

Spielberg's Heartwarming 'War Horse'

✘ Albert Narracott loved the thoroughbred horse from the moment he saw him. When his father purchased the animal in a moment of pride, Albert vowed to take care of him. He named his beloved horse Joey and instantly set to work on training him.

Set in Europe during World War I, Steven Spielberg's *War Horse* follows

Albert and Joey on an incredible journey of courage and adventure.

Played by newcomer Jeremy Irvine, Albert teaches Joey how to plow his father's field for planting, despite tremendous opposition from his family and townspeople who do not think the small mare has the stamina.

When Albert's father, Ted Narracott, sells Joey to the British military in a moment of desperation, young Albert is devastated and pleads with the soldier who purchased Joey to let him serve alongside his animal. Capt. Nicholls (Tom Hiddleston, *Thor*) refuses because Albert is too young, but he agrees to return the horse when the war is over.

Albert soon finds out Capt. Nicholls has died in battle, and he fears

Joey has met the same fate. But the brave horse makes his way through

Europe as we watch him become acquired by German soldiers and

then cared
for by a young girl and her grandfather in France.

Joey is eventually dragged back into battle and forced to haul heavy artillery for soldiers intent on completing their mission with no thought to the consequences the horses face. Though the thoroughbred escapes, racing through ravaged lands, he entangles himself along the way in barbed wire fences.

As viewers, we're taken through a gripping journey of triumph, sadness, hope and joy. Albert joins the war when he's old enough in an effort to find his dear horse. With Joey's tenacity and Albert's love, it is hard not to believe these two will be reunited again—as impossible as it may seem.

Because it is set in the middle of WWI, *War Horse* features violence. Several battle scenes depict dead soldiers and horses strewn on the battlefield. Two German traitors are executed and throughout the film, horses are treated brutally. Albert is gassed in a battle scene, and afterward he is badly scarred around the eyes.

Spielberg puts his own touch on the film, based on a young adult novel that was adapted into an award-winning play. Though promoted heavily among the "faith-based community," *War Horse* doesn't contain overtly Christian messages beyond such elements as loyalty,

friendship and laying down your life for another—even if it's a horse.

Characters mention God a handful of times, as when a down-on-his-luck

Ted Narracott tells his wife: "I used to believe God gave each man his

fair portion of bad luck. Now I don't believe that anymore."

And when

Capt. Nicholls and Joey enter their first battle, the soldiers shout,

"Fear God! Honor the King!"

Though Spielberg's latest wartime project has a heartwarming message

and contains no sexual content or noticeable profanity, the movie earns

its PG-13 rating for intense battle sequences. Families with young


children may opt to choose another movie on its Christmas Day release.

But those with teenagers will enjoy the tale of a young boy and the

incredible, unconditional love he has for a horse that is more friend

than farm animal.

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Seven Tips to Develop Your Own Bible Reading Plan

- ✘ A man who became a Christian bought a Bible. He said, "Have you seen this thing?"

The Bible is daunting. At roughly

770,000 words, that's about 2,500 normal book pages—equivalent to 12 non-fiction books!

Bible reading falls into that special category of things we all know are important but struggle to do, like diet and exercise.

Every year since 1988 I've read the Bible cover to cover. This is certainly not required, but I've learned some things along the way that may be helpful to you.

Arrested Development

For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat. **—Hebrews 5:12, KJV**

Praise of Angels

For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord-.-.-.-And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men. **—Luke 2:11,13-14**

You Aren't Reaching the Next Generation If ...

OFFENDER #1: If you talk in a different voice when the camera is turned on: Everywhere else on television we see reality. Love it or hate it, reality programming has left an indelible mark on the industry. So when you appear on your program with your “classic TV voice” it sticks out like a sore thumb. You know who I’m talking about. Numerous ministry leaders who are gracious, authentic, and engaging when talking with friends over lunch. But turn on the camera, and they become someone else.

The television commercial business is a great example of the change. National spots used to be narrated by men with powerful voices. Deep voices that resonated with power and authority. But listen to a commercial today. More often than not, it sounds like a regular guy—or woman. The advertiser knows the connection doesn’t come from a perfect voice, but from the sound of someone like you and me. Watch regular television and listen to the difference. Stop trying to be bigger than life. Be real. Speak normally. It doesn’t make you more anointed or powerful when you try to sound like God. Talk like everyone else, and you’ll be amazed at the connection.

The “over the top” era is done.

OFFENDER #2: If on TV you wear different clothes or hairstyles than everyone else: Back in the glory days of “variety” programming, stars wore some pretty weird outfits, and the audience loved it. When I took the tour through Graceland—the estate of the late Elvis Presley—I marveled at the collection of his outrageous concert outfits. Unbelievable

stuff. A walk through the historical section of a prop and costume department in Hollywood is a similar experience. *But that was a different time.*

While I'm always open to change, as of this writing, Nehru jackets are done. Big gold chains are for hip-hop artists and gangsters. Trust me. Everyone knows that's a toupee on your head. T.D. Jakes is cool. White preachers that try to dress like T.D. are not. T-shirts under sport coats went out with Miami Vice. Spandex is not for TV—ever.

And when it comes to TV evangelists, what's the thing about hair? Do I really have to elaborate? Years ago, I filmed one offender deep in the desert of the Middle East for a TV segment. The wind was raging, and his comb-over was so huge, he went through nearly a case of hairspray to keep it under control. When he was finished, his hair looked more like a NASCAR helmet. The desert sands were blowing all around him, and my crew was fighting to hold down the equipment, but that comb-over stayed firm without a hair out of place. If a nuclear attack had happened at that moment, I wanted under that helmet of hair. Study the wardrobe and hairstyles of secular TV hosts today. It's remarkably normal stuff. Tasteful and subtle. Now—quick—switch back to a Christian TV program.

Ouch.

Now to be fair, let me turn the tables and say something to today's "hip" young pastors: *It's time to stop wearing those striped shirts with the shirrtails out when you preach.* Wearing jeans and open collar shirts is fine. But styles change and it's time to change with it. Hundreds of young contemporary pastors all look alike today—jeans, striped shirts, tails out. And while you're tossing out those shirts, dump anything with big designs on it. You know what I'm talking about—the t-shirts with the big printed crosses, or the torn up sport coats with stuff written on them.

The point is, people change, trends change, and fashion changes. When every pastor in America looks alike, nothing is distinctive anymore.

OFFENDER #3: If you use the phrases, “Shake the Nations,” “Transform Your Life,” or “Touch the World” more than once in a 30-minute TV or radio program. Yes—I admit being guilty of these offenses in my day, but I went into treatment and I’m better now.

The point is about *hype*. There’s just too much of it in **religious media**. When every CD set, book, or sermon from every preacher will change your life, then nothing will. The audience gets numb when the superlatives come in a continual flood. I always coach actors that during a dramatic scene, speaking in a loud voice all the time actually lessens the impact of the scene. When someone talks loud continually, after awhile, the audience simply filters it out.

Talking loud has impact, only after you’ve been speaking in a softer voice. **Contrast matters. Stop the hype.** Yes, God can do amazing things. He can transform people’s lives. He can shake nations. But be realistic about your products and your ministry. Let other people say nice things about you. Modesty is a virtue. You’ll be amazed at the credibility you’ll gain with the audience.

OFFENDER #4: If the audience notices the furniture more than you. I was once asked for my thoughts on a particular Sunday morning program, and when I viewed the DVD, the first thing I noticed was the set design must have cost an absolute fortune. Not because it was creatively designed, but because it looked so expensive. It was almost all white, very elaborate, had a few gold touches, and generally, looked like the inside of a palace. For some reason I can’t figure out, we’ve come to think that we’ll gain more respect as Christian broadcasters if we create the illusion of a really expensive set. I made two comments to the pastor. First—why should I financially

support your media ministry? Your set makes it appear you have all the money you'll ever need. Second, this environment is so far removed from my daily life, I can't really relate to you or your message. He didn't take my advice, and his audience continues to drop. (Well, what did you expect?)

I love a great setting for a program and our company has designed and built some amazing sets for our media clients. When it's appropriate, it can make a huge impact because it places your message in a complimentary setting. Sets are important. *But the program is about your message—not about you or your set.* Keep that in perspective.

OFFENDER #5: If you're still doing a talk show format with a monologue, a live band, and interviews. The comedy greats like Carson, Leno, Letterman and others have taken control of that territory, and plenty of others—especially in late night programming—are following in their footsteps. So let's look at another approach. For some mysterious reason, certain Christian broadcasters think this format is sacred, and have tried it over and over and still haven't succeeded. But by contrast, Oprah, Dr. Phil, Glenn Beck, and plenty of others have all done successful interview programs without the need of a live band, monologue, or the other trappings of late night TV.

Be bold. Be innovative. Stop copying other people and explore the right format that will showcase your gifts and talents—not look like someone else.

OFFENDER #6: If you're still building altars of prayer requests people have sent in. It's done for one reason—to impress the audience with numbers. If the audience can see that thousands of people responded, and the evangelist has built an altar from the requests, then maybe I should send in mine as well (and include a check.) As most of these points I'm listing indicate, this was started by well meaning people with the best of intentions. Truth be told, it was probably a

good idea once. But when it's done over and over, it simply loses it's meaning.

An older generation was touched by big, expansive gestures, but a younger generation sees it for what it is—excessive manipulation.

Anytime you use an idea like this, make sure you're sensitive to the issues of manipulation and exploitation. As I'll say over and over throughout this book, we're creating media for a generation that's been sold to, marketed, and branded all their lives, and they're the most media savvy generation in history. Be very careful that even with a well-intentioned idea, that it's not perceived as a gimmick or publicity stunt.

OFFENDER #7: Finally, if the singing group on your program is called "The (insert name here) Singers." I think this idea when out about the time of *Lawrence Welk* or *The New Christy Minstrels*. In junior high I was in "The New Creation Singers." In seventh grade it was cool. It's not now. The (insert TV evangelist name) Singers. You get it. Enough said.

The list of religious media indiscretions could continue, but you get my point. The production styles, creative ideas, fashion, or techniques that worked yesterday don't always work today. Please remember that in listing these particular offences, I'm not commenting on the intentions or integrity of particular ministries who are still trying these worn out methods. I have the greatest respect for anyone trying to share their faith with the culture. But I'm commenting on the need to stop kicking a head horse, and start looking at a new method of transportation. Our job as communicators is to see the changes coming in the culture and adapt, so our message is as relevant now as it was yesterday—and will still be tomorrow.

A Heart for Iraq's Children

During the height of the Sunni/Shiite clash, Jeremy and Jessica Courtney moved their family to war-torn **Iraq**—to sell shoes. Now they're using the 3,000-year-old Kurdish footwear business as a way to provide lifesaving medical care to Iraqi children.

Klash shoes inspired Jeremy Courtney of the Preemptive Love Coalition (PLC) to launch "Buy Shoes, Save Lives." As a result, some cobblers sell the woven shoes on international markets to help fund the children's care.

The effect of chemical warfare, poor prenatal care, malnutrition or intrafamily marriage has caused tens of thousands of Iraqi children to have a common birth defect: literal holes in their hearts.

"These kids broke our hearts," says Courtney, executive director of PLC and a musician, songwriter and businessman. "We determined to start an organization that would address their need for surgery and provide them with hope and a future."

The Miracle of Hanukkah

Hanukkah is celebration is known in the Jewish calendar as the Festival of Lights, but the word "Hanukkah" literally means "dedication" in Hebrew and comes from how the temple was

rededicated to God.

The Lord promised to make Israel “a light to the nations” (Isaiah 49:6). Yeshua said of Believers, “You are the light of the world ... Let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven” (Matt. 5:14-16).

We have seen single mothers who emigrated from Ethiopia telling their children, as they receive your gifts, that people half the world away love them. Elderly Holocaust survivors have told us that receiving winter blankets and heaters from donors outside of Israel has helped them to learn how to trust non-Jews again. Young IDF soldiers without any family in the country are as brave as any Maccabee, but they can be terribly lonely. When they put on the backpacks that you have donated, a funny thing happens; rather than being weighed down, they appear to carry their burdens more lightly.

As I think about the miracle of Hanukkah, how only a tiny amount of oil proved sufficient to light the great Menorah in the Temple for eight days until more help could be found, I think of how those of you who have stood by and supported Israel are the inheritors of that same miracle. There are only a few faithful compared to the great need, and so it is miraculous how much your love and faith has accomplished.

There are many still left in darkness—the darkness of poverty and the darkness of despair. We all have much more work to do to fulfill Yeshua’s high calling. So, as we celebrate this year, let us expect miracles. Know that with every gift you send to Israel, “Light is sown like seed for the righteous and gladness for the upright in heart” (Psalm 97:11). That is a Festival of Lights worth celebrating!

Barry and Batya Segal are co-founders of Vision for Israel.

We Will All Stand Before God

And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works.

—Revelation 20:12, KJV

Should Franklin Graham Repent for Mormon Comments?

It's no secret that Franklin Graham once described himself as the prodigal son—but why is an obscure pastor calling on the son of one of America's most beloved evangelists to repent now?

“Graham is misleading Christians to vote against scripture for Mormon Mitt Romney,” says Steven Andrew, president of USA Christian Ministries. “God cannot bless us for betraying Jesus and voting for a non-Christian. No one comes to God except through Jesus—this includes the USA.”

Earlier this week, Graham told CBN Christians could vote for someone who is a Mormon. Andrew is calling on Graham to retract his statement.

“Yes, the fact that Mitt Romney is a Mormon doesn't bother me at all,” Graham said. “You can have the nicest guy and he can be a Christian and just wonderful but have absolutely no clue

as to how to run a country, you don't want that ... Mitt Romney is a very capable fellow, I know him. I know Newt Gingrich, another capable person. Michele Bachmann, a very capable lady. Rick Santorum, I like a lot, very gifted guy, a very sharp person and so there are some good candidates out there."

But Andrew is calling him out, saying Graham overlooked Scriptures like Exodus 18:21 and 2 Samuel 23:3 when he made his statements.

"Mormonism is secretive, recognizes none others and adds to the Bible. We can't have a president missing a true relationship with God. Do we want God to bless America?" Andrew asked. "We don't want Franklin to stop standing for righteousness. We respect Franklin and others and will respect them more when they repent."

Graham could not immediately be reached for comment.