



The Stories We Tell: How TV and Movies Long for and Echo the Truth

Mike Cospers , Timothy J. Keller (Editor) , Collin Hansen (Editor)

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The average American watches 5 hours of TV every day.

Collectively, we spend roughly \$30 billion on movies each year.

Simply put, we're entertainment junkies. But can we learn something from our insatiable addiction to stories? Mike Cospers thinks so.

From horror flicks to rom-coms, the tales we tell and the myths we weave inevitably echo the narrative underlying all of history: the story of humanity's tragic sin and God's triumphant salvation. This entertaining book connects the dots between the stories we tell and the one great Story--helping us better understand the longings of the human heart and thoughtfully engage with the movies and TV shows that capture our imaginations.

The Stories We Tell: How TV and Movies Long for and Echo the Truth Details

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Author : Mike Cospers , Timothy J. Keller (Editor) , Collin Hansen (Editor)

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Kevin says

Not really what I was expecting. I'd hoped for something that could function as a tool to help sharpen discernment and more critically evaluate consumed media. Instead it seemed an exercise in how to watch as much crap as one can watch, and still try to artificially cram some element of creation-fall-redemption-consummation theme into it and, voila - it's redeemed and worthy for Christian consumption!

I read it with my teenagers and literally had to skip some sections due to their graphic/inappropriate nature (granted, the author did issue some advance warnings re: graphic comments and definite spoilers). I've enjoyed this author's blogposts on TGC and some of his movie reviews in the past, but was disappointed in this one. I plan to check out Grant Horner's work in the future (Meaning at the Movies) to see if it's closer to what I was looking for.

I gave it two stars rather than one, because it's not like a "didn't like it" at all - there certainly were some good parts (especially early on) and helpful concepts that I think we took away from it, namely, that everyone has some source of ultimate hope, and artists are putting that into their works. Identifying that hope and then comparing that to the true and better narrative would be a helpful solo exercise, but perhaps even better as conversation starters with nominal and non-believers.

Lee Button says

Pastor Cosper has tied the tales of TV and cinema together with mankind's longing for redemption. He has done it admirably. Stories of creation and fall and salvation and future glory are woven into the fabric of the movies and television we watch. I don't watch TV nor go to many movies but I knew the characters Cosper describes and the plots he summarizes. I believe he is fair with the facts and personal with his application. (His own life being affected.) This book is a window into our culture.

Melissa says

I adored this book and found myself underlining/highlighting like a crazy woman, making numerous connections to literature that also echoes the Truth of Scripture. Cosper uses engaging examples that help TV and movie lovers see that all truth is God's truth and the grandest story of all is the Creation/Fall/Redemption story.

Logan says

Let me first say this: if you're looking for a book about what a Christian should and should not watch, this is NOT that book. If you're looking for a book that will challenge you to actually engage and interact with the shows and films you entertain yourself with, you're in the right spot.

I may be giving this book an extra star but I really enjoyed, and was challenged, by Cospers writing. Regardless if the shows he used for parallels were "Christian-okay", he does a great job of highlighting how various themes echo what took place in Eden, our current state before God, and our innate desire for peace and justice. Though, the lack of Breaking Bad references was disappointing.

His final word to aspiring Christian filmmakers is spot on in that he urges Christians to craft a good story, make plenty of bad movies to learn from, but to ultimately do all to the glory of God.

Annie Kate says

Every culture has its stories. Our Western culture's stories are, more and more, presented in movie form. So, for us and our children to engage the culture, we need to consider movies, both the ones we watch and the ones we don't watch.

However, because we Christians are part of God's much greater culture, we also need to understand our culture's stories in the light of God's truth. This is especially important because the emotions involved in stories often allow an author's ideas to slip into our minds unnoticed.

...

Any movie could be used to point to the gospel, and I think this insight is the heart of the book. But we should also not forget Cospers caution: "We think we're merely being entertained, but the power of story is being used to frame the way we think about love, marriage, sex, children, war, peace, nationalism, and more."

...

I recommend this book to all Christians—movie buffs, parents, mature young people, homeschoolers, and anyone working with youth, outreach, or ideas.

...

You can read my complete review on my blog.

Josh says

A good book overall. The basic premise is that traces of the biblical narrative of creation, fall, redemption, and consummation, can be found in every story we tell. A bit repetitive at times in illustrating that point, but still interesting overall.

Brad Peters says

Cosper is a good writer and this book reads well. His intent with this work is clear, and for what it is, he achieved it. The author's thesis is that the glimpses of the gospel and Truth is woven into the stories we tell

and watch and without question, Cosper weaves that strand of analysis throughout the whole work.

The book for me was difficult in the sense that he spends a large portion of his book describing the story lines, characters and plot twists of the movies and television shows he includes. Unfortunately for me, the book ended up reading much like when one bumps into a friend who proceeds to go on for some time describing in great detail the movie they saw last weekend. Cool ... unless you haven't seen the movie. Then, you smile and nod and say, "hey, that's great...." But you really don't know what they're talking about. I found myself skimming multiple pages of each chapter as they were consumed with descriptive narratives of movies or TV shows I haven't seen. (Full disclosure, I don't watch a lot of TV or movies, but given Cosper's ravenous, lifelong addiction to consuming video entertainment, I'm not sure there are many people could hang with his ability and commitment to watching a lot of TV and film.)

That said, when he did get around to analysis it was solid, I just wished there was more of it. He begins with a disclaimer for Christians who might wonder why or how he can match his appetite for Hollywood with scriptural admonition to put our minds on whatever is "pure, right and lovely" and I found his answer to that likely critique nuanced and flavored somewhat by grace and spiritual maturity, though I would disagree with the wisdom of taking the liberty to pour over some of the material he does, hoping to find a nugget of truth in a pile of mulch.

Cosper divides the book into genres of film and story, and again, unless you've seen the films that he devotes almost full chapters describing in copious detail, my sense is you'll be as lost as I was. To point, when he dug into TV shows or films I have seen I was able to track along nicely.

His closing is solid and he weaves a thoughtful pairing of the rise of social media and "reality TV" which I felt was insightful ... and an example of what I thought the entire book would be like. Alas it wasn't, and the book felt like a "well you had to be there..." tale of films and TV shows that frankly, I'd suggest are a waste of time even if you could wring from their sordid story lines a few drops of living water. Ironically, he quotes CS Lewis's famous line from *The Weight of Glory* about "making mud pies in a slum and passing on a holiday at sea ... being far too easily pleased." I wonder of the consumption of some of the popular culture he cites in this book is an example of being far too easily pleased.

I don't know, but this is the life Cosper has led and he's tried to offer some truth from the countless hours/days/decades he has spent in front of a screen. Perhaps that is the redeeming value underlying the Stories He's Told.

Evan Knies says

What a book! Wow

Alisa says

My hubby teaches a worldviews class at a Christian high school and uses movies to show what the different "isms" look like in our culture. Because movies are the primary vehicle for philosophies to reach the general public today, we are movie nerds. We watch all the special features and are familiar with directors, producers, and film companies. We also read a lot of books on movies and the movie-making process.

Cosper did a good job of putting the love of movies thru the grid of faith. Looking at the why of it all - why does this movie/TV show resonate? Why do we enjoy this? And the most basic question of all: Why do human beings tell stories? I not only enjoyed this book, I profited from reading it.

Courtney Huskisson says

I primarily enjoyed this book, because this is exactly what goes through my mind anytime I watch movies or TV shows.

Movies and TV have always been the best way to 'take a temperature' on the 'state of the culture'. It's hard to say if we reflect our entertainment or if our entertainment reflects, but no matter how symbiotic that relationship is, entertainment is a window into the soul of our culture. The most intriguing part about entertainment is that you not only witness the depravity you expect there but you see the longing for the gospel.

Our culture wouldn't say it in such words, we long for love, heroes (messiahs), and happy endings. Even in cases where the 'ideal' isn't portrayed because of cliché, it seems mainly to be a bitter reaction that points out 'things are not the way they should be'.

For me, entertainment has been a great launching point to dialogue with those who do not have a Christian world view. Even those of varying beliefs can engage in a piece of entertainment together and realize their longings are the same.

I would highly recommend this to people who haven't considered these aspects of entertainment before. It's a good eye-opener for those who don't typically look past the surface of a story.

Matt B. says

In "The Stories We Tell", Mike Cosper looks at major biblical themes and translates them through the lenses of current television and movies. The book is not a guide to what shows echo specific themes such as the fall or creation. What it does is seek to guide the reader towards viewing these programs with an eye towards recognizing the human story and condition in the art we consume on a daily basis.

I enjoyed reading Cosper's connections between television shows and movies to the major themes. Even though the format became a bit redundant, the stories and perspective he offers is worth the effort and time. If you enjoy reading about popular culture and how it relates to the bigger narrative of life, you will enjoy this book.

I agree with Cosper's conclusion that we need more Christians in the entertainment industries. A biblical worldview needs to be present and visible, whether the movie or television program is "Christian" or not. We need the truth spoken in the dialects of culture that we can, and these are the most visible and consumed types.

Geoff Petrie says

Very approachable and easy to read. Mike echoed the kind of ideas that I've had since I was a little kid. That all stories and narrative are broken fragments of what's made whole in the gospel of Jesus Christ. I loved how he used most of my favorite tv shows and movies as references to explain my great God and how I can see God in the TV and Movies that I watch. But also that that doesn't mean that I have a license to watch whatever I want.

Patrick says

I read this book alongside a similar book, Grant Horner's *Meaning at the Movies*. Both books compare and contrast movies with themes from the Bible, arguing that every human being, whether they realize it or not, has an inborn yearning for God, who is best known through the Christian gospel. Cospers focuses on similarities, while Horner focuses on differences (one of Horner's major arguments is that although we know the truth about God deep down, we consciously or subconsciously suppress it, and that this is evident in the stories we fashion). Both books were enjoyable to read side-by-side.

Matthew Mitchell says

Fascinating exploration of how the BIG story that we're living in is expressed in television and movies. Cospers is not saying that all culture is redemptive, no, instead he's saying that cultural products can't escape telling stories that yearn for and echo the True Story, no matter how twisted or diminished they are.

Cospers writes about many shows that I couldn't watch in good conscience and also wish that had never been produced, but he sees them with a clear biblical lens. I profited from every well-written chapter, especially the chapter on "frustration."

This is must-reading for anyone who wants to produce culture (Christian filmmakers, I'm looking at you!) and good reading for Christian adults who want to think about what they are taking in and make connections to the biblical storyline in which we are currently in the middle. Recommended to be read with discernment and to develop discernment.

Barry says

Very insightful. I guess I need to read Rhythms of Grace next
