

REEL PARABLES

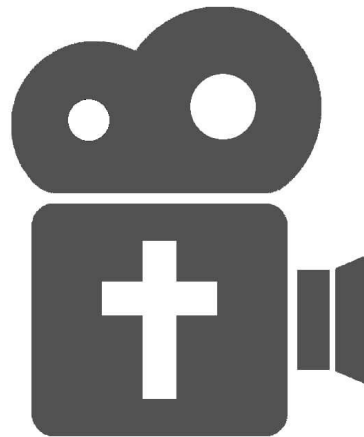
Presents



HOW TO SHARE GOD'S STORY WITH MOVIES

SIMON L SMITH + REEL PARABLES

INTRODUCTION



REEL PARABLES

I have been a Youth pastor and I have been a Singles pastor. I am the father of five. I teach our AWANA's Trek group (Junior High boys & girls. I feel the tension of being in the world but not being a part of the world. I especially feel that tension when it comes to media, specifically movies.

Yes, there are movies we simply should not see. Every study after every study shows that, without very few exceptions, Christians see the same movies as non-Christians. That is where Reel Parables comes in.

Reel Parables is more than just movie-based Bible studies, think of Reel Parables as a different kind of Christian movie review.

My purpose for Reel Parables is to share God's story with movies. Specifically, it is my desire to:

1. Educate and Encourage believers through God's story.
2. Engage the world with God's story.
3. Equip the Church to do the same.

I don't intend to give you moralistic movie reviews or recommendations. I use both Plugged In and Movieguide when I want that type of information. Instead, it is

my sincerest prayer that Reel Parables will encourage you in your own personal story with Christ and equip you to share that story with others.

Please check out www.reelparables.com for more movie bible studies and a better type of Christian movie review.

Also, let me know what you think. I would love to answer any questions or concerns you may have. I am easy to find online.

Until next time, God bless,

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When God's Story is our Story



1

WHEN GOD'S STORY IS OUR STORY

The most common question I get about Reel Parables is, "how do you do it?" For the longest time I would simply say, "I don't know" and not give it another thought. I assumed that what I do - see God's story in movies - is nothing special.

The thing is, this question keeps coming up. A lot.

So, I decided to figure it out how I do it. You know what? The more that I write here at Reel Parables, the more that I see a pattern. Here's the thing - to see God's story you have to know God's story.

First, we should all be growing in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. As we learn about God and His story we can more easily see a pattern.

That pattern usually looks something like this:

- There is a corrupt world, usually with a counterfeit king or ruler.
- There is typically an outside - and dual natured - hero (savior) who is not a part of the corrupt world.
- The Hero will usually sacrifice something, often his or her life.
- If the hero dies, he or she will often be resurrected or reborn. If the hero does not die, the world is often restored to its former glory. Also, relationships are restored and reunited.
- This resurrection or restoration usually leads to community (restored relationships) and a calling.

There is a corrupt world, usually with a counterfeit king or ruler.

We may not know what it is, but we know that there is something seriously wrong with the world. The original creation is broken (think the Fall) and something is wrong.

Often, this world is under the control or influence of a fake ruler, a counterfeit king. This character wants to be in charge and acts like they are in charge, but they are not in charge. This antagonist often sounds and looks good, but is eventually revealed to be evil.

Example: *Wreck-it Ralph*

We find out at the end of *Wreck-it Ralph* that Kind Candy is not the real king, but is instead an imposter. He is a counterfeit king who has "reprogrammed" Sugar Rush. Yes, Sugar Rush is fallen. Part of his hacking - part of the fall - turned Vanellope into a "glitch."

Example: *Disney's Frozen*

Because of Elsa's actions, Arendelle is "frozen" and trapped in ice. Not only is Arendelle affected by this, but as the story unfolds so is Anna. As we are warned at the start of the movie, we must beware a frozen heart.

Also, Hans, who we think is a good guy, ends up being a bad guy. He looks good. He sounds good. In the end he is seen to be a liar and a deceiver.

Both of these worlds are "fallen" - not what they should be - and both are (at least temporarily) under the control of a false ruler. This is our story.

We to live in a fallen world currently under the control (at least to some degree) of the Devil.

Satan, who is the god of this world, has blinded the minds of those who don't believe. They are unable to see the glorious light of the Good News. They don't understand this message about the glory of Christ, who is the exact likeness of God. (2 Corinthians 4:4)

There is always hope, though.

There is typically an outside - and dual natured - hero who is not a part of the corrupt world.

Enter the hero!

To save this world and to defeat the counterfeit ruler, a hero will arise! This hero is usually from the outside or somehow unrelated to the other characters. Also, this hero often has two natures or at least a secret identity. He/she is like the other characters, but he or she is also different from them in some way.

Example: *Wreck-it Ralph*

Ralph, the bad guy from Fix it Felix, Jr. is not from Sugar Rush. He is the hero of Sugar Rush.

He is like them - he is a game character - but he from the outside, he is from a different game.

Example: *Superman*

Superman is a classic example. He looks and acts human, but he is not merely a man, he is a Super Man. This Super Man was sent to Earth by his father to be our hero, or example of what we can be. Bonus points for his Superman/Clark Kent secret identity.

Books like *Superman is Jewish? (How Comic Book Superheroes Came to Server Truth, Justice and the Jewish-American Way)* have done a good job of showing how these types of characters, especially Superman, are a type - or a picture - of Jesus Christ.

Example: Spider-Man 2



In the original - and far better - *Spider-man 2*, Spider-man's true identity is finally revealed. The hero is unmasked and everyone sees that Spider-man is just a kid, Peter Parker. He is the hero, but he is also just a kid.

Jesus is both the Son of God and the Son of Man. He is God, but he also gets us.

Therefore since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast to our confession. For we do not have a high priest incapable of sympathizing with our weaknesses, but one who has been tempted in every way just as we are, yet without sin. Therefore let us confidently approach the throne of grace to receive mercy and find grace whenever we need help. (Hebrews 4:14-16)

Yes, we have a savior who is like us and can sympathize with our weakness, but how is also so far above us that He was tempted, but did not sin.

Sacrificial Death/Humility

This hero will usually sacrifice himself or herself to save the others. If they don't give up their life they will at least give up something significant.

Example: Wreck-it Ralph

While Ralph does not die to save Vanellope and Sugar Rush, he is willing to. He thinks he is going to die. He tries to save her anyway.

Example: Frozen

Anna sacrifices herself to save Elsa from Hans. As Hans is about to kill her with a sword Anna jumps in front of her to save her. She offers her life to save Elsa's. Frozen even shows us her last breath.

Example: Terminator Genisys

Pops, Arnold's most personal Terminator yet, sacrifices himself to save not just Sarah Conner, but the entire world. To prevent Judgement Day Pops willingly goes to his death to save the day.

All of these examples show us what Jesus did for us.

But God demonstrates his own love for us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us (Romans 5:8)

Yes, Jesus loves us the way Ralph loved Vanellope, the way Anna loved Elsa, and the way Pops loved Sarah.

Resurrection or Restoration

If the hero dies he or she is often resurrected. If not, the world is usually restored to its original glory or relationships are reunited and restored. Think Anna and Elsa from Frozen or Vanellope - a real Princess/daughter of the real king - from Wreck-it Ralph. (Jesus rose from the dead!)

Examples: Frozen

Yes, Anna died to save Elsa. Her heart is frozen. Remember, only an act of true love can thaw a frozen heart. While Frozen wanted us to think that this "true love" was a romantic love (like so many Disney Princess movies), Frozen shows us that unconditional love or sacrificial love is true love.

Because Anna saved Elsa with an act of true - unconditional and sacrificial - love, her frozen heart is thawed and she is "resurrected."

Not only does she come back to life, but her relationship with her sister, Elsa, is restored. To further show us the power of *the* resurrection, all of Arendelle is renewed and restored to its original glory!



Examples: Terminator Genisys

Yes, Pops, Arnold's Terminator in Genisys, sacrificed himself to save Sarah, but he did not stay dead. Not only is Pops "resurrected," but he is resurrected to a new and improved body!

We can go on and on. We see this idea of resurrection in the first Matrix. Neo dies, comes back to life, and has new powers that can defeat Agent Smith. We see this in Big Hero Six also. We know that Baymax dies to save Hiro, but later find out that he still lives! We see it yet again with Groot from Guardians of the Galaxy. After giving up his own life to save the other Guardians we see a little baby Groot dancing. He lives again.

Yes, Jesus died for us. He also came back to life for us!

Now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. (I Corinthians 15:20)

Because of His resurrection, we too will live even if we die!

It is the same with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable. (I Corinthians 15:42, read all of chapter 15)

Jesus will put things right through the eventual restoration of all that has gone wrong with the world. — Timothy Keller (@timkellernyc) August 12, 2015



Calling and Community



This resurrection or restoration or reunion usually leads to community and a shared calling or purpose. The victory has been won. The characters are brought back together, but the story is not over. Here the characters are typically united by a common calling, by a shared purpose, but by a new reason to band together.

Yes, in the context of the movie this often sets up the sequel. This often leads to the next movie (sequel) as the story is not yet over. Just like us! Salvation is not the end, we too still have a job to do! (The Great Commission.)

Examples: Terminator Genisys

Pops sacrifices himself to save Sarah Conner - and the entire world - from Judgement Day. Pops is resurrected to a new and improved body. Yes, Pops, Sarah, and Kyle are united in a happy ending. Their story is not yet over. Now they must work together towards a common goal. Queue the sequel.

Examples: Frozen

Not only is Anna resurrected and Arendelle returned to its former glory, but the city, which was closed off, is now opened. Not only are Anna and Elsa reunited with one another, but the whole city is united in celebration. The sacrifice, death, and resurrection ultimately lead to community.

The bible is BIG on community; confess our sins to one another, weep with those who weep and laugh with those who laugh, united in purpose.

Therefore, if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort provided by love, any fellowship in the Spirit, any affection or mercy, complete my joy and be of the same mind, by having the same love, being united in spirit, and having one purpose. Instead of being motivated by selfish ambition or vanity, each of you should, in humility, be moved to treat one another as more important than yourself. Each of you should be concerned not only about your own interests, but about the interests of others as well. (Philippians 2:1-4)

This purpose, this calling, applies to every Christian.

Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. Remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age. (Matthew 28:19-20)

I don't know what this looks like for you. I don't know where you are going or who you will come across. I do know that God wants us to make disciples.

As you watch movies look for these big ideas.

- How is the world corrupt world. Is there a counterfeit king or ruler.
- How is the hero? How is he or she different from the others?
- What does the hero sacrifice? Did the hero sacrifice himself or herself?
- If the hero died, was he or she resurrected or reborn? If the hero did not die, who or what was restored and/or reunited?
- How did this sacrifice and resurrection affect community? Does this community have a common calling or purpose?

Jesus Came to Seek & Save the Lost



2

JESUS & THE LOST PARABLES

In Luke 15 Jesus told three Lost Parables; one about a lost sheep, one about a lost coin, and another about two lost sons.

In each of these stories we get to see what Jesus is like.

The shepherd went looking for one lost sheep, even though he had 99 others. Why? Because that one sheep was important to him. We are that important to Jesus. Jesus loves you the same way.

The woman went looking for one coin, even though she has 9 others. Why? Because that one coin was valuable to her. You are that valuable to Jesus. Jesus loves you the same way.

Finally, a father had two sons. While both wanted the father's blessing/wealth, neither wanted the father. One got his inheritance early, ran away, and blew it. The other stayed, had access to all the father's blessings, but ignored it.

Both sons had issues, not just the proverbial "Prodigal Son." The father loved - and longed to be with - both sons.

In each of these stories we see Jesus' character.

- Jesus loves and cares for us the way the shepherd loved and cared for the one lost sheep.
- Jesus finds us valuable in the same way that the woman found the one lost coin valuable.
- Jesus longs to be with - and share His blessing - with us, just like the father wanted to give his blessing on his two sons.



Adam and Eve and the Lost Parable

This story - God looking for what was lost - goes all the way back to the beginning, all the way back to Genesis.



Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God moving about in the orchard at the breezy time of the day, and they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the orchard. But the Lord God called to the man and said to him, "Where are you?" The man replied, "I heard you moving about in the orchard, and I was afraid because I was naked, so I hid." (Genesis 3:8-10)

Adam and Eve had sinned. Adam and Eve were ashamed. Adam and Eve tried to hide from God. But He went looking for them. Yea, I know God knew where they were. But He was calling out to them, "Where are you?" They were lost and God went out to find them.

You and Me and the Lost Parable

These three lost parables retell our story. Like the sheep, like the coin, and like the children (sons), we too are lost.

But your sinful acts have alienated you from your God; your sins have caused him to reject you and not listen to your prayers. Isaiah 59:2

Because of our sins we are separated from God. Me. You. Your parents. Your kids. Everyone.

For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. (Romans 3:23)

Just like the shepherd searched for the sheep, just like the old woman searched for the coin, and just like the father was looking out for his son, Jesus chases after us.

But God demonstrates his own love for us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. (Romans 5:8)

Yes, while we were still sinners - and therefore lost (separated from God) - Jesus demonstrated His love for us by dying for us.

Jesus died for us while we were sinners.

Jesus died for us while we were still lost.

Jesus died for us while we were separated from God.

Hollywood and the Lost Parable

FYI - Hollywood can't stop remaking and retelling the Lost Parable.

Finding Nemo

Nemo is literally "caught up in his sin." He disobeys his dad, Marlin, and is caught by a diver with a net. How do you know Marlin still loves Nemo, even though he disobeyed? Because he went looking for him!

Finding Nemo is the parable of the lost fish.

The next time you watch Finding Nemo with your kids remind them that they are like Nemo and lost because of their sin. Also remind them that Jesus loves them the way Marlin loved Nemo! Just like Marlin went looking for Nemo, because he loved him, Jesus is looking for them (and died to save them)!



Frozen

Elsa, ashamed and afraid of her own actions, runs away. She is the lost sister. But Anna, the sister she left behind, loves her and went out looking for her lost sister.

In this story we are Elsa, the lost ones, and Anna is the Christ character. She even died to save Elsa like Jesus died to save us.

Just like Jesus rose from the dead, so did Anna!

"Only an act of true love can thaw a frozen heart."

Jesus loves us the way Anna loved Elsa.

The next time you watch Frozen with your kids remind them that they are like Elsa and lost because of their actions. Also remind them that Jesus loves them the way Anna loved Elsa. Not only did she go out looking for Elsa, but she died to save her. Just like Jesus died for us.



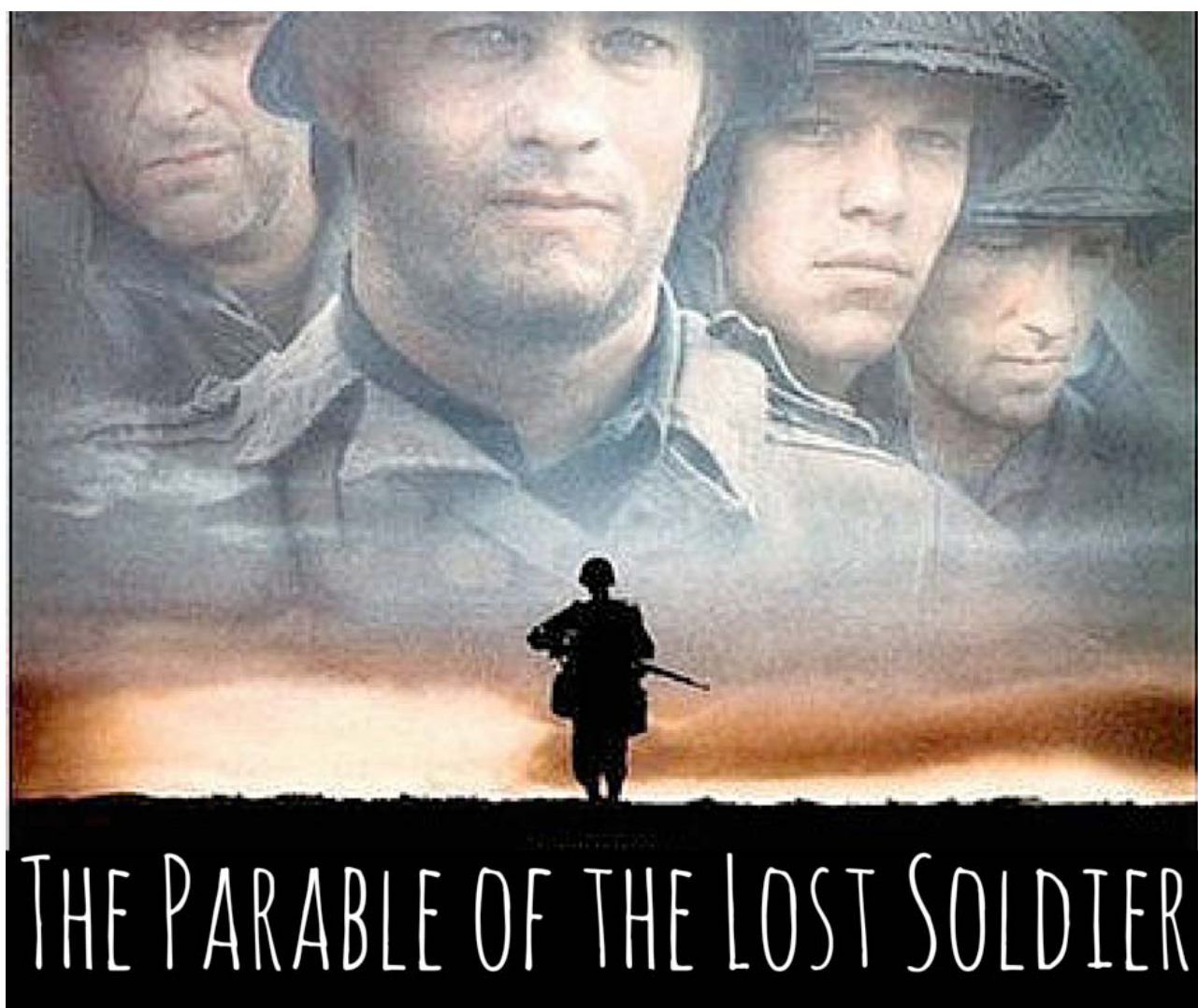
Saving Private Ryan

Not all Hollywood Lost Parables are for kids. Saving Private Ryan is a Lost Parable for adults.

Private Ryan is lost at war and a group of soldiers are sent to find him.

Like Jesus did for us, these men sacrificed their own lives to save Private Ryan.

Yes, Jesus demonstrated His own love for us in that while we were still sinners, He died for us!



Yes, the Lost Parables are powerful. We get them. We understand them. They move us.

Why? Because the Lost Parable is our story.

- Be on the look out for this type of Reel Parable.
- Someone is lost, usually due to their actions (sins).
- Someone, the hero and Christ-figure, will chase them and try to find them.
- This hero will usually sacrifice something to save them, usually their life.
- That sacrifice usually leads to resurrection or restoration or reunion.

You can share God's story the next time you see this Lost Parable in a movie!

For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost. (Luke 19:10)

Jesus, Super-heroes & Phil 2



3

SUPERHERO JESUS

There's no doubt that superheroes are a type - or an example of - Jesus Christ. They fight evil. They save us from evil. They protect us. They are powerful - often with other worldly powers.

We even say that they often have a "Messiah Complex" or a "God Complex."

Superman is a great example. Superman's creators were Jewish and purposely molded him after Moses. As Christians, we see that along with being like Moses, Superman is also a lot like Jesus.

1. He was sent to Earth by his father.
2. He was sent with a purpose.
3. He is an example of complete goodness.
4. He saves us from evil.
5. He is "all powerful."
6. He hears our cries for help (prayers?) with his super hearing.
7. He has no equal.
8. He is other worldly - not of this Earth.
9. He is, however, still very much like us.



Superhero Savior

Even more than this, however, superheroes often show us what Philippians 2 looks like in real life.

I love Philippians 2. On a (admittedly) naive level, I feel that if we could change the world - and cure most ills - if we all followed Philippians 2. Here, we are told to "have the same attitude" as Jesus and treat others the way he did (and the way he treats us).

Simply put, we should not only be concerned about our own interest, but we should also be concerned about the interest of others.

Instead of being motivated by selfish ambition or vanity, each of you should, in humility, be moved to treat one another as more important than yourself. Each of you should be concerned not only about your own interests, but about the interests of others as well. You should have the same attitude toward one another that Christ Jesus had, who though he existed in the form of God did not regard equality with God as something to be grasped, but emptied himself by taking on the form of a slave, by looking like other men, and by sharing in human nature. He humbled himself, by becoming obedient to the point of death – even death on a cross! As a result God exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow – in heaven and on earth and under the earth – and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father. (Philippians 2:3-11)

What would the world look like if we treated others the way Jesus treats us?

We see this repeatedly in superhero movies.

The superhero humble themselves to serve - and save - the world.

Iron Man - Tony Stark - willingly carries a nuclear weapon into space to save New York. He knows he may die, but he does it anyway.

Spider-man - Peter Parker - pushes himself to the point of death to save the people on the train. He pushes himself so far that they think he died! (FYI - **If you are interest, we looked as Spider-man in more detail over lent.**)



In Superman returns, Superman willingly flies a mountain of kryptonite into space to save the world. He is willing to die to save the world.



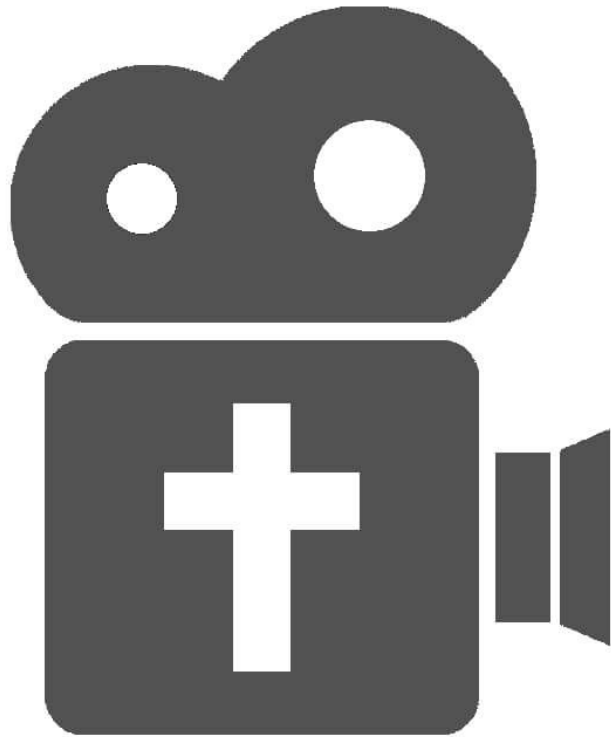
We see almost all superheroes - Wonder Woman, Daredevil, the Fantastic Four, the Incredibles - put themselves in harms way to save the world and to save those that they love.

This is what Jesus did for us.

But God demonstrates his own love for us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. (Romans 5:8)

This humbling - this emptying - is easy to see if you ask the right questions.

- What does the hero want? What or who does the hero want to save?
- What stands in the hero's way? What or who is trying to stop the hero?
- What does the hero give up - or sacrifice - to succeed (save those whom he or she is trying to save)?
- How is the hero restored or resurrected?



REEL PARABLES

4

NOW WHAT?

I know this is a lot, so I've created three "cheatsheets" to help you out; How to See God's Story in Movies, How to See God's Story in Superhero Movies, How to See God's Story in Movies – The Lost Parables.

Head over to [Reel Parables](#) to sign up to get your free resources and please share this book with anyone you feel would like it or could use it. Not only will this guarantee that you get the latest Reel Parables posts, but you will also get my most popular downloads, including "How to Time Travel."