

# Why Christians Desperately Need Better Movies

As a filmmaker, one of the quotes I live by is “the stories we tell shape the reality we live in.” I’m not sure who the source is or if they are a Christian, but I believe there’s a lot of biblical truth behind this concept. It’s why I’ve chosen to focus my career on making documentaries that depict real-life stories of unsung heroes of faith. As a believer, I know it can be challenging to find God-glorifying entertainment, but seeing real faith lived out is worth the effort.

Long before the health-guru community started saying, “you are what you eat,” the Bible stated this reality in more eloquent, accurate terms:

“Since we are encompassed with such a great cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us” (Heb. 12:1).

We all want to “run the race” well and be able to get rid of all the bad that entangles us. Well, in that same verse we see that we can run well “since we are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses.” The witnesses, or stories, we surround ourselves with affect our ability to thrive in life.

We should be selective with the entertainment we watch. Whether or not we believe it, we learn from and internalize the messages we witness. If what we see and read all day is about divisive news, political fighting or how other people are wrong, then that’s going to affect how we view everything. Our ability to enjoy the good things of life is directly related to the stories we take in. Personally, I want to experience hope and joy as much as possible, so I need stories

of goodness.

I've had the privilege of producing documentaries that depict real stories of real people doing real good in their communities in ways that inspire me not merely as a filmmaker, but as a Christ-follower. From homeless parents striving to provide a better life for their children, to an American family that left their comfortable lives to rescue people oppressed by war and terror as seen in *Free Burma Rangers* (which I had the opportunity to direct), these stories I get to share ground viewers and me in a permeating hope. The noise of negativity in the news cycle and social media can be deafening if we don't take time to tune it out and direct our attention to better stories. This isn't a matter of ignoring the evil that goes on in the world, but filling our minds with the noble, pure and good truth on which Christ called us to concentrate.

Documentaries are powerful because they can take us into places we would likely never travel, allowing us to meet people we otherwise wouldn't see and understand their ways of living. They're more than movies; they're an opportunity to gather around a screen with our family, learn about the world and be inspired by people who aren't just talking the talk but walking the walk.

Historically, the disciples learned how to follow Christ by literally following Him around and watching Him. Jesus never told the disciples to do anything they hadn't first seen Him do. They became mature disciples because they first saw Jesus living it out. But we see this in all of society, too. To become a high school teacher, you get to first go watch others teach. To become a doctor, you probably need to at some point watch a doctor do their work. To change your car oil, you can look on YouTube and someone will show you how to do it.

But with faith, we mostly just hear people talk about it. If faith is important to us, then we should all ask ourselves,

“Who am I watching live out faith? Or am I just listening to people talk?” We owe it to ourselves to find mature people of faith who can actually watch so we can learn what is possible. It’s to our benefit! And one of the amazing things about documentaries is that they allow viewers to, in essence, follow people around. Documentaries can help with your crowd of witnesses.

Uplifting entertainment doesn’t have to be inarticulate or predictable. Next time you want to watch a meaningful movie with your loved ones that will help you to relax while focusing on hope, put on a documentary of individuals doing good. Your reality will be shaped by the stories you tell and see—think about the shows and movies you watch most: Do they reflect a world in which you want to live? {eo}

**Brent Gudel** is an documentary filmmaker. His newest project, *Free Burma Rangers*, from *Lifeway Films* and *Deidox Films*, will release in theaters across the country as a two-night Fathom Event on Feb. 24 and 25.