



# AND THE OSCAR GOES TO...



February 2004

From before Sir Alec Guinness to Drew Barrymore films have been a powerful form of entertainment, escapism and sign of the times. They can help us in life and in shaping faith. Movies offer opportunities for laughter and learning about ourselves. We can explore questions about our lives and faith as we come to know and identify with the characters on the big, or not so big screen!!

"No form of art goes beyond ordinary consciousness as film does, straight to our emotions, deep into the twilight room of our soul" [Ingmar Bergmann]

**Raking Over the Trash** is a NEW bi-monthly resource in our culture and context! This edition focuses on the Academy Award Nominated Films. Future topics could include: current events, trends in thinking, notable stories, fashions and consumerism, a significant trend, book reviews, TV, or resources for responding to events in the lives of young people. Readers will quickly note our efforts not to *re-invent the wheel* but point to good work already done, or resources out there... The films in this edition are already covered on the web and in magazines!!

Future editions will evolve as we learn and get creative with a range of contributors beyond the Youth Unit staff!!

nsw.uca.org.au/boe/youthunit and www.youthunithub.org email: youth@nsw.uca.org.au

## Using Movies in ministry with Youth & Young Adults & beyond...

Movies are an important part of our culture. Movies can: powerfully communicate ideas, evoke emotions, motivate to action, help us to escape, see others dealing with issues, provide choices, challenges and teaching, and entertain. Some are exceptional and wonderful, others boring and tedious. Some confront us with important questions while others disturb or horrify. In this country far too few of us experience a variety of Australian made stories alongside mainstream Hollywood blockbusters.

Faith and life can be explored, enhanced and examined. Stories can act as a roadmap for life and vivid illustrations often ask the big questions. It seems only 10-15 years ago we talked about the explosion of video rentals as the final straw for cinema. But people missed the all encompassing movie experience! While many smaller independent theatres have closed we now can't keep pace with the development of multiplexes, dolby ear shattering digital sound and the movies stretch well beyond a civilised 98 or 110 minutes.

Yet we're told in the post modern age there are no meta-narratives [big all encompassing stories]. Films address this yet fantasy like 'The Lord of the Rings' trilogy suggest again that maybe it's a scepticism about anyone claiming to have 'truth' nailed down rather than whether or not there are some truths we share and are influenced by. This only encourages us to use the power of story and the movie experience to crack open all kinds of reflection and discussion about issues of life and faith.

### Different ways film might be used:

- Whole film as an unexamined entertainment night in the traditional group program  
Terminator 2 has some redeeming features but it might be a group of high schoolers 'film of choice'
- Whole Film for enjoyment, discussion after, later in small groups or in open ended terms

Imagine sitting in stunned silence with 200 hundred others after the credits at a 'Christians for Peace' awareness and fundraising screening of the film 'Romero'. 'Sister Act' was a fine film in its time for promoting discussion about the church breaking out from behind its wire mesh fencing.

- Whole Film as part of a deliberate mission strategy in gathering a particular group

Films could be the excuse to draw together a community of people who gather around the life and faith issues these experiences evoke. 'The Matrix' or 'Keeping the Faith' are good examples

- Whole film on DVD/Video in the hall or someone's large lounge room

Where the movies are not accessible or you insist on previewing a film! Great venue for conversation. 'Star Wars Episodes I, II, IV, V or VI' could all be viewed in anticipation.

- One/Key Scenes as part of any input or for their own sake

These could be included in talks, camps, or worship. Allow the story to open up a subject or put a different spin on the usual take. 'Dead Poets Society' class lessons, 'The Mask' and a worship themed on masks and 'Bruce Almighty' come to mind.

- One/Key Scenes as a worship station in a space with options

In worship where people move around the space and make choices. eg. 'The Matrix' red pill/blue pill scene repeating. 'The Truman Show' sailing boat trip.

- One/Key Scenes as a silent or just audible backdrop in a reflective or coffee shop space

Just the visuals might be an interesting backdrop to another focus or activity... especially well know stories. 'Baraka' or stories like 'Run Lola Run'

- Whatever you are viewing, do your research by accessing newspapers, magazines and websites to draw out information as a resource for questions, themes etc.

Previewing films is recommended. However a confronting, ridiculous or violent story doesn't have to be accepted and could be discussed for its flaws, faults and cautions. This years crop of Academy Award nominated films are 'very dark' for example and that's great! Take note of ratings and warnings when considering suitable choices for high schoolers and young adults.

*so many movies, so little time...*



## Master and Commander The Far Side of the World

Rated MA with Russell Crowe, Paul Bettany

The most striking thing about this film is the cinematography and the impression of being right among the tension and reality of battle. Peter Weir is very good at depicting the space where a story happens and the depth of its characters. That's important because this story plays out almost entirely aboard HMS Surprise as it pursues a superior foe in the French ship Archeron during the Napoleonic wars.

"Lucky" Jack Aubrey (Russell Crowe) is an extraordinary leader attempting to overcome a similarly committed enemy. The subsequent interaction between the central characters onboard is an excellent study on leadership. The journey is shared with his friend Dr Stephen Maturin (Paul Bettany) the ship's surgeon and naturalist. Maturin is the voice of caution against Aubrey's blinkered pursuit of honour and duty. Here the pursuit of the enemy is a struggle between pride and the loss of crew members. Outgunned, Aubrey is inspired by the motif of the stick insect to camouflage the ship and launch a surprise attack. This sub-theme of disguise is followed through the story.

An interesting aspect of the film was various suggestions and comments about where God might be acting in their situation. The injured crewman shouts prophet-like warnings, funerals at sea centre on committed prayer and the crew even come to believe that one junior officer was the "Jonah" responsible for their misfortune and lack of breeze. Reflecting on questions of faith or providence, Jack says, "Not everything is in your book Stephen." Aubrey's strength is his ability to give and take in pursuit of the ultimate goal.

[www.spiritualityhealth.com/newsh/items/moviereview/item\\_6766.html](http://www.spiritualityhealth.com/newsh/items/moviereview/item_6766.html)

[www.masterandcommanderthefarsideoftheworld.com](http://www.masterandcommanderthefarsideoftheworld.com)



Aubrey led by example, with authority, taking time to correct errors, vulnerable to needs and in building a team

## websites

Internet Movie Database *wealth of Info inks* [imdb.com](http://imdb.com)  
Roger Ebert [suntimes.com/index/ebert1.html](http://suntimes.com/index/ebert1.html)  
*famous thumbs up/thumbs down reviewer*  
Rolling Stone Magazine [rollingstone.com](http://rollingstone.com)  
Urban Cinefile *subscription site* [urbancinefile.com.au](http://urbancinefile.com.au)  
Filmcritic.com *mix of excellent views* [filmcritic.com](http://filmcritic.com)  
Rotten Tomatoes Critics *various* [rottentomatoes.com](http://rottentomatoes.com)  
Spirituality & Health *good at themes* [spiritualityhealth.com](http://spiritualityhealth.com)  
Screen It! [screenit.com/search\\_movies.html](http://screenit.com/search_movies.html)  
*spoilers and warnings about a films rating and the reasons*  
Dave's Somewhat Weekly Reviews [davesreviews.com](http://davesreviews.com)  
*our kind of approach*  
eFilmCritic.com *balanced various* [efilmcritic.com](http://efilmcritic.com)  
Hollywood Jesus *best starting point* [hollywoodjesus.com](http://hollywoodjesus.com)  
The Text This Week *lectionary linked films plus* [textweek.com](http://textweek.com)  
Visual Parables *access to a newsletter* [visualparables.net](http://visualparables.net)  
*Christian subscription based movie review journal*  
Yahoo Movie Reviews *directory of endless sites*  
[dir.yahoo.com/Entertainment/Movies\\_and\\_Film/Reviews/](http://dir.yahoo.com/Entertainment/Movies_and_Film/Reviews/)

## The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King



Rated M 221 minutes

Director: Peter Jackson

The last instalment in one of the most popular movie trilogies in a long time, The Return of the King provides a fertile and probably now well-known story for people to gather around. It

is quite long, and contains some strong battle scenes so it's perhaps not for young kids (if they have managed to escape the marketing hype), but for most people there is something to take away from this experience. It is, on the surface, an adventure/fantasy epic with monsters, kings, battles and magic. But this is no children's story!

There are some major themes such as costly discipleship, temptation and loyalty. These are dealt with in a solid fashion in a number of places. Perhaps the key to a discussion around these topics is to start from the potential for evil and good within us all. It is easy to be drawn into the story world as an overly simplistic good vs evil, but if Gollum and Frodo's relationship is placed at the centre we can see that there is both hope and fear in us all. What is the tipping point between the two? What are the tools to live out of hope rather than fear? Where do you find redemption? ("Yes Johnny, you're right. God, Jesus and the bible, well done".)

Perhaps more interesting for those who really enjoyed the film would be to explore other issues such as the role of mentors (see Gandalf and Aragorn, Denethor and Faramir) and appropriate styles of leadership; or where do you draw your identity? (Is Aragorn tied to his family's past/can Frodo overcome his wounded-ness/ what does it mean for Sam to serve Frodo? Gandalf's change as his mission changes)

LOTR has often been read alongside of the Gospels (Mark in particular) as the journey of the fellowship and the road of discipleship draw parallels.

### Resources:

"What does the Bible say about The Lord of the Rings" 2001, Scripture Union Connect Series

[www.lordoftherings.net/](http://www.lordoftherings.net/)

[www.christiananswers.net/spotlight/movies/2003/returnoftheking.html](http://www.christiananswers.net/spotlight/movies/2003/returnoftheking.html)

[www.tolkienonline.com/](http://www.tolkienonline.com/) and many, many others



# 21 Grams

Rated MA (language, sex, some violence and drug use) 125 minutes

21 Grams is a difficult and emotionally raw movie, but also an incredibly powerful one. The title refers to the alleged weight a body loses in death, traditionally held to be the weight of a soul. The story concerns three people Paul (Sean Penn), Christina (Naomi Watts), and Jack (Benicio Del Toro) whose lives collide around a fatal car accident. The consequences upon each of their lives and the choices they make are stark, real and often quite dark. But the point of the film is to explore each characters response to tragedy, search for hope and resolution of grief and guilt. It provides no easy answers, but explores the trajectory of each character as they search for something to hold onto and provide some grip on life.



Not a film that you could take many groups to, but as an experience it will cast your life and your choices into sharp contrast. The questions of guilt and responsibility are at the forefront and thus probably best dealt with in a group that has some level of trust and intimacy together. There is certainly moral ambiguity in the film, but not an immoral world. It is a story of those points in your life when everything is overturned and challenged. How do you respond (honestly) and what makes for good or responsible choices. We are all imperfect, so how do you measure a person – a soul weighs 21 grams – but is that all it's worth?

Of note, is Jack's struggle with his Christian faith. An ex-criminal who has found faith, his struggle includes his sense of an uncaring God who does not respond to Jack. Where does faith go when life starts to fall apart? Does God play a role, or sit back watching? An interesting question would be where is God in this story? Does it open up people to talking through their own dark nights of the soul?

## Links

Job and Paul (where is God in the moments of dying every day). Perhaps looking for the hope in Jeremiah?  
[www.21-grams.com](http://www.21-grams.com)



# FINDING NEMO



rated G 97 minutes

Nemo is the remaining son of Marlin the Clown Fish after 400 eggs and their mother were presumably killed and eaten by a predatory Barracuda despite a cosy anemone as a home in a friendly corner of the ocean. Several years later we pick up the story on Nemo's first day at 'school' despite overly protective Marlin's nervousness.

The overly protective attitude pushes Nemo to swim beyond the shelf and leads straight to the danger of a scuba divers net and the dentists fish tank in Sydney, Australia. The locals warn Nemo of his impending fate as the birthday present of an infamous young niece. Meanwhile we follow Marlin and new companion Dory [voiced superbly by Ellen DeGeneres] on the long journey to find Nemo and return him to safety. You'll recognise Australian voices such as Geoffrey Rush the pelican, Bill Hunter the dentist and Barry Humphries as Bruce the Shark.

This *biggest box office grossing animated feature film ever* continues the excellent ground breaking work of the PIXAR animation house [with their signature desk lamp replacing the 'I' in their name graphics]. It's a fairly typical Disney themed story where: difference is tolerated, community is central, shortcomings are affirmed rather as uniqueness, talent is emphasised and characters work hard to 'get along'. Finding Nemo is a terrific film for the whole family with a note that early scenes and some of the chases or threats in the film are very real and potentially a little scary for the youngest of viewers.

## Themes:

- The film explores the illusion that parents can make the world safe for their children
- Facing difficulties and exploring the unknown become vehicles for us discovering who we are
- Cooperation between seemingly conflicted fish and birds or underwater species
- Fear of the unknown
- Great scene when Marlin and Dory are in the 'belly of the whale' and have to 'let go' in order to be saved and sent on their way. Faith is difficult.
- This is not a retelling of the Parable of the Lost Sheep but its not a bad version [Luke !5:4]
- Would be interesting to use in worship alongside 'The Deep' by Tim Winton

## Discussion:

1. Share in your own words what you get out of the story 'Finding Nemo'?
2. What makes this such a great story?
3. Is there a particular character or part of the story you remember?
4. What theological or 'god describing' connections can you see in the characters experiences?

## Worship:

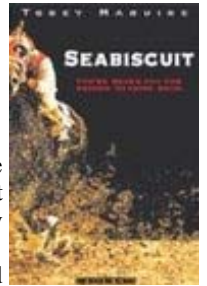
Pick out some key scenes for repeat play before worship and one or two as part of the input, encourage people to bring water based activity equipment and perhaps decorations to worship. Frame a set of discussion questions around the characters and the questions the story asks of each one.

How is this film like the journey of discipleship?

What might it say about the values of the rule and reign of God?

# SEABISCUIT

Rated M 140 minutes [www.seabiscuitmovie.com](http://www.seabiscuitmovie.com)  
Themes: redemption, second chances, inspiration, story



“You know everybody thinks we found this broken down horse and fixed him. But we didn’t. He fixed us; every one of us. And I guess in a way we kinda fixed each other too.”

In the 1930s Depression in the United States came the true story of a horse ‘that was too small’ which inspired a nation. At one time it was said Seabiscuit had more media coverage than the President. This film didn’t do great box office in Australia but was critically held up as a good film with an inspirational story based on the novel by Laura Hillenbrand. Perhaps it’s a very American story where *word of mouth* was mostly about the stunning racing footage. This is a film about second chances.

Some have said it doesn’t accurately portray the downside of racing yet in telling a large canvass story of redemption and compassion many will find it a favourite. Three characters are able to pull themselves back from tragedy and life’s blows to get behind this suspect horse and eventually stop the nation with its racing feats on radio and at the track.

Seabiscuit’s match race against War Admiral managed to lift and give hope to a whole country. Jeff Bridges performance as CS Howard the failed entrepreneur is powerful yet sensitive as the loss of a son and the stock market crash have taken their toll. The emotions are tugged strongly in these moving characters stories. The jockey even wears superhero styled riding gear as a tribute to the owners late son and his love of Flash Gordon. The film was nominated for seven Academy Awards.

Links: Zacchaeus, The Bent Over Woman, Paul, The Good Samaritan

Questions:

1. What struck you about the characters in this film?
2. How do you think these people are able to lift themselves above their troubles and triumph?
3. What are some other inspirational examples you can think of?
4. How does this film show the idea of ‘redemption’ or gaining back worth?

# Lost In Translation

rated PG 116 minutes

Rated R in the US there is one strip club scene responsible, which may cause offence

‘Everyone Wants to Be Found’

Themes: love, connection or belonging, displacement, relationship, hope and questions about life

Bob [Bill Murray] and Charlotte [Scarlett Johansson] are two people who meet in the midst of a disjointed cross-cultural experience while Bob is shooting a commercial which signifies not the end but perhaps a transition in his acting career. Charlotte is young, just finished college and newly married. In a typical Hollywood treatment these two would either not meet or would have a sexual affair and move on. The deeper themes in Sofia Copola’s story mean something much more significant is experienced. The film is set in Japan to heighten the sense of jarring, lostness and culture shock, which surrounds these characters own experiences. Life’s possibilities are discovered through their series of adventures.

The drama and comedy of this story are ideally suited to Bill Murray and Copola wrote with him in mind. She was amazed at his illisiveness and spent eight months just trying to contact him about doing the film. Bill Murray deserves the Oscar!! Despite excellent work from Sean Penn in Mystic River. Either will make an *interesting* acceptance speech! While many are surprised Murray is in a drama [Stripes, Caddyshack, Charlie’s Angels] the best comedy has always had a dark edge.

Great scenes include: Bob’s old movie on TV with overdubbing, the unstoppable exercise machine with Japanese instructions, taking Charlotte to hospital for an X-rays of her toe and going to a restaurant and not being able to tell the difference between the pictures and the karaoke bar and songs chosen.

Lost in Translation brings its vibe and experiences to the viewer as you try to understand the journey and make useful comments about the film afterwards.

Questions/Discussion points:

The Spirituality and Health website raises a number of points:

- The difference between the tourist and the soulful traveler
- In an attempt to ‘get a handle’ on their lives and this trip, we see magnificent views from the hotel and every mod con or service available, yet they can’t sleep, feel lost and eventually embark on a soul-mate journey of discovery
- The problem of boredom... perhaps the sub-theme allowing young people to relate to this film alongside its more appropriate young adult audience
- Transitions and the farewells between the two

Links:

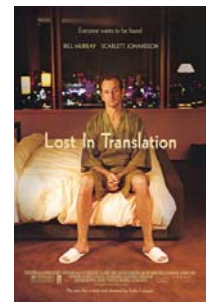
The Rich Young Ruler, John the Baptists followers ask Jesus ‘where are you at home?’ seeking to clarify who they should follow, ‘Life for Rent’ Dido from album of that name, ‘I Still Haven’t Found What I’m Looking For’ U2 song from ‘Rattle and Hum’

Worship

Imagine a setting and space designed to show lost-ness on a journey, visible art displays and stations depicting biblical stories and life experiences [e.g. Techno corner, Berlin wall, relationship depicted] the catch phrase ‘everyone wants to be found’ could be the theme. Use Dido, U2 or other music within the ‘liturgy’.

Websites

- [www.lost-in-translation.com](http://www.lost-in-translation.com)
- [www.imdb.com/title/tt0335266](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0335266)
- [www.hollywoodjesus.com](http://www.hollywoodjesus.com)
- [www.rottentomatoes.com/m/LostinTranslation-1125647](http://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/LostinTranslation-1125647)



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RAZZIES: are *alternative* awards @ Oscars time for the worst achievements in film for 2003

