



# Spiritual Disciplines: Selectivity Concerning Popular Culture

Walking with Jesus

**iFOLLOW**

The iFollow Discipleship Series

## About the iFollow Discipleship Series Pastor's Edition

### Categories

The iFollow Discipleship Series is designed to be used in congregations to assist people in their pursuit of God. This assumes that individuals are in unique places in their journey and there is no perfect set of lessons that everyone must complete to become a disciple—in fact discipleship is an eternal journey. Therefore the iFollow curriculum is a menu of milestones that an individual, small group, or even an entire church can choose from. The lessons can be placed in three general categories: **Meeting with Jesus** (does not assume a commitment to Jesus Christ); **Walking with Jesus** (assumes an acceptance of Jesus Christ); and **Working with Jesus** (assumes a desire to serve Jesus Christ).

### Components

Each lesson has a presenter's manuscript which can be read word for word, but will be stronger if the presenter puts it in his/her own words and uses personal illustrations. The graphic slides can be played directly from the Pastor's DVD or customized and played from a computer. There are also several group activities and discussion questions to choose from as well as printable student handouts.

### Usage

The lessons are designed to be used in small groups, pastor's Bible classes, prayer meetings, seminars, retreats, training sessions, discussion groups, and some lessons may be appropriate sermon outlines.

### Credits

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# The Spiritual Discipline of Selectivity Concerning Popular Culture

*This presentation is designed for people who have decided to accept Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior.*

## Learning Objectives

1. Understand “In the world but not of the world”
2. Review Bible examples of this principle
3. Discover ways in which Jesus was selective about the culture
4. Learn guidelines and questions we can ask ourselves (Phil. 4:8)
5. How to have good judgment without becoming judgemental

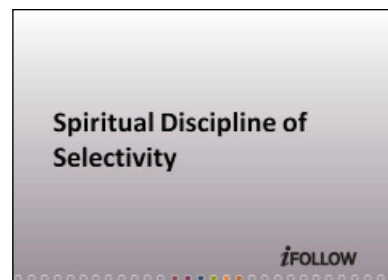
## Content Outline

1. A complex subject: God loves the world, but we’re not supposed to?
2. Some OT people called out of the world and some called into the world
3. The example of Christ’s lifestyle
4. Contemporary popular culture viewed through the life of Christ
5. Conclusion: Jesus’ prayer for us

## Background Material for the Presenter

When one begins to delve into the question of how to live as a follower of Christ in this world while keeping oneself “unspotted,” the waters get very murky very fast. Here are just a few texts which are downright confusing, not to say contradictory!

“Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.” (James 1:27) “Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow.” (James 1:17) “For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boast-



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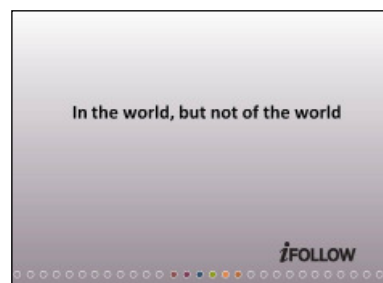
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ful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world.” (1 John 1:16) “For the world is Mine, and all it contains.” (Psalm 50:12) Well, which is it? The world and all it contains belongs to God, or “all” that is in the world is *not* from God?

Or how about this pair? “For **God so loved the world**, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have everlasting life.” (John 3:16, emphasis supplied) “**Do not love the world** nor the things in the world.” (1 John 1:15, emphasis supplied) John even goes on to say, “If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.”

How can all this fit together? Checking the Greek doesn’t help much. There is only one word used for “world” in the New Testament, except in places which also mean “age” or “era.” The word is **kosmos**, which seems pretty all-inclusive even if one doesn’t read Greek. It means the people, the physical creation, the order of the universe, the human system, just like the English “world” or even “universe,” **kosmos** covers it all. So is it good, or is it bad?



We know God made the world, and “saw that it was very good.” (Genesis 1) We also know the children He made to be His own chose their selfish interests ahead of their love for Him, and the world became a very different place than God had planned. So far, it’s clear. There were physical changes, thorns and unruly weeds, storms and seasons, dangerous animals; and there were spiritual changes in the hearts of human beings, leading all the way to murder within the first generation of humans. (Genesis 3 and 4) None of this was from God, yet this changed the world He loved and immediately began to work to save.

From then on, there were choices to be made. There were “sons of God,” and “daughters of men.” (Genesis 6) Of course both those phrases include both genders. There were people who chose to follow God, even though He was invisible and no longer walked with them in “the cool of the evening,” and there were people who chose to follow their own erratic desires.

What did it mean for them to be human beings living in a sinful world, but having their citizenship in a different place, desiring “a better country, that is, a heavenly one?” (Hebrews 11:16) We can learn a lot from the examples set for us in the early stories of our faith. And the first thing that becomes obvious is that the definition of “not of the world” is not a static one, but varies drastically from person to person and from one situation to another.

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**Abraham:** In Genesis 12, we have God calling Abram out of “his father’s land”—a very important and unsettling move in those times—to “a place I will show you.” Obediently, Abram and his household move, and keep on moving. They are taken away from the powerful center of learning that Ur of the Chaldees was, with its libraries and temples and architectural wonders. Out in the quiet places of nature, Abram and Sarai learn about God and His true worship. They receive promises, visits from God, and even new names. They are made the progenitors of a whole new nation, chosen to be priests for God to the world.

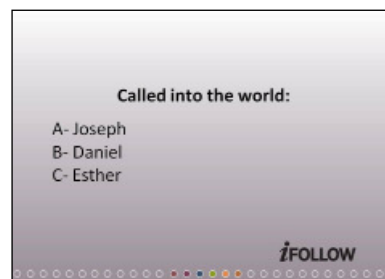
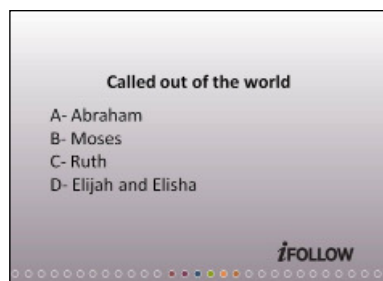
**Moses:** First raised in a humble home, Moses by God’s miraculous intervention became part of the first family of the nation. Then, when he has received a palace education, he is taken away from it all and retrained by forty years of shepherding. It is in the wilderness that God speaks, even naming Himself to Moses, and calling him to become one of the greatest leaders and lawgivers of all time.

**Ruth:** A Moabitess who was presumably raised in an idolatrous home, Ruth is called to leave her homeland and go to the small town of Bethlehem, where amid scenes of the simple duties of home, she will learn to love the one true God—and, little though she knows it, will become an ancestor of the Messiah!

**Elijah and Elisha:** By and large all the prophets, including Elijah and Elisha, are called to live simple lives, moving from town to town giving whatever message God has entrusted to them. Elijah even lives by a brook for an extended period, fed by wild ravens. In the wilderness, he learns to hear the voice of God, and nearing the end of his work, when he becomes burned out and discouraged, the lesson is impressed on him even more firmly than before—God’s voice is still and small, and best heard in the quiet places.

**Preliminary Conclusion:** Clearly, following God and being “not of this world” means going out, away, living alone or possibly in a small, likeminded community. Over the centuries, thousands of God’s earnest followers have done, and still do, just that. But, there are exceptions.

**Joseph:** Here is a boy who was raised in the time-honored nomad tents and then picked up and dropped in Egypt, of all places, the most decadent of the ancient societies—so degraded its name became a byword for sin, just as Babylon’s later did. Joseph is not only taken away from his quiet outdoor life, he is immediately transplanted into the home of a high official, and subjected to



temptations which could have cost him his life whether he gave in or not! From being Potiphar's most trusted steward, he goes to prison. But again, he rises to the notice of high officials. Now he's the steward on the Inside! And next thing you know, Joseph is a kind of Deputy Pharaoh, in charge of the whole department of agriculture, and married to the daughter of an idolatrous priest?

Does Joseph feel he is placed in a position that is incompatible with his faith? No, in Genesis 45:5-8 and again in 50:20, Joseph says God *sent* him to Egypt, to save lives, and that even though others mean something for evil, God can mean it for good, anyway. And God wins.

**Daniel:** It is one of the low spots of the Old Testament. The people of God have been so rebelliously determined to worship their own gods their own way, and refusing to obey their Creator, that they are about to find out what happens when God's patience comes to an end. Teenaged Daniel and his three friends, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, are captured and borne off to Babylon and a genteel sort of slavery, probably as eunuchs. In some ways, Daniel's story parallels Joseph's. Both are among the few Bible characters for whom no sin is recorded, (which is not to say they were sinless.) Both are imprisoned, one with lions, for adhering to their faith even in adversity and temptation. Each becomes assistant governor of a major ungodly nation.

Daniel's story doesn't have the kind of exciting finale where he saves his nation. (Although he was certainly highly instrumental in what is probably the greatest recorded change of heart in a pagan king.) He, in fact, has to live through the conquest of the nation he's been serving his whole life by the next nation on the prophetic chart, as he is in a unique position to recognize. Daniel has already retired by this time, but is brought back into the public eye to serve the next administration with the same kind of unswerving righteousness.

This is no wilderness sojourn! Apparently one can serve God just as well in the bustle of high civic life as in the desert. And apparently, He sometimes asks someone to do just that.

**Esther:** If ever a person in the Bible is placed in a questionable position, it is Hadasah, the niece of Mordecai, whom we refer to by her Gentile name, Esther. The seventy years Jeremiah had promised are long over, and many refugees have returned with joy and singing to the Promised Land. They are rebuilding and facing the trials of inhospitable neighbors, learning and relearning new lessons about how to worship. Yet many have stayed. Why did Mordecai stay? We are not privileged to know. Does he wish he hadn't, when Ahasuerus makes the decree demanding that **all** beautiful virgins be brought to his harem? Surely Mordecai is horrified and wishing he and Hadasah were far away and out of reach. He may even try to hide her. We don't know that either.

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What we do know is that every virgin that the overseers think worthy of the king's notice, including Hadassah, is collected and taken into the custody of Hegai, at the royal harem. For twelve months, they are given beauty treatments and possibly trained in ways of being pleasing concubines. Then they each have one night with the king. At the end of the night, that girl is taken to the "second harem," to the custody of Shaashgaz, who has charge of the concubines (Esther 2:8, 14). She will never be called to the king again unless she "delighted" him. Her dreams of a husband and family of her own are over forever. She is now a concubine of the king, imprisoned inside the petty life of a harem, for life. Esther does delight this jaded king, and is chosen as his queen. Most startling of all, she is cautioned by Mordecai **not to let on that she is a Jew.**

Do Mordecai and Esther, separated, they believe, forever, walk the floor and mourn? Can this possibly have been God's plan? No matter. There is no escape. And yet the day comes when Mordecai tells Esther she might have been brought to this place "for such a time as this," and that the fate of her entire nation is in her hands. Once again, God brings human plans for evil to good, though there is still sin and ugliness and bloodshed in the end of this story. And once again He does it right in the palace of the king.

What, then, can we say? Some followers of God have been called *out* of the world and into a simple life, learning to be faithful and true in the company of nature and nature's God. Others have been called **into** the world, learning to be faithful and true while also being faithful to high-status business and politics, though these always remain second place to God. What **does** it mean to be "in the world, but not of the world"?

## The Greatest Example

There is much we can learn from fellow human beings. Yet they are, after all, sinful, faulty mortals like ourselves. We can argue whether Moses and Joseph were placed where they were—Moses with the sheep, Joseph in Egyptian slavery—in part because of their own prior attitudes and actions. We may insist that Esther didn't do the right thing by not openly living her Jewishness. How can she have kept Sabbaths or festivals or maintained a kosher diet, if she was supposed to keep her faith and ethnicity a secret? Perhaps God made good even of their mistakes. Perhaps we would have done entirely differently in their places. We can suppose so, anyway.

But we do have a perfect example. Just one. And that one is enough. When God saw the time was right, that is to say, the world was at its lowest ebb, which seems an odd time to choose, He "loved the world" so much He sent His Son, not to conquer the planet, knock us into shape, and reestablish His rule (all of which He could have done

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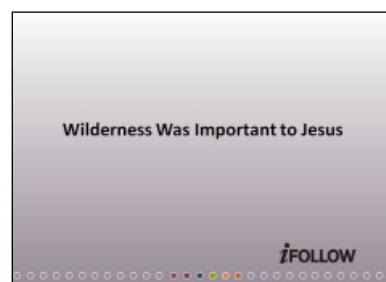
and had the right to do), but to enter right **into** this sinful, dangerous, chaotic world as a *baby!* **Kosmos**, by the way, means an ordering, or even a decoration. It represents the beauty, symmetry, and divine order of the universe. It's arguable whether this world still belonged to that divine order, once Satan had held sway here for even a short time. By the time Jesus came, there wasn't much left to display what God had originally intended.

But there He was, Creator of the universe, wearing our clothes, eating our food, speaking our degraded language, living in a body that was a paltry shadow of the ones He'd designed, growing up, "learning obedience by the things which He suffered," (Hebrews 5:8). Whatever that means! It can't mean what it means to us, suffering because of *dis*obedience and slowly learning better. After He'd been here for three long decades, He "started His ministry." As if He hadn't been ministering all along. . . For three and a half years, He continued to walk in the world, eating the food, talking the language, being accused of gluttony and drunkardness, teaching His upside-down Way.

### **In what ways was Jesus selective about the aspects of the culture into which He (unlike us) chose to be born?**

First, and no doubt very importantly, Jesus chose to be born into an observant Jewish home. In fact, Joseph was so observant he nearly didn't marry his fiancée when it turned out she was pregnant. He was going to "put her away quietly." We learn two things about Joseph here. First, that he did do his best to observe the Law, and second, that he understood the spirit of the Law better than, for example, those who later brought the woman caught in adultery to Jesus to be stoned. Joseph could have demanded that Mary be stoned. But he knew more about love, and the God of love, than that. He also listened when he had his own dream. Perhaps he had not been able to bring himself to believe Mary's story, but he did believe when he had a dream of an angel himself. How many men in that day and that society would have?

Mary and Joseph took the prescribed offering to the temple when Jesus was born, and took Him to the temple Himself when He reached the required age. Clearly, they were faithful Jews who did their best to follow God's teachings and who knew that His fore-





most teaching is love. This is the sort of family God chose to raise His Son on earth. We can't choose what family we grew up in, but we can choose to center our adult homes and families on the God of love.

Second, He did choose a humble home and an agricultural society where he would be able to get into nature. It is obvious in all the gospels that Jesus loved being out by Himself in nature to pray and meditate. He clearly considered this a good way to regain His perspective. For example, after the feeding of the multitude, when they tried to crown Him king, Jesus sent the disciples off across the lake on their own, going “up on the mountain by Himself to pray.” (Matthew 14:23) At other times He called His disciples to go apart with Him for a while, whether in the hills or on the water. Can we assume that a connection with nature is important to all of us, no matter how our personalities differ?

It seems that these two factors were the most overarching aspects of Jesus' lifestyle, and have the most universal application to us today, living in a world so different it would hardly seem the same planet to someone transplanted from the first century. If we have those two down—Love God first, last, and always; and take time to rest and meditate, preferably out in fresh air and greenery—the rest of the world that surrounds us may be easier to sort out. Maybe, when it comes to realizing and regularly reloading our connectedness to the rest of creation, we *are* supposed to be both in and of the world—the natural world, that is.

## Popular Culture

What do we mean by “popular culture?” Here is the definition from the *Wikipedia*:

**Popular culture (or pop culture)** is the culture—patterns of human activity and the symbolic structures that give such activities significance and importance—which are popular, well-liked or common. This is often defined or determined by the mass media. Popular culture is deemed as what is popular within the social context. ... Popular culture is also suggested to be the widespread cultural elements in any given society that are perpetuated through that society's vernacular language or **lingua franca**. It comprises the daily interactions, needs and desires and cultural ‘moments’ that make up the everyday lives of the mainstream. It can include any number of practices, including those pertaining to cooking, clothing, consumption and mass media, and the many facets of entertainment such as sport and theater. ... Popular culture often contrasts with a more exclusive, even elitist “high culture,” that is, the culture of ruling social groups. The earliest use of “popular” in English was during the fifteenth century in law and politics, meaning “low ... base ... vulgar” and “of the common people” until the late eighteenth century by which time it began to mean “widespread” and gain in positive connotation. (Williams 1985)

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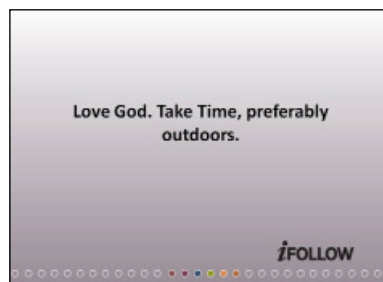
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Pop culture finds its expression in the mass circulation of items from areas such as fashion, music, sport and film. The world of pop culture has had a particular influence on art from the early 1960s on, through Pop Art. When modern pop culture began during the early 1950s, it made it harder for adults to participate. Today, most adults, their kids and grandchildren “participate” in pop culture directly or indirectly.

If “popular culture” is defined as those elements of culture that are widespread and accepted by the majority of any given society, then we can see immediately a striking and enormously definitive difference between the cultures of Jesus’ day and our own. We call it the “global village.” When life all over the planet moved no faster than the pace of a fast horse, and most often at the pace of a person, a people group could be almost completely isolated even from other groups that were geographically quite nearby. Someone in a village in China knew little about what went on even in the next valley, and nothing at all about what went on in a village in Guatemala, or even that such a place existed. Culture, art, and religion moved with trade and exploration, so Italy heard about Asia only a few decades after Marco Polo traveled there, and Galilee and Judea knew something about Egypt, the near East, and the eastern Mediterranean because they were centered in the intersection of many trade routes. But you could have an alien place called Samaria right between the two. “We don’t associate with **those** people.” We may not know much, but we know they’re different, and different is bad.



Human nature is what it is, and there are still enclaves and prejudice and us/them ways of thinking. There are still valleys in Appalachia or Quebec or maybe even neighborhoods in New York City or San Francisco, where people do things “the way they’ve always been done” and look with deep suspicion and mistrust on Outsiders. Only today, they have televisions and computers and cell phones in those valleys, and the world has shrunk mightily.

So now we can talk about “pop culture” and mean a kind of people group so huge it would have been unimaginable in Jesus’ day. Now you can see Bantu and Brazilian, Indonesian and Inuit, Mongolian and Manx teenagers wearing blue jeans and little white earbuds created by North American pop culture and made in Asia. And they’re all texting each other about the latest episodes of television programs their parents never heard of.

Is it possible to figure out how Jesus wants us to live in *this* world, but not of it? How on earth can we even talk the same language as these millennial children, let alone reach them with the Everlasting Gospel that’s supposed to go to *all* tribes and kin-

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dreds and nations? Perhaps we can list some of those cultural elements mentioned above, as well as others that we have concerns and quandaries about, look at them each in the life of Christ, and then formulate some questions we can ask ourselves when trying to make wise decisions.

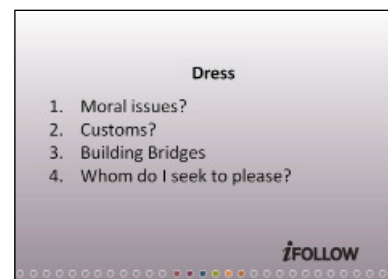
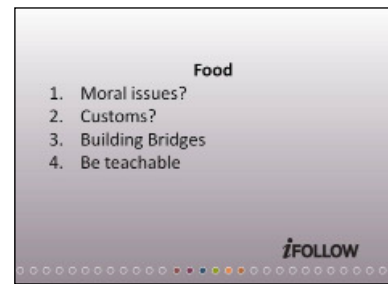
## Food and Diet

One of the first things that comes to mind when thinking of differing cultures is eating; various types of food and cookery. Every people group has its own local diet, its own cuisine, even its own idea of what constitutes healthy nutrition. When we travel with the intent to learn about other people, food is one of the first things we want to experience and experiment with.

Seventh-day Adventists have had their own subculture when it comes to this subject, although our ideas about plant-based, low-fat, low-sugar, low-additive foods have now been widely accepted in the world around us. It's easier than ever in Western societies to be vegetarian or vegan without facing so much as a lifted eyebrow.

**What did Jesus do?** Again, He chose an observant Jewish home, and He centered His ministry where the diet laws given in the Torah were accepted as conventional wisdom, “what we do.” But beyond that, He seems to have eaten what was put in front of Him. He certainly ate lamb at the Passover, and is shown to have killed, cleaned, cooked, and eaten fish even after His resurrection, in His glorified body! That seems so strange to some of us. And He **did not** follow the detailed washing rituals the various sects prescribed for before meals, though no doubt He was clean. His culture ate what we today would call a “Mediterranean diet,” that is, lean meats and fish, legumes, lots of fresh, in-season produce, a variety of fresh, whole grain breads, and olive oil. He is never shown as being present at a gathering where anything particularly decadent would have been served.

Questions to ask: What are the customs where I live? What are the moral issues, if any, of eating? Do they include sustainable agriculture practices and ways of supporting local growers? How can I use my eating habits as a way of building bridges to those around me, rather than as a wall? How can I use food as a way of being teachable and allowing others to teach me, too, rather than always being in the teaching position?



## Dress

Of all cultural issues, this is one of the most “hot potato” topics, at least among conservative Christians. Because of issues of modesty and purity, what we wear goes far beyond tastes or fashions. But we are often guilty of making modesty or purity the excuse for pushing a particular **style** we like and are used to, when another fashion might be just as modest, and more becoming to the person we are trying to persuade of our view, which might be our own child.

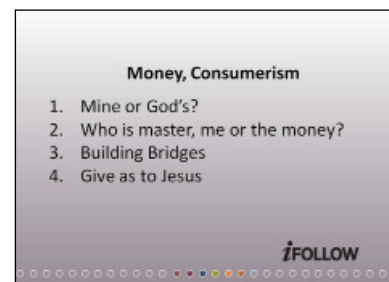
**What did Jesus do?** This is an interesting subject to pursue. Jesus, in fact, never mentioned dress at all except to rebuke the religious leaders who made their clothing **too** “holier-than-thou” and a subject of pride! See Mark 12:38 and Luke 20:46. He wore the dress of those around Him, and it’s clear by context even if not mentioned that what He wore was a simple, humble version. The only thing we know about for sure is His seamless tunic for which the soldiers gambled at his death, probably spun and woven for Jesus by His mother.

Questions to ask: What are the moral issues of dress? What are the dress customs of my personal culture, and how are they different from or similar to those of the culture around me? Are there ways I may use my dress to build bridges rather than walls? Whom do I seek to please when I choose what to buy, and what to wear on a given day? What might those in the cultures around me think when they first see me? Is this what I want them to think?

## Money and Materialism

This is another hot topic, maybe more in the culture around us than in the church. And perhaps we ought to take more notice of it. We tend to like to talk more about what we’re using or wearing than about how much we spend on it. The Western cultures today are richer than any societies in the history of the planet. Never before have more people had so much. And still the “poor are with us.” And still they starve in our streets.

Shopping is all too often seen, not as a way of obtaining necessities, but as a hobby in itself; something fun to do on a free afternoon or even in time that ought to be spent otherwise. The average person spends more time shopping than volunteering for community service or participating in religious activities. Consumerism is rampant in our developed societies, and the developing ones are following in our footsteps as fast as they can. As Christians, we ought to ask ourselves whether **consuming** or **conserving** is actually what God has called us to do. Does a steward consume His master’s goods, or use them as the Master would specify?



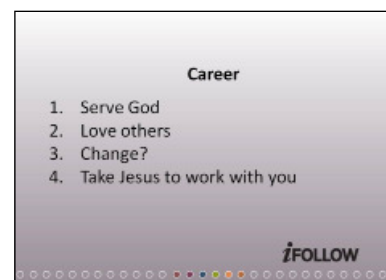
**What did Jesus do?** First, He appears to have had no money of His own at all. Jesus did not even have a house of His own, or a business, though He may have been expected to take over Joseph’s carpenter shop. He did not collect clothes or things, but gave His life to ministry, serving God’s purpose and the needs of humanity.

He said that it is difficult for the rich to enter God’s kingdom (Matt. 19:24, Mark 10:25) and that one cannot serve both money and God (Matt. 6:34, Luke 16:13). From these things it is clear that money should make us at least cautious. But does this mean He wants everyone to live in nomadic poverty, subsisting on the offerings of friends, such as the women and men who supported Him? No, because He also clearly showed His support for marriage and the creation of new families, talked about building, but being wise about it (Luke 12:18; 14:28), and even recommended making friends with “unrighteous mammon,” possibly with some tongue-in-cheek attitude (Luke 16:9). Jesus gratefully accepted the gifts of those who supported His ministry, as well as enjoying the home of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus at Bethany, for example. So we can safely assume that not everyone is called to be a wandering minister for God, but that we are all called to be ministers to others with the goods God has entrusted to us. The practice of tithing is designed to remind us of God’s ownership of all that we have. When we practice tithing, we learn to live on less than 100 percent of what we earn. This is a principle that Jesus was familiar with. He specifically mentions offerings and generosity, publicly commending the widow who did not hold back anything for herself, but gave the little bit she had. (Mark 12:41-44, Luke 21:1-4)

Questions to ask: Is my money dedicated first to God, or first to myself? Do I serve my money, or does my money serve me? If I had two dollars left, what would I do with them? In what ways can my money build bridges to the ones around me for whom Jesus died? Do I really need all I have? Do I ever buy just for the fun of having new things? How much of my resources do I dedicate to the poor Jesus commended us to serve as if they were Himself?

## Work and Career

A closely related issue is that of our lifework. Today the emphasis we see in the media, in educational advertising, and all around us is to find the job that will support us “in the way to which we’d like to become accustomed.” How much money will it make? Yet, if we pay attention, there is a growing amount of media, from movies to books to editorials in major magazines and newspapers dedicated to debunking that attitude, trying to teach people that they will be far happier and more motivated if they choose careers that actually fulfill their heart’s knowledge of who they were meant to



be. There is not much point to making lots of money if you are so busy making it that you have no time to enjoy it.

Further, there are highly visible organizations and even well-known celebrities leading the way by dedicating time and resources to reducing hunger, poverty, disease, abuse, and violence in the world. Are we content to let them lead the way, satisfied that they can afford it? Or, are we as followers of Jesus also dedicating time, resources and careers to righting the world's wrongs?

God sometimes calls someone in an unmistakable way, usually to do something the person feels completely powerless to do. Most of the time, though, He seems to leave our career choice up to us. This doesn't mean He doesn't have a deep interest in the issue, and some advice, if we'd listen for it.

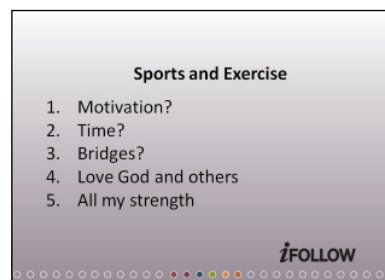
**What did Jesus do?** Well, Jesus was one of those who is definitely and directly called, put on earth for a particular task, and aware of it from childhood. He allowed nothing to get between Him and His mission, not even the preaching of the rabbis or what they saw as the rules. He was here to love people. Dare we say that each of us, no matter if we're telephone operators or garbage collectors or lawyers or waitresses, is here for the same reason?

Questions to ask: How did/will I choose my career? In what ways can I use my work to serve God? In what ways can I use my work to love others? How would I know if God were asking me to change jobs, and what would I do? How can I remain aware of Jesus walking with me day to day where I work?

## Sports and Exercise

In Jesus' day, there were athletes. The Olympics started in Greece before Christ was born. Usually, their training was for the purpose of becoming better soldiers, but such events as chariot racing also occurred. In Rome spectator sports were offered to the general populace, including things more evil than what is permitted today. There is no record that Jesus gave any attention to these things, although Paul refers to them, using the athlete as a positive image for faithful Christian discipleship. (1 Corinthians 9:24, Galatians 5:7, Hebrews 12:2)

God created our bodies and designed them, in fact, to be much stronger and more efficient than they are now. But does the pursuit of strength or muscle-building purely for its own sake, or the use of many, many hours of time either practicing the sport or



watching someone else do so make us better servants of God and humanity? There have been some sports heroes who did use their strength and fame to better the world. There have been some who dedicated their sport and their bodies to God. The film *Chariots of Fire* tells the story of a famous example of using sports as a witness to the world. So it doesn't behoove us to make hard and fast rules in this as in any other cultural arena.

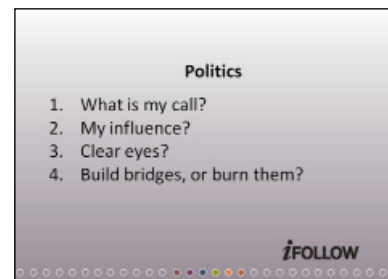
**What did Jesus do?** Jesus or any of His disciples, male or female, would have laughed if you'd invited them to join your sports club. Jesus walked the length and breadth of the Holy Land day after day. And so did his enemies, those priests and lawyers we think of as overfed and self-satisfied. His disciples fished by hand, kept house, hauled toddlers, walked miles, rowed boats, made everything they used from clothing to dishes to furniture, ground grain between stones, and thought nothing of following Jesus from Galilee to Judea and beyond the Jordan (Matt. 19:1) or hurrying on foot to a secluded place He'd gone by boat (Matt. 14:13). He walked back and forth from Bethany to Jerusalem daily during the last week of His life, and so did those with Him. If they heard our doctors advocate "at least a half hour of physical activity a day," they would assume we were sick.

Questions to ask: Why am I devoted to this sport? What is my motivation? What am I accomplishing? Can I use my sport or exercise to build bridges between people and people, or people and God? Am I spending time I ought to spend on other things? Conversely, am I spending time in inactivity or sedentary pursuits that I could use strengthening my body and my health? What does it mean to love God with all my strength or might, as Deut. 6:5 enjoins?

## Politics

We have already dug into some aspects of this subject, in the stories of Joseph, Esther, and Daniel. The Bible makes it clear that God can and does use people in the highest levels of government and administration. We have the only known chapter of the Bible that was written by a pagan king in Daniel 4. We could not have had that story without Daniel, and his three friends, and no doubt other, nameless witnesses for God in Babylon's courts. As the world nears its end, it is past time for us to stop keeping Christians away from politics on the assumption that it is all pollution and corruption.

That said, it **is** a tricky arena, one in which we must walk carefully. It **is** difficult to be involved with politics and not allow it to harm our faith. It **is** hard to tell which com-



promises are useful, acceptable ways of getting along together with all God's children, and which are compromises of principle. It is not an area to enter lightly.

As for being involved from the outside as most of us are, that, too, requires prayer and careful study. We certainly must not advocate any particular party or candidate from our churches, pulpits, papers, or use any spiritual authority we may have to influence others around us. But we must watch for the issues that are issues of God, and work for what is right, what will lead to mercy and justice, which Micah 6:8 lists as some of our first duties to God. We just have to remember the third thing, at the same time; "Walk humbly with your God." No matter how much we've read about a certain issue, or how strong our opinions are, self-righteousness is still wrong.

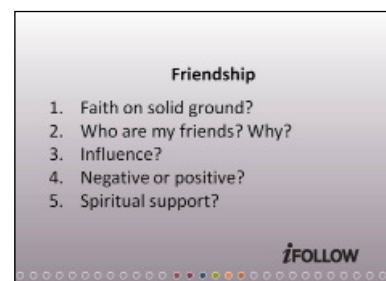
**What did Jesus do?** Jesus was Jesus wherever He was. He didn't take His case to the politicians, whether religious ones like Caiaphas and Annas or secular ones like Herod and Pilate. But He didn't shrink from them when they came to Him. He didn't cower before them, even when they killed Him. And His entire life and ministry was one whole, seamless teaching about peace, mercy, and justice in the world He was buying back at such infinite cost.

Questions to ask: How can I know how deeply I am called to be involved in or stay away from politics? How can I use my influence for God and my fellow beings? How can I keep my eyes clear and not allow emotions or selfish opinions to color my attitudes toward civic life and responsibilities? Do my politics build bridges or burn them?

## Friendships

We may not think of friendships as related to pop culture, but it is the environment in which we experience much of the world around us. There seem to be two extremes: staying as far away from the world as possible, having all our friends in the same church or group, and not even meeting people who believe differently, or being so friendly with and so much a part of the world around us that no one even knows we are a Christian, let alone whether that means anything or not. We can be sure neither of these extremes is God's will. Where should we be?

It must vary from person to person, environment to environment, and even from stage to stage of our lives, because we already saw that God called some people in the Bible further out of the world, and some higher into it. So, like everything else, it requires passionate, personal, intense, listening prayer.





**What did Jesus do?** Honestly, it's scary to contemplate. Jesus left the holy places where He'd lived, along with all His holy friends and Family, and went to a place He knew was filthy and polluted in the extreme. He knew much of the language was not suited to discussing the things of God, and that He'd have to live in a body degraded by thousands of years of sin. He knew He'd have to eat some of His own creatures. But He didn't shrink from it.

When He got here, He first spent many years training Himself to live close to God on a second by second basis and to know the Bible from cover to cover, then threw Himself into the deep end. He made friends with dishonest tax collectors, prostitutes, and greedy men. He hung out with gluttons and drunkards and street people. He chose as His inner circle some illiterate fishers and a political terrorist called a zealot, a tax collector and a guy with sticky fingers. He didn't even seem to mind when the spiritual people accused Him of being just like the broken people He singled out for His affection. Whenever He had any idea that His own faith might falter, or even before that, He withdrew alone and prayed some more until He got His perspective straight and His faith strengthened. He also depended (sometimes with disappointing results) on the spiritual support of a few of His closest friends who He knew loved God as He did.

Then, and this is the scariest part, He went open-eyed to His death, leaving His pure, heavenly message and mission in the hands of these same faulty folks and whoever they might be able to convince to join them. Yikes! That would be you and me, by the way. And His friends changed the face of the earth forever.

Questions to ask: How much time and energy do I invest making sure my faith is on solid ground? Who are my friends? Why? What do my friends think about my faith? Are they influenced by it, or just irritated by it? If they see it as a negative thing, how have I encouraged that? Is there something I can do to change it? Whom do I depend on for spiritual support? Is my prayer life strong enough to support me when they fail?

## Entertainment

Last, but definitely not least, we come to the one popular culture arena that is the most controversial of all. In the first century, even in decadent Rome, no one could have foreseen something known as the Middle Class, a huge stratum of society who have all their needs and most of their wants met, but neither have servants to see to that nor have to spend end-

**Entertainment**  
If it were true, would it be good?  
From Philippians 4:8:

- Is it true (that is, does it teach a truth?)
- Is it honorable?
- Is it right?
- Is it pure?

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- Is it lovely?
- Is it of good repute?
- Is there any excellence?
- Is there any praise?
- Would Jesus watch/read/play this?

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less hours of backbreaking labor to accomplish it, and therefore have leisure time unprecedented in history. On top of that, or because of it, we have also invented and developed something that will be the instrument of the gospel to the whole world, but is mostly put to much lower uses. It's called Mass Media, including the worldwide explosion of information generally lumped under the Internet.

What about entertainment? In this, there is little direct learning from Jesus' life in first century Galilee and Judea. In those days, people talked, sang songs or played simple instruments, read if they could, danced folk dances, took walks, went swimming and boated. Archaeology has found throughout the Roman Empire of the first century examples of lewd, evil activities, wild parties and entertainment made of human beings, such as the gladiator contests to the death, watching people eaten by wild beasts. In fact executions of criminals were public spectacles. There is no record that Jesus or any of His apostles ever considered making their way to the Colosium in Rome, but Jesus did participate in a wedding party, even providing an emergency supply of drink at His mother's request.

We could spend pages and pages categorizing the forms of entertainment available to us today and trying to make a list of rules. Church people used to do that. No cards. Unless they only have numbers, but without pictures. No movies. Unless you can watch them in the privacy of your home. No dances at all. Once the people raised by these rules grew up and realized the arbitrary nature of them and the lack of a Bible foundation for some interpretations, they tended to throw them all out and do as they pleased. They had never been taught the principles that would enable them to make their own wise decisions.

**What are the principles?** There are at least two overarching principles we should consider. First, there is time. Jesus believed in relaxation and time out. But look and see how many hours He spent that way. Work "as long as it is day," He said. "Night is coming, when no one can work." (John 9:4)

The second principle might be more controversial. It is this: If it were true, would it be good? Most Christians would never consider hiring (or worse, buying) an exotic dancer. We would be horrified at the thought of watching gladiators or captured slaves brutally fight and kill each other, and would turn our heads if confronted with a crucified criminal. But we seem to think if it's "just pretend" that makes it OK. We watch movies or shows or play video games of all of the above and worse, and never ask if it is pleasing to God.

There is conflict in life, and the Bible shows us that important lessons may be taught and learned by stories of incidents which are not very pleasant (David and Bathsheba, the war stories) or not even true (the rich man and Lazarus). But is there a serious point like that to everything we read, watch, and play?

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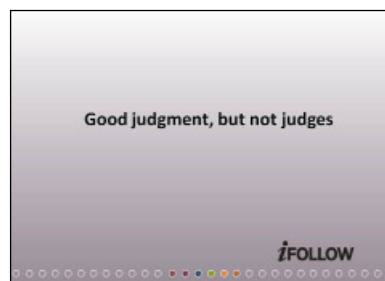
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Questions to ask: Is it true (that is, does it teach a truth?) Is it honorable? Is it right? Is it pure? Is it lovely? Is it of good repute? Is there any excellence? Is there any praise? Would Jesus watch/read/play this? (See Philippians 4:8.)

We shouldn't leave this subject without spending at least a moment considering one other question, that of children and youth. Even when something meets all the above criteria, that does not necessarily make it suitable for children and youth. We must first of all know our own children well and shield them, especially when young, from something we know would upset them even if it is suitable to other children their age. Then, we must remember that one of the things we learned from the life of Jesus is that He spent thirty years preparing before He put Himself in the midst of the chaotic life of the people for whom He came. There are things we might willingly share with our older or adult children that we must keep from them until they are ready, and once again, this requires prayer, prayer, and more prayer.



## Having Good Judgment without Becoming Judges

Once we have studied and discussed and prayed, the one thing we will have learned for sure is that there are few specific, practical rules in Scripture. The rules that we do find are open to individual interpretation, and therefore must be taught by God's "still, small voice," not by us. In all our attempts to discern clearly what God would have us do in all these things, we will find ourselves changing positions as we grow, both in age and in spiritual maturity. What is OK for us today will not necessarily be what is right for us at some other point in our lives. That being the case, how can we stand in judgment on another's decision concerning what is right for them? We can do all in our power to make our influences positive, to encourage others to see that their lives matter not just to themselves, but to God. We can share these questions, and be honest about our own struggles and occasional flip-flopping. But we can't make anyone else's decision, just our own (and for our small children). If a friend does not see why she needs to consider God's opinion, we must be quiet and pray. If a friend who is a Christian says he has prayerfully considered and has come up with a decision that is different from ours, then perhaps we ought to pray and ask God whether we have something to learn from him. But it is also possible that different people, in different situations, with different personalities and needs **may get different directions from God**. Yes, it really is possible. And that's God's business, not ours.

All we know is, Jesus wants us to be in the world, but not of it. And that's probably as

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progressive as any other aspect of Christianity and sanctification. On one of His last nights on earth, He talked about this very subject. Eighteen times in Jesus' prayer in John 17, that word **kosmos** (world) appears. Eighteen times! That's worth some study time. Here's probably the definitive text: "I am no longer in the world; yet they themselves are in the world, and I come to You. ... I do not ask you to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world." (John 17:11, 15-16)

As Jesus lived and moved and had His being in this world, as He mingled and loved and worked, so are we to be. As He kept His goals and His citizenship above, so must we. And if He needed thirty years' training and whole nights in prayer, how much do we need?

"Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy, to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen." (Jude 25)

## Handouts in this Package

1. In the World, but Not of the World
2. Some Principles in Considering Culture
3. Adventist Church Standards on Popular Culture



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## Additional Resources

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## Discussion Questions

1. What are some of the ways your upbringing was similar to/different from Jesus' upbringing?
2. Share some specific ways in which you put God first in your life.
3. What chances do you get to be out in nature?
4. If you live in a city, what steps could you take to see to it you are connected with God's creation?
5. Do you agree that the two basic principles help with the rest of the often controversial lifestyle questions? If so, how?
6. Which cultural areas are especially easy or difficult for you? How can you be sure not to criticize those whose issues are, perhaps, the opposite of yours?

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## Group Activity

**Purpose:** To stretch our minds as we consider what we think we're good at, vs. what God might call us to.

**Preparation:** You will need space for some small groups or teams. Put the sample scenarios below on 3x5 cards. It helps to use one color of card for public scenarios, and a different color for wilderness scenarios. You may wish to post the "questions for both groups to consider," or put them on papers at the tables.

**Assignment:** Divide the group into two parts by asking those who believe they could make a faithful contribution to public, civic, or political life to go to one table or one side of the room, and those who believe they would be happier serving God in the solitary wilderness places at a second table or the other side of the room. Those who don't think they can choose one or the other need to just pick one. Once the group has divided itself (likely not very evenly, which doesn't matter, but you may subdivide into smaller groups if needed) inform them that the ones who chose public life have just been called to the desert, and the ones who chose the desert have been placed in high governmental or business positions. Let them choose from some of the following scenarios, or some they come up with, and discuss what they think they would do in such situations.

**Time:** Allow a couple of minutes to divide, then 15 to 20 minutes for discussion and sharing. Allow another 15 minutes or more at the end for group sharing of insights and reactions.

### Sample Public Scenarios

1. You have been elected to serve on the department of education in your state.
2. You have just inherited majority stock in a large department store chain.
3. God has given you a gift of music and you are now a singing celebrity.
4. Imagine being the Vice President of one party, and then being asked to be in the same position when the opposing party takes over, which is something like what Daniel faced. What would you do?

### Sample Wilderness Scenarios

1. You are the sole support and caregiver of an ailing relative, and there is no way of putting him or her in long term care.
2. You, with the gifts and callings you actually have now, are "stuck" in a tiny village on Hudson Bay.
3. You spend forty years as the only teacher of a one-room school.

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4. You are a street person with no physical resources or ways of changing your circumstances.

### **Questions for Both Groups to Discuss**

Try not to get sidetracked by what you know or don't know. God would provide that. Do your best to truly put yourself in the place you have been given and imagine what your real reactions would be.

1. What attitudes do you think you would have first?
2. What attitudes would you try to have?
3. What kinds of things might you try to accomplish?
4. In what ways would your prayer life change?
5. What if, like Esther, you were instructed not to reveal your faith? How would that complicate things?

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# Handout 1

## In the World, But Not Of The World

We can learn a lot from the examples set for us in the early stories of our faith. And one of the first things that becomes obvious is that the definition of “not of the world” is not a static one, but varies drastically from person to person and from one situation to another.

**Abraham**

**Moses**

**Ruth**

**Elijah and Elisha**

**Joseph**

**Daniel**

**Esther**

Which are like your life? Has it varied in different times of your life? Do you know for sure where you are called to be right now?

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## Handout 2

### Some Principles in Considering Culture

## Food and Diet

**What did Jesus do?** He chose an observant Jewish home, and He centered His ministry where the diet laws given in the Torah were accepted as conventional wisdom —“What we do.” But beyond that, He seems to have eaten what was put in front of Him. He certainly ate lamb at least at Passover, and is shown to have killed, cleaned, cooked, and eaten fish after His resurrection, in His glorified body! That seems so strange to some of us. And He **didn't** follow the detailed washing rituals the various sects prescribed for before meals, though no doubt He was clean. His culture ate what we today would call a “Mediterranean diet,” that is, lean meats and fish, legumes, lots of fresh, in-season produce, a variety of fresh, whole grain breads, and olive oil. He is never shown as being present at a gathering where anything particularly decadent would have been served.

**Questions to ask:** What are the customs where I live? What are the moral issues, if any, of eating? Do they include sustainable agriculture practices and ways of supporting local growers? How can I use my eating habits as a way of building bridges to those around me, rather than as a wall? How can I use food as a way of being teachable and allowing others to teach me, too, rather than always being in the teaching position?

## Dress

**What did Jesus do?** This is an interesting subject to pursue. Jesus, in fact, never mentioned dress at all except to rebuke the religious leaders who made their clothing *too* “holier-than-thou” and a subject of pride! See Mark 12:38 and Luke 20:46. He wore the dress of those around Him, and it's clear by context even if not mentioned that what He wore was a simple, humble version. The only thing we know about for sure is His seamless tunic for which the soldiers gambled at his death, probably spun and woven for Jesus by His mother.

**Questions to ask:** What are the moral issues of dress? What are the dress customs of my personal culture, and how are they different from or similar to those of the culture around me? Are there ways I may use my dress to build bridges rather than walls? Whom do I seek to please when I choose what to buy, and what to wear on a given

day? What might those in the cultures around me think when they first see me? Is this what I want them to think?

## Money and Materialism

**What did Jesus do?** First, He appears to have had no money of His own at all. Jesus did not even have a house of His own, or a business, though He surely must have been expected to take over Joseph's carpenter shop. He did not collect clothes or things, but gave His life to His ministry.

He said that it is difficult for the rich to enter God's kingdom, (Matt. 19: 24; Mark 10:25) and that one cannot serve both money and God (Matt. 6:34; Luke 16:13). From these things it is clear that money should make us at least cautious. But does this mean He wants everyone to live in nomadic poverty, subsisting on the offerings of friends, such as the women and men who supported Him? No, because He also clearly showed His support for marriage and the creation of new families, talked about building, but being wise about it (Luke 12:18; 14:28), and even recommended making friends with "unrighteous mammon," possibly with some tongue-in-cheek attitude (Luke 16:9). Jesus gratefully accepted the gifts of those who supported His ministry, as well as enjoying the home of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus at Bethany. So we can safely assume that not everyone is called to be a wandering minister for God, but that we are all called to be ministers to others with the goods God has entrusted to us. One certain moral issue about money is the principle of tithing. Even though it is not mentioned in Jesus' life, we can know that it is a rule He gave us for our happiness. And He does specifically mention offerings and generosity, publicly commending the widow who did not hold back anything for herself, but gave the last bit she had (Mark 12:41-44; Luke 21:1-4).

**Questions to ask:** Is my money dedicated first to God, or first to myself? Do I serve my money, or does my money serve me? If I had two dollars left, what would I do with them? In what ways can my money build bridges to the ones around me for whom Jesus died? Do I really need all I have? Do I ever buy just for the fun of having new things? How much of my resources do I dedicate to the poor Jesus commended us to serve as if they were Himself?

## Work and Career

**What did Jesus do?** Well, Jesus was one of those who is definitely and directly called, put on earth for a particular task, and aware of it from childhood. He allowed nothing to get between Him and His mission, not even the preaching of the rabbis or what they saw as the rules. He was here to love people. Dare we say that each of us, no

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matter if we're telephone operators or garbage collectors or lawyers or waitresses, is here for the same reason?

**Questions to ask:** How did/will I choose my career? In what ways can I use my work to serve God? In what ways can I use my work to love others? How would I know if God were asking me to change jobs, and what would I do? How can I remain aware of Jesus walking with me day to day where I work?

## Sports and Exercise

**What did Jesus do?** Jesus or any of His disciples, male or female, would have laughed if you'd invited them to join your sports club. Jesus walked the length and breadth of the Holy Land day after day. And so did his enemies, those priests and lawyers we think of as overfed and self-satisfied. His disciples fished by hand, kept house, hauled toddlers, walked miles, rowed boats, made everything they used from clothing to dishes to furniture, ground grain between stones, and thought nothing of following Jesus from Galilee to Judea and beyond the Jordan (Matt. 19:1) or hurrying on foot to a secluded place He'd gone by boat (Matt. 14:13). He walked back and forth from Bethany to Jerusalem daily during the last week of His life, and so did those with Him. If they heard our doctors advocate "at least a half hour of physical activity a day," they would assume we were sick.

**Questions to ask:** Why am I devoted to this sport? What is my motivation? What am I accomplishing? Can I use my sport or exercise to build bridges between people and people, or people and God? Am I spending time I ought to spend on other things? Conversely, am I spending time in inactivity or sedentary pursuits that I could use strengthening my body and my health? What does it mean to love God with all my strength or might, as Deut. 6:5 enjoins?

## Politics

**What did Jesus do?** Jesus was Jesus wherever He was. He didn't take His case to the politicians, whether religious ones like Caiaphas and Annas or secular ones like Herod and Pilate. But He didn't shrink from them when they came to Him. He didn't cower before them, even when they killed Him. And His entire life and ministry was one whole, seamless teaching about peace, mercy, and justice in the world He was buying back at such infinite cost.

**Questions to ask:** How can I know how deeply I am called to be involved in or stay away from politics? How can I use my influence for God and my fellow beings? How can I keep my eyes clear and not allow emotions or selfish opinions to color my at-

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titudes toward civic life and responsibilities? Do my politics build bridges or burn them?

## Friendships

**What did Jesus do?** Honestly, it's scary to contemplate. Jesus left the holy places where He'd lived, along with all His holy friends and Family, and went to a place He knew was filthy and polluted in the extreme. He knew not even the language was suited to discussing the things of God, and that He'd have to live in a body degraded by thousands of years of sin. He knew He'd have to eat some of His own creatures. But He didn't shrink from it.

When He got here, He first spent many years training Himself to live close to God on a second by second basis and to know the Bible from cover to cover, then threw Himself into the deep end. He made friends with dishonest tax collectors, prostitutes, and greedy men. He hung out with gluttons and drunkards and street people. He chose as His inner circle some illiterate fishers and a political terrorist called a zealot, a tax collector and a guy with sticky fingers. He didn't even seem to mind when the spiritual people accused Him of being just like the broken people He singled out for His affection. Whenever He had any idea that His own faith might falter, or even before that, He withdrew alone and prayed some more until He got His perspective straight and His faith strengthened. He also depended (sometimes with disappointing results) on the spiritual support of a few of His closest friends who He knew loved God as He did. Then, and this is the scariest part, He went open-eyed to His death, leaving His pure, heavenly message and mission in the hands of these same faulty folks and whoever they might be able to convince to join them. Yikes! That would be you and me, by the way. And His friends changed the face of the earth forever.

**Questions to ask:** How much time and energy do I invest making sure my faith is on solid ground? Who are my friends? Why? What do my friends think about my faith? Are they influenced by it, or just irritated by it? If they see it as a negative thing, how have I encouraged that? Is there something I can do to change it? Whom do I depend on for spiritual support? Is my prayer life strong enough to support me when they fail?

## Entertainment

**What are the principles?** Perhaps there are a couple of overarching ones we should consider. First, there's time. Jesus believed in relaxation and time out. But look and see how many hours and hours He spent that way. You won't find many. Work "as long as it is day," He said. "Night is coming, when no one can work" John 9:4.

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The second principle might be more controversial. It is this: If it were true, would it be good? Most Christians would never consider hiring (or worse, buying) an exotic dancer. We would be horrified at the thought of watching gladiators or captured slaves brutally fight and kill each other, and would at least turn our heads if confronted with a crucified criminal. But we seem to think if it's "just pretend" that makes it OK. So we watch movies or shows or play video games of all of the above and worse, and never ask if it is pleasing to God.

There is conflict in life, and the Bible shows us that important lessons may be taught and learned by stories of incidents which are not very pleasant ( David and Bathsheba, the war stories) or not even true (the rich man and Lazarus). But is there a point like that to everything we read, watch, and play?

**Questions to ask:** Is it true (that is, does it teach a truth?) Is it honorable? Is it right? Is it pure? Is it lovely? Is it of good repute? Is there any excellence? Is there any praise? Would Jesus watch/read/play this? (See Philippians 4:8.)

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## Handout 3

### Dress

As Seventh-day Adventists we have been called out from the world. We are reformers. True religion which enters into every phase of life must have a molding influence on all our activities. Our habits of life must stem from principle and not from the example of the world about us. Customs and fashions may change with the years, but principles of right conduct are always the same. Dress is an important factor in Christian character. Early in our history instruction was given as to the way Christians should dress, the purpose of which was “to protect the people of God from the corrupting influence of the world, as well as to promote physical and moral health. ...”—*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 4, p. 634. Truly a comprehensive purpose! There is no virtue in dressing differently from those about us just to be different, but where the principles of refinement or morality are involved the conscientious Christian will be true to his/her convictions rather than follow the prevailing customs.

Christians should avoid gaudy display and “profuse ornamentation.” Clothing should be, when possible, “of good quality, of becoming colors, and suited for service. It should be chosen for durability rather than display.” Our attire should be characterized by “modesty,” “beauty,” “grace,” and “appropriateness of natural simplicity.”—*Messages to Young People*, pp. 351, 352. That it may not be conspicuous, it should follow the conservative and most sensible styles of the time.

The adoption of fads and extreme fashions in men’s or women’s dress indicates a lack of attention to serious matters. Regardless of how sensibly people generally may dress, there are always extremes in style that transgress the laws of modesty and thus have a direct bearing on the prevalence of immoral conditions. Many who blindly follow the styles are at least partly unconscious of these effects, but the results are no less disastrous. The people of God should always be found among the conservatives in dress, and will not let “the dress question fill the mind.”—*Evangelism*, p. 273. They will not be the first to adopt the new styles of dress or the last to lay the old aside.

“To dress plainly, abstaining from display of jewelry and ornaments of every kind, is in keeping with our faith.”—*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 3, p. 366. It is clearly taught in the Scriptures that the wearing of jewelry is contrary to the will of God. ‘... not with broided hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array’ is the admonition of the apostle Paul (1 Tim. 2:9). The wearing of ornaments of jewelry is a bid for attention which is not in keeping with Christian self-forgetfulness.

In some countries the custom of wearing the wedding ring is considered imperative, having become, in the minds of the people, a criterion of virtue, and hence it is not

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regarded as an ornament. Under such circumstances we have no disposition to condemn the practice.

Let us remember that it is not the “outward adorning” which expresses true Christian character, but “the hidden man of the heart ... a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price” (1 Peter 3:3, 4). The use of cosmetics not in keeping with good taste and the principles of Christian modesty should be avoided. Cleanliness and Christlike deportment should be observed in the care and grooming of the individual who is seeking at all times to please and rightly represent Christ our Lord.

Christian parents should bring to bear the weight of their example, instruction, and authority to lead their sons and daughters to attire themselves modestly, and thus win the respect and confidence of those who know them. Let our people consider themselves well dressed only when the demands of modesty are met in the wearing of tasteful, conservative clothing.

### **Reading**

Like the body, the inner being also needs wholesome nourishment for renewal and strengthening (2 Cor. 4:6). The mind is the measure of the person. Food for the mind is therefore of the utmost importance in developing character and in carrying out our life’s purposes. For this reason our mental habits should be carefully checked. There is no better index to character than what we choose to read and hear. Books and other literature are among the most valuable means of education and culture, but these must be well chosen and rightly used. There is a wealth of good literature, both books and periodicals; but equally there is a flood of evil literature, often in most attractive guise but damaging to mind and morals. The tales of wild adventure and of moral laxness, whether fact or fiction, which are presented in print or other communication media are unfit for the youth or adult.

“Those who indulge the habit of racing through an exciting story are simply crippling their mental strength, and disqualifying their minds for vigorous thought and research.”—*Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students*, p. 135. Along with other evil results from the habit of reading fiction, we are told that “it unfits the soul to contemplate the great problems of duty and destiny,” and “creates a distaste for life’s practical duties.”—*Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students*, p. 383.

### **Radio and Television**

Radio and television have changed the whole atmosphere of our modern world and have brought us within easy contact with the life, thought, and activities of the entire globe. Radio and television are great educational agencies. By these means we can

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greatly enlarge our knowledge of world events and enjoy important discussions and the best in music.

Unfortunately, however, radio and television also bring to their audiences almost continuous theatrical performances and many influences that are neither wholesome nor uplifting. If we are not discriminating and decisive, radio and television will turn our homes into theaters and minstrel shows of a cheap and sordid kind.

Safety for ourselves and our children is found in a determination, by God's help, to follow the admonition of the apostle Paul: "Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things" (Phil. 4:8).

### **Recreation and Entertainment**

Recreation is a purposeful refreshing of the powers of body and mind. A vigorous, wholesome mind will not require worldly amusement, but will find a renewal of strength in good recreation.

"Many of the amusements popular in the world today, even with those who claim to be Christians, tend to the same end as did those of the heathen. There are indeed few among them that Satan does not turn to account in destroying souls. Through the drama he has worked for ages to excite passion and glorify vice. The opera, with its fascinating display and bewildering music, the masquerade, the dance, the card table, Satan employs to break down the barriers of principle and open the door to sensual indulgence. In every gathering for pleasure where pride is fostered or appetite indulged, where one is led to forget God and lose sight of eternal interests, there Satan is binding his chains about the soul."—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 459, 460.

We earnestly warn against the subtle and sinister influence of the moving-picture theater, which is no place for the Christian. Dramatized films that graphically present by portrayal and by suggestion the sins and crimes of humanity—murder, adultery, robbery, and kindred evils—are in no small degree responsible for the present breakdown of morality. We appeal to parents, children, and youth to shun those places of amusement and those theatrical films that glorify professional acting and actors. If we will find delight in God's great world of nature and in the romance of human agencies and divine workings, we shall not be attracted by the puerile portrayals of the theater.

Another form of amusement that has an evil influence is social dancing. "The amusement of dancing, as conducted at the present day, is a school of depravity, a fearful curse to society."—*Messages to Young People*, p. 399. (See 2 Cor. 6:15-18; 1 John 2:15-

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17; James 4:4; 2 Tim. 2:19-22; Eph. 5:8-11; Col. 3:5-10.)

Let us not patronize the commercialized amusements, joining with the worldly, care-  
less, pleasure-loving multitudes who are “lovers of pleasures more than lovers of  
God.”

Recreation is essential. We should endeavor to make the friendships and recreations  
of our people church-centered. We recommend that in every home where there are  
children, materials be provided which will afford an outlet for the creative energies of  
youth. Wholesome association and recreation may be provided through music orga-  
nizations, AJY class projects, and outreach (missionary) service bands.

### Music

“Music was made to serve a holy purpose, to lift the thoughts to that which is pure,  
noble, and elevating, and to awaken in the soul devotion and gratitude to God.”—*Pa-  
triarchs and Prophets*, p. 594. Jesus “held communion with heaven in song.”—*The  
Desire of Ages*, p. 73.

Music is one of the highest arts. Good music not only gives pleasure but elevates the  
mind and cultivates the finest qualities. Spiritual songs have often been used of God  
to touch the hearts of sinners and lead to repentance. Debased music, on the con-  
trary, destroys the rhythm of the soul and breaks down morality.

Great care should be exercised in the choice of music. Any melody partaking of the  
nature of jazz, rock, or related hybrid forms, or any language expressing foolish or  
trivial sentiments, will be shunned. Let us use only good music in the home, in the  
social gathering, in the school, and in the church. (See *Seventh-day Adventist Church  
Manual*, p. 78.)

*Statement from Chapter 13 of the **Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual**, “Standards  
of Christian Living,” the official description of the minimum spiritual disciplines of the  
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