

Why Read Brave New World

March 1, 2019

by Lori Bridges/ David Schrock

Next Thursday, the ladies' book club will discuss the book, *Brave New World*. Published in 1932 by Aldous Huxley, an English writer and philosopher, well known for his practice of Eastern religion and drug use, it might raise the question: Why read this book from such a "sketchy" author?

Two answers will be given below. One is by Lori Bridges, who will lead the discussion of this book next week. The other is by Neil Postman from his equally important book, [*Amusing Ourselves to Death*](#).

My apology for reading *Brave New World* is that we should love the Lord and others with all our hearts and minds. Therefore, as thinking Christians we should not ignore such literary works but engage them with a fulsome biblical worldview.

Faithful Christians do not *only* separate themselves from the culture. Rather, with minds renewed by the Word, we are to speak the gospel to a world that looks much like Huxley's vision of the future. Indeed, as [D. A. Carson observed](#) in [*Christ and Culture Revisited*](#), Christians must learn how to both resist and engage the culture. And in our ladies' book club, there is a great opportunity to do both.

An Invitation to Read *Brave New World*

*Do not love the world or anything in the world.
If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them.* 1 John 2:15

Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation.
Mark 16:15

As Christians, how do we obey both of these exhortations from the Lord? One answer is that we are to go into the world *without* becoming like it. In other words, we are to love the world by not loving the world, so that our love for God might impel us to tell the lost world about the love of God.

God tells us every person is made in his image, so we want to love and care for all his creation. This includes those individuals (or cultures) whose choices we don't always love. Still, in this cultural engagement, we have to be careful to not be affected by the choices, scenes, lifestyles, and temptations that surround us in this world.

We can love those in the world without loving the world by seeking to understand the world. This might include seeking to understand why people make the choices they do, live in situations that make us uncomfortable, have lifestyles that contradict our Christian values, and pursue the temptations we try to avoid. Even when we don't want to be like the world and

return to the old habits we practiced before coming to Christ, we still cannot ignore the place people are coming from.

This is where reading good books comes in. Sometimes we can peek in and see what we don't want to touch through the medium of good books. Through reading the stories of others or even futuristic science like *Brave New World*, we are prepared to go and effectively speak the gospel to the people suffering from the things we find in good books.

Hebrews 5:14 tells us, "But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil." Our church book club has become a great place to read books that challenge our thinking and enlarge our hearts and minds. Some we can completely relate to; some challenge us deeply. To that second goal, our book club offers a safe place where we can confront difficult ideas and evaluate how believers need to think about those ideas and see them through a biblical lens.

That's where books like *Brave New World* can help us. It's not a comfortable book to read; at times it made me feel like I was swimming in spit. A few weeks out from finishing it, however, I see how "good" it is. The characters are upsetting, the world frightening, and the story itself is dismal. Yet, as it envisions a world run by human pleasure (a worldview known as hedonism), it reveals so much about our age of instant gratification. While written by a non-Christian, one whose lifestyle is understandably upsetting, Huxley has written a book for our age.

For Christians, this book even has a way of producing disgust with our modern, pleasure-seeking world. It reminds us how a life lived without the sovereign grace of God and the comfort of the gospel, leads people to live for themselves, their sensual desires, all the while making themselves vulnerable to the larger desires of the State.

Therefore, we read *Brave New World* not just because it is a "classic," but because it is a timely reminder of what people in our world are pursuing, how technology is changing morality, and why we must hold fast to the faith once for all delivered to the saints.

In this way, this book gives us a chance to hone our skills of discernment. It prompts us to cling to Christ more deeply, to love him with all of our mind, and it helps us know how to help others know the goodness of God. Certainly, there are many parts in the book that are disturbing, but be encouraged: those who are in Christ don't stay in yucky worlds too long. And for those who have been rescued by the cleansing blood of Christ, this book will help us feel the lostness of the world around us. Perhaps, it will even lead us on rescue missions to deliver the hedonists around us to find eternal pleasures at the right hand of God (Psalm 16:11).

For these reasons and more, this book is worth reading. Not all that is good for us feels good. So may we feel the discomfort of sin in this book, and seek more of Christ.

Neil Postman's "Argument" for Reading *Brave New World*

Few books are more important for understanding the modern age than Neil Postman's [*Amusing Ourselves to Death*](#). (Add this to a future book club list). And in this classic, media ecologist Neil Postman contrasts two dystopian novels—1984 by George Orwell and *Brave New World* by Aldous Huxley. His comparison explains why this book should be read today. (Citation from Justin Taylor, [*A Brave New World is Here*](#))

Contrary to common belief even among the educated, Huxley and Orwell did not prophesy the same thing. Orwell warns that we will be overcome by an externally imposed oppression. But in Huxley's vision, no Big Brother is required to deprive people of their autonomy, maturity and history. As he saw it, people will come to love their oppression, to adore the technologies that undo their capacities to think. [Think: iPhone]

What Orwell feared were those who would ban books.

What Huxley feared was that there would be no reason to ban a book, for there would be no one who wanted to read one.

Orwell feared those who would deprive us of information.

Huxley feared those who would give us so much that we would be reduced to passivity and egoism.

Orwell feared that the truth would be concealed from us.

Huxley feared the truth would be drowned in a sea of irrelevance.

Orwell feared we would become a captive culture.

Huxley feared we would become a trivial culture, preoccupied with some equivalent of the feelies, the orgy porgy, and the centrifugal bumblepuppy. As Huxley remarked in [*Brave New World Revisited*](#), the civil libertarians and rationalists who are ever on the alert to oppose tyranny "*failed to take into account man's almost infinite appetite for distractions*" [emphasis added].

In 1984, Huxley added, people are controlled by inflicting pain. In *Brave New World*, they are controlled by inflicting pleasure.

In short, Orwell feared that what we hate will ruin us.

Huxley feared that what we love will ruin us. . . . Huxley, not Orwell, was right.

Much of our world is caricatured in Huxley's novel and for that reason it is worth reading—if for no other reason than that our love for the world will be exposed (and opposed) and our compassion for the lost will increase. May such an edifying experience result from reading this book.

For More Christian Reflections on this book, read Christian theologian and ethicist, Alastair Roberts, [*Brave New World, 85 Years Later*](#).

Soli Deo Gloria, ds