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TIPS FOR DISCERNING THE NEWS

In a time when misinformation and disinformation are widespread, navigating the news can be difficult—but it's more crucial than ever.

Here are 11 tips to help you evaluate news stories with discernment:

1 CHECK THE SOURCE

Pay attention to the source of the news story. Is it a reputable news organization with a history of accurate reporting? Is it a lesser-known or partisan outlet? Or is it a satire site like the Babylon Bee or the ONION, whose stories are written to make you laugh but shouldn't be taken seriously? Be especially cautious of news that comes from sources you are unfamiliar with or that have clear biases.

2 Look for Multiple Sources

When possible, get your news from multiple sources for a more balanced and nuanced perspective on the issue at hand. When searching for additional sources, look for reporters and avoid repeaters. Reporters covered the story directly. They were on the scene talking to witnesses and assessing the situation themselves. Repeaters simply paraphrased and published someone else's story—repeating any errors that may have been in the original account.

3 Read Beyond the Headline

Headlines are designed to grab attention, but they may not accurately reflect the content of the article. Most times, headlines are not written by the same person who wrote the news story. Read the entire article for a better understanding of the story or issue.

4 Beware of Mind Readers

Who, what, when, where, why, and how? These are the fundamental questions of news reporting. Often, the most difficult question to answer is, "Why?" It cannot be deduced from simple observation. Witnesses can only speculate. Be wary of any story that purports to explain why someone did something without a direct quote from the individual responsible.

5 Watch Out for Reporter Bias

Recognize that all news sources have some degree of bias, whether conscious or unconscious. Try to be aware of the source's biases and factor that into your evaluation of the information presented. For better or worse, this is becoming easier as more news outlets acknowledge—and even embrace—their biases.

6 Recognize Your Own Bias

Confirmation bias is the human tendency to search for, interpret, favor, and remember information that confirms one's existing beliefs. It is especially pronounced when it comes to closely held, ideological, or emotionally charged views, like those found in politics. To counter confirmation bias, increase your skepticism when reading or watching stories with which you initially agree.

7 Consider the Context

Pay attention to the broader context of the news story—including the historical, social, and political factors that may be relevant. This can help you understand the implications of the news story and evaluate its significance.

8 Require Transparency

If a news story lacks transparency in how it was sourced, reported, or edited, it may be inaccurate or biased. When the story says, "experts agree," demand to know which experts they are referring to and what credentials or experience justify their expertise. It is okay to ask, "Is that anonymous source even real?"

9 Be a Critical Thinker

Be skeptical of claims that seem too good (or too bad) to be true and be willing to question the assumptions underlying the story. Ask yourself questions about the article you are reading. What evidence is presented to support the claims being made?

10 Wait

Often, more details emerge over time, further clarifying a story and occasionally changing it entirely. The first narrative is sometimes a false narrative. For example, when actor Jussie Smollett claimed he was assaulted by white conservatives late at night on the streets of Chicago, major news outlets immediately reported it as a hate crime. Only later, as the facts emerged, was his story revealed to be a hoax.

11 Read With a Biblical Lens

One cannot truly discern the news without considering biblical concepts and truths. Today, most stories adopt a premise that something is either 'good' or 'bad', and the Christian reader must pause to consider why the author makes that assumption and whether it aligns with biblical text.