

rB Reality TV Really Is | Rod Brace

<http://rodbrace.com/article/reality>

There's a form provided by the I.R.S. as a matter of convenience to those who have lost past tax returns. Send in the form and the I.R.S. will send you a copy of your lost return. Oddly enough, this form is not most often used for the purpose for which it was created. The primary user of this form is mortgage companies. They have found through the years that a person may want so badly to qualify for a new house that he or she will forge copies of past tax returns to submit in their mortgage application. The "reality" of not being able to buy the house they want (and likely cannot afford) justifies the form-forgery. These days, money changes everything -- and money changes everyone. That's reality.

Just a few years ago, reality TV was a unique concept: drop a dozen "regular people" with sparkling grins and mostly-hard abs onto a remote desert island (remote, except for the posh production crew housing, groves of satellite dishes and squadron of Humvee drivers) and you've got yourself hit TV.

Today reality shows are the new paradigm of entertainment. They are relatively cheap to produce and offer up a bit of interesting human dynamic. But do they really represent "reality?" I'd like to say "no," but I'm afraid, from a moral context at least, they do.

The "reality" of this new genre of entertainment reveals a great deal about who we are and how we act when that million dollar carrot is dangled in front of our greedy little paws. Money changes everything -- money changes everyone. And in the world of on screen reality, the end often justifies the means.

For several seasons now, America has seen that a million dollar prize will bring a group of strangers to a new low in back-stabbing, conniving, lying, extortion, stealing, gossip, cheating . . . all in the name of "playing the game." Reality TV has become the new standard of acceptable behavior for those times when the stakes are high.

We have become a nation of fans and imitators of the new stars of entertainment TV who have re-written the rules of engagement. In the name of "playing the game" we, too, have embraced deceit. The way we play the "game" speaks volumes about who we are in those split second judgment calls of character and integrity. We "play the game" at work. We "play the game" at church and in our community. We resort to "playing the game" with our spouse. We model the attributes of a successful "player" for our children. As a result, we have lost our moral footing and deemed it worthy of primetime!

America's applause and celebrity status now goes to these gladiators of social finesse. We salute your cunning guile and your "take no prisoners" attitude. You, reality TV players, are a tribute to all things American: greed, lust, dishonesty, disloyalty, sexism, anger, deceit, immorality. We watch your pursuits with a sense of comparison, asking, "Am I worthy to play the game? Could I win?"

My prayer for you and I is that we are not worthy to play. Rather, that we pursue a new reality, a new context of moral character. Be good friends. Be content with what we have. Love genuinely, give freely, console, encourage, delight and provide. Some would say that reality is a boring one. To them we should simply respond that the value of one's life lies in what they are rather than what they win.

So resist the urge to follow the herd. Play a different game -- the joyous game of living simply.

[Excerpt from Simplify by Rod Brace. Available at Amazon.com or your favorite online bookseller.]