

## **Introduction**

In 1932, Aldous Huxley published his acclaimed novel *Brave New World*. It's about a benevolent world dictatorship called the World State that controls people, but not by forcefully oppressing them. It does so by engrossing them in trivial pleasures and pursuits instead. Those trivial pleasures and pursuits so entertain people that they don't resent the control it allows the World State to impose. They welcome it. Years later, in his novel *Brave New World Revisited*, Huxley stated what the lesson was. It's that tyranny will eventually prevail in our world because of **"man's almost infinite appetite for distractions."**

That's a striking observation. It explains so much about our current culture and us – if it's true. So, I ask you. Is it true? Do human beings have an almost infinite appetite for distractions? Our two verses, Proverbs 12:11 and 28:19, answer that question for us.

## **Discrimination**

These verses, written by Solomon, are twins – almost identical but not quite. One of the eight major themes of the Book of Proverbs is the sluggard. The sluggard is the lazy person who lacks the drive to act. But that isn't the problem the two people in our verses have. Notice that the first person **"tills"** and the second **"pursues"** or **"follows."** They have drive and act. There's an issue though. It's to what they direct their drive and action. The first person directs his to tilling the land. He plants, tends, and harvests, which results in **"plenty of bread."** In contrast, the second directs his to pursuing **"worthless"** or **"empty"** things, which results in **"poverty in plenty."**

We see that both persons are the same in degree of drive and action. But they're different in to what they direct them. The first directs his to things that are more valuable (more beneficial). The second directs his to things that are less valuable or even not valuable at all. What these verses are about is clear. It's discrimination not drive.

I've mentioned before what we *think about* when our *minds* aren't necessarily occupied. Now let's consider what we *do* when our *bodies* aren't necessarily occupied. By "**necessarily occupied**" I mean with things like sleep, work, grocery shopping, personal hygiene, house cleaning, and so on. When our bodies aren't necessarily occupied, we have what is called "**leisure time.**" According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the average American has approximately 5.3 hours of leisure time each day. Some of course have more than that and others less.

Now, during that 5.3 hours, a host and variety of activities, experiences, and events clamor for our attention and intention. The question is, "**To which of those will we give that?**" Or to ask it another way, to what things will we direct our drive and action?

Our verses call us to have "**sense**" and not "**lack**" it in deciding that. To *lack sense* means to fritter away our leisure time by directing our drive and action to less valuable things. To *have sense* means to direct our drive and action to more valuable things. I'm calling doing that "**discrimination.**" To be discriminating means to direct our drive and action to the more valuable things. We do that in a specific way. We *take* the time for the more valuable things in their order of importance. We then *find* the time for the less valuable if there's any left over to find. That really is Solomon's thrust in our verses.

## **Entertainment**

This thrust of his speaks to several aspects of human life, one of which is entertainment. When I say "**entertainment,**" I'm including its cousin "**amusement**" as well, which is similar enough to it to include in the definition. Entertainment is something we do for the purpose of relaxation, recreation, or relief. Some forms of it require a degree of thoughtfulness, talent, training, or exertion, like playing softball. Others don't, like scrolling on Facebook. Some forms require entertainers, like a concert. Others don't, like playing Yahtzee or video games.

There are of course almost countless forms of entertainment. They

include watching or playing sports, playing video games, watching television, going to movies, attending concerts or plays, scrolling on Facebook, listening to music, collecting things, traveling, reading novels, surfing the Net, playing cards, reading, eating out, fishing, and much more.

It's instructive to identify the forms of entertainment to which we direct our drive and action. Here's an exercise you can do. Recall and list the ways you routinely choose to be entertained in a normal week. I did that. My list includes reading, walking, running, a little bit of TV, and surfing the net for news. What about you? What are the forms of entertainment to which you routinely direct your drive and action?

### **An Appetite for Entertainment**

Now that we know what entertainment is, let's examine our appetite for it. I mean by that, how much it means to us – the place of importance it occupies in our lives.

One barometer for measuring that is the money we devote to it. Consider how much Americans will spend on entertainment in 2016. It's estimated to be \$597 billion. That amount includes \$92.9 billion on television, \$81.5 billion on internet access, \$32.5 billion on books and e-books, \$30.9 billion on movies, \$21.3 billion on paper and digital magazines, \$19.8 billion on music, \$16.4 billion on console, mobile, and online games, and \$9.7 billion on paper and digital newspapers.

Let's think in more particular terms of households. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the average American household spent \$2,827 on entertainment in 2015. That represents 5.6% of annual expenditures.

The bottom line is that entertainment is serious business in the United States. In fact, according to PricewaterhouseCoopers, the world's largest professional services firm, the United States is **“the biggest entertainment market in the world for the foreseeable future.”**

But money spent on it is just one indicator of our appetite for entertainment. Another is its pervasiveness. It penetrates, intrusively,

into every arena of cultural life. Social critic Neil Postman hit the nail on the head. He wrote, “**(Our) cultural life is redefined as a perpetual round of entertainments.**” He wrote that in 1985, but it’s even truer now than it was then. Americans are so hooked on entertainment that almost every aspect of cultural life incorporates it into its methods and aims: politics, education, news, and even religion. Contrast the presidential debates today with the Lincoln Douglas debates of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and you’ll grasp what I mean. They’re a whole lot more entertainment than they are debate.

I say all of that to say this. The appetite of Americans for entertainment is enormous – as much as mine is for chocolate.

### **The Value of Entertainment**

To this point, I’ve explained what entertainment is and people’s appetite for it. Now let’s apply 12:11 and 28:19 to it. Those verses challenge us to determine its value with objectivity and precision.

We do that by examining its nature and its impact on us. Most entertainment is humanly shallow. It doesn’t deeply affect us. We rarely receive orientation or perspective from it. It rarely changes us. It normally leaves us where it found us instead. Playing or watching a basketball game, for instance, doesn’t make us a better or worse person. We thoroughly enjoy it but it doesn’t change us. That illustrates that there’s essentially something trivial about entertainment. That people make lots of money providing it doesn’t change that.

But it does have value nonetheless. It gives us needed diversion from the more serious and mundane matters of life. You know the old axiom “**All work and no play make Jack a dull boy.**” It acknowledges that entertainment brings pleasure and fun into our lives. While pleasure and fun aren’t necessities of existence, they certainly contribute to the joy of existence. They’re gifts from God who is Himself the most joyful being in the universe. He takes pleasure in our pleasure and fun.

## **Be Sensible**

Entertainment, therefore, has a place in our lives. We can have an appetite for it. But our verses call us to control it.

We need to be honest here and admit it. Many if not most Americans are addicted to entertainment. They crave it as no other people at any other time and place in history have.

The empirical evidence is convincing. Let's take just three forms of entertainment in that regard. One is television. The U.S. Department of Labor reported last March that the average American (children, teen, and adults) watches 3 hours of television per day. Another form is console, mobile, and online games. The Entertainment Software Association reports that 155 million Americans play them more than three hours a week. For core gamers, it's over 22 hours a week. Still another form is Facebook. Its founder Mark Zuckerberg estimates that the average Facebook user scrolls 40 minutes a day. To that add more minutes of liking and commenting.

Those are just three forms of entertainment. Taking into account how much additional time Americans devote to countless other forms, it's clear. Many if not most lack sense. They aren't controlling their appetite for entertainment. It's a major distraction instead.

But a distraction from what? Our verses tell us. According to principles for interpreting proverbs, the meaning of the first person tilling his land goes beyond the activity mentioned. It represents all more valuable pursuits. Today, I focus on the most valuable of those, which is engaging Jesus and His kingdom at hand.

I've explained before how we engage Him and it. We direct our drive and action to spiritual practices like solitude and silence, fasting, study, worship, prayer, Bible memorization, lectio divina, practicing the presence, and more. We do that intently and routinely. The Bible reveals the result when we do. It's the condition of life that every sane person seeks, which is pervasive and habitual love, peace, and joy.

But even a glance at the actions and reactions of those around us

make it clear. Most don't have that condition of life. And the reason they don't is because they aren't intently and routinely engaging Jesus and His kingdom at hand. And the reason they aren't is distractions. Robert Schuller once asked Mother Teresa why so many Americans aren't experiencing God's presence. To which she replied, "**Too many distractions.**" She was right.

And the primary of those distractions is entertainment. Shakespeare declared in his play *Hamlet*, "**But do not dull thy palm with entertainment.**" That's precisely what many Americans, including professing Christians, are doing. Lacking sense, they dull their palm, diminish their spiritual lives, with entertainment. They take the time for entertainment and find the time for engaging Jesus and His kingdom if there's any left to find. For instance, the Barna Research Group reports that the average Christian reads the Bible nine minutes a day. Compare that with the average Facebook user scrolling 40 minutes a day. I'm not on Facebook but suppose I am. Also suppose I scroll 40 minutes a day and read the Bible 9 minutes a day. I lack sense if I do. I'm letting entertainment dull my palm.

If you and I want love, joy, and peace to prevail in our persons and lives, we must heed Solomon's call in our verses. We must have sense and discriminate. We *take* the time to engage Jesus and His kingdom at hand. We *find* the time to be entertained if there's any left to find.

## **Conclusion**

I leave you with a summarizing thought. According to the Boston Medical Center, an estimated 45 million Americans go on a diet each year. They recognize their need to control their appetite for food and do – some at least. You and I need to do the same with entertainment. We need to control our appetite for it. We *take* the time to engage Jesus and His kingdom at hand. We *find* the time to be entertained. We have sense if we do. We lack it if we don't.