

## Becoming sons of Issachar

By Lee Warren

**C**AN YOU NAME ONE fiction or non-fiction book on the *New York Times* bestseller list published last week? Can you name one song on the Billboard top 40 list from last week? Can you name one of the top 10 grossing movies of this past week? These are questions an editor of a large Christian publishing company asked writers at a writer's conference recently. These are questions Christians need to ask themselves.

### Keeping Abreast of Culture

Why? Don't we have more important things going on right now that need our attention? Our nation is at war. We have family, church, and work responsibilities. Who has time to notice the latest fads of pop culture? And why should we care?

Did you know that one of the 12 tribes of Israel was known for understanding their culture? First Chronicles 10 recounts the death of King Saul. David was made king of Israel in chapter 11 and as he prepared his army for war in chapter 12, I'm sure he was glad to have the sons of Issachar on his side. 1 Chronicles 12:32 refers to "the sons of Issachar who had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do."

The sons of Issachar understood the culture in which they lived and knew what their nation ought to do as a result. Many in the American church can't make the same claim because they've run away from culture, deeming it worldly or a waste of time. While much of it is worldly, imagine understanding our culture so well that our politicians would turn to the church to find out what America ought to do about our culture war.

### Engaging Culture

Here is the Amazon.com top 10 list of best selling books as of the hour I wrote this article. It includes fiction and non-fiction.

1. *The Da Vinci Code* by Dan Brown,
2. *The South Beach Diet* by Arthur Agatston,
3. *The Passion* by Mel Gibson (Foreword), Ken Duncan (Photographer),
4. *Angels & Demons* by Dan Brown
5. *The Five People You Meet in Heaven* by Mitch Albom,
6. *Deliver Us from Evil* by Sean Hannity,
7. *Mind Wide Open* by Steven Johnson,
8. *The Fabric of the Cosmos* by Brian Greene,
9. *The Proper Care and Feeding of Husbands* by Laura Schlessinger, and
10. *The Last Juror* by John Grisham.

### Being aware of culture is a far cry from being yoked to it.

Are you familiar enough with any of these books to discuss them with others? A quick glance at the jacket of *The Da Vinci Code*, *Angels & Demons*, and *The Five People You Meet in Heaven* would make it clear that while these books are "spiritual," they are incompatible with Christianity. Since Americans are reading these books, we need to know why they are incompatible with Scripture and be able to engage the culture in a conversation about them from a Christian perspective.

We don't need to read every best seller. By reading jacket blurbs, visiting Amazon.com's website, and reading book reviews in the newspaper we can

usually understand the premise of a book well enough to discuss it. On occasion, we may need to dig deeper and read a bestseller so we can discuss it in detail.

The same principles apply to popular music, movies, and television programs. We need to understand them well enough to hold conversations about them. Not every book, song, or movie is asking the deep questions of life, but all of them do portray a world-view. And we need to know about that world-view before we can agree with it, expand on it, or refute it.

We don't need to make ourselves susceptible to the influence of every form of debauchery pop culture has to offer. Being aware of culture is a far cry from being yoked to it. Those who struggle with watching certain types of movies, listening to certain types of music, or reading certain types of books should not put themselves in a position to fall just to stay current with the culture. We can gain enough knowledge in the areas we don't struggle with to make a huge difference in our culture.

As a writer, I need to know who my audience is before I write. If I don't know who my readers are and what they believe, I won't be able to make a connection with them—and they will quickly turn into non-readers of my writing. The same principle applies to Christians. When we speak to people, we need to know who they are and what they believe if we are going to interact with them. If we do not understand the culture they are engrossed in, we miss an opportunity to show them the comprehensiveness of the Bible and subsequently, the Christian faith. ■

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