highlights that our need for rest, or Sabbath, is not just a byproduct of human sinfulness, In fact, "sabbath is a foretaste of heaven."³⁹ Being a people who are rested and restored by God, allows us to take part in God's missional calling for humanity. Without this practice, we distort our reality and experience of life.

³⁶ Leviticus 25 NIV

³⁷ Mark 6:31 NIV

³⁸ A. J Swoboda, *Subversive Sabbath: The Surprising Power of Rest in a Nonstop World*, 2018, 40, <https://www.overdrive.com/search?q=C8205254-1E80-4CA4-AAD9-BA3F8DE7E84B>.

³⁹ Swoboda, 41.

The inclinations that cause us to engage in forms of modern entertainment—the desire to flex our imagination, to worship, to see beauty, to experience emotion and to rest—are themselves gifts from God, but when those inclinations are channeled away from God, humanity suffers. God’s desire for us is to enjoy His abundance, fruitfulness and fertility, peace, intimate love and rest, within “the context of healthy relationships with God and with others.”⁴⁰ Wright explains that the entire canon of the Bible shows the “constant determination of the living God, to defeat and destroy all that seduces human beings away from the love they receive from God and the love they should give to God.”⁴¹ Entertainment is one realm of modern life that is explicitly related to humanity’s search for love, meaning and joy outside of God. It is clear that God’s mission includes entertainment and affects our view of it. God’s plan for humanity is that He would be centre and source of our lives, including our work, leisure and affections and that we engage in socially edifying and God-edifying forms of rest. It’s clear that western society is not yet arrived at this ultimate ethic and Wright proclaims that the antidote to our idolatries and distortions, and therefore the task of believers who are united in mission with God is “to lead people back to acknowledge the only true and living God.”⁴² Instead of directing people to look to other activities or people for our sense of security, awe and wonder, believers are called to help people see the ultimate beauty and glory in God.

Redemptive Entertainment

Can today’s entertainment industries and content be redemptive? What would it look like? This section will offer fundamental principles for redemptive entertainment. Given that

⁴⁰ Wright, *The Mission of God*, 178.

⁴¹ Wright, 178.

⁴² Wright, 171.

God's mission involves the blessing and restoration of all creation, it is safe to say that entertainment is a realm of society that God can and wants to redeem. The activities that are now used for diversion, amusement and pleasure can be reformed to things that point our society towards 'Z', God's ultimate ethic for entertainment, which is really a humanity so satisfied in God that it does not need entertainment. Albert M. Wolters advocates that the biblical strategy for historical change is one of "progressive renewal, rather than a violent overthrow."⁴³ God calls his people reformation and sanctification, which is to "to make free from sin, cleanse from moral corruption, to purify."⁴⁴

A common form of Christian entertainment is media that re-hashes Biblical stories, such as Noah's ark, Daniel in the lion's den, and Jesus's birth, death and resurrection. Using the digital media available to us now and not available to the ancients, such as animation, filmmaking and video, the Bible is transplanted and re-told in new forms. In other words, new package, same content. This continues to be a valuable way of "redeeming entertainment", but there is more. Given that the biblical grand narrative is God's mission to rescue and bless all of creation,⁴⁵ it can be said that any content or activity with redemptive undertones or overtones helps to re-form all of creation.

Redemptive Entertainment can be any content or activity that reiterates God's mission for universal redemption and invites the viewer to see their lives and the world as God does. Every person lives with a worldview that answers questions such as, "What's the world really like? What's reality really like? Who am I really? Why am I here? Is the world friendly or frightening? Is God friendly or frightening?"⁴⁶ The Bible invites us into a metanarrative, one that answers

⁴³ Albert M. Wolters, *Creation Regained: Biblical Basics for a Reformational Worldview*, 2nd ed (Grand Rapids, Mich: William B. Eerdmans Pub, 2005), 91.

⁴⁴ Wolters, 89.

⁴⁵ Wright, *The Mission of God*, 171.

⁴⁶ Joyce Edith Bellous and Daniel R Sheffield, *Conversations That Change Us: Learning the Arts of Theological Reflection*, 2017, 169.

these questions within a Christian worldview. Modern entertainment can be redemptive if it answers these questions in a way that aligns with God's mission. In other words, it explicitly or indirectly promotes the restoration of the world and humanity, and not the destruction or distortion of it. An encounter with God's redemptive metanarrative narratives starts a process of theological reflection, which is the re-forming of the human mind.⁴⁷ Redemptive entertainment harnesses humanity's natural inclination for imagination and beauty "to cultivate hope and act as a stepping stone for others to understand the meaning of God's love."⁴⁸

Levels of Entertainment

Here are some filters for Christ followers to think through their sources of entertainment. This list is not meant to be comprehensive, but to point us from 'Y,' how we currently experience entertainment closer to 'Z,' God's ultimate ethic. Redemptive entertainment would move people closer to the bottom of this list.

1. Things that help us to get their minds off work, worries, frustrations or concerns.
2. Things that are new and novel.
3. Things that address wounds, acknowledge brokenness (sin) and seek healing.
4. Things that help us to experience peace and relax.
5. Things through which God speaks to us.
6. Things that draw us closer to God.
7. Things that we feel life and energy in, a greater felt sense of God's presence.

⁴⁷ Bellous and Sheffield, 118.

⁴⁸ Gould, *Cultural Apologetics*, 165.

In God's the ultimate ethic, "entertainment" would be so satisfying, that people would not want to call it entertainment. "Enjoying God" would be a more appropriate name for the activities. This can be seen in the absence of entertainment-like activities in the New Testament. Joy, delight, beauty and satisfaction were found in following Christ, not in distractions, amusement or diversions. In Acts, Paul and Silas were singing in prison!⁴⁹ They did not need to be at a rock concert to sing. God refreshes His people with fresh imagination and positive emotions so that He can bless them and the world. Our time engaging in entertainment is not a time to disengage from the 'burden of being a Christian' but a chance to be rightly nourished. The movement towards God's ultimate ethic of entertainment is really an invitation to experience the fullness of God's goodness, love and blessing.

Entertainment In Church History: Dance

Historically, the Church has had a negative view of popular entertainment forms, and this had led to an unfortunate division between the church, the arts and secular entertainment. Instead of pointing people to the ultimate ethic of entertainment, the Church has merely rejected it and cast the chasm wider. By looking briefly at the Church's relationship to dance, it becomes clear how entertainment forms can be both redeemed and redemptive. For God's people living in Old Testament times, dance was a joyous community experience associated with celebration and worship. The different Hebrew words used for dance in the Old Testament are descriptive; they convey a dancer "enthusiastically leaping and skipping, twisting and whirling."⁵⁰ Albert M. Wolters affirms, "the creator gave us the good gift of bringing these [bodily movement, rhythm, music and social interaction] together for celebration and enjoyment, as we know from the many

⁴⁹ Acts 16:15 NIV

⁵⁰ Fleming H. Revell Company, *The Revell Bible Dictionary*, 275.

biblical references to dancing.”⁵¹ Moreover, Scripture associates dancing with God’s ultimate restoration of his people. Jeremiah proclaims God’s everlasting love for Israel and promises the Israelites that “you will take your tambourines and go out to dance with the joyful.”⁵² King David famously danced before the Lord with all his might in celebration at the ark.⁵³ In contemporary western churches, there is little to no dance. During a Sunday service, congregants are invited only to sit and stand, but mostly sit. In contrast, dance is an integral part of modern entertainment. Today’s professional entertainers have an ability to command a stage with their bodies, especially in some form of dance or acting. Gentlemen’s entertainment clubs involve watching women dance. Pop stars are flanked by a legion of dancer, all designed to invoke awe, wonder and excitement. When someone says, they are going to “go dance” or “watch a dance”, it is assumed that they are going to be entertained, not to worship God.

Unfortunately, many churches and Christians have ignored the gift of dance as a form of worship over the centuries. Some even instilled a negative or sinful attitude toward dance, such as the churches that follow the line of Calvin, who condemned dance “on the grounds that it arouses passion and invites promiscuity.”⁵⁴ Like all areas of creational life, dance can be redeemed. The integration of music in the historical church shows that the expressive art forms can be used to bring the human heart into closer communion with God. As Wolters puts it, “The original good creation is to be restored... Emotional should not be repressed by purified... Art not to be pronounced worldly, but claimed for Christ.”⁵⁵ Some traditions, like as African and black churches have retained some dance in their worship gatherings, but there is still along way to go before Western Christian worship includes dance.

⁵¹ Wolters, *Creation Regained*, 112.

⁵² Fleming H. Revell Company, *The Revell Bible Dictionary*, 275.

⁵³ 2 Samuel 6:14 NIV

⁵⁴ Wolters, *Creation Regained*, 112.

⁵⁵ Wolters, 71.

Practical Theology of Entertainment

The call for Christians today as, the new humanity, is to be agents and co-workers in God's mission "to restore his whole creation to what it was intended to be—*God's* creation, ruled over by a redeemed *humanity*, giving glory and praise to its Creator."⁵⁶ Instead of rejecting entertainment, Christians must learn how to discern, create and re-shape our world through the stories we tell and the world we convey. Redemptive entertainment is anything that demonstrates, or allows one to engage in activities that have been re-formed according to the principles of the Kingdom of God and invites the viewer into God's metanarrative.

Application For for the Church

Invite Creative Forms Of Worship

In his compelling essay "Why The Church Needs Artists," Tim Keller writes, "The Church needs artists to assist the body in understanding truth, but just as importantly the Church needs artists to equip the Church to praise God. We cannot praise God without art."⁵⁷ Church leaders must recognize the role of creativity and the arts in worship and raise up leaders in the arts. Beauty, rightly directed, brings us closer to God. Certain churches may have a special calls towards this. For example, churches in creative urban centers may have a congregation filled with artists and creatives and should seek to help them use their gifts to glorify God.

Be Discerning In Copying The Entertainment Industry

As churches have grown larger and larger in the North America, sanctuaries look more and more like stadiums, theatres and cinemas. Mark Sayers contends that the church has

⁵⁶ Wright, *The Mission of God*, 165.

⁵⁷ Ned Bustard, *It Was Good: Making Art to the Glory of God* (Baltimore, MD: Square Halo Books, 2006), 120.

swapped devotion and worship for entertainment and that by playing to the “values of our consumerist, entertainment culture, it has becoming an empty vessel, with little truth and meaning to offer the world.”⁵⁸ In this way, the church has failed in its missional calling to shape people into an “alternate reality” and let alone live in that alternate reality.⁵⁹ Perhaps the church has resorted to adopting the a secular interpretation of beauty and worship, because it has not received or created it’s own God-inspired expressions of version of beauty of worship. Instead of playing to the “religious economies, which much like commercial economies, where it is trying to serve potential consumers and win them over from other firms in the market.”⁶⁰ Church leadership must view it's congregation as the engine of God's redemptive work, including leadership in the arts. According to Alan Roxburgh, a missional leader is one who “cultivates the imagination of her congregation, such that they where and how God wants them to act in their community.”⁶¹ Church leaders must engage the imagination of the congregation. Instead of trying to fit the congregation into the of theatre production, and worship into popular entertainment, what would it look like for the church to let God’s spirit direct them in worship? Just as the Holy Spirit breathed into the early disciples and directed their ministry, how might the Holy Spirit direct the church today if the church pressed in intently?

⁵⁸ Mark Sayers, *The Road Trip That Changed the World: The Unlikely Theory That Will Change How You View Culture, the Church, and Most Importantly, Yourself* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2012), 26.

⁵⁹ Darrell L. Guder and Lois Barrett, eds., *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America*, The Gospel and Our Culture Series (Grand Rapids, Mich: W.B. Eerdmans Pub, 1998), 200.

⁶⁰ Guder and Barrett, 84.

⁶¹ Alan J. Roxburgh and Fred Romanuk, *The Missional Leader: Equipping Your Church to Reach a Changing World*, 1st ed (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2006), 13.

Application for Christians

Right Self-Discipline

Entertainment in the purest sense in modern society, which is pleasure for the sake of pleasure, should be avoided. There is something much better than mere indulgence: God's presence. Every activity should be subjected to the Spirit-led discernment and self-control. This requires a vigilant self awareness and a tempering of our own desires. I do not believe it is possible to condemn one form of entertainment. For example, the question is not, "are video games sinful?" The questions should be: Is the regular practice of it helping me to grow more christlike? Or is it detracting? It is magnifying any of the seven deadly sins in my spirit, or is it helping me to grow in virtue? For some individuals, God may compel them to give up video games completely, whereas others can play with self-control and godly wisdom. On their own, video games need not be an evil form of entertainment, but to choose entertainment over what will truly fill our souls over and over again is detrimental to our spiritual and emotional health. Since so much of modern entertainment promotes desires such as lust, greed, sex, power, it is important for Christians to practice discernment, check the spirit of the entertainment and practice moderation.

Seek Godly Rest and Refreshment

What is easiest for us to consume is not always what is best for us. Christians should pray and ask God, "how do you want to replenish me?" before reaching for the automatic sources of entertainment. Too often people default to what the world offers us for entertainment, without looking at what it's doing to us. Christians can think of this as "trading up," giving up the trivial, fleeting entertainment of the world, for that which deeply refreshes. Give explicit attention to forms of physical and mental and spiritual rest and restoration that bring you closer to God,

where you left feeling more at peace, or agitated. An intentional practice of weekly, God-honouring Sabbath will allow believers to experience true rest and refreshment in God. Christians must recover the spiritual discipline of rest and there are countless resources for the stressed out modern mind.

Application for Entertainment Professionals

Entertainment changes us. It shapes our lives and who we become. It gives us narratives about what it means to be a good and successful dad, friend, daughter or executive. Those who have been called to work in entertainment or the arts, have been given a sacred responsibility to tell God's metanarrative.

Tell Redemptive Metanarratives

Missional entertainment professionals must especially consider the narrative underneath their work. Is this reinforcing and edifying the image of God in humanity? Does it reflect Kingdom values of justice, compassion, or does it promote, glorify unhealthy, destructive behaviours and narratives? Does it lead people to worship God or an idol? The redemptive quality need not always be explicit, but creators must consider if does their final product moves society from 'Y' to 'Z,' towards God's ultimate ethic. Each story, campaign and poster would need to be assessed by those creating it. Professionals and artists must pray for wisdom and illumination of the Holy Spirit.

Seek Inspiration From God

It's common for creatives to seek inspiration by studying and digesting the work of other artists but creative ideas need not come from external stimuli, they can come directly from God. Artists should especially spend time in the Word, in Christian community and in prayer, submitting oneself to the Spirit's transformation. Through the practice spiritual disciplines, they

allow God to sanctify their imagination and transform their minds. As shapers of society's metanarrative, they have a particular responsibility to God.

Be a Part of God's Blessings To The World

Creatives and Entertainers should avoid working in a setting that are "worldly" in the sense of being dominated by the service of Satan rather than the service of Christ.⁶²

Entertainment industries are not necessarily inherently evil, but some have certainly been infiltrated by evil and those should be avoided. Outside of those, Christians should continue to work in entertainment industries to extend God's blessings. Wright posits, "our missional motivation ... is a matter of deep compassion for those oppressed by the forces of evil and idolatry." Christian entertainers combat idolatry not only to glorify God but also to bless humanity.⁶³ Wherever possible, be an agent of God's compassion, justice and mercy, engaging others in the industry to use their 'powers of persuasion' for good.

Conclusion

In a world filled with tragedy, pain and suffering and seemingly compounding world problems like environmental degradation, racial injustice and social inequality, modern entertain is a welcome escape. Christians, as people who have caught a glimpse of God's good and beautiful mission for the world, are uniquely positioned to offer hope, a hope for something much greater than an escape, a beautiful scene or a temporary emotional high. We can offer hope for redemption of the entire cosmos. In a fully redeemed world, entertainment as "something affording pleasure, diversion, or amusement, especially a performance of some kind" would need

⁶² Wolters, *Creation Regained*, 113.

⁶³ Wright, *The Mission of God*, 179.

not exist. In the meantime, as agents of God's mission, Christians are can help point the way to the Ultimate Source of the splendor, majesty, beauty and glory, the presence of living God.

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