

Film Capsules June 2015

To see the full review at the *Visual Parables* site, click onto the title of the films that are underlined.

[Love and Mercy](#)

Rated PG-13. Psalm 103:2-5; Jude 1:2.

Whether or not you are a fan of Brian Williams and The Beach Boys, this unusual biographical film has plenty of drama and Biblical resonance that you probably will enjoy it. It is unusual in that it focuses upon two major events in the composer/singer's life: the "young Brian" of the 1960s, played by Paul Dano, and "the older Brian" 20 years later, played by John Cusack. Shifting back and forth, the film shows Brian breaking away from surf music to create his own style, and Brian meeting at a Cadillac showroom Melinda Ledbetter (Elizabeth Banks), who will ultimately free him from the oppressive control of his therapist Dr. Eugene Landy (Paul Giamatti). Listen closely to the words of the song at the end that gives its name to the film, sung by the real Brian Williams.

[Tomorrow Land](#)

Rated PG-13. Ecclesiastes 3:19-21; Habakkuk 2:1-4.

Like his animated sci-fi film *The Iron Giant*, director Brad Bird's newest film explores important issues. Most recent sci-fi films project the future as a dystopia, thus serving as a warning about current trends in our society. This one, true to the vision of Walt Disney when he built his theme parks based on Tomorrow Land, sees the future as a possible utopia, if only we can "get it together." A young boy grown into a pessimistic man and a young girl still filled with optimism are brought together by another girl who turns out to be an

android. Lots of special effects in this film, but they support rather than overwhelm the human drama.

The Water Diviner

Rated R. 2 Samuel 1:27.

Because Australia lost so many of its youth in World War One's disastrous Battle of Gallipoli, this film, released on its hundredth anniversary, has fared better in that country than here. Russell Crowe directs and stars as the widower father who travels to Turkey to find out what happened to his three sons who fought in the same unit. Gifted with the ability to divine where precious water is located on his large farm, he uses that power when he searches the battlefield where hundreds died a few years before. Through flashbacks we see how savage the fighting was. There is, of course, a romance, and also a delightful boy who guides him around Istanbul. Best of all, there is a Turkish officer who also helps him, so that much of the film is from a Turkish viewpoint, rather unique.

Far From the Madding Crowd

Rated PG-13. Psalm 101:1-3.

Although purists prefer the 1967 version of Thomas Hardy's novel about a Victorian woman going against the custom and prejudice of the times, this version with its beautiful costumes, colorful cinematography, and excellent acting should please romantics and feminists. Carey Mulligan's Bathsheba Everdene is sought after by three very different men, but, given that her inheriting her uncle's large farm means she can support herself, sees no need of a man—at first. The scene when she tells those who doubt that a woman can run such a large by herself is alone worth the price of seeing the film, the confident young woman exclaiming, "I shall astonish you all!" I also recommend the earlier, much longer version because it includes more of the novel, thus providing more

details for a better understanding of the men who are drawn to her.

Where Hope Grows

Rated PG-13. 2 Corinthians 3:1-3

As some of you know, I am not a fan of faith-based films, most of them abandoning the subtlety of art out of (apparent) fear that viewers will miss the message. Writer-director Chris Dowling's is somewhat better, focusing more on the relationships of a failed, alcoholic baseball player with his teenaged, best friend, and a Bible-toting grocery store employee known only as Produce because that is the department in which he works. Produce is especially interesting due to his Downs Syndrome affliction, despite which the young man is able to affect for the good a number of people, including the father. The climax involving the daughter is overly dramatic, but still the film offers good entertainment value for families looking for "wholesome entertainment"—and they will long remember Produce, a most delightful character.

Iris

Rated PG-13. Matthew 6:28-29; Mark 10:15.

This documentary about NY fashion icon Iris Afert ought to be atonic for all sad souls feeling the blues over their age. At 93 Iris is still going strong, giving speeches and accepting awards, and still shopping in upscale stores and flea markets for more gewgaws to store in her apartment that looks like an overstocked clothing and gift shop. Although Christ might question her obsession with clothing and jewelry, I think he would applaud her child-like enthusiasm for life and beauty.

The Connection

Rated R. Psalm 7:9.

This French film covers the same 1970s campaign against drug lords that William Friedkin's classic crime caper *The French Connection* did, but from the French side. The two actors playing the cop and the drug lord are equally good, both showing dogged determinism—the one to bring down the criminal, even at the risk of losing his wife and children, and the other to maintain the lucrative trade that provides for the lavish lifestyle of his family. Both find that there is a high price to pay for their struggle.

[Mad Max: Fury Road](#)

Rated R. Genesis 6:11.

George Miller, director of the previous Mad Max films, revisits the post-apocalyptic era, minus Mel Gibson. This time Tom Hardy is Max, not so “mad” as haunted with visions of his dead wife and child. It is a time akin to that described at the opening of the Noah's Ark story, except that there seems to be no God to bring a flood to a parched Australia, now one vast desert wherein people have become so crazed for water that they might welcome a flood. The plot is basically one long chase crammed with ultra-violent encounters along the way. The best that I can say is that it does move fast!

On Video

[Good Kill](#)

Rated R. Ecclesiastes 4:1; Romans 7:24.

Thomas Egan has served six tours flying F-16s in Iraq, but now he sits half a day at a time in a trailer heading a team that kills the enemy long distance. The drone he “pilots” is thousands of miles away beaming video of Afghanistans identified as terrorists far below. When given the green light he launches a missile, usually at a house where the Taliban

have been meeting. Often, when other Muslims come running to rescue those trapped in the rubble, his team launches a second missile to “take them out” too. “Good kill,” he is told most of the time, but occasionally children who come near a target are also killed. This and other ethical concerns bother Egan and a female team member, so much so that his relationship with his wife and children are endangered.

[White God](#) (Fehér isten)

Rated R. Proverbs 12:10; Exodus 23:12; Isaiah 11:6.

Hungarian writer/director Kornel Mundruczo adds a canine apocalyptic touch to the familiar “boy and his dog” tale—or, in this case, a girl and her dog. The story that begins as two separate journeys in which the girl and her beloved dog that her father abandoned on the streets of Budapest ends with hundreds of dogs attacking anyone they can catch in the streets, but ends with a scene akin in spirit to that Isaiah 11:6-9.

[Slow West](#)

Rated R. Psalm 73:6; Psalm 91:2-3 KJV.

A naïve teenager leaves Scotland in search of the girl he loves, guided by a gunman who saves him from a Union soldier hunting down a Native American fleeing the village the soldiers have just torched. The girl and her father have fled to the American West because of a dead or alive reward for murder. The boy does not know about the reward on their heads, but the bounty hunter does, hoping the boy will lead him to his prey. Other ruthless men are also out to find the man and the girl, all their paths converging on a cabin in Colorado. There is lots of blood spilt along the way and at the climax, and a surprising redemption as well.

Peter and Paul

Not Rated TV Film. Romans 8:38.

Winner of two Emmys, this 1981 dramatization based on Acts and the Letters of Peter and Paul gives you your money's worth, clocking in at over 3 hours. There are a screen full of stars, with Anthony Hopkins as the apostle Paul, Robert Foxworth as Peter, plus John Rhys-Davies, as Paul's companion Silas; Herbert Lom as Barnabas; Raymond Burr as King Herod Agrippa I; Oscar winner Jose Ferrer as Gamaliel; Jean Peters as Priscilla; Julian Fellowes (yes, the one of *Downton Abbey* fame!) as the Emperor Nero; and Eddie Albert as Procurator Festus. Scriptwriter Christopher Knopf combines speculative material (much of it dealing with face to face encounters between Peter and Paul) with extensive episodes from the Book of Acts. Though curiously omitting the Pentecost story, the film includes the stoning of Stephen; Christ calling Saul on the road to Damascus, Peter and Paul's encounter in Jerusalem; their conflicts over whether or not Gentile converts had to be circumcised (with Paul later unaware that Peter had come over to his side); Paul and Barnabas's travels to Asia Minor and Greece; Paul's clashes with the Judaizer Christians; Paul's arrest and journey to Rome where he is well received by the city's Christians; Peter's decision to follow in Paul's footsteps to Rome; and their martyrdom in approximately A.D. 64. Plenty to contemplate—and a good film to see if you think the NBC miniseries *A.D. The Bible Continues* concentrates too much on Pilate and Caiaphas.

The DVD is available for \$14.99 (plus postage) or in a combo pack with two dramas, *A.D.* and The Bible Collection's *Paul the Apostle* for \$29.99.

Desert Dancer

Rated PG-13. Ecclesiastes 3:4; Jeremiah 31:4.

Set in Tehran during the unsuccessful Green Revolution, this is the story of a young man longing to dance despite the fundamentalist Muslim regime's strictures. Gathering some like-minded students at the University of Tehran to form a secret dance company, they decide to hold their first performance out in the desert. However, the morality police learn of the plan, though not the exact location. The "based on a true story" film, like Zorba the Greek and Charles Schultz's Snoopy, uses dance as a symbol of both the celebration of life and as a rebellion against all that would oppress that celebration.

Hope Bridge

Rated PG-13. Job 17:15; Romans 5:3-5.

The story of a teenager in search of the reason why his musician father committed suicide, this is a good film to show and discuss with youth the topic of self-destruction. Far better than most so-called faith-based films, the filmmakers do not preach, but instead teach through example. Also far better than the many films aimed at teenagers wherein the adults are stupid or clueless, and thus easily manipulated, the counselor and the mother are caring and supportive.