

I was sitting in my desk. It was English class, my freshman year, at Holland Christian High School. We were talking about TV shows, movies, and advertising and about how they affected the way our brains worked - about how we thought. I remember our teacher, Miss Schuer, telling us that these shows changed how we saw the world.

She told us that the way women were portrayed, how violence was displayed, and how couples on TV dated would shape what we thought was normal for women's looks, common for violence, and standard for dating behavior. What appears normal for people on TV, in ads, and in the movies, quickly becomes normal for us as well. In short she told us that we are what we watch.

I didn't believe her. As I sat in my desk, drawing aliens in the margins of the handouts she had given us, I remembered thinking that advertising and media might be powerful, but I knew better. I knew that the women in the ads for that new Pantene shampoo were unrealistic and photoshopped. I knew that the death and carnage in the latest horror movies was fake and a product of Hollywood. I knew that the dating couples in the movie American Pie and similar films that came out around that time weren't how the real world worked.

And because I knew those things weren't real, I watched them, believing they wouldn't affect me. Whatever came out in the theaters, I went to - the rating or why it was rated that way didn't matter. I found no problem in playing games like Grand Theft Auto and surfing on websites I should have stayed clear of. I had no filter in terms of what music I listened to - unless it was country music from before 1990. I still don't listen to that. Miss Scheur told us the law of screens - that we are what we watch. I thought I was smart enough that the law didn't apply to me.

When we open the pages of Scripture, we don't see a lot about screens. The people in the Biblical accounts didn't have the technology we do today. Adam and Eve didn't have iPhones in their pockets, Ester didn't have a Pinterest account, and Moses had the only tablets around and they were made out of stone. I know - I'm not sure how they survived either.

Even without this overlap, I believe God has something to say about the things we watch. Scripture records an event that happened right around 3,000 years ago. There was a group of people, the Israelites, living in the country of Israel. A man named David was king at the time and there's this crazy event recorded in which David goes up to walk on his roof.

Now some of you might be picturing David clinging to shingles atop his slanted roof - if so, erase that image. The roof was almost certainly flat. He was likely simply walking there momentarily to get some fresh air. Now when you're on a roof, you can see a lot. And as David looks out, he sees someone else on their roof. It's a woman, and she's taking a bath. And generally, when someone takes a bath, they don't have clothes on. And David likes what he sees.

It's at this moment - let's call it David's roof moment - that he has an important choice. He can go back into his home, trying his best to forget what he saw or he can give in to his temptations. Some of you know how the story goes - David gives in. He has his palace minions get the woman, brings her to him, and he sleeps with her. Then the story gets even more bizarre when she gets pregnant and David essentially murders her husband so he doesn't find out what happened.

At a later point in time, David realizes how far he has strayed from what is right and true. He realizes how powerful just looking at something can be. In fact we have record of him writing *"I will lead a life that is without blame in my house. I won't look at anything that is evil."* (Psalm 101:2b-3a NIV) David, likely influenced by this disastrous event, realizes that the things we look at deeply affect us. He vows to be careful with what he watches. He learns the law of screens - that we are what we watch.

As I moved through my early years of high school, the law of screens caught up with me. Even though I knew that the shows, games, and movies I watched weren't based in reality, they changed me and over time twisted my mind to thinking of girls as objects, to be numb to violent acts, and to have a warped view of what a healthy dating relationship looked like. I thought I could beat the law of screens. But just like gravity, the law of screens exists whether I liked it or not.

In hindsight, I should have understood this from the beginning. After all, after watching Kung Fu Panda every 7 year old wants to karate chop random household items and every 16 year old wants to drag race their car after watching any of the Fast and the Furious movies. Advertising companies get this too as they spend millions of dollars on getting onto the screens in front of us. Screens deeply affect us.

As this reality soaked into my life, I realized I needed to change. Knowing what screens did wasn't the problem; I needed to decide which screens I was going to watch. After this truth had soaked into my life a bit more I remember being at a buddy's house and the latest Grand Theft Auto game at the time - San Andreas - had just come out. The game was there and a couple guys were playing it.

I wanted so badly to sit down and join them but I held back, knowing that whether I liked it or not that screen would affect me. Around that time I also started paying more attention to the messages TV shows were sending and why movies were rated what they were, and began taking some songs out of my playlist. And that began the process of pumping life back into my soul - seeing and thinking about the world more as God intended.

I think we all, like David, have those roof moments - those moments when we see something that we're tempted to watch. We convince ourselves that it'll be okay and won't really do any real harm. And we forget that the law of screens is in effect, whether we like it or not.

My prayer for you then is not that you unplug from all of your screens. It's not that you stop watching TV, stop going to the movies, or never watch a YouTube video again. I don't want you to become completely culturally incompetent or to grow a beard and go live in some cave in the Himalayan Mountains by yourself for the rest of your life.

Rather, my prayer for you is that as you encounter those screens that are clearly pushing you outside the bounds of where life is found, that you would have the insight to remember the law of screens and the strength and courage to walk away.