

How Do We Talk To Our Kids About Pop Culture?



Cover Story

Editor's Note: This month's cover story was written by Daniel Day of Axis, one of Summit's partner organizations. Axis creatively teaches a post-literate generation via the medium of current popular culture. In the midst of today's often confusing marketplace of ideas, we interview different worldviews and narratives by peering through the lens of media and asking the question "Does the Gospel of Jesus stand firm when compared to other counterfeit gospels presented in the world?" Axis' speaking teams exist to awaken the next generation and resource their parents to follow Jesus. For more information about Axis, go to www.axis.org. This month's Summit Spotlight features several Axis staff members

who are also Summit alumni, including Axis' founders.

The sanctuary was quiet and beautiful. We walked in and began setting up for chapel. We pulled our props and the computer out of our bags. We tested the equipment. Everything worked. We sat down on the wooden pews and waited for the crowd of Christian middle- and high-school students.

A few minutes later we could hear them coming. The hum began in the distance and grew louder as students walked down the hall and into the sanctuary. Soon the reverence was drowned out by loud teenagers excited about a break from classes.

One of the teachers walked on stage and grabbed a guitar. As he began to lead the Christian school through a rendition of "How Great Is Our God," the enthusiasm faded until it was completely gone. Small pockets of students sang while the rest waited quietly for chapel to be over.

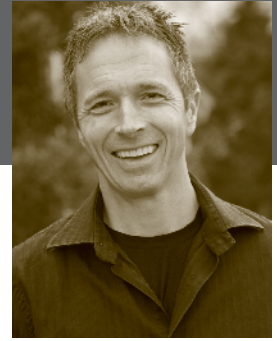
After a few songs, it was time for us to begin our presentation. We showed a random video of a panda bear sneezing — the students laughed. We read a section of verses from Proverbs about wisdom — the students listened. And then we played the music video for the number one song in America at that time.

The guy in the song sang about how he's

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from the president's desk

a word from dr. jeff myers



Our research from a few years ago shows that the average Christian young person is involved in “screen time” 33.25 hours a week. That’s more time than students spend on anything except school and sleeping, more than church, eating, sports, and homework combined. And that was before smartphones and iPads.

Christian parents are concerned about the influence of media violence and sexuality on their children, and they should be. Fortunately, there are effective ways to teach your children to be media-wise. Summit has a huge impact in changing this for the better, as you’ll see at the end of this letter.

When I need insight into cultural wisdom, I turn to Dr. Ted Baehr, a Summit instructor and chairman of the Christian Film and Television Commission. Ted developed the following five pillars for building a culture-wise family::

Pillar 1: Understand the influence of the media on your children.

In the wake of the Columbine High School massacre, CBS president Leslie Moonves put it quite bluntly: “Anyone who thinks the media has nothing to do with this is an idiot.” The major medical associations have concluded that there is absolutely no doubt that those who are

heavy viewers of violence demonstrate increased acceptance of aggressive attitudes and aggressive behavior. “Do not be misled: ‘Bad company corrupts good character’” (1 Cor. 15:33).

Pillar 2: Ascertain your children’s susceptibility at each stage of cognitive development.

Not only do children see the media differently at each stage of development, but also different children are susceptible to different stimuli. As the research of the National Institute of Mental Health revealed many years ago, some children want to copy media violence, some are susceptible to other media influences, some become afraid, and many become desensitized.

Pillar 3: Teach your children how the media communicates its message.

Just as children spend the first fourteen years of their lives learning grammar with respect to the written word, they also need to be taught the grammar of 21st century mass media so that they can think critically about the messages being programmed for them.

Pillar 4: Help your children know the fundamentals of the Christian faith.

Children need to be taught the fundamentals of the Christian faith so

they can apply their beliefs and moral values to the culture and to the mass media of entertainment. Of course, parents typically have an easier time than teachers with this pillar because they can freely discuss their personal beliefs. Being wise in a decadent culture is something parents, mentors, extended family, churches, and schools must all work together to build.

Pillar 5: Help your children learn how to ask the right questions.

When children know the right questions to ask, they can arrive at the right answers to the problems presented by the mass media of entertainment. For instance, if the hero in the movie your child is watching wins by murdering and mutilating his victims, will your children be able to question this hero’s behavior, no matter how likable that character may be?

And remember, spend your entertainment dollars wisely. To learn more and to support Ted’s ministry, go to www.movieguide.org

The Summit Impact on Cultural Wisdom

We’ve found that Summit opens students’ eyes to the culture’s influence. They learn to discern counterfeit worldviews and to pursue what is true rather than what is convenient. As a result, the average Summit grad significantly reduces his media consumption to between two and five hours a week rather than 33.25.

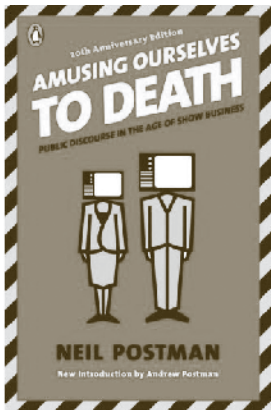
Our summer sessions are filling rapidly. Please go to www.summit.org to save a spot for the 16-to-21-year-old young adults you love.

“**Children need to be taught the fundamentals of the Christian faith so they can apply their beliefs and moral values to the culture and to the mass media of entertainment.**”

Dr. Ted Baehr

changed and promises not to abuse her anymore, but tells the audience he's lying to her so she won't leave him. The girl in the song admitted she couldn't leave the relationship because she didn't know where to go and being with him — in an abusive relationship — was better than not being in a relationship at all. As the song entered its chorus, students around the auditorium (in a very conservative Christian school) began to hum. A moment later the entire student body was singing loudly — all of

Suggested Reading



Amusing Ourselves to Death

by Neil Postman
Available at Summit's bookstore:
summit.org/store.

were imprinting a philosophy of abusive relationships on their brains.

The world is full of questions and even the smartest people in the world don't have all of the answers. That's why the issue of teenagers walking away from God is not about unanswered questions. It's about

unquestioned answers. Music, movies, and the rest of popular culture are full of answers to some of the biggest questions a person could ever ask. But what answers are they offering?

Teenagers have lots of questions: questions about what the church should look like, the accuracy of the Bible, and most importantly, questions about Jesus — who he really is and what it means to follow him. Teenagers tell us that they don't feel safe sharing their doubts and questions with their parents or teachers: "My parents and teachers don't take me or my doubts and questions seriously."

So instead of talking to parents about their questions, they talk to their friends. Or worse, they don't talk to anyone. But that doesn't mean their questions go away. Teenagers keep looking for answers, and they often find them in media and pop culture. Most of the time they don't realize how popular culture affects them. And just what is its biggest impact? It makes the world look more beautiful and fun than Jesus.

Consider some of the following examples from media that mislead teens into thinking "the way of the world" is not only pleasing, exciting, and fun, but also a legitimate choice that is theirs to make.

Christianity: *Sex is amazing and was created for a man and a woman to share within the boundaries of marriage.*

Popular Culture: *According to The*

axis

APATHY TO ACTION

Big Bang Theory, sex is amazing between friends or any two consenting adults.

The number one comedy on TV is called *The Big Bang Theory*. It's a hilarious show that features the awkwardness of highly educated scientists trying to live "normal" lives.

The most consistent theme in *The Big Bang Theory*, after social awkwardness, is sex. And oftentimes, social awkwardness is presented through the cast's ability and inability to sleep with someone. Leonard, one of the primary characters, has a crush on Penny that spans the entire life of the show. We see them sleep together numerous times, even when they are not in a "dating" relationship.

But *The Big Bang Theory* doesn't stop at presenting sex as something shared between friends. There are also numerous references to masturbation and pornography. Almost every sexual reference comes in the form of a joke — accompanied by a lot of laughs.

The Big Bang Theory never honors sex as special — something beautifully designed for a husband and wife. Instead, it devalues sex by implying that sex outside of marriage is fun, exciting, and without consequences. (When is the last time you

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pop culture

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saw an STD mentioned in a movie or TV show?)

Teenagers are buying into this idea. According to CNN, young evangelicals aren't waiting anymore. This generation needs older generations to help them see the beauty of sex within marriage. This means that parents need to have ongoing conversations with their kids about the role, purpose, and place for sex and why sex was designed for marriage.

Christianity: *God "knits" together complete people. The chief end of human life is to glorify Him.*

Popular Culture: *According to Twilight you are only half a person. The chief end of human life is to love and be loved by someone else.*

For the past several years, *Twilight* has taken over the book and movie worlds. In this series, an ancient vampire falls in love with a high school student, and the entire series focuses on their attempts to be together forever.

Bella, the high school girl, falls in love with Edward, the vampire. Several times we hear Edward say, "Bella, you are my life now ... you're my only reason for staying alive." At one point Bella says, "If this is about my soul, take it! I don't want it without you."

When the two are apart, Edward turns suicidal and Bella becomes self-destructive. *Twilight* shows that Bella is miserable without Edward, but decadently happy with him.

The message teenagers take away from these movies is that they need to be in flesh-and-blood relationships to find fulfillment. Finding fulfillment within a relationship with Jesus is much less fulfilling.

Christianity: *The purpose of life is to glorify God and enjoy him forever.*

Popular Culture: *Have fun! Even if something is illegal or bad, if you enjoy it, go for it. Live "Wild, Young, & Free," according to Wiz Khalifa, Bruno Mars, and Snoop Dog.*

"So what, we get drunk? / So what, we smoke weed? / We're just having fun / We don't care who sees / So what, we go out? / That's how it's supposed to be / living young and wild and free." The message to listeners looking for purpose in Wiz Khalifa, Snoop Dogg, and Bruno Mars' 2012 song "Young, Wild, & Free" is simply to have fun. Do drugs and get drunk, and don't worry about who sees. Life is about doing what you want to do, when you want to do it.

Have the Hard Conversations

So what's the best way to talk to teens

about the negative impact of popular culture on their Christian walk? Treat them like adults, listening to their doubts and questions with the goal of helping them see truth. But it's not just a matter of pointing out bad worldview ideas in their favorite songs and movies — it's teaching them how to think through the ideas for themselves. As the popular saying goes, "Don't prepare the path for your child, prepare your child for the path." Attacking Lady Gaga's view of life can easily backfire. Teens' music and movies are personal: they really like them, and sometimes they feel like they know the artists and actors personally. In talking about false ideas in media, concentrate on truth claims without ever attacking a particular personality or celebrity.

The best way parents can talk through the ideas found in popular culture with their teens is by engaging with them in a winsome manner — not a *winning* manner, a *winsome* manner. Speak truth in love. Watch these movies or TV shows with them and then discuss them afterward. Engage with them on their level.

Good parents do not necessarily equal good kids, but if parents do their part as parents, there's a good chance the next generation will be equipped to do their part and end up changing culture for the better along the way.

Summit News and Notes

» Want to hear Jeff Myers, John Stonestreet, and others speak in person? Register for our Engage events in Minneapolis, Dallas, and San Diego: worldmag.com/engage.

» Looking for helpful commentary on the cultural issues of the day? Don't forget to look at Summit's Resources section at summit.org.

» Keep up with the latest Summit news, resources, and offers. Go to summit.org to sign up for our email list.

a look at our world

news and commentary



Editor's Note: Our President Emeritus, Dr. David Noebel, helps us with research by sending 20-30 pages of clippings of each month's news. To see the complete list of Doc's clippings, go to www.summit.org/resources/the-journal/, open the PDF, and scroll to page 9, or call us at 866.786.6483.

Culture

ST. FRANCISVILLE, LA.—Living in a small Southern town, it's easy to forget that politics exists.

When I was working in Washington, D.C., as a journalist in the 1990s I would return here from time to time to visit my folks. It never failed to irritate me how disconnected everyone here was. Didn't they know there had been a Republican Revolution and Speaker Gingrich was going to set everything aright? I was on Capitol Hill watching it all go down—and nobody cared to ask me what it was like. What was wrong with them?

Now that I live in my hometown, I see this disconnect not as a vice but as a virtue. A limited virtue, and a risky one: living here, it's easy to believe politics doesn't matter much and to give oneself permission to disengage. When the only political talk you hear is the Hannity-Limbaugh line, it's tempting to turn away and focus on private life.

“... we are not responsible for saving the world, but we are responsible for doing what we can in the time in which we are given.”

Rod Dreher

This suits my temperament. I tend to be a decline-and-fall pessimist. Perversely enough, little makes me happier than devouring a freshly baked Spenglerian meditation on how our civilization is staggering towards decrepitude. But then I think about a dinner I had a decade or so ago in my Brooklyn apartment. As usual, my guests and I were decrying the decline of Christianity. One of us, a Catholic priest, agreed that our gloom and doom was justified but accused us of lacking perspective.

“You only see the rot, and it is very real,” he said. “But you don't see the possibilities. When I was a teenager in the '70s, the only option you had for catechism was the liberal priests and nuns in the parish. Nowadays, you can go online, tonight, and have Amazon.com send you in less than a week a theological library that Aquinas could only have dreamed of. Do you realize how fantastic that is?”

He went on, talking about how our contemporary age, for all its chaos and breakdown, also contained the seeds of renewal—if only we had the wit to see what was in front of us.

People who think small towns are a refuge from the crises of our civilization are deluded. You're probably better off here than living in a city, but you see the same patterns of social change, including the same dysfunction and pathologies. When I was a kid, out-of-wedlock childbirth, unemployment, and intergenerational poverty were almost wholly black problems. Not anymore. The barrier between

healthy and diseased doesn't follow the color line.

To whom can we look for relief? The government? Please. Politics? The Republicans and the Democrats are, to paraphrase the poet, ignorant armies clashing by night.

Besides, the rot is not primarily a political problem. You can't pass laws to change the character of individuals or communities. Given the realities of our postmodern, post-Christian culture, the best we can hope is to create a legal and political framework in which people are free to make good choices.

But how to choose? This is the heart of our collective dilemma: we have come to value choice over what is chosen.

It's wrong to yield to fear and paralysis. As Gandalf counseled Frodo, we are not responsible for saving the world, but we are responsible for doing what we can in the time in which we are given. That's moral realism. And as the philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre counseled the readers of *After Virtue*, the time may come when people of good will lose faith in a debased system and look elsewhere to construct “new forms of community within which the moral life could be sustained so that both morality and civility might survive the coming ages of barbarism and darkness.”

This is what St. Benedict and his followers achieved in the ruins of the Roman Empire, even though—as MacIntyre concedes—they didn't realize what they were doing. All they wanted to do was pray together and live in peace.

That's not a political program, or if it is, it's what Czech dissident Vaclav Havel called “anti-political politics”—the success

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a look at our world

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of which, Havel wrote, cannot be predicted in advance:

That effect, to be sure, is of a wholly different nature from what the West considers political success. It is hidden, indirect, long term and hard to measure; often it exists only in the invisible realm of social consciousness, conscience and subconsciousness ... It is, however, becoming evident—and I think that is an experience of an essential and universal importance—that a single, seemingly powerless person who dares to cry out the word of truth and to stand behind it with all his person and all his life, ready to pay a high price, has, surprisingly, greater power, though formally disfranchised, than do thousands of anonymous voters.

Havel wrote that in 1984, as an outcast in communist Czechoslovakia. Five years later, he was president of the liberated country. What might his words mean for us today?

Over the past few months, some friends and I in our small town have been doing something that would have been unthinkable a generation ago. We have been planting an Orthodox Christian mission church in our little Southern town. Our congregation is tiny, and all of us are converts, like the priest who moved here from Washington state to serve us.

At 45, I am the oldest person in the mission. Somehow, each of us—all born and brought up Protestant—found our way to Orthodoxy, the ancient faith of the Christian East. One of us is a sheriff's deputy who works courthouse security. During slow times, he reads the Early Church Fathers on his Kindle. All of us have stories like that. We are an improbable bunch.

If we had not been raised in a time of

turmoil, in which it was possible to conceive of changing churches so radically, and in which, thanks to the Internet, information about Orthodoxy was so easily obtained, there wouldn't be a mission church on a hill south of town, a congregation in a cypress-wood house under the Louisiana live oaks, chanting the fourth-century liturgy developed under John Chrysostom, patriarch of Constantinople.

And though few people in this conservative churchgoing community know what Orthodox Christianity is, our bearded, ponytailed, black-cassocked priest is not the standout he once would have been in this community, in part because the hippies—yes, the hippies—got here first in the '70s.

"Hey Father," an old farmer here good-naturedly asked our priest, "what you wearing under that black robe?"

"My Hank Williams Jr. Live in '95 concert shirt," he answered.

That priest is so in. This might work, our little hobbits-at-prayer venture. We don't want to change the world. We just want to pray together. Yet who knows what may come of it?

— Rod Dreher

The American Conservative
January/February 2013, p. 8-9

Economics

A team of sociologists at the City University of New York published a study on participants in the Occupy Wall Street movement in New York City. Among the findings: More than a third of respondents had household incomes of \$100,000 or more, placing them at the cusp of the top quintile of income distribution in America. Seventy-six percent of those who were not currently students held at least a bachelor's degree, and more than a quarter of gradu-

ates went to top-ranked schools. Overall, almost three-quarters of respondents were employed in professional occupations. The protests were led by a core group of experienced activists who were "disproportionately white and male," according to the report. "Many were children of the elite, if you will," one of its authors told the *New York Post*. Not quite disadvantaged, then; just badly educated.

— *National Review*

February 25, 2013, p. 6

Religious Liberty

In January 2012, Obama's Department of Health and Human Services announced that it would require almost all employers to provide coverage for contraception, sterilization, and some abortion drugs. After being criticized, it announced that it would issue further rules to accommodate religious organizations that object to this mandate. These rules, it said, would make insurers rather than employers cover the cost of this coverage. A year and an election later, the administration is sticking to this logical absurdity. And really, why should anyone have expected any step in the direction of liberty? The press largely accepted the Democrats' conceit that resistance to the rule amounted to a war on contraception and women, the Democrats won, and this issue is widely believed to have helped them. Conservatives cannot drop the matter without abandoning religious liberty and the rule of law. (The Religious Freedom Restoration Act has to trump the administration's regulatory dictates, as some courts have rightly ruled.) Anyone with eyes to see should now understand, at least, that social liberalism is at best only incidentally related to freedom.

— *National Review*

February 25, 2013, p. 6, 8

summit spotlight

a look into the lives of summit alumni

Axis Staff Credit Their Time at Summit As Inspiration

Jeremiah Callihan (Axis Co-founder)

Summit Student: 1999-2000

Summit Staff: 2001-2004

Summit changed my life. My parents made me go as an 18th “birthday present.” I was always a leader in high school and accepted my parents’ Christianity. I realized at Summit that the Christian faith is more than family tradition. It was the first time I realized Christianity is the intellectual thought system that speaks truthfully into all of life. Summit is where my faith became my own and where I learned how little I knew about God and His world. Summit has helped form my thoughts on God, work, and education. It influenced the founding of Axis.



Jeremiah Callihan

Daniel Giddings

Summit Student:

2000-2001

Summit Staff:

2001, 2004-2007

Going to Summit has been perhaps the most valuable experience in my life thus far. It was May 2000 and my mom showed me a brochure about this place in Colorado, and that’s all I needed at the time



Daniel Giddings

to convince me to go. Little did I know that the result of spending two weeks listening to brilliant speakers unpack the necessity of having a biblical view of the meta-narrative of life would ultimately change the way I saw the world around me. The decade following my Summit experience has been nothing less than an adventure of discovering life as it relates to the biblical narrative.

Meghan Libassi

Summit Student: 2004-2006

Summit Staff: 2010-2013

I loved Summit. At 18, it was a great summer camp. Then I went to college. I watched many of my friends walk away from their faith. They had no foundation, although many of them had grown up in the church. I returned to Summit at 20 to learn the evidence for the faith I had claimed. At that point, I realized that Summit was never “just a summer camp.” It was the introduction to what I needed to keep my faith.

Meghan Libassi

Without Summit, I would not be working for Axis. God uses Summit to change lives, to change culture, and to change statistics.

David Eaton (Axis Co-founder)

Summit Staff: 2006 and 2008

I loved Summit. It inspired me. The lectures were great, but I loved the porch talks where my concerns were addressed head-on. My wife went as an agnostic, and it forever



David Eaton

changed her. It gave her the opportunity to think that Christianity might have some credibility. My brother also went with lots of questions and doubts, and it really gave him a foothold and the desire to get a Ph.D in philosophy. Not only did Summit help

two people very dear to me, it also paved the way for me to start Axis.

Melanie Mudge

Summit Student: 2008

Summit Staff: 2009-2010

I attended Summit when I was 21. I was only just beginning to truly understand Christian theology, so I was extremely skeptical for the first three or four days. I even asked my mom to take me home! But by the end of the first week, God had opened my eyes, and I never wanted to leave. Originally, I thought Summit was trying to brainwash me; I left knowing that I had finally been taught the Truth.

Because of Summit, God gave me a deep desire to help rescue others from the lies I once believed, which is why I now work for Axis!



Melanie Mudge



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with your kids about pop culture?**

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Is It Too Late for This Generation?

Video games, movies, music, and television have rewired the brains of the rising generation, destroying their thinking capacity and moral discernment. And experts in child psychology think it may be too late to undo the damage. **The Captivated Package** charts the problem and includes:

DVD: *Captivated*. If you're concerned about media captivity, you'll want to watch this new movie right away with as many friends as you can gather. Featuring top media experts — including Summit President Dr. Jeff Myers — *Captivated* shows how to find hope in the midst of media addiction and a decadent entertainment culture.

BONUS DVD: "Entertainment and the Christian," Parts 1 and 2 (John Stonestreet) is a special bonus that examines how entertainment seeps into our thinking and how to effectively evaluate the worth of movies, music, and television from a biblical worldview as well as how to have an impact for Christ on an entertainment-hungry generation.

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