

Ten Films to Stir the Spirit: Part 2

Several readers have asked EthicsDaily.com to recommend films to jumpstart spiritual discussions. EthicsDaily.com's three movie reviewers have each weighed in, offering 10 films apiece.

"The Grapes of Wrath," 1940, Not Rated

This movie has one of my favorite characters of all time: Casy the preacher. His statement—"So maybe there ain't no sin an' there ain't no virtue. There's just what people do"—is a wonderful mouthful to chew on in discussion. The film offers a dog-eat-dog view of the world during the Great Depression.

"To Kill a Mockingbird," 1962, Not Rated

I used this film in a class I just completed called The Pastor as Spiritual Guide. The instructor of the class asked me to find a movie showing a character acting as a spiritual guide. To me, Atticus Finch is the definition of the spiritual guide. The scene where Bob Ewell spits on Atticus is worth watching as an example of spirituality being worked out in a real-world situation.

"The Empire Strikes Back," 1980, PG

Yoda's training of Luke is a good primer on faith. Yoda's words—"Do or not do. There is no try"—are golden. When Luke responds to Yoda that he does not believe what Yoda has done, Yoda says, "That is why you fail." Yoda thus speaks volumes about the need of simple faith in living.

"The Mission," 1986, PG

This is just out on DVD and should be in the library of every Christian. Robert DeNiro's scene of penance for his sin and the response of the Indians to his presence in their camp is a remarkable scene of grace being lived out.

"Groundhog Day," 1993, PG

Bill Murray plays Phil Connors, a man stuck in a Twilight Zone life. Phil keeps living the same day over and over again. This movie speaks to the difference

between *chronos* time or clock time and *kairos* time or God's time. Discussion here could center on the nature of life and what life is about.

"Forrest Gump," 1994, PG-13

"Jenny, I don't know if Mama was right or Lieutenant Dan. I don't know if we have destiny or we are floating around accidental like on a breeze." So says Forrest, whose life and adventures tell us much about what it means to be human. The tragic lives of Jenny and Lieutenant Dan help us see how choices make up the life we live.

"The Apostle," 1997, PG-13

What do you do if you have committed a terrible crime, find yourself on the run, yet still feel the call of God on your life? Robert Duvall, who stars in and directs this wonderful film, introduces us to Sonny Dewey, a Pentecostal pastor who kills his wife's lover. Sonny runs away, but cannot help but start a church and minister to people in the community where he lands. This is a wonderful example of the idea that we are saved from the penalty of sin, but not the consequences of sin.

"The Truman Show," 1998, PG

Jim Carrey as Truman Burbank puts together a wonderfully understated performance as a man raised in a false world. Since birth, he has been the star of a reality show that runs 24 hours a day and has the world glued to see what he will do. Ed Harris plays Christof, the producer/director of the show. The scene in which Christof is revealed as the puppet master of Truman's life easily lends itself to a discussion of the nature of God and God's place in the world.

"Babe: Pig in the City," 1998, G

This movie was not as popular as the original, but it packs an emotional punch lacking in the first film. We see Babe off in the city, abandoned with Mrs. Hoggett by a travel mix up. Babe is left in a hotel populated by other animals who are standoffish and unwilling to be friendly. They end up being left by their humans to fend for themselves. Babe emerges as a savior. His actions are Christ-like and warrant discussion.

“The Iron Giant,” 1999, PG

This animated film asks a big question: “Am I destined to be what I am programmed to be?” This movie tells the story of giant robot found by Hogarth Hughes, a young boy being raised by his single mother. Hogarth must protect the robot from the government, which wants to destroy it out of fear. The film is set in the '50s, and we sense the paranoia of the times.

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