

# The Matrix

## Distinguishing between Reality and Illusion

-Michael Peterson-

The Matrix trilogy (1999) with Keanu Reeves tells the story of a computer programmer, Neo, who begins to question the reality around him and eventually learns about the Matrix.

***The Matrix is a false perception of the real world.*** It constantly invades people's perceptions of their lives, environment and reality. Morpheus, who rescues Neo, describes the Matrix as *"everywhere around us. It is in the room we are in; we can see it when we look out our window or when we turn on our television set. We can feel it when we go to work, when we go to church, when we pay our taxes. It is the world that has been pulled over our eyes to blind us from the Truth."*

The false world of the Matrix is an illusion, perpetrated by powerful others seeking to hide reality from us. The Matrix twists and contorts reality, controlling thoughts, perceptions, attitudes and behaviors to conform to its illusion.

The parallels today are almost too numerous to mention. We are saturated with endless streams of information, flooding us with news and entertainment. We are constantly being influenced via

the Internet, "news" sites, programs and social media. Our mobile phones keep us ever connected to the Matrix.

Living in the false perceptions that surround us, what we have come to call "media" determines what we think about, how and when we think about it.

As a college professor, I have observed the increasing influence of the media in the lives of college students. Typically, students find it extremely difficult not to check their phones and social media sites every 10 to 15 minutes. During

**"THE MATRIX IS EVERYWHERE AROUND US. IT IS IN THE ROOM WE ARE IN; WE CAN SEE IT WHEN WE LOOK OUT OUR WINDOW OR WHEN WE TURN ON OUR TELEVISION SET. WE CAN FEEL IT WHEN WE GO TO WORK, WHEN WE GO TO CHURCH, WHEN WE PAY OUR TAXES. IT IS THE WORLD THAT HAS BEEN PULLED OVER OUR EYES TO BLIND US FROM THE TRUTH."**

class, students can be seen constantly surfing, checking email, looking at Internet sites or social media. They are somewhat addicted and feel almost obligated to keep in touch and respond to this media world where they are consumed by an alternate reality made up of

digital information. In that "matrix," they are easily swayed by the prevailing information they consume.

The Matrix shapes their perceptions, often in direct conflict with their own, not by their own reason, logic and experiences. Of course, it is not just college students who are susceptible. We all can easily be passive participants in the Matrix and fall prey to misinformation, fake news and false realities.

### Fake News, False Realities

False realities have been around for some time, and are often created by institutions or individuals of influence. Government agencies, media companies, religious institutions, medical science and educational systems have all been guilty of advocating false realities and promoting illusions that cause us to experience negative outcomes. False realities created and promoted by the Matrix influence voters, increase violence and create division. It is no accident that our nation is more divided than ever, and the media has played a leading role.

Those people who are courageous enough to think outside the box, and do their own thinking, logical reasoning and

fact checking are hard pressed to accept the alternative reality of the Matrix advanced by so many areas of our culture. Medical science is not immune to the Matrix, as evidenced by the testimony of the former editor of the prestigious New England Journal of Medicine, Dr. Marcia Angell:

*"It is simply no longer possible to believe much of the clinical research that is published or to rely on the judgment of trusted physicians or authoritative medical guidelines. I take no pleasure in this conclusion, which I reached slowly and reluctantly over my two decades as an editor of The New England Journal of Medicine."* (Marcia Angell, MD, *The New York Review of Books*, January 15, 2009).

The illusion of health and healthcare is something that we wouldn't expect, but for those of us who work in the health professions, it is something we know to be true. Medical science journalism is highly suspect.

## Politically Correct

The Matrix is always at risk of being exposed, so political correctness has become the law enforcer. To question conventional wisdom risks being punished with the wrath of those who control our "culture" and our "reality." Hence, national security or immigration measures are twisted to become racist; questions about the sanctity of marriage or gender fluidity risk labeling someone a homophobe or transphobic. Questioning climate change risks being labeled a "denier" and non-scientific. Questioning the efficacy of vaccines for your child makes you a poor parent and a health "wacko." Labels such as "Nazi," "racist," "homophobe" or even "Christian" are ways people are kept within the Matrix.

In fact, "Christianity" itself is now being described as a "white supremacist" religion by some media, academic and cultural elites.

It is not just the pressure of the Matrix to control our perceptions of reality. We also can become willing partners through our exorbitant pursuits of entertainment, amusement and escape. The advancement of

virtual reality technology is now making this even more exciting and tempting to the point where even our social and sexual needs and desires can be satisfied via an avatar.

We may literally be able to immerse ourselves in a false reality. For some, even the technology we currently have has led to increased addiction, depression and mental illness. What will happen when virtual reality becomes mainstream? Apart from technology, many seek solace through drugs, alcohol or amusing pursuits—these are just other ways to engage in the Matrix.

## The Way Out

Ultimately, the question is, "how do we disengage from the Matrix?" The picture I have painted is somewhat bleak but it is not a foregone conclusion. The real issue we face is being able to determine the difference between the lie (Matrix) and the truth. The very first step is to accept the truth—and for Christians, the ultimate truth is that Jesus Christ is the Son of God; Jesus is the way, the life and the truth. He is the light that shines in the darkness. He is the gate; he is the exit door. Once that truth is accepted, we can begin to look at our lives and see the Matrix in which we exist through the reality and lens of Christ.

God gave us minds with which to reason, apply logic and weigh information. Learning to think well is a skill that we all need to develop. It was no small thing for Solomon to ask for wisdom—the ability to think, judge and make determinations as a king. We should be no less shy in asking God for that same wisdom. Learning and being unafraid to ask questions, or to question information is vitally important.

The Spirit of truth (John 14:16) produces a sound mind (2 Timothy 1:7). The Spirit of truth empowers us, helping us identify basic logic fallacies with which we are bombarded by the media and the Matrix. God empowers us to distinguish between reality and fabrications, lies and truth.

As we grow in Christ, we also grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (2 Peter 3:18). And it is through Christ and by the grace of God that we can escape the Matrix and finally see reality. □

*Michael Peterson works in higher education, encouraging students to pursue truth.*