

Your Input, Your Choice, Your Spirit

By Maria

AM 3800 10/09

Contents

Your Input... (ML #3800)

What is "worldly"?	1
What is godly and ungodly input?	2
What is neutral input?	2
Our duty as Christians to protect our spirits	3
What turns neutral input into ungodly input?	4
Time is a major factor	5
Spiritual accountability	7
Parental responsibility	8
What do you want out of life?	9
In summary	10

Devotional: Your Input... (ML #3801)

Guidelines	11
Spiritual accountability	15
Discerning what is neutral and what is ungodly	16
Guarding your time	18
Addictions	20
Staying open to the help of others	24

Dear Family,

The Lord wants to update our perspective on what we take in through the various forms of media and communications available today. As the Family shifts to a more outward focus in order to more effectively fulfill the mission, there needs to be a change in how we judge our input. Factors such as opening the door for secular employment and business opportunities when they facilitate the mission, making allowance for our children to attend school outside the Home when that is the best available option for their education, and all Family members generally being more active and involved in our job of reaching and winning the world, will often mean taking in certain input that we might previously have shunned, and using it wisely to further the mission.

2. In the change journey, the Lord is consistently moving us away from the "one

size fits all" rules and regulations approach to keeping our spirits strong. He is expecting us to have personal faith and conviction about our choices, because we've made them in counsel with Him. He wants us to be happy.

3. What we view, read, and listen to has a huge effect on our lives. In this Letter we'll be focusing on the effect that input can have on us and how to gain the results we want through making good choices. For the sake of simplification, I'll just refer to everything you take in along these lines, whether information, entertainment, media, education, or other, as "input."

4. In the past, the Lord has given a lot of counsel on the topic of the input we take in, much of which is still applicable today if you see it as guidance, wise counsel, and sound principles rather than hard-and-fast rules. While some of the specific applications or examples have changed over the years, the Lord isn't nullifying the concerns He has outlined about our input in the past, or the general counsel He has given regarding how to determine what may be good and helpful and what may not be. There are helpful guidelines in His past counsel, but how you apply it is in your court and is your responsibility.

5. I'll keep this Letter to the point so that the counsel is clear and easy to review. There will be more information from the Lord in the devotional that follows. I pray that reading and studying these two Letters will aid you in evaluating your goals, habits, and priorities, and based on that, making good decisions on the input you take in, so that you can most effectively fulfill His call in your life of fulfilling the mission.

What is "worldly"?

6. In the past, we tended to classify most reading material and media that were not strictly Bible-based or Family-produced or

approved as “worldly” or “of the world,” which we often equated with “ungodly.”

7. Now, rather than judging only by the source of the material, we must focus on the effects of what we take in, recognize how it influences us, and discern what is helpful or harmful accordingly.

8. When we use the term “worldly” or “secular” in this counsel and from now on in our pubs, we won’t be equating it with something that is assumed to be negative or ungodly. It will be used to refer to input that is nonreligious, as opposed to either Family input or other religious input.

9. This is more in keeping with the dictionary definition of “worldly” or “secular,” which does not describe it as either negative or positive, but simply as anything related to the temporal realm. It will require a conscious effort to shift our perspective and to not automatically label input as bad just because it is worldly or secular.

Worldly input

10. Definition: Input that portrays things that are temporal and of the earth. That which is devoted to, directed toward, or connected with the affairs, interests, pastimes or pleasures of this world. That which is secular; nonreligious. Information, education, media, entertainment, or other input relating to or devoted to the temporal world.

What is godly and ungodly input?

11. To decide what is godly and ungodly input, you need to determine the effect that it has on your spirit rather than solely what its source is.

12. Just as worldly or secular material cannot automatically be assumed to be ungodly, it’s also true that religious material cannot automatically be assumed to be godly. Some materials may be religious, yet because they promote false religious assumptions, they may be ungodly.

Godly input

13. Definition of godly: Showing reverence for God; emanating from God; belonging to Heaven (true to heavenly culture values); true to godly beliefs and values.

14. Godly input is any input that brings you closer to God, supports your faith, or has an uplifting and positive effect on your spirit. It is input that amplifies the truth, or illustrates lessons that result in spiritual growth. It is input that promotes godly attributes and values, and that motivates thoughts, words, or actions that draw you or others to God.

Ungodly input

15. Definition of ungodly: Lacking reverence for God; denying or disobeying God; sinful; characterized by iniquity; evil.

16. Ungodly input is any input which moves you away from God, hinders your faith, or teaches incorrect or negative principles. It is input that hinders positive spiritual growth or that promotes disobeying or even denying God. It is input that tries to refute God’s Word or to destroy faith in it. It is also input that promotes evil as good or exalts values that are contrary to godly values.

What is neutral input?

17. While some input is clearly godly and some is clearly ungodly, there is much input that is neither godly nor ungodly in itself. Instead, the individual’s perceptions, motives, and treatment of this input determines whether it has a godly effect or an ungodly effect on them. Things that fall into this neutral category often tend to become spiritually negative or harmful if overindulged in, because they crowd out the beneficial input and life experience that a person could otherwise be getting.

18. If we place neutral input against the touchstone of the mission, it becomes clear that:

19. We do need a certain amount of input from the world in order to stay current and relatable to those we are here to reach and

win with the Lord's love. Staying current with the news, local happenings, and being aware of trends or current issues, and being relatable to others in our speech and writing, are all part of “becoming all things to all men, that we might win some” (1Cor.9:22). There may also be certain skills we need to develop in order to professionally participate in or facilitate the mission in the way the Lord is calling us, and this may involve reading books or online resources, or taking courses, to increase our knowledge and skills.

20. In summary, we can view our input in two distinct ways:

- 1) **Based on the source of the input: secular, Family, and other religious material.** This classifies what kind of material it is, but isn't all that useful or reliable in determining whether it is something positive or negative for you to partake of. Thus this isn't the most important classification. However, it helps to be aware of the source and what it represents, as part of your decision.
- 2) **Based on the potential effect of the input: godly, ungodly, and neutral.** The potential effect of the input is what you should be making your decisions based upon, regardless of the source. Determining the effect the input has, whether godly, ungodly, or neutral, should be your criterion from this point forward in deciding what you will or won't allow in your life.

Our duty as Christians to protect our spirits

21. Our mission is bringing Jesus to others, helping them come to know His love, and sharing spiritual truths with them. In order to do this successfully, we need to be full of Jesus and to live those spiritual truths ourselves. The more of Jesus we have in our lives, the more we take on His nature. The more of Jesus we have in our lives, the more others will be drawn to His Spirit in us, and the more successful we will be. Thus, anything that draws us away from Jesus and His Spirit, or that tarnishes our spirit or sullies

our testimony is something we would want to avoid. Anything that weakens our conviction and motivation to be His lights in the world could hinder our success in the mission.

(Jesus:) As a Christian missionary and disciple, you want people to clearly see My values alive in you. You want your actions, countenance, words, and lifestyle to reflect godly qualities. Upon getting to know you, people should say: “They're principled. They're honest and kind. They love Jesus. They're trustworthy. They're happy. They're good Christians.”

What you take in is what you reflect. If the things you take in aid you in living a godly, balanced, happy life, then your reflection will remain clear and vivid. People will see Me within you (ML #3801:27–28).

22. As Christians, Jesus has commissioned us to be in the world but not of the world. We are His representatives, entrusted with sharing His message with the world. In order to do well as the Lord's representatives and to be an accurate reflection of His love and care for people, we need to be conscious of how we give the world entrance to our lives. We need to identify which forms of input negatively affect us as individuals, and we need to do our best to counteract or minimize those avenues, so that we can successfully be “in the world, but not of the world.”

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

Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.—Rom.12:21

(Jesus:) When I'm important to you, and maintaining a strong spiritual life is

important to you; when being a quality representative of Me to the world is important to you; when your Christian values and the qualities of a disciple are important to you; when you are judicious as far as what you invest your time and talents in, then you are in a good position to weigh the pros and cons of worldly input, information, and entertainment, and judge what is or isn't worth your time and acceptable for your spirit (ML #3801:32).

What turns neutral input into ungodly input?

23. Both your purpose for neutral input and the effect it has on you can play a big part in whether or not neutral input becomes ungodly for you.

24. Due to the Internet, information (which often falls into the neutral category) is plentiful and accessible the world over. Being able to access information easily, quickly, and cheaply creates great benefits, both for the mission and the spread of the Gospel, as well as for personal or work needs.

25. However, knowing how to use the Internet effectively and how to stay focused on getting the information that you need without it becoming a timewaster or a distraction from your goals is important in order to prevent this potential asset from falling into the ungodly category.

26. Entertainment is enjoyable, and it has a place in a balanced life. It goes without saying that most entertainment isn't entirely pure, but some of it can be acceptable and even healthy if it is used in moderation for times of relaxation and recreation; otherwise it can become ungodly by overindulgence or not guarding your attitudes and habits from being negatively influenced.

27. Whether neutral input is acceptable or ungodly depends on your use of it. Is what you're spending your time on benefiting you as a person or aiding you in your service to the Lord, or is it stealing your time from priorities that are actually much more important to you? If the latter is the case, it would fall into the ungodly category.

28. When determining what neutral input is acceptable for you, or when determining the amount of time that you spend on it, it's vital that you are honest with yourself about your priorities in life. For example:

29. • Are you consistent with your godly input—your time with the Lord, your time studying His Word, and strengthening your faith? How effective is your time with Jesus? Are you becoming more like Jesus through your times with Him, taking on more of His nature, and growing in faith?

30. • If you made a list of the things that are most important to you in life (for example, your spouse and children, your service to the Lord, your relationships with others, your health, your character, ongoing training in areas that will enable you to be more successful in fulfilling the mission), would you say that you are investing in those priorities in the manner you want to? Do you spend the majority of your time on the things that are truly important to you?

31. • How are you affected by the input that you allow in your life? Does it enhance your service for the Lord, or does it drain you spiritually, or make you feel lethargic, discontent, unmotivated, or desirous of more of the world? Does your input detract from your joy, peace, and faith? Does it take away—whether in time or quality—from fruitful, happy, uplifting relationships with friends, co-workers, or fellow believers? Is it taking the place of time that could be invested in the development of your talents or skills, in preparation for greater usefulness in the future?

(Jesus:) **If you have a strong personal desire to maintain spiritual health and cleanliness, then you will be able to discern and avoid what has an unclean or negative [ungodly] influence in your life;** you will be able to keep yourself spiritually clean. This is going "beyond duty" and discovering what I know is good for you as an individual (ML #3801:37).

32. When it comes to the more neutral forms of input, in order to accurately assess what is or isn't good for you, you have to ask the Lord and analyze the results of your actions and intake on your spirit. It can be humbling to admit that something just isn't good for you. It goes against human nature to stop watching, reading, listening to, playing, or partaking of something that is entertaining or relaxing or interesting but that's spiritually detrimental. But that's exactly what you need to do if you want to protect your spirit. If you can learn to recognize what things are healthy or harmful for you, you'll be well on your way to making healthy choices.

33. There are some things which might be tolerable input for one person, but for another person would be damaging and something to stay away from completely. There might be some things which are okay for someone in a limited amount, but problematic for that same person if taken in excess. When looking at yourself and examining whether something is spiritually healthy for you, there are many factors to consider, but one big one is: What is the fruit in your life? How does it affect you?

When John Wesley was away at college, he asked his mother Susanna for a list of sins to avoid, and she replied: "Whatever weakens your reason, whatever impairs the tenderness of your conscience, whatever obscures your sense of God, whatever increases the authority of your body over your mind, whatever takes away from your relish for spiritual things, that to you is sin, no matter how innocent it is in itself."

(*Maria:*) If you're going to be a Family member and you want to adhere to the truths that the Family teaches, then of course you need the Word that the Lord gives through the Family. Besides this, whatever other extracurricular material you read, study, or view should have a positive effect on you; that should be the standard you judge by.

Time is a major factor

34. A principle of success is that you must use your time wisely. Successful people are disciplined in their decisions and activities; they are judicious and don't waste time. They put the best of their time, focus, and energy toward reaching their most important goals. Often that means sacrificing something they would like to do in order to accomplish something they need to do.

35. This principle is a good one to apply to the time you spend on extracurricular input. How much time is appropriate to give to this extra input should quickly become apparent when you compare how much return it is giving you for the time invested, versus the other important things in your life that you need to invest in.

36. Time is in short supply; there is never enough time to do all that needs to be done. Professionals the world over are faced with this dilemma. Some time management experts say that what people choose to spend their time on determines approximately 90% of success or the lack of it. It's not money or talent or luck or circumstances that make the biggest difference—it's time, and how you choose to spend it. Those who reach their goals are those who invest significant time and effort in reaching those goals, and who often make sacrifices in order to do so.

37. As a Family, we are reaching for more success in accomplishing the mission. We're not content with the results we've gotten so far. We also have other important priorities in our lives, such as giving our children the best education and training possible, nurturing our marriages, progressing in our spiritual lives, building our networks, studying topics we want to become more proficient in, investing in our health and fitness, etc. All of these priorities require time.

38. Thus, one of the greatest factors to consider is not just the quality of the input itself—although that is important—but the time that it can take away from other important things, if you let it.

(*Jesus:*) The entertainment you enjoy may be relatively harmless in content for your spirit and faith, but it can still be harmful to your profession and to the mission and to your happiness if it's robbing you of your time (ML #3801:71).

(*Jesus:*) I want you to approach worldly [secular] input not just as a spiritual issue, but also as a practical one, as a time-management issue (ML #3801:75).

(*Jesus:*) Something that begins as a good thing in your life, or that has the potential to be a benefit in your life, can become a negative or ungodly influence if it consumes too much of your time, focus and spirit (ML #3801:19).

Let him who would enjoy a good future waste none of his present.—Roger Babson

39. Something to keep in mind is that those who create and market information and entertainment specifically aim to make it interesting, gripping, even addictive. Those who have a vested interest in making their program, movie, game, website, album or book successful do their best to make it very appealing, and to make you want more, to keep you coming back. That's how they make it pay.

40. This is something to understand on a fundamental level about information and entertainment—it's designed to draw you in, to absorb your interest. Without realizing it, you can surrender hours and hours of your precious time. Unless you've consciously decided to spend a set amount of time, you can chalk it up to having been caught by the creators of that media. They were successful in their goals. How are you doing on your goals?

(*Jesus:*) If something—even something that can be beneficial and have a place, such as good movies—is taking your time from the

most important things, then it's not good for you and should be reduced or eliminated. It's a matter of what you're spending your time on; it's a matter of priorities (ML #3801:11).

Why is it that we can spend all day scrounging for extra minutes and then head home only to flush countless hours down the drain watching television? Television (even bad television) can be extremely habit forming, turning your half-hour escape into an entire evening wasted.—Laura Stack, *Productive* magazine

If you are feeling the stress of too much to do and too little time, I recommend you ... avoid screen-sucking activities. This is a modern addiction similar to smoking cigarettes: Once you're hooked, it's tough to quit. Be aware of and limit how much time you spend watching uninteresting television, checking e-mail, surfing the Web, playing computer and hand-held games, etc. You will be amazed about how much more reading, connecting to old friends, or just thinking can be done without a screen in front of you.

Ultimately, what do you want to do more of? What do you want to do less of? Figure that out so you create and live within your personal boundaries, then do it. You'll be so glad you did!—Abby Marks Beale, *The Corporate Educator*

Many Christians, perhaps most, can imagine making heroic sacrifices for God, yet we resist the small adjustments. "Jesus, I will forsake my home, family, and future, but don't ask me to give up my favorite [form of entertainment]!"—Joshua Harris, *Focus on the Family* magazine

[Media] is altering the meaning of "being informed" by creating a species of information that might properly be called disinformation. ... Disinformation does not mean false

information. It means misleading information—misplaced, irrelevant, fragmented or superficial information—information that creates the illusion of knowing something, but which in fact leads one away from knowing.—Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death*

Spiritual accountability

41. The Lord is counting on you to take responsibility for your life and choices, to be willing to make hard choices in order to reach your goals and to be what you feel He is calling you to be. The counsel here will bear good fruit in your life if you have the discipline and objectivity to assess your habits and pastimes, to compare them with your priorities in life, and follow through accordingly.

42. This is something that you may need the help of others to achieve, especially if you tend to slip on your commitments. If you need frequent motivation and an outside perspective in order to stay on track with your goals and habits, please don't hesitate to be honest with yourself and others, and set up safeguards accordingly. That's a sign of strength, maturity and wisdom.

43. Everyone has different areas of strength, and self-discipline is not a strength that we all have. You need to be spiritually mature, willing to be honest with yourself and with others, and willing to do whatever is necessary in order to preserve your spirit—whether you can follow through on your own or you need help to be consistent. The important thing is that you seek the Lord personally, receive His tailor-made counsel and know what is acceptable for you, then set clear guidelines for yourself and remain within them to the best of your ability.

44. While the Lord's counsel to us on this topic is on the one hand a personal matter, because He is asking each individual to be more accountable and mature about their choices, we are also accountable to one another, because we affect one another. While some choices are a private matter, the effects may not be private. Therefore we

have a responsibility to be honest with ourselves about our limitations, and to help each other to stay strong for the sake of being a good representation of Jesus and accomplishing the mission.

45. When you live communally, it's not only the results of your actions that affect others, such as the effect that wrong, unbalanced or negative input may have on you, and how it affects your demeanor, the quality of your work, your focus, and your success. Your actions also affect others in a personal way. If you watch a movie in the living room, other people hear it and see it. If you play music aloud, other people hear it. If your children are allowed to do something, the other children in the Home will want to do it too.

46. If you live communally, these are things that you will continue to need to discuss as a Home and agree on guidelines together. It's possible that you'll want to establish guidelines that apply to anything that is done in a public or communal area or that can be heard or seen by others. The Home is still responsible to make sure that the actions and testimony of its members are consistent with the testimony of your Home overall and the mission you aim to accomplish.

47. Whether you live on your own or with others, it's important to seek out safeguards in the form of reliable, open, and honest friends who share the same goals. They should be willing and able to "tell it like it is" regarding how you are faring in the area of reaching your goals. It's crucial that you share a mutual trust and openness in your communications.

48. There is tremendous strength in having support from like-minded people who share your goals and visions and determination, and who are willing to work hard with you for success. Take advantage of the camaraderie that can be found in having mutual goals and commitments, and support one another in being all that you can be for Jesus.

49. People are different and have different needs—and that's okay. You can support one another in keeping your personal commitments and staying spiritually strong. The fruits that are

borne in your life and work will be an indication of the strength and clarity of your decisions and commitments in this area. If someone is keeping their spiritual life healthy, is open to counsel, successful in their work, working in unity, and manifesting the fruits of the Spirit, they are probably making good choices in their input. If someone is faltering, they might need more help and support and encouragement in their choices and commitments. What they do remains a personal choice, but your support can go a long way toward helping them have the strength to follow through and make progress in this area.

50. If you find that you don't have enough motivation to make strong choices for yourself, thinking about your loved ones and the mission you are here to accomplish can give you the added impetus you need. You are responsible to preserve your spiritual integrity, not only for your own sake, but for the sake of the work, for the sake of your brothers and sisters who need you, for the sake of your family and children, and for the sake of those whose lives you will yet reach and change with the Lord's love.

Frequently we use media simply for a diversion. How often do you sit down and say, "You know, I want to find something that is mindless and I can just veg out to"? We think it's harmless enough. Yet research shows that this is the state of mind that makes us the most vulnerable to ideas we don't usually agree with. Why do you think advertisers have so much impact on our culture? They hit you when you think you're not paying attention and aren't impacted by their message.—Chris Leland, *Focus on the Family*

True wisdom does not come from information alone. Clifford Stoll quips that, "Data is not wisdom any more than 50 tons of cement is a skyscraper." Wisdom comes from meditating on, then acting on, meaningful information.—Kevin A. Miller, *Leadership Journal*

Parental responsibility

51. When it comes to teens and children, it's obviously a different situation. Most children and teens enjoy movies, games and entertainment quite a bit, and many don't have enough life experience or self-discipline to make responsible choices on their own. Until a child becomes an adult, it is the responsibility of their parents and guardians to set boundaries, to train their children and teens in how to make these decisions, and, usually, to limit or monitor the amount of input or entertainment they partake of, until they are responsible enough to make wise decisions on their own.

52. This takes time, and it's often not a smooth road, but you can take comfort and advice from parents the world over who work through this with their children and teens. Parents set boundaries for their children and young people in this area because it's necessary to learn discipline and discernment when it comes to entertainment if you want to be successful in life. It's part of learning to use one's time wisely and to make the right choices, even if they come at some personal sacrifice.

53. In deciding what boundaries are healthy for your children and teens, bear in mind that if you are limiting media entertainment, they will need something to replace it. Children and teens need action, stimulation, adventure, and new experiences. They need things that grab their interest and that they can delve into and learn about and experience. If they don't have those things in real life, they will want to get that excitement and thrill from the vicarious experiences they can have through movies, games, the Internet, and other forms of media.

54. Keep in mind too that once someone of any age has gotten used to being entertained by the media, it can take time to develop a sense of enjoyment from other pastimes, activities, or interests. This transition isn't necessarily a spiritual problem; it arises from the way our brains and bodies function. Once someone is used to the fast-paced visuals and sounds of games or movies, it can seem that not much in normal life measures up, and it takes time to wind down from that and learn

to enjoy real-life experiences and opportunities. There will be a period of withdrawal, when nothing seems as much fun as the media you are trying to cut back on, but that stage of dissatisfaction will pass if you stick with your convictions.

55. Don't be discouraged if it seems that your children or teens have developed preferences for "screen" entertainment above any other. If you are consistent in limiting media entertainment and replacing it with quality time spent together, and helping them to pursue other interests and hobbies or learn new skills, in time they will adjust and have much healthier appetites and perspectives on what they consider fun and worthwhile. They will be experiencing more of life rather than just watching it, and as a result they will be more well rounded, well adapted, and better educated.

Compared to the ease with which, say, our grandparents were able to find delight in relatively low-stimulating activities, it now takes an enormously high level of stimulation to deliver us just a modicum of enjoyment. There is a pervasive emotional numbness overtaking us. ... Many people now report what someone has called a *joyless existence*—a life where even the most significant accomplishments leave you feeling empty, and what used to bring great excitement and happiness now leaves you numb and unsatisfied.

Anhedonia, the reduced ability to experience pleasure, is no longer the exclusive domain of emotional disorders. It is becoming the experience of a lot of ordinary people like you and me. Increasingly, we are finding it difficult to extract ordinary enjoyment out of our chaotic world.

Simply put, anhedonia is brought on, paradoxically, by the excessive pursuit of pleasure. It is a by-product of the fantastic technological improvements in our world. We now have such a high level of stimulation that we can escape boredom in an instant.

Just think about it. Are you ever lonely? Just log on to your favorite Internet chat group,

and bye-bye loneliness. Bored? Turn on your iPod or watch a movie on your [computer]. ... Need to work on a project or homework? Put your iPod earpiece in one ear, your cell phone earpiece in the other, turn on your laptop to check your e-mail, and now you can concentrate on your project or homework.

All of this stimulates your brain to the point of overload. Technology is revolutionizing our lives but ravaging our brains. A reasonable use of technology is good, but too much is bad. ...

...A healthy pleasure system is best achieved if you spread your pleasure around. We should be able to derive pleasure from our work, but also from our play or recreation time; from our hobbies, but also from time spent with our family; from personal "me" time, but also from social activities; from private meditation, but also from [group] worship. As in so many things in life, it's all about balance. The pleasure you get from life is the accumulation of the pleasure you take from all aspects of your life.—Archibald D. Hart, Ph.D., *Thrilled to Death—How the Endless Pursuit of Pleasure Is Leaving Us Numb* (See also "[Hollywood Stars Turn Their Back on the Small Screen.](#)")

What do you want out of life?

56. As you make your daily choices of how to spend your time, you are determining your future, your fruitfulness, your legacy, your success. It all comes down to what you want out of life, and then being disciplined enough to pursue your goals.

57. We are each responsible before the Lord to preserve our time and invest it wisely, and to guard our spirits. If you are careful about these two things, you can safely enjoy and benefit from what is available.

58. If you are vigilant about preserving your time, you will have enough time for the most important things in your life, and the sacrifices you make will be repaid many times over in the happiness and fulfillment that comes from reaching your goals and finding success.

59. If you guard your spirit—taking in what is beneficial and walking away from those things that harm your spirit—you’ll have a healthy spirit that will stand up well to the storms of life, and you’ll have peace in your relationship with Jesus. You’ll be a testimony of His love, someone He can use to bring many to Him.

60. The wonderful thing is that you can reap these good results without having to give up all the entertainment you find relaxing or enjoyable, or cutting yourself off from the readily available information that can make your job and life better or easier. You can strike a good balance. It will include some sacrifices and difficult choices—because doing what’s best is often the hard choice—but it will also include rewards and payback that are well worth it.

61. You can learn to take what is good and beneficial from what both the secular and religious worlds have to offer, while still protecting yourself from timewasters, false or distorted principles that can sometimes be mingled with some truth, or excesses that cause you to lose track of the true standards and get off balance in your attitudes or perspectives. It all depends on you and your commitment to maintaining your spiritual health, guarding your time, as well as the discipline that you put into reaching your goals.

62. Don’t lose the habit of asking the Lord about your input. That doesn’t mean you have to sit down and get a lengthy prophecy every time you want to do something, but He does want to give you counsel on your activities, your entertainment, your education, your information-gathering. Have faith to come before Him with an open heart, and learn to trust His choices for you, too, knowing that He loves you and wants you to be happy.

Every movie, TV show and song contains someone’s philosophy. Of course, not all entertainment is “hollow and deceptive,” but much of it is. And unlike being taken prisoner during war time, the captivity process of the mind occurs slowly—a gradual desensitization.—Bob Waliszewski, *What’s Up With Today’s Entertainment?*

Most of us want to be physically healthy. Unfortunately, sometimes we don’t eat as if that were true. The same is true of our minds. We want to be mentally healthy. But too often we don’t “eat” as if that were true! Our minds are often filled with things that are unhealthy. This can be especially true of the entertainment we choose.—Jerry Solomon, “Is It Just Entertainment?”

(*Jesus:*) Think about what lasts in the world beyond, and whether what you’re doing today, or this week, is working toward something eternal that will still matter once you’re gone from this Earth. Think about the things you love or that matter to you right now—are they going to come with you into the world beyond? Or are they temporal things of this world that are going to pass away?

As you think about these topics, you’ll find yourself wanting to change the way you live, or make adjustments to the things that are important to you based on eternity and on Me. That’s how you can tell whether you’re living for Heaven or living for this world.

When you’re not keeping the heavenly vision, your self becomes so much more important to you. ... But when you live for Heaven, I become the most important One again and you remember just how vain and fleeting it is to chase your own satisfaction for the short time that you have on Earth.—“The Heavenly Vision,” ML #3608:23–25, GN 1185.

In summary

63. As mature adults, we are each responsible for our spiritual lives—both our relationship with the Lord and growing spiritually, as well as protecting our spirits from those things which would be negative or detrimental to our happiness and our service to Him. We are His representatives, and the more of His nature we take on, the better we will be able to convey His love and message to others. To be successful in the mission, we need to minimize those things that harm or taint our

spirits, or influence us to become more like the world and less like Jesus.

64. The major considerations when deciding what input is acceptable for you are:

- a) The source of the input. It helps to be aware of the source and what it represents, as part of your decision.
- b) The content and tone of the input, whether it is godly, ungodly or neutral, and if it is neutral, what the fruit is in your life, how it affects you as an individual, and what example it is to your family, children, and others.
- c) The time it takes, and whether it is taking away from other priorities and goals in your life.

65. What do you want out of life? Where do you want to invest your time? What are the things that are truly important to you? What do you want your future to look like? What will help you to grow, either spiritually or in your character or your skills? You will want to invest your time in reaching those priorities and goals.

Former Charter policy required all FD Homes to have “System input guidelines” in place for Homes and individuals, and for each individual member to adhere to those guidelines. This Letter now contains our current policy stance on these matters.

While we still recommend that a communal Home unitedly decide on guidelines for matters that affect a Home collectively, and it is the communal Home’s prerogative to do so, the responsibility for making wise choices in regard to personal worldly input falls to the individual.

The responsibility for children or teens’ worldly input falls to the parents, who are encouraged to set guidelines that teach responsibility and discernment until the child or teen is ready to start helping to make those decisions for themselves.

Devotional: Your Input, Your Choice, Your Spirit

By Maria

AM 3801 10/09

Guidelines

1. (Jesus:) I need you to be in the world but not of the world. I need you to do the job, to give My message, to save lost souls, to win disciples. I need you to live My message in a modern way, to use relatable methods, so that My Word and truth is appealing and desirable, and so that My love is spread far and wide. To do this effectively, you must stay free in spirit and not let yourself be entangled in the world.

2. I need you to be more inclusive, more welcoming of others, and yet I challenge you to be in the world but not of the world. I need you to be humble messengers; at the same time, I want to see conviction in My children. I want you to remain pure and strong in spirit.

3. There is much in the world that you need and that can benefit My work—services, knowledge, experience, technology, etc. There is a lot that comes from the world that you can use for My glory, to benefit My Kingdom.

4. There is information that is important for you to be aware of, either as a part of your witness and testimony, or for your or your children’s education, or to aid and assist you in your career of winning the world. There’s also entertainment that can be beneficial in small doses; it helps you to relax, and it provides a diversion of sorts, which can be beneficial.

5. I want you, My children, to be able to borrow and use from the world that which is good and beneficial, whether it is for informational, educational, or recreational purposes. I want you to “Choose the good and eschew the evil” (1Pet.3:11). My counsel holds true that states, “What fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? And what communion hath light with darkness?” (2Cor.6:14). It is still true that if you take in those

things of the world that are dark and negative, they will pollute your spirit.

6. The things in the world that are negative, that are detrimental to your spirits, that weaken your faith, that are ungodly, are still to be avoided. The dangers of the negative and ungodly elements of the world are as real as ever. The truth of My Word on this has not changed. You, as Christians, should not dabble in these things. However, not everything in the world is filled with “unrighteousness” or “darkness.”

7. Some things are negative, ungodly, and faith-destroying across the board for everyone; they’re not good for anyone’s spirit under any circumstances. Other things are less clear-cut, and may be negative in one person’s life but not in another’s [neutral]. Or something may be neutral in small doses, but may be negative or detrimental if used or engaged in to a high degree.

8. I want you, My children, to learn to look more at the results of engaging in worldly entertainment or taking in worldly input. Is the fruit good? (Mat.7:16–17). If the fruit is good, then chances are that what is being partaken of is also good. For example, if I lead you to read a book that trains and educates you in a realm that will assist you in reaching your target audiences, or helps you to become more professional in your witnessing and outreach methods, or helps you to be more relatable to those you’re ministering to, or helps you to develop a useful new skill, then that is good fruit. Or, if you watch a movie once in a while for relaxation purposes, and it doesn’t negatively affect you, and it helps you to disconnect from the work and relax and unwind or has some other good results, then that is also beneficial.

9. I want you to be able to take what is in the world and from the world and use it for My glory. If reading something is going to assist you in the mission, then read it. If listening to songs from a certain Christian artist will uplift you, draw you closer to Me, and provide variety in your spiritual feeding, then feel free to listen to that artist. If reading the news helps you to be more

up to date with what is happening in the world, and thus a better witness, then read it. If your child reading an age-appropriate novel is going to further his education and help to expand his vocabulary and literary skills, and it doesn’t have negative content that will affect him adversely, then let him read it, or read it with him.

10. One of the biggest dangers with input from the world is not so much the content—as there is much good and helpful information—but the time that it takes from other important areas of your life and work if engaged in excessively. Unfortunately, some of My children still take in quite a lot of the world, packing their free time and entertainment time with worldly input of all sorts.

11. Often it’s not that the thing engaged in is so bad or negative in itself, but an excess of anything can have a negative effect in the long run. If something—even something that can be beneficial and have a place, such as good movies—is taking your time from the most important things, then it’s not good for you and should be reduced or eliminated. It’s a matter of what you’re spending your time on; it’s a matter of priorities.

12. If you’re spending time participating in worldly entertainment but don’t have enough time to invest in the things that count—such as the mission, or your children, or living a healthy lifestyle, or your spiritual well-being—then your priorities are off. If your input is taking away from other good things in your life—such as time with others, time investing in your work for Me, or time that you’d invest in your spiritual life—then it’s not a good investment choice.

13. When it comes to My standard for input in the Family today, here are the basics of My counsel:

14. • It is My will that Family members actively minimize negative and ungodly influences in their lives. In fact, now that you will have more interaction with the world on some levels, it is more important than ever to minimize

ungodly influences. I want you to minimize the “junk food” of the spirit that hinders your connection with Me and your ability to fulfill the mission.

15. • I want Family members to be in the world but not of the world. You live in the world, you work in the world, you have contact with the world to various degrees, and you can use and benefit from much of the good in the world, but the “spirit of the world”—negativity, perversions, spiritual darkness, selfishness, lust, deceit, pride, greed, “anything goes,” etc.—should not be in you or a part of you. Family members are called to be My representatives, and thus I need you to learn to take on My nature, to “be like Jesus.”

16. • Your success in the mission, as well as in your personal and family life, is directly related to what you feed your spirit. Negative and ungodly input hinders your ability to live a happy and productive life in service to Me and others. Your choices—good and bad—will result in natural consequences.

17. • There is a lot in the secular world that can be used to benefit you. For example, technology, sports, fashion, makeup, interior design, vocabulary, engaging in a hobby or interest, etc. All of these things can be good in moderation, and can even enhance your witness.

18. However, these and other things from the world that are good and beneficial when used appropriately can cross the line and become detrimental to you and to your spirit if they become obsessions or addictions.

19. Something that begins as a good thing in your life, or that has the potential to be a benefit in your life, can become a negative or ungodly influence if it consumes too much of your time, focus and spirit. Then you’re not using and benefiting from the good things in the world; you’re letting those things manipulate and negatively affect you.

20. • Entertainment, no matter how “harmless,” takes time. That’s a big consideration for you who have such a huge job to do to win the world. Your time is precious and you can’t afford

to waste it. While entertainment has a place in a balanced and spiritually healthy life, it is still a factor that any time that you spend engaging in entertainment is taking away from time that you could be investing elsewhere.

21. You have to weigh the needs of your life and goals. Perhaps watching that movie is a good and healthy choice at the time. Maybe it will provide the relaxation that you need so that you can continue giving the mission your best. Or it might provide interesting insight into a sector of society or a certain type of character or individual. At other times the choice to watch a movie would be taking away from something else that is important, and could literally be stealing your time.

22. • When choosing whether or not to partake of something from the world, ask yourself: “Is it going to benefit me in some way? Why am I doing this or engaging in this? What is the goal I’m after, and is this going to achieve the results I’m looking for?” The goal could be to learn something new, or to relax, or to be more professional or something of the sort. The goal doesn’t always have to be directly related to the mission, but it should be a worthwhile goal that will benefit your life, your character, or your career; you should have a worthwhile reason for investing your time.

23. • As the Offensive gains momentum and as your ministries grow, you will have less time or desire for the less worthwhile types of entertainment. Just as professionals who are actively pursuing their careers have little time for or interest in entertainment that doesn’t benefit them, so will it be with you. It will be low on your list of priorities. You’ll be busy with exciting projects that need your time and focus. You’ll seek to be spiritually strong so that you’re able to provide the answers and counsel from Me and from My Word that others need. You’ll see the success and fruitfulness that comes from focusing on the mission, and this will give you even more motivation to invest your time where it counts the most.

24. (Question:) How can we discern which forms of entertainment or information are beneficial and which aren't?

25. (Jesus:) A lot depends on the state of your spiritual life, the strength of your discipleship, and the level of your obedience. If you're maintaining a healthy spiritual life and are striving for consistent spiritual progress, then your spirit will be strong enough to take in acceptable amounts and forms of entertainment and influence without being weakened in the process.

26. To accurately discern what entertainment or influences are going to be okay for you, you have to be able to assess your spirit, your spiritual life. When you know that you've been obedient to Me by spending the quality time with Me that you need, by acknowledging Me, by using the spiritual weapons, by doing those things that strengthen your spirit, then you have a clearer vision, and much more spiritual discernment, and even common sense regarding which influences are okay for you and which would be negative.

27. As a Christian missionary and disciple, you want people to clearly see My values alive in you. You want your actions, countenance, words, and lifestyle to reflect godly qualities. Upon getting to know you, people should say: "They're principled. They're honest and kind. They love Jesus. They're trustworthy. They're happy. They're good Christians."

28. What you take in is what you reflect. If the things you take in aid you in living a godly, balanced, happy life, then your reflection will remain clear and vivid. People will see Me within you.

29. But if what you take in is harmful and negative, then it taints the good that is within you. It muddies the waters, and the reflection that people see is not clear or positive. Your actions, your speech, your thoughts, your reactions and your countenance will reflect elements of the world rather than Me. People may still see some of My traits within you, but it won't be the full display or attraction that it could be.

30. You have to determine if what you are taking in, or want to take in, is going to make your reflection brighter or dimmer. By being honest with yourself and seeking Me for further counsel, you'll be able to make well-informed and wise decisions about the entertainment you engage in, and thus the influences that affect you.

31. What is important to you, as My disciple? Consider your beliefs, look at your values, evaluate the state of your spirit, and ask yourself if what you want to partake in will support your beliefs and values and not weaken or tear them down. Measure that entertainment against the state of your spirit—if your spirit is strong and healthy, you're less likely to be hurt or tainted by [neutral] entertainment.

32. When I'm important to you, and maintaining a strong spiritual life is important to you; when being a quality representative of Me to the world is important to you; when your Christian values and the qualities of a disciple are important to you; when you are judicious as far as what you invest your time and talents in, then you are in a good position to weigh the pros and cons of worldly input, information, and entertainment, and judge what is or isn't worth your time and acceptable for your spirit.

33. When this life is over, you are the one who will give account for the state of your spirit—in addition to giving account for your life on Earth, and the way your life and actions affected others. Your spiritual state is your responsibility. If you want a strong, healthy, clean spirit, then you'll be prayerful, wise, and discerning in the entertainment you engage in, in the influences you accept.

34. The ball is in your court. What you need to look for in entertainment are those things that you can enjoy without disrupting our relationship, your profession, or your personal life and happiness. It's best to look for entertainment that can aid you in some way—whether it aids you in drawing closer to Me, in learning something new, in fellowshipping with others, or in relaxing, winding down, and spending time off in a positive way.

35. Be open to others' counsel on these matters, and after you have considered these things and weighed your priorities, ask Me. I love you, and I want you to be happy, to enjoy life, to have your needs met, to protect your spirit. I can help you to find a good balance in these things.

Spiritual accountability

36. (Jesus:) As My followers, you should be following the instruction in My Word on what kinds of things you should or shouldn't allow in your lives. There's so much counsel on this in the Bible, in the Letters, and in centuries' worth of Christian writings. To make a point, though, let's focus on two basic verses: Philippians 4:8 and 2 Corinthians 6:17:

Phil.4:8: 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.

2Cor.6:17: Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you.

37. If you have a strong personal desire to maintain spiritual health and cleanliness, then you will be able to discern and avoid what has an unclean or negative [ungodly] influence in your life; you will be able to keep yourself spiritually clean. This is going "beyond duty" and discovering what I know is good for you as an individual.

38. Notice that the verse doesn't say "If you browse the Internet for only ten minutes a day, I will receive you"; it just says to think on the good things, the pure things, and to avoid what is unclean [ungodly]. It is your duty as a Christian to find out what is clean and unclean in your life and to act accordingly.

39. Things that are unclean [ungodly] are those that have a negative effect on your spirit, that separate you from Me, that weaken your faith, that erode your values, that damage your beliefs, that cause you to be unloving in your actions, that waste your time, that make you more like the world and less like Me.

40. I've told you to look at your spiritual input as the daily food you need. I told you to "eat" spiritually what is required to fill the needs of your spirit. I could make the same point with secular input and say, "Don't eat what has a bad effect on you."

41. People learn what they can and can't eat physically, and they try to avoid those things that create problems for them. You can put this same principle to work spiritually. If something causes a bad reaction in your spirit, lowers your spiritual resistance, ruins your appetite for what is healthy, keeps you from getting the spiritual nourishment you need, makes you crave "spiritual junk food," or gives you trouble in any other way, then avoid it.

42. If you overdo and take in some input that you know is harmful for you, take action to repair and fortify your spirit. Take in extra spiritual input to cleanse your mind and heart, and abstain from additional negative input in order to let your spiritual system heal. But mostly, try to not ingest those kinds of things in the first place. Consistent spiritual health is the goal.

43. Remember that you're shooting for spiritual health and spiritual strength—not just the absence of spiritual disease. The idea isn't to take in as much negative or ungodly input as you think you can handle before there are noticeable bad effects, but rather to only allow what doesn't detract from a healthy, active, fruitful spiritual life.

44. When considering how much of the world's entertainment to take in, consider these points: Are you able to hear from Me with a clean channel, enjoy good times in My Word, live in unity with your brethren, maintain an intimate relationship with Me, fulfill your mission, and

have faith for miracles and progress in your life and work? If you put those points as the priority and then factor in worldly input, you will be better able to find what is acceptable for you.

45. Please learn to treat your spirit with respect, and have conviction about what you can or can't handle. I want you to care about how spiritually healthy you are, and to do your best to maintain and improve your spiritual health.

46. I want you to have a personal conviction about what you allow or avoid in your input. I want you to have faith for the things you allow in your life, knowing that they're okay with Me because I've confirmed that they won't harm you spiritually. I want you to also have faith for what you don't allow in your life, knowing that it's not just because a rule says so, or the Family says so, or even because your Christian values or the Bible say so, but because you have made that choice out of personal conviction and a desire to be close to Me and in the best condition possible to enact My will for your life. Your choices are based on the knowledge that if you indulge in such and such a thing, it will detract from those goals—and those goals are more important to you than a little worldly input. That's maturity.

47. I expect you to stand on your own before Me—to guard your spirit from what is bad, and to enjoy what is acceptable for you with a clean and happy conscience.



48. (Jesus:) Being responsible to determine and decide on your intake means just that: You must be responsible. Some definitions for responsible are accountable, trustworthy, mature, sensible. You are responsible to make mature, sensible, and wise decisions regarding your intake. You're accountable.

49. Before, you adhered to the guidelines because it was what the Family did, what the Family believed, what the Family instructed. Today, your actions need to stem from your beliefs, your convictions. What you believe, and what is important to you, needs to determine how you live your life.

50. You have to take stock of your life and evaluate whether your actions complement your personal convictions, values, and beliefs. You have to take stock of where you're at today and determine if those choices are going to bring you to the place you want to be tomorrow.

51. If you're aiming to be professional in your discipleship, in the mission, then you'll adjust your decisions, as needed, to reach those goals. You'll make decisions based on what you believe is necessary for a disciple of Jesus. You'll base your decisions on what you know will please Me and what you believe I'm asking of you.

52. Taking this stance and approach to life, learning to live your convictions and make the right choices because it's what you personally believe in, is going to strengthen your faith. It requires that you get down to the core of your faith, to see where it stands, to strengthen it if necessary, and then base your decisions on that faith. It's going to make you a stronger, more effective disciple. It's going to cause the things you do to be more powerful and more personally fulfilling, because you'll be doing them out of a firm personal belief in what you stand for and what you know I expect of you.

Discerning what is neutral and what is ungodly

53. (Mama:) As you'll remember, the definition for neutral is input that is neither godly nor ungodly in itself. One way you can discern between what is neutral and what is ungodly is by the effect it has on your life.

54. (Jesus:) When judging what is ungodly and negative regarding influences from the world, you can use the tried and trusted measuring stick of "by their fruits you will know them" (Mat.7:20). You can judge the input by the effects it has in your life, how it influences your thoughts, priorities, desires, and goals; how it affects the way you spend your time; whether it makes a difference in your vocabulary; how you view family life, or the opposite sex; what

your daydreams or fantasies are; what you want to spend your money on; how you want to live your life; what you consider acceptable, and what look or attitude you take on.

55. There are innumerable ways that you can be affected by what you take in, so you need to go into any intake from the world with your eyes wide open.

56. (Mama: Another way you can discern whether something is neutral or whether it is ungodly is by putting enough thought and prayer into deciding whether or not to partake of a certain kind of secular input. Give the Lord sufficient time to show you clearly, and weigh the input against the other priorities in your life, and that will help you to decide wisely.)

57. So often people get themselves into trouble with [neutral] input—either through addictions, compromises, or wrong spiritual attitudes—because they simply aren’t on guard and don’t properly or sufficiently count the cost. If you have a very casual attitude and don’t put much prayer or thought into choosing what you take in from the world, then you won’t be sufficiently on guard or think things through fully. And if you’re not putting enough thought and prayer into deciding whether or not to partake of some kind of worldly input, then you probably won’t be alert enough to notice the effects on your spirit either, or make the time for spiritual cleansing and strengthening when necessary. (Mama: This is a case when neutral input turns into ungodly input.)

58. Something can be okay for one person but negative [ungodly] for another. This is due to differences in personalities, spiritual strengths and weaknesses, how different people process information and visuals, whether someone’s thoughts are disciplined or they tend toward daydreaming, whether they are prone to addiction or they are disciplined and moderate in their choices, etc.

59. Addictions to any form of secular input or entertainment, no matter how innocent, will result in negative fruit, both in your spirit and

in the use of your time. If you reach that level, even with something that is seemingly harmless, it’s a danger to your spiritual and professional life. Anything that pulls you away from moderation and a good balance in your life will hinder you from reaching your potential, and needs to be remedied.

60. But you don’t have to be addicted to take in ungodly or negative input that will hurt you. You could take in very little, but if you find that those things are influencing your spirit, if you’re less interested in Me and the things of the Spirit, if your attitudes are starting to shift toward the ways of the world, if you’re becoming materialistic and selfish, if you’re critical of others or Me, if your style or vocabulary is falling below an acceptable standard in your mission field, if you’re becoming critical of spiritual values and truths, if you’re drifting from the godly attributes that even the world expects of true Christians—love, integrity, kindness, consideration, honesty, discipline—then you need to look at the input you’re receiving, because it could very well be hurting your spirit. Even if the input itself is not ungodly or negative [but is neutral], its effect on you could be ungodly and negative.

61. When evaluating what you take in, consider: What is the input itself? Does it have bad elements that are obviously ungodly influences? It doesn’t take a lot of discernment to figure out when a movie, book, or game is obviously dark or unhealthy. The difficulty comes in judging the “not so bad” or “okay” [neutral] stuff.

62. That’s when the other element of consideration comes in: the fruit. How does that input affect you? If you’re honest with yourself, I will make it clear to you.

63. You need to watch for the obviously ungodly, negative, counter-Christian-values input and entertainment, and that’s not hard to judge. But with most of what’s out there and available [neutral], you’ll have to ask yourself: “Is this input making me better or worse? Is this hurting my spirit? What are the effects of this

entertainment, both during and after engaging in it? Is this building up my spiritual strength, integrity, and values, or is it eroding them?" Those are just sample questions, but I'm sure you realize the intent of the exercise. You need to figure out for yourself if something is hurting your faith, spirit, conscience, self-esteem, values, goals and principles.

64. Your loved ones can try to help you—and they should—but in these matters you'll also have to "keep" yourself; that is, keep yourself free of the Devil's inroads and evils. If you're not as sensitive in the spirit as you'd like to be, or if you have a hard time sticking to a good balance, you can display wisdom, good judgment, discernment and integrity by asking others for their help and counsel. Don't wait for others to come to you; go to them.

65. It's wise to seek a double check. It's not spiritually healthy to consider this aspect of your life a totally private matter, thinking, "I'm going to do this and no one can tell me otherwise." Personal accountability is being willing to take responsibility for yourself and your actions, while being open to and seeking help from Me and from others. You can't blame others or pass the buck, but because you want to do well, you seek out the godly counsel of others too. Personal accountability means that you will be held accountable for what you do.

Guarding your time

66. (Mama:) As the Lord has made clear in His counsel, time is a major consideration when looking at what worldly input you consider acceptable or beneficial. Before you read these next few messages, I want to present the balance. If you're already giving the best of your focus, efforts and energy to the priorities that matter to you, then these messages are not directed to you. But if you see the need for improvement in how you spend your time (which I often feel the need to improve in personally; probably most of us can relate), then I pray these messages are helpful for you.

67. The counsel about having a balanced life, about taking time to rest and relax, still stands. All work and no play will not enhance your happiness, your witness, or your effectiveness, nor will it get the job done faster. However, too much play will detract from your success—and that's the Lord's point here: to invest your time where it counts. Sometimes investing in time for rest and recreation is exactly what you need to renew your vision and help you to accomplish more than ever.

68. Don't push yourself too hard. If you're already stretched to the limit but you still see the need for improvement in the results you're getting, often the solution is not found in working more but in working smarter—redirecting your focus and efforts toward your top priorities.

69. (Jesus:) Every minute that you spend doing something is a minute that you're not spending doing something else. That's obvious, but it's worth carefully considering in terms of the Offensive and the mission. Everything costs something. Even great activities cost you in terms of time taken from other pursuits and activities.

70. If even the best and most worthwhile things in life cost in terms of your time, as well as in other ways, how much more should you be judicious about the price you pay for time and energy spent on entertainment—especially entertainment that doesn't build your spiritual strength. Content aside, simply the time you exchange for those activities is something that you need to care about in these busy days.

71. The entertainment you enjoy may be relatively harmless in content for your spirit and faith, but it can still be harmful to your profession and to the mission and to your happiness if it's robbing you of your time. If you're going to be professional missionaries, busy teachers of large flocks, those who collaborate with the influential and well-to-do, that isn't going to happen if you also want to have the time for large amounts of fluff and entertainment.

72. You, as a Family, need more Offensive momentum than you currently have. You're trying to reach new heights of fruitfulness and success in the mission, and in most cases that's going to require more of your time. Providing your children with the quality education and experiences that they need also requires time. Keeping yourself physically and spiritually healthy also takes time. All of those priorities are more important than entertainment. Every hour that you spend on worldly entertainment is an hour spent not doing something else that may be far more important to you in the long run.

73. What you're taking in may not be bad in itself; it may not be negative to the point of derailing your spirit, sapping your faith, or otherwise hindering you spiritually. You might think that what you're doing has no impact on you or on the Offensive. But the truth is that if you make decisions to spend too much time on such frills, your work isn't going to take off in the way it needs to in order for you to experience the fulfillment and success that I want you to have. This could very easily happen, not because you're weakened spiritually, but simply because you ran out of hours in your day or week.

74. Although I've promised to help you to be more successful and powerful through working in the spirit and using the spiritual weapons, adding more time to your day isn't something that I'm going to do. The work of the Offensive needs to happen in the same 24-hour day you've always had. So if you want significantly better results than before, and if you want your children to have a better education than they did before, and if you want to be healthier physically and spiritually, it makes sense that you're also going to have to be more judicious with your time than before.

75. I want you to approach worldly [secular] input not just as a spiritual issue, but also as a practical one, as a time-management issue. If you intend to be a successful, professional, happening organization on the rise, you're going

to have to make sacrifices. You can't cut down on time spent engaging in the mission, training your children, or communing with Me and studying the Word. If anything, you need more of those things to make your desired future a reality.

76. I'm not saying that you'll never have time for entertainment. I'm just saying that you have to look at what it costs you in two ways: One way is the risk to your spirit, and the other is the time that it takes away from other more necessary pursuits. It's a question of what you want. If you want to see your calling for Me really take off, then that extra push has to come from somewhere. In many cases that means that either more time has to be invested, more effort needs to be made, or you need to focus your efforts more specifically on the investments that count.

77. If you don't put enough work toward your important goals, chances are the future you will experience will be somewhat lacking—fairly good, but not great. The Offensive requires more. Because you want more success than you currently have, you must be judicious with what you allow to take up the precious, irreplaceable hours in your day.

78. How much time do you think entrepreneurs in society have for entertainment when they're starting out? Or what about successful top executives? It's an established fact that great success doesn't leave a lot of time for fluff. To take yourself from where you are to where you want to be is incompatible with also having lots of free hours to burn as you will.

79. So think about what you trade those hours for, and ask yourself if there's something else you could or should be doing in order to maximize your future. You can't always work, and there should be time to relax and enjoy entertainment. But too much relaxation—even what was “normal” by yesterday's standards—may be that “little folding of the hands to sleep, and so shall thy poverty come” (Pro.6:10–11).

80. Don't let entertainment steal the time that would have given you a push over the top. Be

willing to spend more time working and less time playing in order to see your dreams fulfilled.

81. Count the cost. If you add things up and you're seeing fruit, and it's time to relax, then great; go for it. But if you don't yet have the success you want, how many hours can you justify spending on entertainment? If you think that you can spare those hours, consider where the greater fruit that you wish to enjoy is going to come from. Who's going to make you more successful in the future than you are now, if you're not willing to put in the time to make that future a reality?

82. Relaxation is a need. Even entertainment is a need, but it comes at a high price—the cost of your time. Make sure you're paying for what you actually want, what will benefit you in your life. Otherwise, you might get down the road a ways and see that you traded souls, disciples, finances, education, fitness, and success for mediocre entertainment and useless information. That would be a sorry trade.



83. (Jesus:) Worldly input, regardless of how acceptable it is, takes your time. Often it is time and focus that could be put toward more worthwhile things—your work, your children, your marriage, fellowship with other Family members, etc. Time in your day is like money in a bank, and what you withdraw for one thing takes away from the total you have available to spend on something else.

84. You have to carefully consider whether worldly input is worth your time. In some cases, this type of relaxation or entertainment is what you need, and it will help to refresh you and enable you to keep going. In other cases, if your channel is open to other possibilities, I will show you alternate methods of relaxation that will be more effective, more worth the investment of your time, and a boost to your spirit at the same time.

85. If you are the type of person who naturally enjoys secular input for your entertainment and relaxation, it's wise to regularly ask yourself questions like: Is it the best in this instance? If you're tired after a long day, would

sleep be a better idea? Every hour you stay up late at night is at least one less productive hour the next morning, and possibly a less productive day overall if you don't get the sleep you need. If worldly entertainment is a habit you've fallen into because it's "easy," consider the other ways there are to relax, and encourage others to join you.

86. If you want to be a world changer, your priority must be the job at hand, and that's where you should invest your energy. You have to learn to push yourself to reach your potential, and that doesn't come easy. I don't mean slaving away in the arm of the flesh; I mean utilizing your time wisely.—Not just going full strength for a few hours here or there, or a few days of the week, but learning to work consistently, putting in quality, focused hours, and making every day count.

87. When you're working with this mindset for success, there's less empty time to fill. You go to bed earlier and spend your down time in a good balance of quality activities—including catching up on your time with Me, or enjoying recreation with your friends and co-workers and family, or improving your personal or professional life in some way. The input you do allow in your life is something you've run by Me for approval, and it's enjoyable and blessed by Me, and doesn't negatively impact your spiritual strength.

Addictions

(From ML #3489:26–27, GN 1073:)

Dictionary definition:

Addiction (n): "Addiction" has been around a long time—its first recorded use was in 1599, long before drugs were a problem. Although *Encarta* defines addiction primarily as "a state of physiological or psychological dependence on a drug liable to have a damaging effect," its secondary definition has been the most common use for hundreds of years, and continues to be used today: "great interest in something to which a lot of time is devoted."

The fact that such “great interest” often leads to negative effects is reflected in the words the thesaurus lists for addiction: habit, compulsion, dependence, need, obsession, craving, infatuation. Many dictionaries and encyclopedias mention the negative effects of such compulsions and habits.

(Mama:) When we think of addictions, most people think of things like drugs or alcohol, maybe caffeine, things that you absolutely can’t live without, or that are very painful or physically debilitating to abstain from. Many of you probably don’t feel that extreme or intense about anything in your life, and therefore you would naturally conclude that you don’t have any addictions. But when we asked the Lord to clarify what He considered an addiction, His answer was interesting.

(Jesus:) Addictions can be mild or severe. In My eyes, an addiction can be anything from a habit or desire or interest that’s just a little bit too important to you, to something that is seriously damaging your service to Me. An addiction could be anything that you sometimes, or often, put before one or many of the important things in life, such as your time with Me, your fellowship with others, or time spent investing in your Home and children and work for Me. An addiction doesn’t have to be something huge that you can’t physically live without. My definition is much broader. An addiction could be anything you do regularly or repeatedly that is just a little bit too important to you, or that hinders you in some way, or that wastes time, or that you have made a god of in your life, or that bears bad fruit, or that takes the place of the “better” things in your life.

88. (Jesus:) When you pray about how to have a godly balance in your worldly [secular] input, it’s vital that you take a good, honest look at yourself and that you’re open to counsel from Me, and from others who are strong in Me.

89. One thing to be specifically aware of when it comes to worldly input is that it can easily be addictive. Some of the common signs of addiction are:

- Difficulty cutting back on the object of addiction, even when you know you should.
- Automatically resorting to the object of addiction for pleasure or comfort without seriously considering alternatives.
- When the object of addiction is very frequently part of your thoughts, actions and words.
- Refusal to accept outside opinions and help in that area.
- Regular verbal or mental excuses, such as “people just don’t understand,” or, “I can stop any time, if I want to” (without ever doing so).

90. If some or all of the preceding apply to any aspect of input in your life, then it is likely that you have an addiction of some sort.

91. How do you deal with it? First of all, it’s important to realize that addiction is not always a big, bad, nasty thing. Bacchus is the evil prince of addiction, but he’s not addiction itself. Addiction is a human trait. Bacchus just wants to use addiction to ruin your life. That’s his mission.

92. The word “addiction” might bring to mind images of a chain smoker, a wasted drug addict or alcoholic, or a teenager who becomes dehydrated and sick from a 50-hour video game binge. These are addictions, of course, but they are of the extreme kind. The vast majority of addictions are far more subtle than that.

93. Many people are afraid to admit they are addicted because they fear having to give up their addiction entirely, or they feel as if it’s such a horrible, unique weakness; when, in fact, addiction is common. Any addiction should be handled pretty much the same way:

- 1) Find out if you have an addiction.
- 2) Honestly admit it to Me, to yourself, to others.
- 3) Figure out how to deal with it.

94. Addiction is basically when an object or activity has power over you in some way.

It's part of being human. But recognizing, praying about, and doing something about your addictions is also a wonderful way to maintain a healthy spiritual standard and to shepherd yourself. Dealing with any addiction in your life is a good thing; it makes you stronger.

95. The ideal is that you keep your life in balance overall. When you enjoy something so much that it could slip into addiction, pretty much the only way to keep your life in balance is to regularly evaluate and pray about your interests, habits, and tendencies. That may sound a bit intense to some of you, but it's wise management of your life and goals, and is completely worth it. For example, people who tend to gain weight easily must make it part of their lifestyle to watch their weight. A permanent lifestyle change along these lines may not be pleasant at first, but it will eventually become a habit, and it becomes easier and you become happier.

96. The fact of the matter is, if you don't make the evaluation of your habits a part of your life, you may be faced with the need to make a more extreme choice. If you're overweight, addicted to food, and unable to make lasting lifestyle changes, you may resort to going on extreme diets that are probably not healthy for you, all the while feeling bad about yourself and your body a good deal of the time. Similarly, if you are addicted to computer games and can't make it part of your lifestyle to regularly evaluate and pray about your habits, and be moderate in your playing time and keep games in their place, you may find yourself having to go on game fasts, or I may ask you to quit playing them for good.

97. If you can learn to find a balance, you'll be happier overall. If, for example, you

recognize that reading novels is addictive for you, but you pray about it whenever you want to engage in that activity, and you follow through on the plan I give you, you might wish you could read more from time to time, and you might even occasionally slip in your commitments, but overall you will probably be happier because you're obeying Me and you have a better balance. You'll also be able to enjoy the pleasure of reading novels in moderation, rather than having to cut them from your life completely. It's a win-win situation to come to grips with addictions and make the changes needed to deal with them.

98. Balance is the key and what you should strive for when it comes to worldly input, and every other aspect of your lives.

99. There will likely, however, be times when you need to take what might seem to be extreme measures in order to get your life back in balance. Some of you are compulsive or excessive by nature. If you have that type of disposition and you have addictions, then you should be willing to consider extreme measures, including letting something go altogether in some cases.

100. If you suspect that you have an addiction, it's important to take time to analyze your addiction yourself, with the help of prophecy and also the counsel of others. First of all, look back at how you've dealt with your desires in the past. Have you truly given moderation a good shot? Were you able to stick to your guidelines and rules? Or have you spent too much time on a roller coaster of excessiveness followed by deprivation?

101. If you've truly tried moderation and balance, but have been unsuccessful time and again, then you might need to make a complete break. You may need to completely stop a certain type of input that is playing on your weakness. A new lease on life may be just what the doctor ordered, and should be seriously considered.

102. My goal is not to take away the forms of entertainment that you most enjoy; it is to help you have balance in your life, and to give

you more time for the things that are of greatest importance to you in the long run. I'd like to help you to find that balance through daily choices, seeking Me, wanting My will above all, asking for others to safeguard you when needed, and making the sacrifices necessary to stay within My will. Sometimes you will also need to be willing to give up that form of entertainment completely—or for an ample period of time—to bring your life back into balance, or to allow your spirit time to heal and to be cleansed and strengthened.

103. Please focus on balance. Focus on balance when you pray about your input, when someone points something out, and when you suspect you may have an addiction. If major limitations and extreme measures are what will bring you balance, then go for it. If realism and moderation will bring you balance, then go for it. Find the balance so that you can be fruitful, happy, and fulfilled.



104. (Jesus:) Being addicted to some form of input or entertainment can be difficult to recognize or admit. It's very easy to get so into something that you don't realize how much it's influencing you, how much of your time it's taking—not only as far as relaxation time, but also in terms of your thoughts and focus as you go about your day.

105. If you're spending a lot of time on entertainment, you'll find that it starts drifting into and even directing your thoughts throughout the day, and this is undue influence. It's a sign that things are out of balance in your life and that your attraction to the entertainment has reached unhealthy levels. Or if you find that your mind is constantly turning back to whatever entertainment it is that you're fond of, that's a warning sign.

106. If you've had a tough time and you need to relax, and you feel that the only thing that will help you to feel better is X form of entertainment, that's another symptom that you might be a little too into it.

107. When you recognize that something in your life is out of balance, or that some entertainment is taking up more of your time and thoughts than is healthy, the first thing to do is to realize that this habit has very likely become somewhat of an addiction, and that you need help. Breaking an addiction or cutting back on something you enjoy this much is extremely difficult—if not impossible—to do on your own, so humble yourself and admit that you need help, and set up safeguards. The safeguards will be different for every situation, and you will need to ask Me for these.

108. If you truly want freedom from a strong habit or addiction, honesty will be a key. You will need to be honest and confess not only the problem, but the extent of the problem, and “expose the hideouts.” An alcoholic who is trying to recover, but who keeps a few bottles hidden from those trying to help him, just in case he feels he needs them, will have a much harder time breaking the addiction than the one who takes those helping him around, shows them all the hideouts, explains where he gets his liquor, etc. It's the same with any other strong attraction, injurious habit, or addiction: You have to be honest with yourself and with others and expose the ways that you feed that “need” or addiction; this way you can have help and support in overcoming it.

109. Once you've recognized and admitted the need to change your habits, ask Me for specifics on what to pray for, what weapons to use, what spirit helpers to call on, what positive habits and changes to focus on, and ask for prayer. Ask Me to give you the vision of what the changes will bring into your life, how they will make your life and service for Me better, how freedom from the bondage of the past will make your life more fulfilling and satisfying. Read My Word on the subject of change and fill your heart and spirit with Me and My love. Fall in love with Me once again, and with the mission that I have given you. Then set goals to look ahead to.

110. Recognize that there is a good chance that you will fall, but you don't have to stay down. Get up again! Look forward to spending a day without falling; then two, then a week, then two weeks, etc. Replace that pastime or habit with whatever I tell you to, but don't leave that space open. Fill the space, and become more than you were.

111. Think about all that I'm doing in the Family and the world. Think about the Offensive, the Family's mission, and the Great Commission of all Christians. I am ready and willing to dispense supernatural anointing to help you change, to enable you to embrace the changes that I am bringing into your life with excitement and anticipation. This anointing can make personal changes easier. You can leave the past behind. You can do more, be more, and go farther than ever before!

112. If you find that you have an addiction to overcome, remember: The only thing that can hold you back is you. So allow yourself the freedom that you deserve and that I know you want. Of course, it will cost, and, yes, there will be some loss and it won't be easy, but when compared to accomplishing the mission and your eternal rewards, it's a small price to pay.

Staying open to the help of others

113. (Jesus:) You need the godly counsel of others. That's the principle of shepherding. As you know, I didn't make you self-sufficient in every area.

114. If everyone is figuring out their own personal standard, there is a danger that you can gradually expect less and less of yourself, unless you're very vigilant. Gradually compromising can eventually lead to your channel not being all that clear. If you get in the habit of brushing off My checks and making excuses, then My warnings might not get through.

115. My safeguard in your life is to seek out and receive shepherding, and the counsel and checks of those who care about you and want to see you succeed in your discipleship. If

you get input of this kind from someone, be wise and use it. Remember that the goal is maintaining your spiritual health and integrity. If a check from a friend or loved one will contribute to that, then be very glad for it.

116. If you can get past your pride, you'll see that any shepherding or friendly advice you get is beneficial and a good safeguard in your life. You have the best of intentions to not slip or allow anything that is unwholesome in your life, but you won't always be able to stay on top of everything. So if someone who loves you notices something that might be a problem and gives you some advice, be glad about it. Your goal is to be as fruitful as possible for Me, and a strong spiritual life is going to help you achieve that.

117. If worldly input is properly moderated in your life, chances are you won't often get that many questions about it from others. But when someone does pose a question, the right reaction is to be thankful for the advice and to take it to heart and bring it to Me. If you can do that, then it's likely that your spirit is doing well, and that if something is amiss, it's a minor issue, and I can use a question from your brother or sister to help you. You'll be glad to fix it because you care about what's right. If you can't react to advice on a subject gracefully, however, that's a sign that you might be affected more than you think by the input you're getting.

118. You should know whether or not you are spiritually healthy, and what types or amounts of input affect you badly. The answer should never be, "Well, no one has mentioned anything to me yet, so I guess I'm fine." That won't cut it. I want disciples who care enough about their walk with Me to take care of themselves. Please don't stunt your spiritual growth through depending on someone else to guard your spirit for you. Guarding, preserving, strengthening, and replenishing your spirit is your job.

119. You are ultimately responsible for your spiritual health and strength; yet at the same time, if you are blessed with shepherding or counsel, be thankful for it and benefit from it.