

CHRISTIAN HEADS, HEARTS, AND HANDS

ARTICLES TO FORM US AS FOLLOWERS OF “THE WAY”

You Are What You Eat (Watch)

by Jake Bier

As we head into late autumn and early winter, the festive holiday season is fast approaching. In fact, the other day my wife went into the store to buy Halloween candy (on Halloween, nonetheless), only to discover that all the Halloween items had already been replaced by Christmas things!

This time of year is always a dangerous one for me because I have a real sweet tooth. Some people are tempted by ice cream, cake, and pie — I like candy, and lots of it. Skittles are my favorite, but I also like Twix, Snickers, KitKat...the list could go on and on. If it is sweet and sugary, it is something I love.

As I've gotten older, I am continually reminded that I can't eat as much candy as I want to. Not only do I know that I shouldn't eat as much, I find that I physically can't. After just a few pieces, my teeth start to hurt, and a little while later I can feel my stomach start to turn. Even worse, what my mom used to tell me is true: all that sugar ruins my appetite for real food, leaving me with no room for dinner but still hungry and dissatisfied. As it turns out, man cannot live by Skittles alone.

In a world of endless entertainment, 24-hour news cycles, and the constant stream of social media, many of us have fallen into the bad habits of a sweet tooth diet, and its affecting us mentally and spiritually. It's no secret that smartphones are addicting and destructive, yet we still keep going back for more and more like a kid with the candy bowl.

I know this because I've felt its effects, and I've seen them in others. My wife and I have really tried to protect our 1 year old son, but even so he still is attracted to our phones. I've been amazed to watch him pick up toys and put them up against his ear, clearly imitating what he sees when we talk on the phone. We don't give him screen time, but he almost instinctively knows which buttons to press when he finds one of our phones lying around, and he's thrown more than a few tantrums when we take it away.

Like candy, most of the information and entertainment we regularly consume on social media, TV, and the internet has no spiritual or moral nutritional value. With such a high consumption rate, it's no wonder than many of us feel angry, stressed out, and tired all the time: we're eating junk food.

Perhaps more than ever we need to heed the words of the apostle Paul in Philippians 4:8, “Finally my brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.”

At the very least, these verses should make us think critically about the content we digitally consume. What is being said? What messages are we receiving? What virtues are upheld? Do these things accord with God's Word? In the end, we might just do away with our smartphones altogether.

Recently, I've been increasingly convicted by just how temporal our entertainment really is. Not only are they unconcerned (in a Christian sense) with the things of eternity, but their very nature is fleeting. In fact, social media algorithms are based around a sort of planned obsolescence. Every day brings new content — new pictures, new videos, new ideas — all things are new, but they're gone tomorrow. Nobody cares about yesterday's news, and each day's content passes by like chaff in the wind.

It's for this reason that I am so interested in classical literature and old books of theology: these works, for one reason or another, have stood the test of time. CS Lewis' advice was to never read a new book without having read an old one in between, and I think that's a good principle to apply.

But whether the entertainment we consume is new or old, this passage gives us some basic parameters with which to judge their merit. It's important to remember that no book, movie, or tweet is morally neutral — for better or worse, the stories we tell ourselves are shaping what kind of people we become. You are what you eat, so learn to eat well.

CHRISTIAN HEADS, HEARTS, AND HANDS

ARTICLES TO FORM US AS FOLLOWERS OF “THE WAY”

Race Relations: Four Things You Can Do to Help

by Kevin DeYoung

I can tell you [I am not an expert on individual cases of racial injustice that have been in the public spotlight. [However], I'm a pastor who longs to see the gospel break down old (and high) barriers between people, but other than trying to faithfully preach, pray, and love I'm no authority on this thorniest of issues.

And yet, like many Christians, I want to do something that may, perhaps, by God's grace, over the long run, in some small way, make a difference for good. To that end, here are four things I've learned, am trying to learn, and you should probably learn as well.

1. Don't bail. Talking about race in America is incredibly difficult. Suspicions run high. Our histories go deep. Our propensity for getting hurt and frustrated is great. Therefore the temptation is strong to give up on ever thinking about this issue, entering into this issue, or talking with those who disagree with you on this issue.

Those in the minority can easily conclude about their conversation partners, “These people just don't get it and they never will. I'm tired of trying to show them what they refuse to see.”

And those in the majority can easily conclude, “These people can't get over it and they never will. I'm tired of being the bad guy and always stepping in some mess I never saw.” Don't give up when you come to that point, especially when you are dealing with your brothers and sisters in Christ. Keep talking. Keep forgiving and being forgiven. Keep praying. Stay at the table.

2. Be quick to listen. This does not mean agreeing with everything or patronizing someone with the nod of your head. It means what it means: listen.

Consider that your experience could be greatly influencing the way you see things. Consider that someone else's experience has been very different from yours. Try to understand. Try to empathize. Try to give whatever ground you can honestly give. Have you ever noticed that when you and your spouse get into a fight, the turning point usually comes when one or both of you concede some small point? “You know, honey, I can see why that made you upset.” Listening by itself doesn't solve problems, but it can help us avoid new ones and help us build a foundation of mutual trust and understanding.

3. Enjoy friendships across racial lines. Notice, I did not say “make friends across racial lines.” That's not necessarily bad advice, but it makes friendship sound like a project. We don't need white people looking to fill up their “I have a black friend” quota. We don't need people of any race or ethnicity making friends so they can understand diversity and embrace multiculturalism. Real, lasting friendship is not based on anthropological investigation or sociological congratulations.

That's why I used the word “enjoy.” Have people over for dinner. Go out for a movie. Play basketball every Saturday. Do a Bible study together. There's a hundred things you can do because real friends enjoy being with each other. And when we have friends across racial and ethnic lines, especially ones formed in Christ, we are less likely to stereotype and more likely to sympathize, slower to jump to conclusions and quicker to hear someone out, more eager to build a bridge and less prone to blow one up.

4. Examine your heart. What do you fear? How are you hurt? Why are you angry? Where has bitterness taken root? What lies are you believing? What promises do you need to trust? What about that beam in your eye? Of course, the divisions in our country—and there are similar ones all over the world—won't be solved by pure hearts alone, but they won't be get better without them. And since we in the church know the power of indwelling sin to deceive and destroy, we'd be foolish to underestimate its influence in our own hearts. Sin goes deep—that's at the heart of the problem. The gospel goes deeper—that's essential for any solution.