

How Hollywood Finally Got It Right With the New 'Samson' Movie

The history of biblical epics is littered with the remnants of failed secular adaptations. From *Noah* to *Exodus: Gods and Kings*, Hollywood has a track record of twisting Scriptures to match its own agenda. *Samson*, debuting in February 2018, looks to buck that trend. Hear the heart behind the movie in this special behind-the-scenes clip.

Blow For Religious Freedom: Oregon Bakers' Appeal Denied in Gay Wedding Cake Case

The Oregon Court of Appeals has ruled against Aaron and Melissa Klein, owners of the Sweet Cakes by Melissa bakery who in 2013 refused to design and bake a cake celebrating a lesbian couple's same-sex wedding.

The Kleins felt that designing and making the cake to celebrate the 2013 same-sex wedding would violate their Christian faith.

On Thursday, however, the appeals court upheld the decision by the Oregon Bureau of Labor and Industries to fine the Kleins \$135,000. The hefty financial penalty ultimately forced the couple to close their bakery.

“Although we accept that the Kleins imbue each wedding cake with their own aesthetic choices, they have made no showing that other people will necessarily experience any wedding cake that the Kleins create predominantly as ‘expression’ rather than as food,” the court wrote in its opinion.

The religious rights legal group First Liberty Institute defended the Kleins before the court.

“Freedom of expression for ourselves should require freedom of expression for others. Today, the Oregon Court of Appeals decided that Aaron and Melissa Klein are not entitled to the Constitution’s promises of religious liberty and free speech,” First Liberty CEO Kelly Shackelford stated.

Shackelford added, “In a diverse and pluralistic society, people of goodwill should be able to peacefully coexist with different beliefs. We are disappointed that the court ruled against the Kleins.”

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How You Can Celebrate Your Wife Like Jesus Does

Celebration is one of the characteristics I love most about God. If there is one thing our God is, it is a celebrator. He could have made the world all one color, but no, He celebrates His creation with endless amounts of color. All you have to do is drive in upstate New York in the fall to see the splendor of color.

God celebrates! That's just who He is. God has been celebrating you your entire life. He beholds you when you're sleeping; He observes your successes and learning curves with celebration.

If you are a parent, you probably can relate to this celebrative spirit of God. Do you remember when your toddler was painting? You actually didn't have a clue what it was that this child painted. You fawned over the child, "That's great Johnny; as a matter of fact I think that's the best painting I have ever seen." You would proudly celebrate this painting by placing it upon that family "altar" called the refrigerator.

That's how God responds to even our most brilliant and less than brilliant ideas. He loves you and He is very committed to celebrating you.

For some of us who grew up without receiving much celebration, this idea that God celebrates us seems so unfamiliar. Just know regardless of whom you are or how you grew up God is a celebrator and is celebrating you.

Now you are not the only one He celebrates. He actually celebrates us all. He especially celebrates your spouse.

They are the apple of His eye. He listens to their breath as they sleep and smiles as they go throughout their day. He communicates His celebration of them constantly.

When you are celebrating your spouse, you are in agreement with God. You are Christ-like when you are singing the same song of celebration that He is over your wife.

Remember the days when you first met your spouse? Those were great days of celebration. You didn't need a sermon, a self-help book or a conference to encourage you to celebrate him or her. Almost anyone who knew you was told the good news of this new person you found to celebrate. Remember how you told your

family and friends or just about anyone who you met how smart, attractive, spiritual or funny this new person was?

They were the bread of life! They were the probable solution to your singleness. They were the one you were waiting for—just take a minute and feel that old feeling. Really, close your eyes and remember the song of celebration you once had for your spouse. I know years may have gone by and both of you have matured and changed, but it's good to remember where the song began.

Take a moment; does your spouse feel celebrated? Would they be able to say, "My spouse celebrates me so much?"

Now I know some of you could be sliding into a little "what about me." "My spouse doesn't celebrate me." That takes us back to the power of one.

You lead in the party, you begin to celebrate them and plant celebration. Everyone loves a party! Once you start the love agreement of celebration, the atmosphere of your relationship at least has some change—and that's you.

You will change and begin to pick up, maintain, or make louder the celebration of your spouse. I know that some of those great characteristics you bragged about in your spouse also are weaknesses. Before marriage your spouse was thought to be thrifty; now they are "cheap." They were once called smart, but now you think they are a "know-it-all." The list can go on and on about the weak side of your spouse's strength. Honestly think about it: has your spouse changed so much, or has the way you think about your spouse changed? Oftentimes it's how we think that has changed more than our spouse has changed. Often we go from a spirit of celebration to a spirit of criticism toward our spouses.

Remember criticism of another believer in Christ is probably placing you on the wrong side of God. He is not a criticizer of your spouse, but a celebrator. I always like to be on the

same team as God. I know if I stay celebrating Lisa, regardless of Lisa's disposition, I am in agreement with God. {eoa}

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Will Your Resolutions Produce Fruit That Remains?

We ring in the year 2018 at midnight tonight. I can remember when we were anticipating the year 2000—which was to be a big year—more significant than others perhaps because it was the beginning of a new age.

The year 1990 was a big year too—the beginning of the last decade of that millennium—and I was determined to be ready for it. I worked diligently to complete a list of goals and objectives for every major area of my life: spiritual, marriage, family, financial, business and ministry. It was quite a task.

On New Year's Day I sat down to pray over my well-ordered goals, expecting God to give me His seal of approval. Of course, He would be pleased—I was doing His work!

But instead of congratulating me, He surprised me by saying, "Evaluate your list in the light of eternity." That was it! No

“Well done, good and faithful servant,” “Great job, Joy” or “You are such a valuable worker in My kingdom.”

With God’s directive in mind, I began to look over the list. Did any of my goals have eternal significance? No, reading three spiritual books wouldn’t really count for eternity. Having a weekly family night didn’t really fit the bill either. Handling that software conversion at work had no eternal value. Even organizing the ministry department where I worked in at the church probably wouldn’t matter in the light of eternity.

The conclusion I came to was that only two things on my list would have a lasting impact: building my relationship with God and pouring eternal things into people—whether my family or others. My discovery, of course, was in line with what Christ told us in the two greatest commandments—to love God fully and to love our neighbor as ourselves (see Matt. 22:37-39). This is what I call “putting first things first.”

Does that mean the other goals I wrote down are not important? No. On a list of 100 items, the top 10 are still consequential.

They just can’t become the driving force of your life. Reading three books that the Holy Spirit directs you to read may have eternal value while reading three books of your own choosing may be simply entertainment.

The point is, we cannot have divided hearts. Obedience begins in the affections, and when our affections are set on God, we won’t be pulled in different directions. God will instruct and empower us to do all the other things He requires if we put Him first. He will see to it that we fulfill every command or responsibility He gives us in His Word.

I like formulas, but formulas give us the ability to stand alone. God wants us to lean on Him for everything. He wants us to remain in continual fellowship with Him and follow the

leading of the Holy Spirit so that we are fruitful bearers of His life.

As you begin another significant year, I encourage you to resolve only one thing—to love God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength and to love your neighbor as yourself. As you are faithful to put first things first, God will set your priorities, and the fruit of the year will last forever.

Prayer Power for the Week Beginning Dec. 31, 2017

This week forgetting the things that are behind and focusing on what's ahead, ask the Lord to help you set your priorities so that His will is done each day of your life. Commit to spending quality time with Him, reading and meditating on His Word, surrendering to His will, and enjoying His presence. Keep praying that God would surround our president and those working with him with wise counsel, and that His wisdom would prevail in all decisions that are made. Continue to pray for worldwide revival beginning with our own nation. Thank God for directing your steps and providing all that you need to accomplish His will and purpose for your life. Matt. 22:37-39; Phil. 3:13.

MercyMe Releases Touching Love Song About the Holy Spirit

MercyMe's latest single is a love song dedicated to a surprising subject: the Holy Spirit. Lead singer Bart Millard shares how the Holy Ghost has driven out all fear from his life, building to a powerful crescendo. This video highlights

the song's powerful lyrics.

Francis Chan: My Church Saved 100 People—and That's a Failure

One hundred people saved in one year is not a success if it took 4,000 people to do it. That's Francis Chan's point in this sermon, in which he addresses why megachurch statistics don't impress him and what a truly efficacious church should look like. As Chan says, "You would fire someone with an army that big that's producing that little a result."

After Finding Jesus, Crooked Cop Reconciles With the Man He Framed

Crooked cop Andrew Collins framed Jameel McGee, an innocent man, for possession of crack cocaine. McGee spent three years in prison and even missed the birth of his son. Years later—after losing his position and finding Jesus—Collins met McGee again. What happened next was an incredible testimony of forgiveness. They tell their full story to I Am Second.

How One Weary Woman Overcame Hunger's Horrific Hold

"Where am I and how did I get here?" Overcomer said softly to no one but herself. The answer came from someone above her climbing up the steep wall of the deep ravine.

"You came here for the goodies down there just like I did," said the very haggard-looking woman climbing in front of her. She had to weigh over 400 pounds. "Free triple cheeseburgers, French fries, hot cherry pies, ice cream that never melts, cheesecake, cinnamon rolls, Dutch pastries, white chocolate fudge with nuts, caramels, Grandma's oatmeal cookies, literally whatever you want anytime you want it and all the diet soda in the world to wash it down with." She chuckled as if to indicate it really wasn't funny.

"Where are the goodies?" Overcomer asked.

"Down there." The woman pointed at the bottom of the ravine. "Down where the bottom feeders still are."

Overcomer looked down and saw thousands of people nearly buried in the various kinds of foods the woman described. Some were gathering goodies by the armfuls and carefully trying to sneak them away to caves or shelters they had cobbled together intent on remaining where the food was for as long as possible.

"Were we down there?" Overcomer asked.

"Yep."

"Why can't I remember?"

“It’s that so-called food. It numbed us and caused us to look like this.”

Then, as if awakening from a deep coma, Overcomer looked at herself. She weighed at least what the woman above her weighed and maybe more. All of a sudden she was aware of every ache and pain she felt, as well as the extreme desire to let go and slide back down into the pit.

“Why aren’t we back down there?” Overcomer asked.

“I don’t know about you,” the woman explained, “but I finally realized eating all that stuff that I used to make me feel like I was in heaven was getting me nowhere. I didn’t want to die down there with all the bottom feeders. I woke up one day and a voice whispered to me, ‘Life or death?’ I chose life and started climbing.”

“But climbing is hard work,” Overcomer said groaning as she hefted her leg onto a another rocky outcropping. “I think I’ll go back. I have no idea why I left in the first place. I’ll certainly never get to the top.”

Desperately Hungry to See and Be Seen

The woman stopped, turned around and said, “You must have left there for a reason. You need to think about why you left. More than that, you need to think about who is watching you.”

“What do you mean?” Overcomer said, turning and looking down longingly at the never-ending supply of all her favorite foods.

“Everyone down there is watching us, of course. But down is not the way you should be looking,” said the woman gazing upwards with a look of admiration in her eyes.

As Overcomer turned her eyes to the top of the ravine, she saw what looked like the face of Jesus staring down with compassion and a sense of urgency.

She was still staring when the woman reached down and said, "Here, let me help you. The climb will be easier if you follow me. Then both of us will be looking to the only One who really can help us on this journey."

For a minute Overcomer simply stared into the eyes of the One she knew she had forsaken by making her stomach her god. "What's your name?" she asked the woman.

Desperately Hungry for Life

"Hungry. Now, take my hand," she said as she reached down. In that moment Overcomer was struck with the realization that she, too, wanted to choose life. No matter how hard it might be, surely it would be easier than spending a life of hoarding food and being in pain all the time. Then she remembered. Disgust with her existence had caused her to become crazy enough to start trying to find a way out.

Now she was climbing. It was slow going. At times she needed both hands to climb and so did Hungry. Each time she needed energy and fuel to climb higher, Hungry would show her the edible plants and fruits that grew in abundance all along the ground and between the rocks. There was clear, pure water to drink in the nearby brooks. And each evening as they stopped, a warm fire with a healthy meal was waiting for them at the intended campsite. It was complete with the presence of an unseen guest.

The face of Jesus was constantly before her, and she knew it was His strength helping her climb. She and Hungry weren't the only ones climbing out of the pit. Each day more joined them as Hungry led the way, always being careful to let Overcomer and the others know that they needed to follow Jesus for the path upwards and out. She also shared with them methods to climb better, where to find footholds, how to watch for loose stones that could send them tumbling back to the pit and many other things they needed to know to survive the journey.

Desperately Hungry To Rescue Others

Overcomer was also aware as she dropped off to sleep each night that Hungry climbed back down to the point where they had met and brought more back up to join them on the journey. If she didn't come back in the morning, Overcomer led the others and continued on. Always, Hungry would come back with more to join them.

"The journey seems to be getting easier," Overcomer said to Hungry one evening sitting by the campfire.

"Look at yourself," Hungry answered. "Look at me."

They were both much smaller. "When did that happen?" Overcomer asked, shocked at her outward transformation.

"It happened to me before you met me, but it's been happening to you all along."

"But when I met you, you were almost my size"

"You saw me the way I was before I left the bottom. Every night when I climb down, I become who I was. I become like those I am helping so they know that I, too, have been where they are."

Overcomer thought for a moment and then said, "Maybe next time I'll go back down with you to rescue people. I could sure use a triple cheeseburger."

"You cannot help others if you're even thinking of going all the way to the bottom," Hungry explained. "We are learning a different way of dealing with life now. We are learning the journey with the Master leading us is much sweeter than what's at the bottom. For now, your job is to stay here and lead always upwards as I bring others to join us," Hungry explained.

She paused for a moment. Then, looking Overcomer in the eyes,

she continued, "I can only help those who have made the decision to come out. Sometimes they don't even know why they have come out of the pit. But once they make the decision to come out, it is my job to give them all the resources they need to stay on the journey."

"How do you do that?"

Desperately Hungry to Never Go Back

"The most important thing is to stay on the path myself and NEVER go back to the bottom."

"On all your journeys back, you've never gone there?"

"I did once," Hungry admitted, hanging her head. "It was even harder to climb back out. I learned my lesson. I vowed with His help to never go back again."

"Isn't it hard climbing back down to climb back up again?"

"It's not hard when I know I have His strength to help me. That's all we need on this journey. It's all I'm hungry for."

"But don't you get hungry for all of those foods down there?"

"Do you know why my name is Hungry?" she asked?

Overcomer shook her head no.

Desperately Hungry for God

"I was once desperately hungry for all of those foods down there," she said. "But a coach helped me understand what I really was hungry for was God. Now, every day I change any human hunger into my desperate hunger for Him. Every night I fall asleep knowing He holding me close. He encourages me to keep going. He points out yet another one I am to rescue. He tells me He will be with me as I climb back down. It's as if time stands still until I finish the task. In the morning I'm as rested as if I've slept all night."

Hungry sat down on a rock and picked a few nourishing plants. She ate for a moment, took a drink of water from the container she carried, then continued. "When you are ready to be a rescuer, a mentor, a coach, He will tell you. Then you will be strong enough to make the climb back down with me. When you do, I'll be here to help you stay on the path. Your name alone should tell you that your destiny lies in helping others."

Overcomer closed her eyes, and immediately Jesus was right beside her speaking softly to her heart, telling her of things to come and her part in His Kingdom.

Then, He said, "My child, you have more to learn. You are in the right place. Don't hurry the process. Take a deep drink of the freedom I give you. It's the freedom to follow Me completely. I have more for you so much more.

"I will do new things in your life. You should already know this because your transformation has already begun. But there will be more. I will make paths for you to follow where there are none now. You will be called a trailblazer, but that will only be when you follow Me. And when you need refreshment, I will show you rivers of water where there were none before. It's already happening."

She had a million questions, but instead, she just rested in the arms of the One who loves her completely, desperately hungry to spend every minute in His presence. When she focused on Him, she needed nothing else. {eo}

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This article originally appeared at .

Justice Department Investigates Efforts to Crack Down on Hezbollah

Attorney General Jeff Sessions has ordered a review of law enforcement efforts to shutdown Hezbollah's money-laundering and drug-trafficking operations during the Obama Administration.

Sessions ordered the Department of Justice (DOJ) to "evaluate allegations that certain matters were not properly prosecuted and to ensure all matters are appropriately handled."

This was sparked by last Friday's report by *Politico* that the previous administration sought to hinder a Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) investigation (code named Project Cassandra) into Hezbollah's criminal activities, in order to placate Iran as the controversial Iran nuclear deal was being hammered out by the Obama Administration.

Congress is also investigating whether the Obama Administration thwarted the investigation.

Project Cassandra was a highly-classified operation that began in 2008. The DEA investigation found that Hezbollah, an Iranian proxy, had laundered nearly one half billion dollars and was actively transporting cocaine into the United States. *Politico's* shocking report indicates that the Obama Administration threw roadblocks in front of investigators and also failed to prosecute major players in the criminal enterprise. DEA officers had worked for years on the project, operating out of a facility in Chantilly, Virginia. The agency sought approval for arrests, prosecutions and financial

sanctions—none of which were allowed by the Obama White House.

Hezbollah is not your ordinary criminal organization. It is the largest non-state terrorist group and organized crime syndicate in the world. Hezbollah is both a terrorist organization and a military organization. It is also a political party with members seated in the Lebanese Parliament. Iran, the world leading state sponsor of terrorism, is its patron. The Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps trains Hezbollah fighters. In exchange, Hezbollah—on behalf of Iran—trains Shi'a terrorists across the Middle East and North Africa in order to give Iran the veneer of deniability in its nefarious operations in places like Iraq and Yemen.

Hezbollah uses suicide attacks, kidnappings, assassinations, rocket fire and missile attacks to terrorize and kill innocent civilians. It supports Islamist terrorists around the globe, including those in South America and the United States. It is one of the major conduits of illegal drugs that make their way into the United States, much of it through the Mexican border. The group is responsible for killing more Americans than any other terrorist group except al-Qaeda, including the 241 U.S. Marines killed in the barracks bombing in Lebanon in 1983. In the so-called Second Lebanese War, Hezbollah killed 163 Israeli citizens.

Hezbollah provides the foot-soldiers for Iran as part of that country's attempt to destabilize the Middle East and to diminish the influence of the United States in that region of the world. Its military component is the size of a medium-sized army, with as many as 100,000 soldiers. Its military budget is approximately one billion dollars, money obtained directly from Iran and through its illegal drug trade.

The *Politico* report was well-sourced and credible. It cannot be dismissed as a political hack job. The details of the article are extremely troubling. The investigations by the

Department of Justice and the U.S. Congress are warranted, as *Politico* is not a right-wing news organization and its allegations are serious matters of national security. To turn a blind eye to an international terrorist organization in order to broker an ill-advised nuclear agreement with the world's largest state sponsor of terrorism is the irony of ironies—and, if true, the Obama Administration's efforts to derail Project Cassandra wreaks of disrespect for law enforcement, a cavalier approach to national security, and a casual disregard for the victims of the drug trade across the United States.

Everyone who believes in the Rule of Law, and in those sworn to protect us, should pay attention to the efforts of Congress and the Justice Department to get to the bottom of this alleged miscarriage of justice. It is a matter of utmost seriousness. At the very least, the DEA and the Department of Justice should re-authorize Project Cassandra and continue their efforts to oppose Hezbollah and bring its operatives to justice.

For the original article, visit .

A Prayer to Lead You Out of Desperation and Into Hope

A woman emailed me to beg for permission to commit suicide. She said, "I can't catch a break. The battles never stop. I don't want to live anymore."

My heart goes out to my hurting friend. I well understand where she's coming from. Besides, who can't relate to even an occasional feeling of discouragement? The truth is many of us

have received our share of blisters as we've walked an unintended path of pain. If you've ever found yourself standing in the middle of a road called despair, know there is a shortcut to freedom, a shortcut that has everything to do with life and nothing to do with suicide.

That way is Jesus. He is the path that can take you safely through a world of difficulties. Not only does he provide a way through your troubles, he walks through your troubles with you. In fact, if my friend will give him permission, he will also walk with her and lead her to peace in her storm.

In *Next Door Savior*, Max Lucado wrote, "The Fort Knox of faith is Christ. Fellowshiping with Him. Waiting with Him. Pondering Him. Exploring Him. The heart-stopping realization that in Him you are part of something ancient, endless, unstoppable and unfathomable. And that He, who can dig the Grand Canyon with His pinkie, thinks you're worth his death on Roman timber. Christ is the reward of Christianity. Why else would Paul make Him his supreme desire? 'I want to know Christ' (Phil. 3:10 NCV)."

The words that could help you start your journey to peace could include a prayer like:

Jesus – thank you for taking the blame and punishment for my mistakes. Forgive me for my sins. I give you me. I give you my burdens, my troubles, my despair and worries. These are now your problems because I choose to rest in you.

A prayer like this can change everything. It will take you to peace. To life. To freedom. To Christ.

Whatever happened to my friend who wanted my permission to commit suicide? I shared with her this same prayer that I shared with you. She prayed it and decided not to take her life.

That was four years ago. Today my friend is not only no longer

suicidal, she has learned how to count her blessings and trust the Lord, and has even discovered new God-given life purposes.

She wrote me a letter this week which in part said, "Thank you for believing in me and teaching me how to pray during my battle with suicide. Today, I am glad to be alive."

If you are struggling, please know God is for you. He is holding his loving arms out to you and is ready for you to trust him through this time. You will be glad you did.

To take a test about faith in Christ, see . {eoa}

For a library of articles for those depressed or suicidal, please visit .

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