

HOLY MOTION

MAGAZINE

WINTER 2025

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watch horror
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Our Team



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Favorite movie: The Lord of the Rings

Favorite TV show: The Big Bang Theory



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Favorite movie: Hot Fuzz

Favorite TV show: Brooklyn Nine-Nine

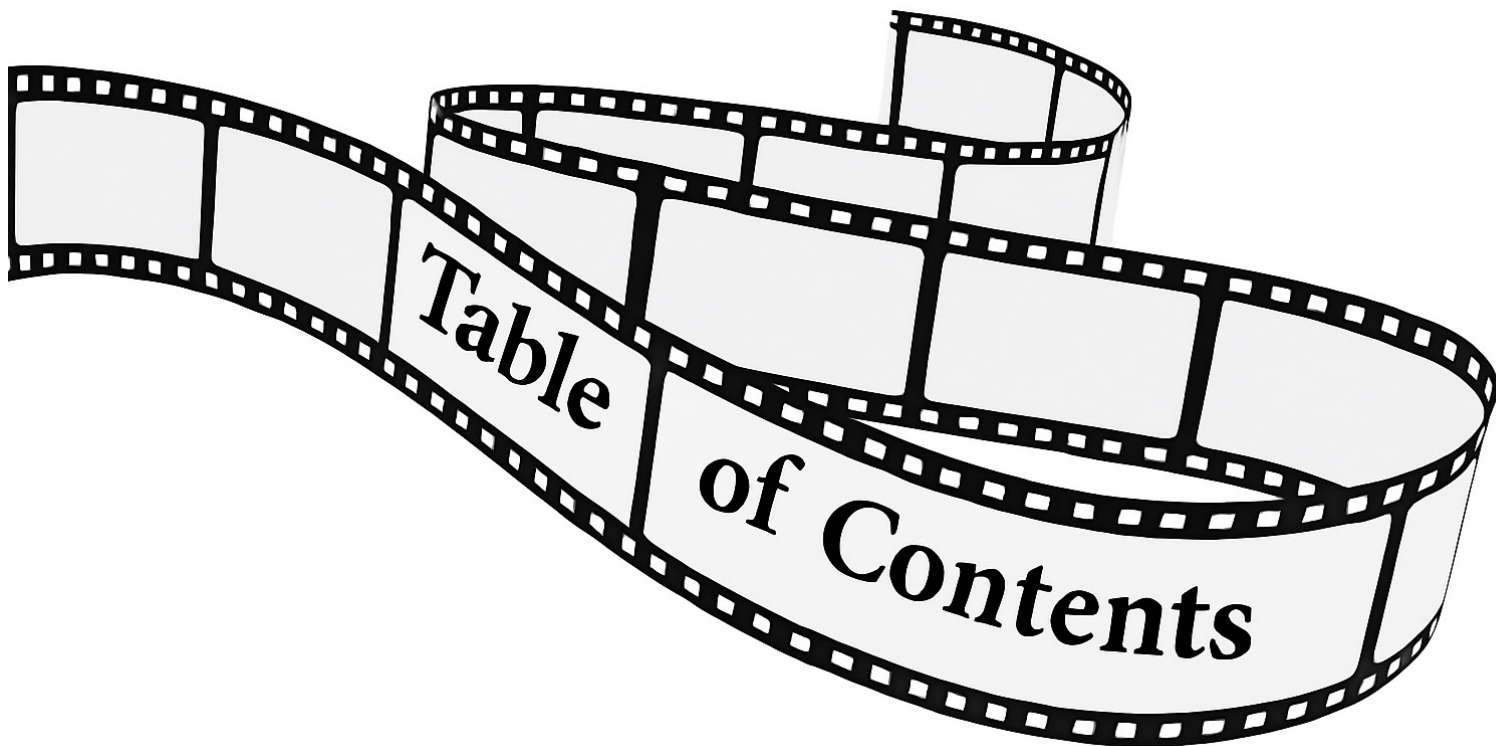


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THE THEOLOGY OF FEAR: A LOOK AT CHRISTIANITY AND HORROR FILMS

By Ella Watson

If the Bible tells Christians, “Do not fear,” what does that mean for a genre built around terror itself?

From “The Conjuring” to “A Quiet Place”, horror films have long stirred discourse in Christian communities. The question stands: should Christians watch or avoid the horror genre?

Films dealing with demonic topics are particularly polarizing, Craig Long, visiting assistant biblical studies professor, said.

The Old Testament instructs Israel to stay away from mediums and spiritists, Long said. The New Testament, particularly in Revelation, also stresses the danger of sorcery. The horror subgenre of the occult and demonic thus tends to draw criticism from Christians.

“I don’t want to suggest that if you go see *The Conjuring*, whatever the new one is, that means you’re going to get possessed or whatever,” Long said. “But I think it can create a curiosity or an openness that leads into a temptation that’s just not necessary.”

If such movies lead a person to explore occult topics or witchcraft, there lies a problem, Long said.

Verses like Isaiah 41:10 and

2 Timothy 1:7 call believers not to live in a spirit of fear. Fear can hinder faith and obedience, Long said.

“If we’re looking for scripture, you’ve got commands not to fear,” Long said. “You’ve got things like perfect love drives out fear, and so there’s room for a question about a genre that is specifically intended to create fear or jump moments, or that high level of anxiety.”

There is room, however, for different convictions, Long said.

While one Christian may feel convicted to avoid all horror films, another may draw the line at ones discussing spiritual topics. Another may consume those, as well.

“It’s a regular temptation to make the argument that our preferences, that there’s some Scripture that makes us binding on everyone,” Long said. “Know who you are...I think for me, I would put demon films in the category of, if not full-blown sinful, just too much temptation to care to mess with. But that’s probably as

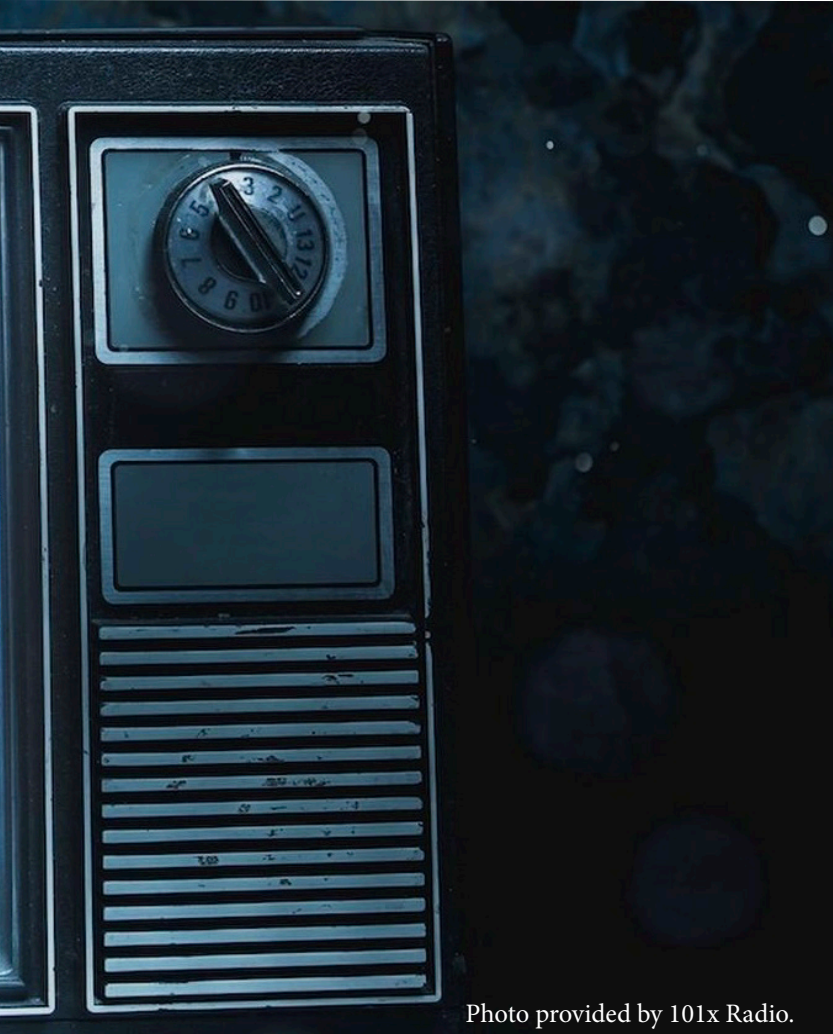


Photo provided by 101x Radio.

much my conviction than straightforward Scripture.”

While there are negative considerations with horror films, they also provide unique perspectives other genres cannot.

Horror recognizes and can shine a light on forces beyond mere flesh and blood, which are found in the Bible, Jeffrey Overstreet, novelist, film critic and assistant professor of English and writing at Seattle Pacific University, said. Horror can explore that reality in important ways.

“I think horror films can show us sort of the brokenness of the world, and thus give us a glimpse into what we’re facing as a culture,” Steve Bailey, associate professor of film and media arts at Taylor University, said.

One example is 2008 horror film, “Let the Right One In,” which focuses on the friendship between a vulnerable young boy and a centuries-old vampire. The movie thematically reveals how prone young men are to being recruited into violent extremism, Overstreet said.

Horror cannot be distinctly separate from Christianity because horror is found in the Bible, Sean Gaffney, associate dean of the school of communication arts at Asbury University, said.

“Horror is one of the genres that’s in the Bible, which means that you have to ignore the horror elements of what’s going on in the Bible if you are someone who says that, as a Christian, you can’t encounter it,” Gaffney said. “We’ve got a lot in the Bible of full-on horror stories, Levite and his concubine, Elisha and the bears, Jesus versus Satan...the story of Legion. I mean, we’re talking about literal demonic level of horror, even the crucifixion.”

The Holy Spirit’s discernment should be a Christian’s guide in their consumption of any content, including horror films, Long said.

Each individual must understand their weaknesses and what negatively influences their thought patterns or increases their fear, Overstreet said. But it is also essential for them to understand their strengths and what helps them to consider dark but helpful topics.

“And we have to take it movie by movie and kind of figure that out for ourselves,” Overstreet said. “We’ll find that a lot of those movies exist in the gray areas in between, where what will be meaningful and rewarding to one person could be really harmful to somebody else.”

Recently, as Gaffney and his wife began a detective show, they turned to one another 15 minutes in. They were not supposed to be watching it, Gaffney said, and his wife agreed. While the show was not inherently wrong, it was not right for them, he said.

If a person is doubtful about whether or not to watch a horror movie, they probably should pass, Long said.

“Don’t try to convince yourself. We have the Holy Spirit for a reason...If you can’t go to X, Y or Z film without having to violate your belief and your conscience, don’t do it.”



Image provided by Pngtree.

WHICH FILMS WILL BE SUCCESSFUL?

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A Look Ahead...



Detective Benoit Blanc (Daniel Craig) stands in a shot shown in the “Knives Out: Wake Up Dead Man” teaser trailer

By AJ Richardson

Every year, a wide array of films is released. Some notable ones of 2025 thus far include Ryan Coogler’s “Sinners,” James Gunn’s “Superman” (which rebooted the DC Universe), as well as “Mission Impossible: The Final Reckoning” (the final Mission Impossible film).

I could go on and on about films that released this year. There were more live-action remakes (“Snow White” and “Lilo and Stitch”), and also a film adaptation of the popular video game, Minecraft.

2025 isn’t over, and some big films have yet to be released. There will be a remake of the 1997 film “Anaconda,” and the third installment in the Avatar film series, “Avatar: Fire and Ash.” This is the year of the third installment, as “Knives Out: Wake Up Dead Man,” the third Knives Out film, will release with Daniel Craig returning to star as Benoit Blanc. Edgar Wright’s “The Running Man” releases in November. It is an adaptation of the Stephen King novel by the same name.

The 2025 box office has now grossed 6.3 billion (as of September 29, 2025), which is still 5 billion dollars behind the pre-COVID-2019 box office, according to Box Office Mojo.

Of course, the constant stream of remakes and franchise films is beginning to tire audiences.

“I have a feeling audiences are starting to get sick of the long train of Marvel, Star Wars, Minions, etc. That stuff is still going to make money, just not as much as it used to,” Gideon Patrick, a graduate of the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh’s film program, said.

And he’s right, “Fantastic Four: First Steps,” one of the three Marvel films to release this year (also the one that grossed the most out of the three), only grossed 521 million dollars, landing it at the tenth spot in this year’s box office. This is different from previous years, when Marvel dominated the top spots at the box office with some of their films making over 2 billion dollars.

This year, “Ne Zha 2,” a Chinese animated film, now sits at the top box office spot. Throughout its theatrical run, it’s made 1.9 billion dollars as of September 29, 2025.

“International markets have increasingly played a role in box office returns,” Patrick said.

Patrick then gave his insight on what he believes will be the most successful films throughout the remainder of this year and next year.

“Avatar 3 is going to do gangbusters. Everyone said that Avatar 2 was going to flop, and they were all wrong. I expect the same thing to happen with Avatar 3,” he said.

Avatar 2 (“Avatar: The Way of the Water”) grossed 2.3 billion dollars worldwide in 2022. Furthermore, Patrick looked ahead to 2026.

“The Odyssey is the only other standout - it’s already selling out large format 70mm IMAX screenings and is looking to be a worthy follow-up to Oppenheimer.”

Christopher Nolan, who directed “Oppenheimer,” “Inception,” and “Interstellar,” among other films, has adapted Homer’s epic for the big screen. The film will release on July 17, 2026.



Matt Damon stars as Odysseus in Christopher Nolan’s upcoming 2026 film “The Odyssey”



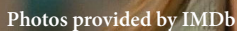
Glen Powell stars in Edgar Wright’s 2025 film “The Running Man”

Photos provided by IMDb

Other than “The Odyssey” and its success next year, I could see “Dune: Messiah,” the third Dune film by Denis Villeneuve, gaining traction and being successful. It’s currently slated for a December 18, 2026, release.

“Dune: Part One” was not considered a box office success after making 402 million. It was released in 2021 to a post-COVID theatre market while simultaneously streaming on HBO Max, and both things inevitably killed its success. “Dune: Part Two,” on the other hand, was considered a box office success with its 714 million worldwide in 2024. Both films were well-received by critics.

The box office landscape continues to shift in unexpected ways. Franchise films still have a grip, although audiences are excited about original and international films alike. With many big films set to release as we wrap up this year and move through the next (“Avatar: Fire and Ash,” “The Odyssey,” and “Dune: Messiah”), the landscape of Hollywood is going to change, and some of these films may help define the future of cinema.





Scarlett Johansson stars as a proactive female leader in “Jurassic World Rebirth.”

Photo by: Jasin Boland/Universal Pictures and Amblin Entertainment

Reese Witherspoon once said in a speech at Glamour’s Women of the Year Awards in 2015 that she dreaded reading scripts that didn’t involve women in their creation because she would inevitably get to the part where the girl would turn to the guy and ask, “What do we do now?!”

“Do you know any woman in any crisis situation who has absolutely no idea what to do?” asked Witherspoon.

This comment and many others over the years have fueled a call for representation of women in film that depicts them as more than just a commodity to be saved.

A prevailing trend has been to have a particular narrative where there is a heroine rather than a hero, where the woman outsmarts the man, Jim Spiegel, executive director of the Geneva College Center for Faith and Life, said. The pendulum has swung to one end and has continued on to the point where there is a kind of counter-sexism.

The arts have reflected this in the form of a high percentage of films and commercials that make the man out to be the idiot in a problematic way, Spiegel said.

“Human history kind of goes that way, where you have

actions and reactions, but it doesn’t mean that somehow the overreaction is justified,” Spiegel said.

But the dominating arc of feminism may be spoiling due to this weaponization of feminism, Kathy Bruner, department co-chair and professor of film & media arts, said.

The cultural backlash of voices from the conservative church, political right wing, and traditional wife influencers has encouraged women to re-embrace traditional roles in the home and family. As part of this, they have challenged women to question whether having a career is a wise choice, pushing them to re-embrace the validity of male authority, Bruner said.

“It’s a sad time for me personally, since I believe women made more progress in the 80s and 90s than we’re seeing now,” Bruner said.

Recent movies like Barbie have delved into what it looks like for a woman to exist in a society that expects them to comply with both the old and the new standard of femininity.

The movie's smart critique of gender stereotypes had biting satirical lines that demonstrated how contradictory the standards for women in this society are, Bruner said. While women are expected to be strong, they are simultaneously expected to be subordinate.

But if Hollywood has the power to portray feminine characters accurately, what is stopping them?

Adam Sonstroem, assistant professor of communication, recalled discussing the nature of reflective versus direct film culture in a class with his students.

"There's a good number of films that have to reflect what's going on in society; otherwise, they're not going to resonate," he said. "But you do have a handful of films that push the boundaries, and in that way they begin to direct culture."

While the vast majority of motion pictures have a reflective nature, there are outliers like *Star Wars* and *The Godfather* that have gone on to become famous and set a precedent, Sonstroem said.

The *Matrix* began to push the boundaries for technology in 1999, and more recently, *Barbie* brought a duality in using self-reflection to prove a greater point that directed its audience, Sonstroem said. By portraying multiple Barbies and their different reactions to societal expectations, it claimed that women have been given impossible shoes to fill compared to men.

The appropriate nature of displaying feminism in movies is highly contextual, Sonstroem said. When a movie made to empower women and discourage the patriarchy outshines its own plotline, it can negatively impact the overall storytelling process.

"An agenda for an agenda doesn't help anybody—but if it's a movie, that's a well-told story," Sonstroem said.



Margot Robbie plays the title role of "Barbie," in a film that explores societal expectations for women.

Photo provided by Warner Bros.



He Loves Me Not

A relationship analysis of
'The Summer I Turned Pretty'

By Kate Delaney



It is evident throughout the seasons that Jeremiah and Conrad deal with grief and loss in very different ways, Katheryn Kelley, assistant professor of psychology, said.

The first season mirrors the premise of all three books, with the final event of the debutante ball showcasing Conrad's avoidant tendencies and Jeremiah's inability to show up for more than the good times, Kelley said.

Conrad displays an ability to seek help outside of himself on how to cope, with mentors like Cleveland Castillo, a novelist, in season one, Kelley said. In season three, he enters the scene coming out of a therapy session and is shown confiding in Agnes, a fellow medical program student and close friend. Jeremiah uses pleasure habits to cope, as is revealed in his partying lifestyle and unwillingness to sit in discomfort coming from Susannah's death and Belly and Conrad's ongoing chemistry.

"By season three, Conrad seems to have developed some decent coping skills, and it becomes pretty evident that Jeremiah is still just here for a good time," Kelley said.

Emma O'Neil, a senior business management student at Cornerstone University, expressed a preference for the third season's storyline because of the development that was shown specifically in Conrad Fisher's character arc.

A defining part of his own attractiveness came from a personal dedication to taking care of Belly in this season, O'Neil said. A mature man values those that he cares about, and Conrad illustrated this by confronting his own feelings and fighting for Belly.

"He was always watching out for Belly, especially when they were younger—and that's just desirable," she said.

A secret scandal, rushed proposal and tiny ring?

Amazon Prime's third season of "The Summer I Turned Pretty" (TSITP) drew record numbers of viewership, with ratings tripling from the first season's opening week. It was Amazon's most watched TV season this summer among women ages 18-34.

The plotline explored different aspects of cheating, from Jeremiah Fisher's casual infidelity on a spring break trip to Isabel "Belly" Conklin's emotional intimacy with Conrad Fisher during their extended stay at his family's lake house in Cousin's Beach over the summer.

A popular pop culture debate that has emerged from the show is the question, "Team Conrad or Team Jeremiah?"



Photo by Eddy Chen/Amazon Prime

It has been recognized that the triangle relies on a "black cat" vs. "golden retriever" dynamic, with Conrad representing the emotionally unavailable type while Jeremiah displays clingy but affectionate characteristics. Each brother's flaws have sparked debates as to which person would more effectively contribute to a long-term healthy relationship.

While the books present a convincing argument for each brother, this

season of the show set viewers up to favor Conrad by portraying Jeremiah as an increasingly childish person, Stephen Bailey, associate professor of film and media arts, said.

Bailey had started watching TSITP when its first season came out because his daughter had read the books and wanted to find out if the show was the same.

"I don't think it should be that obvious," he said. "It's much more interesting if we don't feel them trying to direct us in a certain way."



Belly experiences confusion in her relationship with the Fisher brothers, leading to severed ties with both of them at different points in season three.

Excluding Conrad, a lot of the characters were stagnant over the entire series, displaying ongoing unhealthy coping mechanisms, Kelley said.

Belly's journey in a potent love triangle with Conrad and Jeremiah is defined by a lack of identity, being a person who has been unable to branch out from her extensive summer experiences. Yet, this tendency is also the anchor and hook of her existence, Kelley said.

As the protagonist, Belly has seemed to take the love of the people around her for granted, often catering for attention and not taking responsibility for her actions, Kelley said.

Near the end of the season, she underwent a personal development in Paris by learning to fight for herself and make her own decisions. But in the final episode, Belly's passionate decision, while intended to highlight her own maturation process, reinforced her impulsive tendencies



Photo by Erika Doss/Amazon Prime

that were present since the first season of the show, Kelley said.

"That's what it means to be a female main character in a rom-com by Jenny Han," Kelley added.

Whether you identify as Team Conrad, Team Jeremiah, or Team Belly, there will be more to unpack with Han's recent announcement of a feature-length film that will be released in the upcoming years.



Photo provided by IMDb



THE SUPERHERO CYCLE: A LOOK AT SUPERHEROES AND SOCIETY

By Ella Watson

Superheroes used to be pinnacles of morality. Now they toe the line between heroic and harmful for society.

Over the past 20 years, the superhero movie landscape has been dominated by morally gray heroes. The trend contrasts starkly to the era of traditionally moral superhero films before. This shift is tied to culture, Matt Decker, associate professor of psychology at Taylor University, said.

"Things tend to ebb and flow with how we are viewing culture," Decker said. "When we are losing faith in institutions...then you get Captain America. You get those types of characters who are archetypes of truth, justice and the American way."

Times of uncertainty and darkness prompt viewers to hunger for idealistic heroes as a form of escapism. Audiences look for stability in fiction because it is absent in reality.

A wave of these purely good heroes saturated the 40s and 50s, as people longed for an escape from the horrors of World War I and World War II, Decker said. People didn't want dark reality in film because they had reality in front of them.

Alternately, cultural stability prompts a fascination with darker, grittier subjects and heroes, he said.

"Traditionally, the idea of this person who's only driven by care and altruism isn't real and we want something real," Decker said. "When it's not so dark, then we're much more willing to embrace darker elements."

As a culture, over the past couple decades, people grew fascinated with this dark side, Steve Bailey, professor of film and media arts at Taylor University, said.

Darker films showcase the breadth of human nature, Vance Maloney, professor of psychology at Taylor University, said. The movies mirror Scripture in their showcasing of humanity as fallen.

"Whether or not they would say it this way... we are fallen creatures," Maloney said. "As Paul said, the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak."

Generation may also impact this cycle of idealism and realism, Katheryn Kelley, assistant professor of psychology at Taylor University, said.

Millennials, who came of age during 9/11, Columbine and the recession hungered for stories that grappled with the heaviness of the culture around them. With Gen Z, hope resurfaced as a theme.

"We still needed hope in the midst of the heaviness, and I think particularly Gen Z, with their delight and whimsy and color and fun sort of brought us back to, 'Hey, hope still matters,'" Kelley said.

The relationship of culture and superhero films is not a one way street. Superheroes impact society, as well, Kelley said.

Periods of idealism and heroism in superhero media can inspire particularly young people and children to morality, she said. A study called "The Batman Effect" explored this idea.

The researchers gave the kids an impossible task to complete. They told some kids to just do the task, and other kids to pretend they are Batman and complete the task.

"The kids who were told to pretend they were a movie character tried longer, didn't give up when they couldn't get it the first time, were less likely to act

frustrated and angry when they couldn't figure it out," Kelley said. "(They) handled it so much better than the kids who were just told like, 'Go do this thing.'"

Kids adapt to the content they consume, Kelley said.

Characters that represent positive elements like compassion and selflessness make them more compassionate and selfless.

Conversely, brutal and darker movies desensitize and numb viewers. Children are especially susceptible, Kelley said.

When films are portraying flawed and darker characters, young people may find themselves in those characters.

However, lines become blurred when

"We still need hope amidst the heaviness."



Image provided by PNGkey.



the characters go on to act immorally.

When she was a youth pastor, Kelley had a student who connected deeply with Harley Quinn.

Her idolization of Harley Quinn pushed her further from community and toward destructive behaviors, Kelley said. She began to look for these characters to externalize her pain and trauma.

“You can’t consume anything without it impacting you,” Decker said. “There are two things about those (movies) that concern me. One is that doing the wrong thing for the right reason is okay because it’s not okay... The concern is that when we understand the motivation of that character, we then understand the justification of their actions, and then it helps us justify our actions, even when they’re not right.”

“You can’t consume anything without it impacting you.”

People fundamentally desire to find a point of aspiration, Decker said. Christians desire to be like Christ, but nonbelievers lack that example.

They search for archetypes elsewhere, often in the media. When the media is not presenting them with moral characters, then they do not have a picture of what good is, Decker said. Society then suffers as morality becomes obscured.

“When we’re not presenting them with clear, moral, selfless characters, then they don’t really know what that looks like,” Decker said. “This is a person who represents good. And then, if this is good, then I want to be good.”



Photo provided by Prime Video.



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A woman with blonde hair, wearing a voluminous blue ballgown with ruffles, stands in the center of a highly ornate, golden carriage. The carriage's interior is covered in intricate carvings. To her left, a man in a green and gold uniform and a top hat stands. To her right, another man in similar attire is partially visible, holding a small yellow object. The scene is set on a dark, textured ground.

Film Remakes

What makes them worth watching

By Ella Watson

Remakes have dominated theaters in the past ten years. Contrary to popular belief, the trend is not new, only repackaged.

“Hollywood has been leaning on remakes and reboots since about the 1920s,” Sean Gaffney, associate dean of the school of communication arts at Asbury University, said. “Things would go to a movie theater and then they just disappear. There’s no other place to show them. Yeah, so they would make that. They would make the same movie every two years.”

In recent years, however, Disney has dominated the remake landscape. Disney remakes including “Cinderella,” “The Jungle Book,” “Pete’s Dragon” and “Snow White.” The motivation? Money, Gaffney said. Corporations are buying out studios, forming a huge conglomerate of people who have their hands in a variety of business ventures along with filmmaking, he said. Their interest is in making money.

“Great art, people want to talk about when it’s over.”

“Well, Little Mermaid made money, so let’s just make it again,” Gaffney said. “Well, how are we going to justify making it again? Well, we’re going to do live action now. You know, five years later, we’ll remake the entire Disney catalog with puppets, and then we’ll remake the entire Disney catalog with dogs playing the roles, right? Just because they feel that it’s already a safer bet.”

Corporations choose to play it safe to ensure they profit, causing creativity to take a backseat. Since creativity does not pay, artists are forced to adapt by producing these remakes. Artists have to eat, too, Gaffney said.

While the influx of remakes has rendered the trend stale in many minds, they do not have to be terrible. Some remakes can bring fresh perspectives to stories, Jeffrey Overstreet, novelist, film critic and assistant professor of English and writing at Seattle Pacific University, said.

“You honor the original by not copying it, but by showing that it made a difference to you and that it’s leading you to new ideas,” Overstreet said.

A discerning artist will look beyond the pressure of the audience and tap into their own questions and vision, Overstreet said. When filmmakers become too focused on delivering the product a crowd is



Photo provided by People Magazine.

hungry for, they will miss the moments of inspiration that can set a remake apart.

The best movies result from storytellers with new ideas who deliver new cinematic experiences, Overstreet said. The same is true for remakes.

“Great art, people want to talk about it when it’s over because they’re like, ‘I don’t know what just happened to me, but it was amazing,’” Overstreet said. “Let’s talk.”

Remakes will never disappear, Overstreet said. But whether they resonate with audiences depends on the artists behind them. It’s only when artists embrace their creativity that a remake can become something truly worth talking about.



Photo provided by FreePNGimg.

THE DOS AND DON'TS OF

Why message matters—but so does the movie.



The portrayal of Jesus during his Sermon on the Mount in Mel Gibson's "The Passion of the Christ."

Photos provided by IMDb

In a world filled with stories, large-budget Hollywood films, low-budget Indie films and many more, Christian filmmakers are given a task. This task is to reveal the truth of God through this medium, but how can that be achieved successfully?

I used to believe that storytelling craft and biblical truth needed to be different through stories. This is not the case.

"'Storytelling craft' means, ultimately, communicating truth through the process of storytelling, so if my story rings true, it does so because it aligns with the way God tells stories," Gideon Patrick, a graduate of the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh's film program, said.

The Bible itself is filled with a multitude of stories that are rooted in truth. From Old Testament stories to Jesus' parables.

When writing stories from the Christian point of view, our Christian worldview assists us in writing stories that adhere to biblical truth.

"Personally, I don't think 'how do I make this true biblically' when I am writing something...because of my knowledge of the Bible and other works of art



The portrayal of Jesus and his disciples in Dallas Jenkins' "The Chosen," the story of the Gospel.

CHRISTIAN FILMMAKING

By AJ Richardson

which have stood the test of time, and that truth will show itself in the finished product as I focus on telling a story,” Patrick said.

In this way, biblical truth in storytelling is less about the checklist writers can check off and more about their creative vision taking form.

Due to this, effective Christian filmmaking isn’t necessarily surface-level.

“They affect the spiritual through the image itself, drawing the audience into deeper contemplation rather than superficially affirming a pre-existing belief,” Patrick said.

True artists take their film and follow the concept to the end, honestly and diligently, Patrick said.

The opposite of this would be to directly communicate its themes or thesis verbally to the audience.

“Allow for things to be messy...not every little conflict can be wrapped up easily in some sermon,” Steve Bailey, a professor of film and media arts at Taylor University, said.

These stories should show tension, struggle and unanswered questions, because these are ways that God can work in our own lives.

Patrick has this same point of view.

“This is not to say that cinema does not communicate - it does. But it does not do so through sermonizing or directly verbalizing ideas,” he said.

Using imagery in their visual storytelling, writers and directors can convey truths without saying them outright.

Patrick also described how many of the great directors mimic God without realizing it.

“We enjoy the work of Christopher Nolan, Paul Thomas Anderson, and David Lynch not because they are professing Christians, but because their stories align with the way that God tells stories; in other words, they are true - and when they are not,” he said.

In the end, Christian filmmaking is not about forcing a message to convey already known truths, but to allow truth to emerge naturally through visual storytelling. By embracing complexity, Christian filmmakers can reflect God’s truth in ways that resonate deeply with audiences.

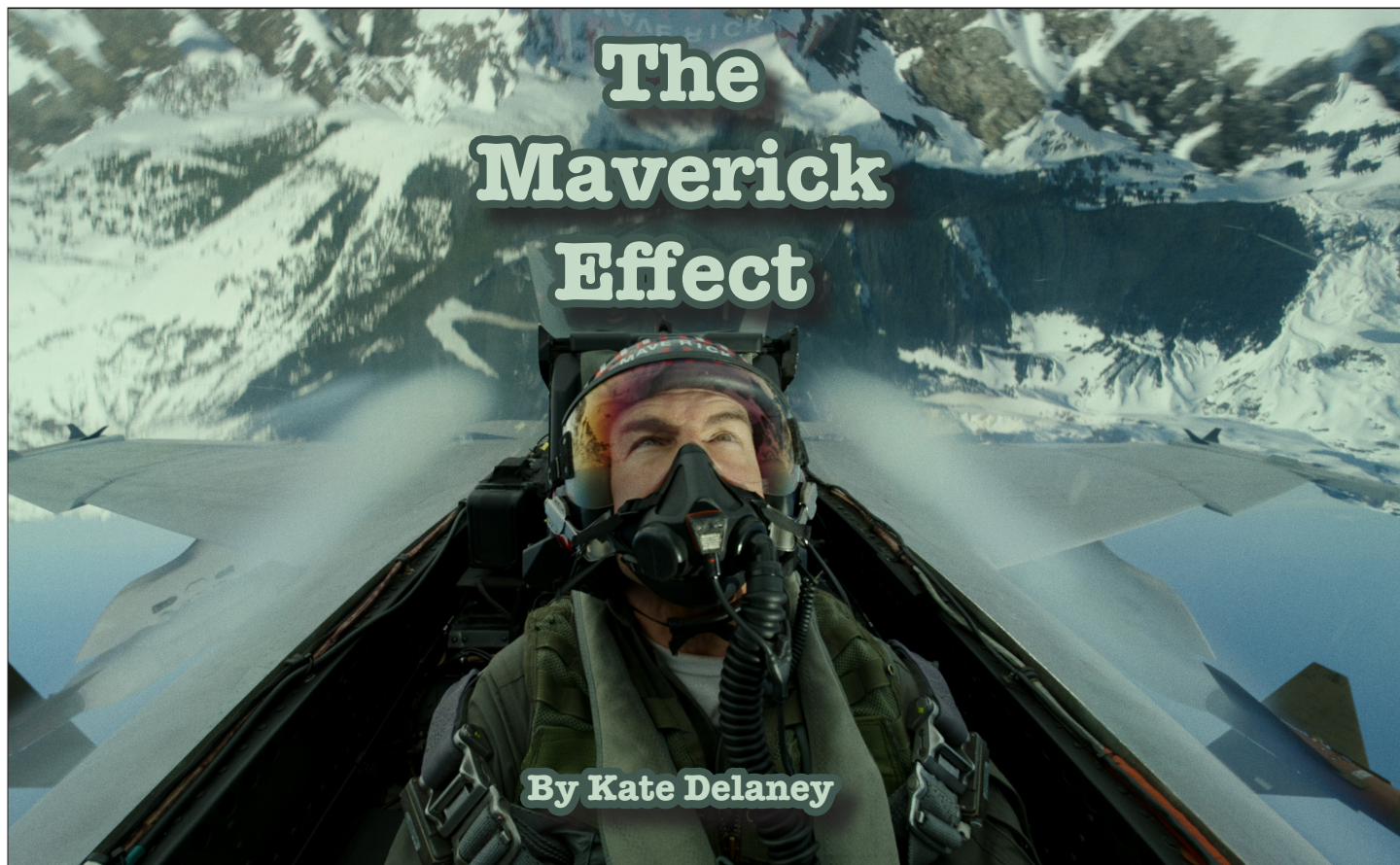
Through Christian films, stories should be told that invite all viewers, Christian or not, to not just watch a film, but to have an encounter with truth.

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“Top Gun: Maverick” wows audiences with an intense storyline and captivating visual sequences.

Photo provided by
Paramount Pictures

When *Top Gun: Maverick* was first released in May of 2022, it drew fans back into theaters, raking in a whopping \$1.49 billion worldwide.

It also rose to the number one ranked film on the charts during Memorial Day and Labor Day weekends, shining an illuminating light on patriotism and honoring those in special forces.

Three and a half years later, veterans are looking back at the moving pieces of the story and why the movie’s message has resonated so well with its audience.

The primary message of the movie was to focus on American capability and might, Major Jonathan Turnbull, a Medal of Honor recipient, said. This was shown not only in the sophisticated equipment that was used but also in the wealth of wisdom the armed forces had in experienced instructors.

The movie illustrated leadership done well, as *Maverick* led from the front and made attack decisions from the cockpit, Turnbull said.

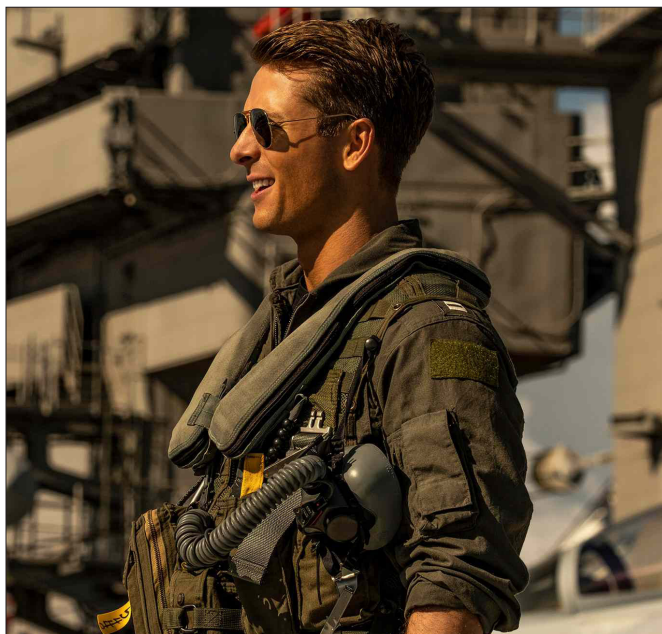
Turnbull recalled looking up to the officers that he would follow when jumping out of a plane in an airborne unit—until he was the officer leading them. The first time he led a group in 2010 at Fort Benning in Columbus, Georgia, was one of the scariest moments he ever experienced.

“You literally have to step off into a void of nothing,” Turnbull said.

Experiencing fear can result in having one’s body physically lock up, Turnbull said. For him, the only thing to fall back on in the moment was his personal faith and training experience. He found parallels with this concept and the training methods that fighter pilots in *Top Gun: Maverick* relied upon.

One sequence near the climax of the movie followed the character Rooster as he made the decision to drop his bombs blindly when the target laser stopped working.

Turnbull emphasized the fact that Rooster and his wingman, Bob, were able to complete their mission



The character of “Hangman” accurately displays the confidence level required of a fighter pilot.

Photo provided by Paramount Pictures

because they had been drilled with several different possible situations on their course back at home. This gave them the ability to rely on muscle memory during a spontaneous decision, even if there was a strong chance they would miss the target.

“The more you practice it, the closer you become to being able to do it,” Turnbull said.

Bill Hinton, a former military helicopter pilot and professor of business at Grove City College, recalled working with fighter pilots at Miramar and North Island in the 1980s, locations that were used when filming both *Top Gun* movies.

Hinton flew helicopters in Vietnam, later transitioning to graduate school before returning to the industry in 1975 as a civilian developing training materials for military pilots to be incorporated in ground-based training. These materials were meant to be accurate with the information found in the Naval Air Training and Operating Procedures Standardization (NATOPS), while being developed in a different format.

Top Gun: Maverick’s Hangman, a highly skilled but overly brazen fighter pilot, was an accurate portrayal of the characteristics Hinton saw in many of the pilots he worked with.

“They’ve got to be a different kind of duck, and maybe they should be proud,” Hinton said.

Tom Cruise’s portrayal of an aged but unspoiled Maverick brought a charismatic depth often difficult to find in a sequel.

Marcy Beauchesne, a former marine and active supporter of local veteran affairs in her hometown of Gaylord, Michigan, described young Maverick as a “rebel without cause.”

“He was rebellious because he was misguided—and when your nature is rebellious, it has to be guided in the right direction,” Beauchesne said. “Sometimes it takes a bit to get there.”

Beauchesne found herself relating to that aspect of Maverick in how she has lived as an American citizen, from standing up for taxpayers by responding to governmental tyranny on a local and national level to spending ten years being a Boy Scout leader and helping develop an honor guard in Otsego County, Michigan.

As a bridge between veterans and the community, Beauchesne has become a point of contact that veterans feel comfortable working with, connecting them with resources.

A person shouldn’t be joining a service organization unless they are ready to be a servant, Beauchesne said. When Maverick found his purpose in *Maverick*, he also became a servant, thus being much more effective.

When *Top Gun: Maverick* was released by Hollywood to theaters rather than streaming platforms, it signaled a step nearer to normalcy in a stagnant culture following the Covid-19 shutdowns, Turnbull said. Political tensions between left- and right-wing supporters were being emphasized with an impending election.

“I felt like the movie brought us together as America and tried to stop the divide in a time when we needed hope and patriotism,” Turnbull said.

And somehow, that message of unbridled courage and redemption is what keeps films like *Top Gun: Maverick* soaring to the top.

What Fantasy Films Can

By AJ Richardson

What we can learn from “The Lord of the Rings,” and “The Hobbit.”

Show Us About Our Faith



Gandalf (Ian McKellen) arrives to Frodo's (Elijah Wood) home at the shire in the first film, “The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring.”

In *The Hobbit*, Bilbo Baggins (a hobbit), is thrust into a world of the unknown with Gandalf the Grey (a wizard) and a company of dwarves show up at his home to recruit him to join them on a quest to reclaim their home mountain from a dragon who has withheld it for nearly two centuries.

The Lord of the Rings (which is canonically set after *The Hobbit*) follows Bilbo's cousin, Frodo, journey across Middle-earth with unlikely companions to destroy a powerful ring that could enslave the world if it fell into the wrong hands.

Both of these stories were originally written by J.R.R. Tolkien in the 1930s and 40s. The *Lord of the Rings* novels were adapted into films by director Peter Jackson in the early 2000s. Jackson also adapted *The Hobbit* into a three-part film series in the early 2010s.

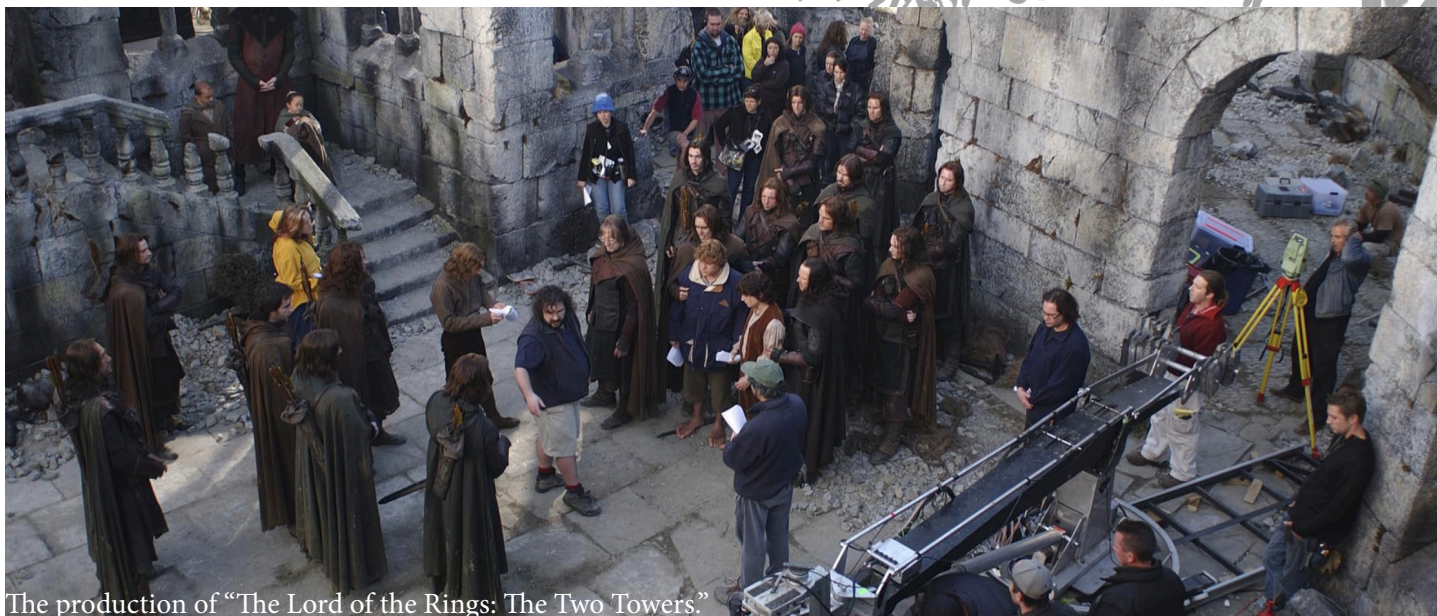
“Tolkien talked of sub-creating, but saw that in the

things we create, we are honoring and praising God as we create things that give him glory,” said pastor and hospice chaplain, Bradford Zinnecker.

Zinnecker took the three main characters of *The Lord of the Rings* — Gandalf, Frodo, and Aragorn — and explained how each portrays an element of Christ.

“He is reborn — resurrected as Gandalf the white, going on to repel the darkness,” Zinnecker said. Gandalf, throughout the stories, is continuously seeking out and destroying evil. He even describes the promise of heaven to Pippin, which gives him the resolve he needs in the battle.

“Aragorn — the healer, the guide, the king. There are elements here of Christ also...willing to sacrifice his life for the world and those he loves,” Zinnecker said. Aragorn, like Christ, is the prophesied king who knew what was necessary for his people.



The production of “The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers.”



Bilbo (Martin Freeman) goes toe to toe with Smaug the dragon (Benedict Cumberbatch) in "The Hobbit: The Desolation of Smaug."

"All three of these protagonists are tempted, and in the end, overcome...but not unscathed. All three of them shed light upon the most noble of saviors...Jesus Christ," Zinnecker said. It is through these characters and their characteristics that we can gain a deeper understanding of Jesus as a Savior.

Furthermore, we can learn more than just this in regard to our faith—the nature of evil, and how it can be overcome.

"What's perhaps more important as well is that no one is immune to evil—everyone is tempted in the LOTR to take shortcuts," Zinnecker said. This is the truth: the ring tempts all who touch it, much like we are tempted in our everyday lives.

Zinnecker then explained how the only way out of sin is a savior like Jesus, while using the example of Gollum and his obsession with the ring. "But he cannot win out; his evil side is too dominant. Only a

savior can pull us out of our sin, he said.

All of this is an example of how the fantasy genre can reveal spiritual truths.

Steve Bailey, professor of film and media arts at Taylor University, holds his view, "It's easier to provide to have some sort of allegory...Tolkien and C.S. Lewis, they were pretty good at that."

Zinnecker also holds this view, "Fantasy lit and film allows us to be transported to other realms, to allow our imagination to broaden. In so doing, we can see old truths portrayed in new ways."

Subtext in stories is a powerful tool in film. Many films are made well, with deeper meanings.

"When you can do that, then you can tell a story and make an impact," Zinnecker said.

Next time you watch a film or hear a story, look deeper, because these films, and their meanings, can let you in to understand so much more.



Frodo (Elijah Wood) holds the ring in "The Lord of the Rings, Return of the King."

Photos provided by IMDb.



Gandalf (Ian McKellen) and the dwarves (Richard Armitage, Aidan Turner and Ken Stott) enjoy their time feasting in Bilbo's home at the shire in "The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey."

Our Top films/shows of 2025

Kate's



Image via Amazon MGM Studios.



Image via Amazon MGM Studios.



Image via Amazon MGM Studios.

Ella's



Image via Warner Bros.

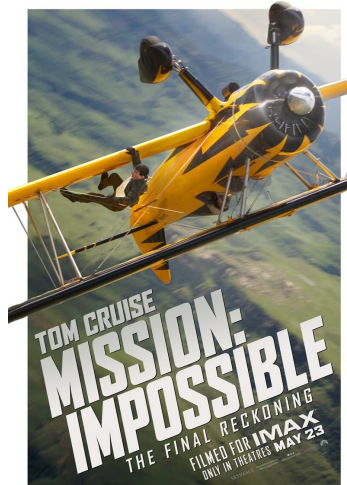


Image via Paramount Pictures



Image via BBC Studios.

AJ's



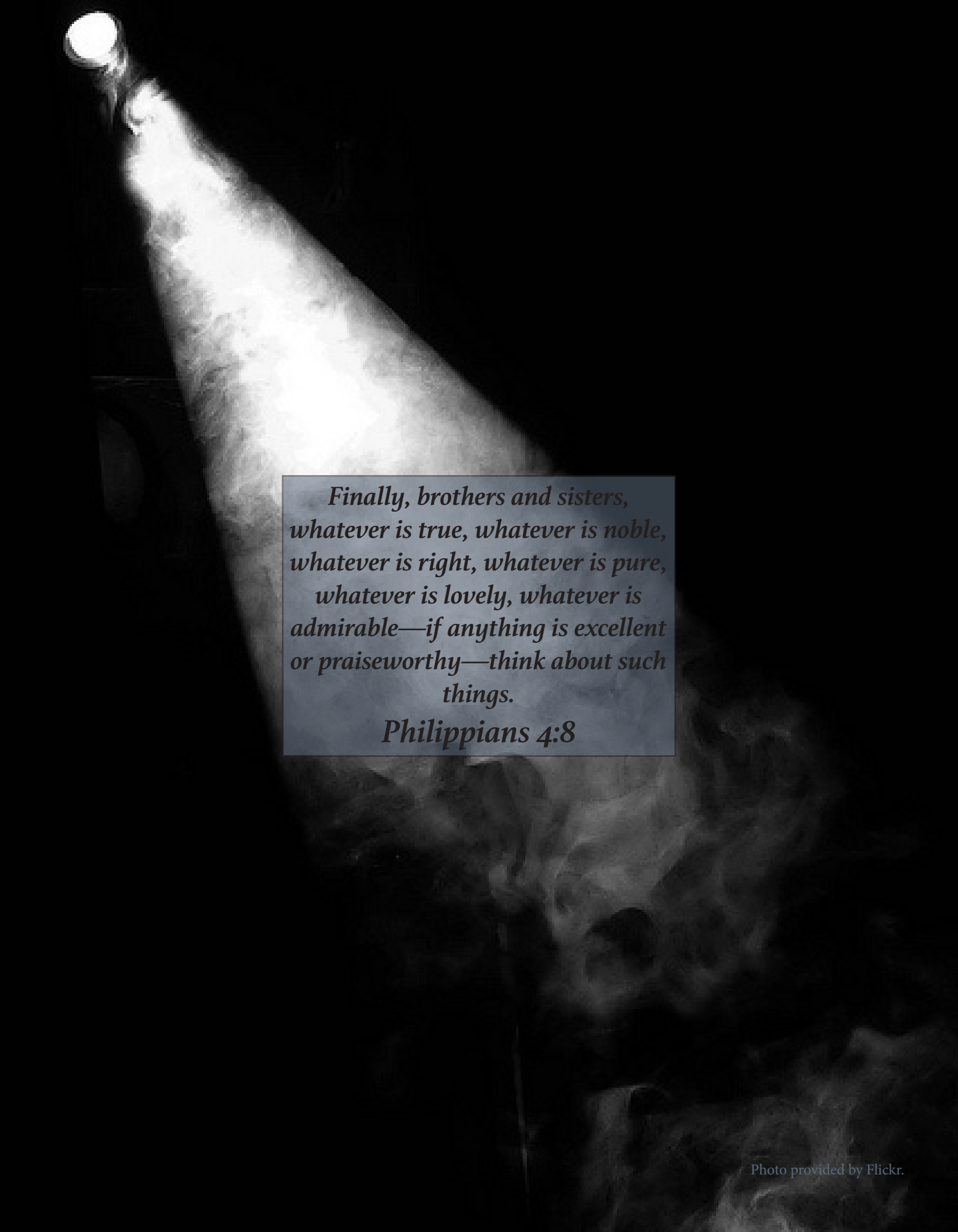
Image via Paramount Pictures.



Image via Warner Bros.



Image via Warner Bros.



*Finally, brothers and sisters,
whatever is true, whatever is noble,
whatever is right, whatever is pure,
whatever is lovely, whatever is
admirable—if anything is excellent
or praiseworthy—think about such
things.*

Philippians 4:8