

Disclaimer: This Model is meant as another tool as you guide and lead your families through the difficult task of life as a Christian. Feel free to utilize this tool (or not) and adapt it/change it as you see fit. The goal is to consider these three questions after consuming any kind of art or media, especially that which is not explicitly Christian. Our hope is the discussion will not end with these three questions but rather that it'll help spark your thoughts.

The idea of the Model of Discernment is type of thinking structure created by Mark Matlock, co-author of the book *Faith For Exiles: 5 Ways for a New Generation to Follow Jesus in Digital Babylon*.

“Realizing it was impossible to filter all media streaming across the screens of the next generation to help them make decisions in advance about what media to consume, I decided the best we could do was teach them to discern culture on their own as they encountered it in real time. Based on Qoheleth’s grand experiment of observing God indirectly, I derived some basic questions for wisely discerning media. (My kids, rolling their eyes after every movie or TV show they watched together, learned to discern culture like this. You’re welcome, Matlock kids! Don’t mention it.)” - Mark Matlock, *Faith For Exiles*¹

Model of Discernment

Upon consuming media, music, show, movie, or even book, consider these three important questions:

1. Where is God? Who is God?

“It’s comparatively easy to find God through his direct revelation in Scripture and in our relationship with Christ, but seeing God indirectly requires intentionality. Cultural discernment, much like wisdom, begins with God.

It’s possible for a for a creator to write God out of the picture entirely, and helping young minds consider this possibility can be very powerful all on its own. It’s great to discover God in an unlikely place, but it’s also worth noticing when God isn’t an active part of a human-created universe.

But noticing where God is missing is not enough. If a person living in exile is to discern culture well, they must also get to know God’s true character. There are many human creation of art and story that include a portrayal of God that is false or misleading. An image of God that is weak, unloving, distant, or cruel needs to be identified and then corrected.”²

2. What Claim is Being Made about How Life Works?

“Every human creation declares something about how the world works, and identifying that worldview is an important part of cultural discernment. Whether we’re dealing with great works of literature, the latest horror movie, or a James Bond film, the author has a worldview. James Bond movies portray one idea of masculinity. What is true or not true about that idea? What about Bond’s notions of survival or good and evil?

¹ David Kinnaman and Mark Matlock, *Faith for Exiles: 5 Ways for a New Generation to Follow Jesus in Digital Babylon*, (Baker Books: Grand Rapids 2019), 103-104

² Kinnaman and Matlock, *Faith for Exiles*, 104-105

It's important to recognize how often art gets life right. Sometimes artists are more in touch with the human condition than many of us in ministry! The artist's claim about how life works is often what draws people to their art, and talking about the worldview underlying their creation is a great way to help young people understand their own claims about life.

...How do these claims compare to God's path for human thriving? How would this creation be different if Jesus's way were followed?"³

3. Where Can Hope and Redemption Be Found - If at all?

"Every character is placing hope in something, but what? Do they find redemption, or does their hope fail them? What is the source of power for their transformation?

Even as followers of Christ, we sometimes try to manage sin in our own strength, feeding the law of the flesh inside us rather than trusting in the grace of Jesus. If we know Christ struggle with where to find hope and redemption, it's no wonder that secular expressions of these things are skewed as well.

...How does this song, story, or work of art change when hope and redemption are found in Jesus?"⁴

³ Kinnaman and Matlock, *Faith for Exiles*, 105-106

⁴ Kinnaman and Matlock, *Faith for Exiles*, 106