

The Sherwood Method:
Creating an Independent Christian Feature Film

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Abstract

This thesis will define the Sherwood Method for creating independent Christian feature-length films by researching the success of the film *Facing The Giants* (2006) produced by Sherwood Pictures. In order to understand the method, the essay has laid out the definitions of key words such as film, independent film and Christian film, and the background of the film industry. It also chronicles the formation of Sherwood Pictures and its effect on the film business. Finally the essay will break down what the key elements of the Sherwood Method are and how Christian filmmakers can use them in their future projects.

Chapter 1

Introduction

First Samuel 17:48-49 (New International Version) reads, “As the Philistine (Goliath) moved closer to attack him, David ran quickly toward the battle line to meet him. Reaching into his bag and taking out a stone, he slung it and struck the Philistine on the forehead. The stone sank into his forehead, and he fell facedown on the ground.”

It would only be appropriate to start this essay with the modern day application of the Biblical story of David versus Goliath. Hollywood is the giant, Sherwood Baptist Church is David and a small film called *Facing The Giants* (2006) is the stone. Though it is not an exact replication of the Biblical story because Hollywood did not fall, the film managed to make Hollywood less intimidating and seem less giant to the Christian film industry.

Michael Catt and Alex Kendrick had a vision of facing off with the Hollywood giants. Catt, the senior pastor of Sherwood Baptist Church in Albany, Georgia, believed that his church could “touch the world from Albany, Georgia” (Biography of Michael Catt). The stone that this South Georgian David was preparing to slingshot at the Hollywood Goliaths was a film directed by associate pastor of Sherwood, Alex Kendrick. Alex and brother Stephen Kendrick orchestrated an independent film, *Facing the Giants* (2006), which was undoubtedly Christian, yet could compete on secular screens and with what

Hollywood had to offer. The innovativeness of the film is what led to its success on the big screen.

Facing the Giants (2006) is not the first independent, low-budget film to be successful against the powerhouse Hollywood-produced blockbusters. It is however one of few faith-based films to garner success at the box office. Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ* (2004) is another recent religiously based movie to create a stir in the entertainment film business. These two films do however, differ in content; *The Passion* could be viewed as more of an historical account of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, while *Facing the Giants* (2006) is the modern day application of Christian beliefs that people can relate with and compare to their own lives.

The film is not your run of the mill production that Hollywood pulls off its assembly line. *Facing the Giants* (2006) is an unconventional movie that few producers would consider signing on to do because it does not deal with the blockbuster themes that are making millions of dollars in theaters today such as sexual themes and violence. However, *Facing the Giants* (2006) was a multi-million dollar success which is huge not only because of the small budget the producers had to work with, but also because of the limited number of screens available for the film. That leads me to ask: why did *Facing the Giants* (2006) prove to be a box office success? What were the key elements that when brought together put this film in a position for success? And finally, how can future Christian filmmakers study those elements and apply them to their future

projects as a way to create a successful independent American narrative feature film?

This essay is a study of the success achieved by Alex Kendrick's *Facing the Giants* (2006). In order to study how well this movie did in theaters and with DVD sales, it will first attempt to display what made this film so successful that it could compete with the larger film companies. Many other things had to go right for the crew of the film in order to get the film into theaters and in front of an audience. They had to find a way to fund the movie, they had to write a script and they needed cameras, actors and sound people, among others, in order to put the actual film together. They also had to find distributors that would take a chance on a small, independent film and find screens to show it on. How did all of these things come together just right so that Sherwood Pictures could successfully battle the Hollywood norms and prove that there are other options available?

The goal of this essay was to talk to the main players in the creation of this film. Through phone interviews and published research, I explored how they found actors that would participate, where they were able to get the money and resources for the film and how they effectively used both. I studied where the original idea stemmed from and why they chose the idea of a high school football team rather than a Biblical story like Mel Gibson chose to portray in *The Passion of the Christ* (2004). After researching what makes a successful independent film and speaking with the people behind the film, it gave a better sense of how such a low profile film could be as successful as it was and generate as much

profit as it did. The study will also include why the filmmakers avoided Hollywood and just stuck to facing those giants from back home in Albany, Georgia. And last, I asked if they would consider Hollywood for future projects?

Before getting too far into this subject, I want to be specific as to what kind of Christian films I have studied in this paper. The films I focused on are not just any film that has ever been released with the Christian label, but rather Christian films released to the secular markets, which were able to compete against Hollywood films in the box office. There are many more films that are released but never find their way out of church basements and social halls. Even though those films do have the Christian label, they are not relevant to this study because they did not compete for secular screens. The purpose of this study is to show how to create a film that can compete on secular screens, so that is the reason I have left the smaller films out of this essay.

As stated earlier, the theme in *Facing the Giants* (2006) is unlike traditional American narrative feature films. It is clearly a Christianity-based film in which the purpose is to teach the viewers how to apply Christian ideas to their everyday life and its lesser purpose is to entertain. Entertainment is just the secondary theme of the film and did not involve what Hollywood would characterize as entertaining; there are no car crashes, shootouts between the cops and the mafia or beautiful women dancing around in next to nothing. The extent of the violence is the impacts of high school football players. The extent of actors wearing next to nothing would be the high cut shirts of the football players in the locker room. The film is not a romance film between two good-looking

people who the culture says are meant for each other. It is a love story between God and His children on Earth. And even though there are a few comedic moments, neither Will Ferrell nor Jim Carrey would probably consider taking a role in the film if offered.

The success of independent films of the past was studied in order to see what worked for *Facing the Giants* (2006). The target audience is a main reason for the success of the film. The producers had a certain audience in mind for the film and when they could reach them then the movie would be a success. The church has played a big part in Christian films. It contributed to the high attendance of *The Passion* (2004) and on the other hand, it also boycotted films they felt went against their values, like *The Golden Compass* (2007) causing a lower than expected turnout. Producers were disappointed with the turnout to *The Golden Compass* (2007) and the church should receive a lot of credit for refusing to attend and educating others about the subtle messages of the film (McClintock, 2007). The church deserves a lot of credit for *Facing The Giants* (2006) not only supporting the film at the movie theater, but because the film was made by the church itself. And in this thesis, it will be evident how important Sherwood Baptist Church was in the creation and success of *Facing The Giants* (2006).

Pastor Michael Catt believed he could reach the world about Jesus from his church in Albany, Georgia. Not only did he make that bold statement, but also he did everything possible to achieve it. He began serving at Sherwood Baptist Church in 1989, and since then he has been able to achieve that vision in

many different ways. Since taking the helm of the church, he and his congregation have built a strong regional television network, The Sherwood Channel. The channel broadcasts out of the church on Mediacom and reaches more than 50,000 homes in the Albany area. They broadcast their worship services, original programs as well as concerts throughout the year. In addition to the channel, Sherwood has TV and radio ministries that span overseas and reaches thousands of viewers (Sherwood Media, 2006).

The most significant addition to the media department at Sherwood since the arrival of Catt is Sherwood Pictures. *Flywheel* (2003) was the first feature-length motion picture to premiere from Sherwood Pictures. It opened in a theater in Albany where it spent six weeks before moving to other theaters in Georgia. Since then it has been featured on numerous Christian television networks such as TBN, INSP and Faith TV. The DVD sales for *Flywheel* have surpassed 40,000 units since hitting the shelves (Sherwood Media, 2006).

Sherwood Pictures' first real success came with *Facing the Giants* (2006). A film, which had a budget of \$100,000, has gathered in more than \$10 million in theaters. The same is true in DVD sales. Sony Pictures bought the distribution rights to the film and the success has continued for the small production company from Georgia. Within the first two months of DVD sales, more than 600,000 units were sold raking in another \$10.5 million (Box Office Mojo).

Could *Facing the Giants* (2006) just be a unique phenomenon or is it only the beginning of a battle between independent Christian film and the industry

giants in Hollywood? The success from *Facing the Giants* (2006) has been greatly surpassed by Sherwood's third feature length film *Fireproof* (2008), gaining more than \$33 million in domestic theaters and was in the top 15 in DVD sales for the first month of its release, including its opening week at number 5 (Box Office Mojo). So, obviously, their method seems to be working.

Christians have been able to excel in other forms of media, but film is still one they have yet to fully embrace. Christian literature has always been able to compete with the secular literature. Contemporary Christian music has also been able to change with the progressive culture and held their own against other secular recording companies. The same can be said for the Christian radio industry.

Christian radio has found a way to become an everyday part of listeners' lives as a self-sufficient medium. Everything a person would need from a station, they can get from Christian radio. The listener receives local and world news, traffic, weather, entertainment along with a message from just one station; there is no need to switch to secular stations to get your everyday information.

The only media that Christians are lacking would be television and film. While there are many Christian television stations throughout America, none of them can compete with the ABC's and the NBC's because a person cannot just live off of watching a Christian station and stay informed with their needs, especially local needs. Viewers do not get local news, traffic or weather from Christian television that they can from secular stations. The other medium that

has failed to compete with the secular counterpart is film. We might be in the early stages of the rise of Christian film, a few recent movies have received some attention at the box office.

Since turn of the millennium, there has been a rise in Christian films from Hollywood. If for no other reason, Hollywood has found that Christians have money and they are willing to spend it. *The Passion of the Christ* (2004) and *The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (2005) are two of the most recent Christian-themed films that Hollywood has found success with. Those are examples of films coming from within secular companies. What about Christian films that are trying to combat Hollywood from the outside? *Facing the Giants* (2006) and *Fireproof* (2008) are great examples of that kind of film. Not only will Christians spend their money to see historical account films that has their values implanted in it, but they will also pay to see a modern day application movie in which they can learn how to apply the teaching of Jesus Christ and the Word of God into their own lives. Secular Hollywood has given many historical accounts of the Bible such as *The Passion* (2004) and *The Ten Commandments* (1956) but tends to shy away from the modern day application-type movies.

If nothing else, *Facing the Giants* (2006) proves that there are David's in the world, armed with nothing more than a slingshot and a faith in God, that are not afraid to square off with the Goliaths of the Hollywood. The process used to create the film is unique and for the rest of this thesis will be referred to as the Sherwood Method because of its origin at Sherwood Pictures. By the end of this essay, Christian filmmakers will understand the Sherwood Method and be able to

apply it to their projects, giving them a chance to duplicate the success of Michael Catt, Alex Kendrick and the rest of the people involved with Sherwood Pictures.

Chapter 2

Methodology

The purpose of this essay is to explain one of the ways to write, produce and finance a Christian film separate from Hollywood. The project that is the main focus of this thesis is the Alex Kendrick's 2006 film, *Facing the Giants*. A church in southern Georgia produced the movie at every step of the process, from raising the money, to finding actors, to shooting locations, to final edits. Compared to the Hollywood blockbusters, this film cost a small price to produce but was successful at the box office and in video sales. In the record books, it has proven to be one of the most financially successful independent Christian films in history. The film has different qualities to it, which makes it a unique study.

The reason I chose to study the film *Facing the Giants* (2006) over all other Christian-themed films is because of its unique qualities. For one, it was backed by a church that gave the filmmakers most of the resources necessary to film the movie. Secondly, the plot characteristics are different than most of the other Christian-themed movies that gained respect and made money both at the box office and in sales. Most of the other films are historical accounts of the stories from the Bible, while *Facing the Giants* (2006) is a modern day Bible story told through something that most Americans could relate to, football. Last, the producers set up a formula for production with their first film and have followed it throughout all of their films.

In this essay, I conducted a historical-critical study of Sherwood Pictures and the film *Facing The Giants* (2006). I modeled my methods off of the writings of Raymond Tucker, Richard Weaver and Cynthia Berryman-Fink's definition of what historical-critical research is. For it to be a historical-critical research, Tucker, Weaver and Berryman-Fink say it must meet these three requirements. 1. This thesis should show why things developed the way they did. 2. Compare this movie to other movies in its genres of independent Christian film. 3. To indicate a judgment of worth, meaning how effective as opposed to how ineffective. Using this method, I reconstructed the past in a systematic and objective manner by collecting evidence, evaluating it, verifying it and synthesize it to establish facts and reach defensible conclusions (Tucker, Weaver, Berryman-Fink, p 67-69, 1981).

Another characteristic of historical-critical research is using first and second hand information (Tucker, Weaver, Berryman-Fink, p 79, 1981). Through researching second hand documents, such as magazine, journal and newspaper articles, I came up with questions to discuss with the producer and director of the film. I interviewed them first hand in order to clear up any questions that were not answered by second hand sources and to confirm the information I had already gathered.

Tucker, Weaver and Berryman-Fink say using this method of research states that the research should criticize the document through the researcher's own interpretation (Tucker, Weaver, Berryman-Fink, p 80, 1981). I spent about 15 pages analyzing a scene of the film *Facing The Giants* (2006) and why the

scene worked through technical criticism and through just visualizing the scene on the screen and using previous research to critic movements and positioning.

To achieve that method of research for this essay, I had to take those elements of the historical-critical method and make my own outline for putting that method to use. In order to do so, with all of my information, I decided to set up the essay in the following way because it would present the information in an order that is easy to follow and it would align closely with the historical-critical method that I used.

I defined all of my important terms using articles resources written by scholars and experts in the field of motion pictures. I showed what kinds of characteristics define what an American narrative feature film is, what independent film is and then Christian film. I also defined why I set *Facing The Giants* (2006) apart from other Biblically based films such as *The Ten Commandments* (1956) and *The Passion of the Christ* (2004).

After defining my important terms for my paper, I supplied research showing makes independent films so successful. In the past, independent films have faired very well at the Oscars and the rise of film festivals has sparked a new interest and popularity for the lower budget, artsy films. I showed how they manage to compete with the higher budget blockbusters that come straight from Hollywood with the huge distribution reach of Disney and Sony.

Then came research as to how Christian and Biblical films have done in the past. I researched the success of films that portray Biblical reenactments on

the big screen, more historical films and see how they compare with their secular historical counterparts. Next, I focused on films that have Christian application embedded in their plots to see how they have fared against the secular films.

I presented all of my important terms defined by past interpretations of the words, comparing independent and both categories of Christian films to the mainstream, high profile film, I dug deep into the construction of the film *Facing the Giants* (2006) itself. I presented research into where the resources and ideas for the film came from. I showed how the actors were chosen from, what their beliefs are and if they contradict the characters beliefs in the film. I presented how the money was raised for the film to actually get filmed. I gave insight into how the ideas were chosen for the themes of the film. Last, I questioned if there was any Hollywood involvement what-so-ever in the film. To get all of these answers, I searched all of the literature I could find about *Facing the Giants* (2006) and I conducted interviews with two key figures in the film, director Alex Kendrick and executive producer Jim McBride.

The first figure that I interviewed is Alex Kendrick. Alex played the most significant role in the film. He was the director, a writer, the lead actor and one of the producers. He and his brother shared the idea for the film. I had the most questions to ask to Alex. The list of questions for Alex included, how was he and his fellow producers able to collect the funds for the filming of the movie? How did he find his actors and did their religious beliefs play a role in choosing who would be in the film? Was there a particular reason why he wanted to make the film independent and stay away from a Hollywood interest in it? With the great

success of his current film, would he consider heading to Hollywood now that he has proven himself as a filmmaker? Why is it important to stay away from the giants of Hollywood? What are the key elements that fell into place perfectly to produce a film that was so successful and yet had such a small budget and such limited resources to work from? Why did he choose to write an application-based film over the more successful Biblically historical films? Why did he choose to tell the story of a high school football coach struggling with money, job and home issues instead of telling a story that was already written in the Bible? What were his intentions for the film before he even saw the first dollar to shoot it? What role did the church play in the making of the movie? How did he manage to overcome the problem of distribution? And why was his film was able to gather so much support around the nation?

The second figure that I discussed the film with was Jim McBride. Executive producer of the film and executive pastor, McBride played a major role in the birth of the Sherwood Pictures, the production company of *Facing The Giants* (2006). McBride gave a lot of insight into the involvement of the church in the production process for the film. While Kendrick supplied information about the writing and directing side of the film, McBride had more information about finding resources for the film including money, sets, actors, equipment, etc. McBride also gave a lot of insight on the “Big Four” system and the formula they used to put the film in a spot to succeed.

At the end of this study on the film *Facing the Giants* (2006), I gave Christian filmmakers a look at what needs to go into a Christian film in order put

their films a position to succeed using the Sherwood method. Using these methods will help Christian filmmakers to gain enough knowledge on the step by step approach to be able to find the proper funds, actors and resources, the nurturing of ideas and the process by which you put a film together to have a product professional enough to compete with the giant film studios that monopolize the film industry not only in America, but in most of the world.

Chapter Three

The History of Moving Images

Before delving into a discussion of *Facing The Giants* (2006), it is important to give some background information about the history of moving images. Since *Facing The Giants* (2006) does fall into the category of film, it would be appropriate to set up how the industry began and elaborate on some key dates and some figures in the history of film. There are key dates that helped birth and transform the moving image to what we currently view it as today.

Film has a history that spans over a century and evolved from grainy, soundless seconds of people doing ordinary movements to high definition 3D cinema full of color, surround sound and special effects. It is a long and detailed history that could be written out in volumes of encyclopedias, so this essay will only focus on key moments in the history of moving images.

Film is a business; therefore it is constantly changing with the culture and technologies. When a new technology, like high definition, is invented, the business will usually have to change in order to utilize it. One reason for constant change is to keep the product fresh, new and ahead of the competition because the goal is to make money. The average budget for a feature independent film is around \$10 million (Safir, 2002), which includes films that are considered independent such as films produced by Warner Independent

Pictures, Paramount Vantage and Fox Searchlight Pictures, which are closely associated with Hollywood powerhouses studios. According to the Motion Picture Association of America, the average budget for a Hollywood feature film in 2006 was just over \$100 million (MPA, 2007).

The first sequence of photographs combined to make a moving image was by Eadweard Muybridge in 1872. Muybridge was hired to solve a bet of whether all four of a horse's hooves off the ground at the same time when it runs. The famous photographer set up a series of cameras triggered down a long path. As the horse ran by it triggered the cameras and fired the images. This sequence of images would be the birth of motion pictures (a horse does indeed have all four hooves off the ground while running) (National Museum of American History).

The term moving image is used because film was the beginning of television and now all films go to DVD and television, so even though the two are considered different media, they are closely related to one another. Today, we are considered to be in an era of media convergence, but media convergence between television and film has been alive since the birth of television.

One of the best examples of television and film is the sitcom *I Love Lucy* (1951). Before Desi Arnaz and his company, Desilu productions, most sitcoms were broadcast live to the bigger markets. During the broadcasting, a television would be set up in front of a film camera and the studio would film the live broadcasting from the television screen and keep that feed as stock footage and

send it to the smaller markets to be broadcast later. Arnaz had the idea to film his show like a movie with multiple cameras, then edit in postproduction in order to cut out mistakes and have a visually better quality product. This is just one example of how closely linked film and television are and why they can be studied together (Smith, 2008).

The history of moving images can be broken down into seven different years that span throughout the last two centuries. The reason why these years are so important is because moving images before each of these years were different than after each (Martin, 2009). So, these were pivotal years for the industry because drastic changes were made that helped film evolve into what it is today.

The First Era of Moving Images

One way movies differ from television is the size of the audience. Movies are viewed by a large number of people, usually in a public venue while television is more private with a small number of viewers. The first key date for film was in 1895 when, for the first time, a group of people paid money to watch a projected image. Brothers Louis and Auguste Lumiere created a movie projector that was lightweight and hand-cranked which they debuted to the paying public on December 28, 1895 in Paris, France. The show consisted of small documentaries under a minute that do not tell a story, but rather show people in real life situations. One of those is called *Workers Leaving the Lumiere Factory* (1895), in which the entire 46 seconds of film is a stationary camera watching

people walking out of the doors of a factory. Most of the Lumiere brothers' early films were this style of movie, no story just people being people (Dirks, 2008).

The Lumiere brothers began touring France, showing their 35mm films to anyone who would pay admission. While touring the countryside, the brothers found other opportunities to capture more footage. So not only were they filming, but they were also getting more footage with their lightweight portable camera (Martin, 2009). The brothers would produce more than 1,000 films during their years of shooting and traveling (Dirks, 2008).

Around the turn of the century, vaudeville was still dominating theaters, but films were slowly stealing some time on the stage. More and more films were being shown during the performances. Finally in 1897 Paris opened its first permanent theater. The first movie theater in the United States would not open for another five years in downtown Los Angeles (Dirks, 2008).

Two important films were released in 1903, *Life of an American Fireman* (1903) and *The Great Train Robbery* (1903). The importance of the films was not the subject matter but rather the editing. *Life of an American Fireman* (1903) use cutaways of firemen sliding down poles during the action sequence. As for *The Great Train Robbery* (1903), it was a sequence of shots that told a story cutting backwards and forwards in time, something that had never been done in a film (Martin, 2009).

Lighting became a point of emphasis during this era. Studios began using electric lighting to create sharper images. Animation was another area going

through many tests during the early 1900's; one of the earliest animated films was *Humorous Phases of Funny Faces* (1906). Studios were testing the use of color process in films around this same time. And, of course, sound on picture was a big area of focus in which Eugene A. Lauste first made possible in 1910; economic factors would prevent it from being adopted for another 17 years (Martin, 2009). The first era of film came to an end in 1914 at the start of World War I.

The Second Era of Moving Images

In 1915, Europe was in the process of change because of the First World War. Austria-Hungary had declared war on Russia and Serbia; Germany had declared war on Russia, Belgium and France before attacking England and bringing together the greatest war man had ever seen (PBS.org). Back in the States, America managed to stay out of the war to this point. The film business was healthy and beginning its own change. It was in 1915 that a Kentucky native and son of a Civil War hero would change the film industry forever. D. W. Griffith's film *The Birth of a Nation* (1915) was the first director to bring all of the elements of filmmaking together to produce a feature length (90 minutes or more) film (Martin, 2009).

Griffith began his film career as an actor and a playwright, acting in small roles for the Edison Company and Biograph. In 1908, Biograph put Griffith behind the camera to try his hand at directing some films for them. He excelled at directing, trying things no one in Hollywood had tried before like moving the

camera closer to his actors and showing different angles. Audiences were experiencing things they had never seen before at the theaters, helping Biograph become a highly popular studio. D.W. left Biograph in 1913 when the studio denied him the permission to make longer movies, so he partnered with Reliance-Majestic, producing companies for the Mutual Film Corporation. Griffith produced four films for his new company to fill his contractual agreements and raise enough money for a film he wanted to direct about the Civil War (David Wark Griffith, 1974).

That Civil War movie Griffith was saving his money for would turn out to be one of the more important films in the history of cinema. *The Birth of a Nation* (1915) cost Griffith more than \$110,000 (equal to about \$2 million today) to produce (Dirks, 2009) and filled 13 reels (15 minutes a reel). In an era when most films cost a dime to see, some theaters were charging \$2 for a ticket to Griffith's film, a record amount at the time. The film grossed around \$10 million (about \$185 million in today's dollars) in its initial run at the box office. But since the rights were sold in some states, exact figures are hard to calculate, some speculate the film could have generated more than \$100 million (\$1.85 billion in today's dollars) (Martin, 2009).

The film had many unique elements that came together to garner its success. The first was editing. Griffith came up with ways to leap in space, leap in time, create a mental leap (to show what a character is thinking) and create a symbolic leap. He constructed scenes using different shot types, such as close shots, medium shots and long shots. Griffith shot space as three-dimensional

as possible and experimented with creative lighting (Martin, 2009). All of these elements, among others, came together to help the movie become something unique and receive so much success at the box office. It was something people had never seen before.

This era saw the rise in comedy films, led by the Mack Sennett. *Tillie's Punctured Romance* (1914), starring Charlie Chapman, became the United State's first feature length comedy. Sennett directed more than 400 films and produced more than 600 (Mack Sennett, 2000). Chaplin went from earning \$150 a week to pulling in more than a \$1 million a year. Chaplin wrote, directed, produced and owned the rights to his own films, becoming the first international superstar and the first moviemaker to be acknowledged as a genius (Gale, 2005).

Film studios saw the benefit of making a big name actor and began the star system. Studios created and promoted these stars; agents would find young talent and mold them into stars, sometimes even changing their names and giving them a brand new image (Martin, 2009).

Film personnel began heading west. In 1910, Hollywood was home to 5,000 people, by 1920 that number rose substantially to 35,000. Film growth grew in California as well, as of 1915 Los Angeles and Hollywood accounted for 65 percent of all American-made films. One of the main reasons for moving west to Hollywood was because of the year-round good weather. The abundance of sunshine allowed studios to produce outdoor movies all months of the year,

which helped get more movies produced and since the film industry is a business, then the more films made, the more money earned (Dirks, 2008).

The Third Era of Moving Images

World War I was over and America was in a time of progress. One phrase commonly used for this decade was the “roaring twenties.” In 1927, America was two years away from the stock market crash and the Great Depression; so many Americans were enjoying life and living with no cares in the world. While the American people were being prosperous, so was the film business. This would be a big year for the film industry with the introduction of sound.

Warner Brothers made history with the release of *The Jazz Singer* (1927) because it was the first feature length to use synchronized sound. Audiences would no longer have to be interrupted with subtitles, but could finally listen to the voices of the actors while watching the screen (Dirks, 2008). Before sound, the reels would come with a score that a pianist would use to create music to background the film. Now films could not only create their own background music, but now audiences could hear the voices of their favorite film stars.

There were three methods to putting sound to pictures; two on film and the other was on disc. The advantages to using discs were the quality of the sound was much better than its counterparts. The disadvantages were that you would need two machines to operate the film and the sound. For film, you would only need one machine, but the quality of sound went down with this method (Martin, 2009).

The same year we got sound for our movies, we also got federal communications regulations. There is no limit to the amount of newspapers a company can print off; as long as there is paper, it can be used to print on. The same is not true for radio; there is only so much airspace for radio. A large radio station could buy a larger tower and broadcast a stronger signal at the same wavelength as a small station. This concern among others called for governmental regulation and the 1927 Radio Act did just that, regulated communication and instated the Federal Radio Commission, which would later become the Federal Communications Commission (FCC). The key assumptions of the 1927 Radio Act were licensing, limited the number of broadcasters to the number of available waves, the shift of power from broadcasters to the government and making stations be a “public interest, convenience and/or necessity” (Messere, 1997).

The Fourth Era of Moving Images

In 1939, the world was on the verge of another war, America was coming out of its greatest depression, Lou Gerig hung up his cleats for the last time (Schoenherr, 2007), the television debuted at the World’s Fair in New York and the film industry began its “Golden Age.” Tom Dirks, author of the website “Greatest Films” wrote that the year 1939 is “the most celebrated year in the history of film” (Dirks, 2008). Three huge films highlighted the year.

The first of the films to debut was the breakout performance for a future American star and directed by one of the most celebrated directors in American

history. The film was *Stagecoach* (1939) starring a young John Wayne and directed by John Ford who would go on to win best director at the Academy Awards four times in the next 13 years (John Ford, 2007). The significance of this film was the official introduction of the American icon, John Wayne.

The next film to hit screens was *The Wizard of Oz* (1939) directed by Victor Fleming and starring a young Judy Garland as lead Dorothy. The exploration of color made it one of the most visually appealing movies in history. Live-action color film was first introduced to audiences in the film *The Cat and the Fiddle* (1934) just five years earlier (Dirks, 2009). Fleming took that new technology and ran with it as far as he could, even the use of color in the script. The Dorothy wears ruby slippers on her trek down the yellow brick road to Emerald City where she is met by the horse of a different color (which changes color whenever there is a shot change). The film was a representation of the new technology.

The last of the important films is the Civil War epic and the year's Best Picture based off the best selling novel, *Gone With the Wind* (1939). Victor Fleming captured his only nomination and win as Best Director. The film won eight Academy awards, including the first film in color to ever win the coveted award for Best picture (Dirks, 2009). The film also remains at the top of the list for highest grossing films (adjusted for ticket price inflation), earning what would equal almost one and a half billion dollars (Box Office Mojo).

The era lasted until 1947, spanning just nine years. Of the films made during the era, 15 movies made the list of American Film Institute's top 100 of the century (AFI 100 Years...Top 100, 2009). The quality of films, directors and stars combined surpass any other era at a time when the world needed a form of relief from everything bad that was happening in Europe and in the Pacific. Films were able to take all of the negative energy in the world and make something positive from it.

Television was first introduced at the beginning of the era and towards the end of the era televisions began appearing in homes. The moving image was shifting from the big screen to people's homes, no longer was viewing the image just something for a large crowd, but was more individual. The rise of television would play a big role in the life of movies. The success and existence of film was fully dependent on the big screen until the introduction of the television. Another medium for film glorified and amplified the industry.

Television opened up the film market. Classic films went through re-release after re-release because there was nowhere else to see them, this meant that a portion of screen times were being filled with old movies and hindering newer, less acclaimed films from getting screen time or even being produced. Now that television was available, older films could make the shift to the small screens, opening up theater space for new movies. Television also gave neglected, lower budget films that did not make the cut for theaters a place to be displayed, which would later be called "made for TV movies."

The Fifth Era of Moving Images

The studios were experiencing great success, led by the big five, Paramount, Warner Bros, 20th Century Fox, MGM and RKO. The government implemented changes to the studio system in 1948. Studios had been in control of every aspect of film; from production to distribution. This resulted in the government stepping in and put a stop to the monopoly film studios had created in the industry.

Prior to the governmental intervention, studios had three branches and dominated the entire process of the movie industry. The studio owned the production side of the films, including finances and resources for the film. They were also the distributors of their movies, the agents between the production and exhibition of the film. Third, it was the exhibitors of the films or the owners of the movie houses. The studios monopolized the film industry because they were the owners of every level of the film process, making it nearly impossible for smaller companies to compete (Martin, 2009).

The Supreme Court intervened in 1948 in the *United States v. Paramount Pictures, Inc., et al.*, accusing top film companies of monopolizing and price fixing. The decision forced the studios to sell off one of their branches, production, distribution or exhibition (*United States v. Paramount Pictures, Inc., et al.*, 1948). All of the major studios decided to sell off exhibition, which means they sold off the movie theaters they had once owned and operated. The brush

with governmental control and the loss of theaters led to the weakening of the MPAA (Motion Picture Association of America) (Martin, 2009).

The golden years of film were gone by 1950 and television had stepped in as major competition. The early 1950's brought a huge decline in the number of movie theater patrons due to the popularity of television. Home entertainment had replaced regular visits to the local theater, dropping movie attendance 50 percent between 1948 and 1952. On average 90 million people paid to see a movie on screen each week in 1948 and just 45 million a week were enjoying the movies four years later. In 1948 there were 20,000 theaters compared to 16,000 in 1952. During 1953, there were 20 million television sets in the United States and a lot of people were glued to their couches and not in theater chairs (Rule, 1953).

The movie studio's first strategy against television was to fight it. Studios did not allow television to show any Hollywood films on television. Contract film stars, who were the most popular actors, were not allowed to pursue any acting opportunities for television. Studios even refused to buy any commercial time on television as a way to combat the new media (Martin, 2009).

Film's next move would be to use technical advantages to combat the black and white opponent, television. Theaters built larger screens to project a much bigger image that television could never be able to duplicate. Along with larger screens, color turned from a luxury to a norm, something that television sets at the time could not replicate. And last, film experimented with three-

dimensional images as a way to make the movie experience far better than the television one (Dirks, 2008).

Cinerama debuted in 1952 offering moviegoers a new experience with wrap-around screens. Theaters were fitted with three projectors shooting images on 146-degree screens and surround sound audio to make the audience feel like they were in the middle of the action. The first film released was *This is Cinerama* (1952), a travel film taking the audience to vacation spots around the world and on a roller-coaster ride. The appeal wore off and the high-cost of equipment ended the run of Cinerama in 1962 with the film *How the West Was Won* (1962) (Dirks, 2008).

In the same year Cinerama made its debut, 3-D films also tried to lure patrons out of their homes and back into theaters. Special 'stereoscopic' goggles had to be worn by audiences to make the action jump off the screen at them. But the goggles proved to be unpopular and made viewing blurry. The 3-D effect was also unable to compensate for the low level movies they produced, leading to the decline in attendance (Dirks, 2008).

Other things studios did to lure audiences back into theaters were Aroma-Rama and Smell-O-Vision. In 1959, Charles Weiss came up with the idea of pumping aromas into theaters through the air conditioning ducts to enhance the theater-going experience. Smell-O-Vision experimented with releasing odors from the theater chairs and later using scratch and sniff cards during films, both proved to be unsuccessful (Dirks, 2008). Drive in movies also burst on the scene

in the 1950's, doubling in number from 1945 to 1950. Studios also produced many big epics, westerns and musicals between 1948 and 1965. With the de-monopolized studios, independents began gaining more attention (Martin, 2009).

The Sixth Era of Moving Images

In 1966, the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) elected Jack Valenti as its new president. One of his first courses of action was to implement a rating system to movies based on the age of the audience in attempts to raise ticket sales, but the reverse happened, ticket sales fell. The first ratings were G (General audiences), M (Mature audiences, parental guidance suggested), R (restricted no one under age 16 admitted without an accompanying adult) and X (for those 16 years and older) (Dirks, 2008).

Soon after the M rating would change to GP (General Patronage) and the to PG (Parental Guidance suggested). The R rating would change to any persons under the age of 17, not 16 (Dirks, 2008). The PG-13 rating would enter the ratings system in 1984 to the movies *Gremlins* (1984) and *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* (1984). In 1990 the NC-17 rating would be used for the first time distinguishing pornographic films from artistic films featuring an abundance of nudity and profanity. The effects of ratings reduced ticket sales immensely, reducing by 40 percent from 1965 before Valenti was elected to 1969 when ratings took effect (Martin, 2009). As a historical reference, this was the same time more than 200,000 thousand Americans were in serving in Vietnam (Nelson).

Studios, to this point, were strictly owned and operated by movie people. It was still a business to them, but the movies' content were also very important because, from the top to the bottom, studios were people dedicated to the art of making films. In 1966, the system of pure movie studios would change when a car parts company would buy one the most prestigious moviemaking companies in Hollywood.

Gulf+Western, formerly Michigan Bumper Company specializing in car parts, bought Paramount Pictures in 1966, the first non-entertainment-specialized company would own a major studio. This was the beginning of the era of conglomerate take over of the movie industry. Paramount was only the first; the rest of the studios would eventually sell out to larger companies and become part of conglomerates. Some scholars like Bernard Dick, a professor of Communication and English at Fairleigh Dickinson University, believe studios went from powerful moviemaking machines to just merely a corporate commodity (Dick, 2001).

Television came to age during this era, adding color as a norm, which also posed problems for the movie industry. Sitcoms were becoming immensely popular; variety shows, such as *Laugh-In* and the *Ed Sullivan Show*, and westerns, like *Gunsmoke* and *Bonanza*, emerged as almost a third of all the sitcoms produced from 1962 to 1971. For the latter part of the era until 1976, comedy sitcoms garnered many of the top spots in ratings wars (Martin, 2009).

The Seventh Era of Moving Images

Last, we enter the modern era of the moving image, full of blockbuster fantasies and media convergence. From 1977 until today, we have seen a list of epic films, including the *Star Wars* and *Lord of the Rings* episodes. Also, new technologies like the VHS, digital video and the computer have allowed consumers to view moving images on different types of media, not just the television and theater screens.

The biggest blockbuster of them all would be the *Star Wars* episodes, the first of which was released in 1977. Four elements made the series become one of the biggest events in the history of film. The special effects used in the films far surpassed effects in earlier films making *Star Wars* more visually appealing than most before it. The films were some of the most heavily marketed in the history of the film industry. *Star Wars* helped put science fiction in the same categories as other classic movies. Last, it gave studios a homerun mentality, allowing them to ride the wave of one mega film for an entire year (Martin, 2009).

In the last few decades, starting with the VHS, media has converged giving us an abundance of alternatives to broadcast television and film in theaters. The Video Home System (VHS), first released by Sony in 1975 (Shiraishi, 1985), marked the beginning of convergence because it gave the audience the ability to customize their viewing experience. Instead of waiting for a movie to come on television, now we have the ability to watch it whenever we please. Today, the number of options has greatly increased, VCR's, DVD's, cable channels, video games and on-demand television.

Since *Star Wars*, special effects have become an area of interest for film studios, including animation. Pixar, formed in 1986 and formally owned by Apple co-founder Steve Jobs, began with simple computer generated designs, creating short films. With more advances in technology, the more complex projects it created. By the early 1990's, Pixar was developing commercials for companies such as Listerine and Pillsbury, along with teaming up with Disney for a few feature films. It went public in 1995 with the release of the first fully computer-animated feature film (Pixar, 2009). The success of *Toy Story* (1995) was enormous, becoming the highest grossing film of the year, and the third highest grossing animated film at its time. Now *Toy Story* (1995) sits as the 17th highest grossing animated feature (Box Office Mojo, 2009), proving the success of animation since the introduction of computer-generated animation.

Another characteristic of the current era of moving image is the rise in “fantastic” films, meaning science fiction, horror or fantasy films. On the “Greatest Films” list of top 100 American box-office hits (adjusted for inflation), 48 of the films came from the pre-1977 era and 52 from the current era. Of the 48, excluding Disney films, only four films were “fantastic,” *Jaws* (1975), *The Exorcist* (1973), *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* (1975), and *The House of Wax* (1953). In this era, all be ten of the films have been “fantastic” (Dirks, 2009).

This era has presented more opportunities for minority directors such as women, Hispanics and African Americans. Penny Marshall, Amy Heckerling and Katherine Bigelow have helped women gain more recognition as filmmakers. Mexican filmmakers Alejandro González Iñárritu [*Amores Perros* (2000), 21

Grams (2003) and *Babel* (2006)], Guillermo del Toro [*Hellboy* (2004) and *El Laberinto del Fauno* (2006)] and Alfonso Cuarón [*Y tu mamá también* (2001), *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* (2004), and *Children of Men* (2006)] have had great success in the American film market; all three has been nominated for Academy Awards (Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, 2009). African Americans Spike Lee [(*Do The Right Thing* (1989))], Keenan Ivory Wayans [*Scary Movie* (2000)] and John Singleton [(*Boyz in the Hood* (1991))] gave voices to a group of people who were not even allowed to star in films during American cinema's early years.

Today, film companies do not rely heavily on American box office numbers to produce revenue for their films. In fact, only five percent comes from the United States box offices, ten percent come from international box offices, 33 percent from television and 50 percent from home video (Martin, 2009). Theaters, which once was 100 percent of film revenues, only account for 15 percent today because of the convergence of media.

The cable industry has exploded since 1977 becoming more personalized and offering hundreds of options for viewing audiences. Cable television is in the majority of American's home, more than 59 percent. More than 400 channels are available (Martin, 2009) for subscribers ranging from Rural Free Delivery, featuring live cattle auctions to MTV Networks' Logo Channel, entertainment for lesbians and gays and anyone else who wants the gay point of view (Logo, 2008).

Conclusion

The seven eras presented in this chapter mark the changes in moving images. After each of the dates the movie and television industry were different than the way they were before. Whether it was a film that made a huge impact on the industry or if it was a change of leadership, the identity of the moving images would drastically change and never look the same.

The different eras brought in the advent of motion picture and the creation of the projector in 1895. In 1915, *The Birth of a Nation* (1915) brought in the second era of motion picture beginning the star system in Hollywood. Sound brought in the third era of moving images in 1927, towards the end of the “roaring twenties” and a couple years before the stock market crash. What could be called the most important year in film would be 1939 because of the use of the next technology, color, and the amount of quality films produced that year. The fifth era began in 1948 marked the first time regulations were implemented in the film industry, breaking apart the strong studio systems and the rise of television. Then came the ratings system and the rise of conglomerates in 1966. Last is the era in which we are in today is marked with film merchandising, innovative special effects, the popularity of ‘fantastic’ films, rise of minority directors and the explosion of the cable industry.

These seven dates mark the major events and changes in the history of moving images. As stated earlier in this chapter, the history of film would be volumes of encyclopedias and could never fit in any smaller essay, but in order to

condense it these would be the major points to hit on. It is also safe to say we are still progressing in the field of moving images. One could say we are actually in an eighth era of moving images and it started in February 2005 with the start of YouTube.com (Hopkins, 2008). We are currently in a transition in the field of digital video, with the Internet and the YouTube-like websites. The transition to digital television that is supposed to take place in the summer of 2009 also leads one to believe we are on the verge of a digital moving image era. Only time will tell if this is a new era, but most of the signs are pointing to it. The speed at which we can share videos with each other has become just seconds and the fact that we can send videos personally instead of to mass media like television or film. We are on the brink of an even more individualistic media society.

The reason for putting this chapter into a paper about *Facing The Giants* (2006) is because it is a film and a moving image that falls into this history. If it were not for these sequence of events to take place, the history of film would be altered and probably not allow for the production of this film. Film is a key term that describes what *Facing The Giants* (2006) is; therefore it should receive a lot of attention in this paper to make clear the importance of the moving image aspect of the film.

Facing the Giants (2006) has benefited from each of the eras in different ways. The first era introduced the narrative film, the second era through the use of Griffith's feature technique, third through the use of sound, fourth through the use of color, fifth through the weakness of studios, sixth through the rebellion

against the R rating, and seventh through the use of new technologies. The history of film is important to product known as *Facing The Giants* (2006).

Chapter Four

Independent Film

Not only is *Facing The Giants* (2006) a film as defined in the previous chapter, but also it is independent of Hollywood. Since the film is considered independent, it is necessary to give a thorough explanation of the meaning of an independent film and why the term applies to this film. After this chapter, it should be clearer as to why *Facing The Giants* (2006) is given the label of an independent film.

The previous chapter reviewed the history of the film industry, mainly the strong studios that help build the film business. The big studios do make up a huge chunk of the equation and are vital to the business, but there is another force in film. The other side of film is not considered “Hollywood” or “big studios,” but rather independent of what Hollywood is. Even though Hollywood might play a part in the films, usually through distribution, the production side is where Hollywood is absent of control. Distribution is not considered when talking about independent film because by the time a film is ready to distribute the production is done and the film is final.

“An independent film is a movie that was really made by independent people, independent producers.” Those are the words of Avi Lerner, one of the most prominent independent film producers in the world. Lerner was the co-founder of Nu Image and Millennium films, which focus on more artistic

independent films. Lerner has produced more than 200 films in his career (LaPorte, 2006).

According to Lerner, an independent film would avoid most every aspect of what we know as Hollywood (LaPorte, 2006). Not to say that a film cannot be physically made in Hollywood, but that it has very little to do with the main figures that make up Hollywood. If a film giant has any hand or say in the construction of a film to better their budgets, that will take away the independent status from the film and therefore will not be considered an independent film. The producers will have the duty of finding sufficient funds for the entire process, from the conception of the idea, through storyboarding, filming until the product is final.

As with any other product, independent films are made to produce revenue for the people involved, but unlike the productions of the Hollywood giants, independent films usually do have more in mind than just the money. They are intended for more than just revenue, they usually have a greater meaning to them that sets them apart from plastic films only made to bring in cash (LaPorte, 2006). Independent films, while not always visually appealing or as technologically advanced as Hollywood films, tend to focus more on the content. The plots for the films do not align with the norms that many people expect from their everyday, typical movies. Meaning, sometimes the films are longer, have a more drawn out storyline, are out of chronological order and are less about special effects and more about the story.

The Sundance Institute is one of the largest supporters of independent films in the United States. Every year the institute hosts a 10-day film festival in the mountains of Utah that draws more than 45,000 audience members to view independent films from all over the world. The festival began when Hollywood-made Robert Redford met with a group of friends and colleagues in 1981 in the mountains to think of a creative alternative to Hollywood. The next year a group of ten up-and-coming directors were invited to the Sundance Institute Filmmakers/Directors Lab to talk over some ideas for independent projects. Redford felt that the remote setting would allow for more creativity for the directors because of the absence of the pressures of the Hollywood marketplace (About the Sundance Institute).

Now, with more than 45,000 people in attendance to the festival, Redford still tries to keep Hollywood away from the independent scene he has created. During the festival itself, Redford tries to keep a low profile and stay out of the view of the public because he says he does not want his celebrity status to take away from the films (Pevere, 2007). Redford appreciates when other celebrities keep their faces out of the paper when they come to visit the festival too, he does not want anything to grab the attention away from the real purpose of the anti-Hollywood film festival.

The Sundance Film Festival tries to promote the independence from Hollywood. The films tend to be noticeably different from the Hollywood products both visually and narrative-wise. The festival is held in a location that contradicts Hollywood, in a small country location away from the smog, sounds of traffic and

busy city life. The setting displays a calm, serene atmosphere contradicts everything that Hollywood and Los Angeles embody.

From a financial standpoint, the independent film business can dish out, on average, about a tenth the amount that a Hollywood production company could for a feature length film. The average budget for a feature independent film is around \$10 million (Safir, 2002), which includes films that are considered independent such as films produced by Warner Independent Pictures, Paramount Vantage and Fox Searchlight Pictures, which are all closely associated with Hollywood powerhouse studios. According to the Motion Picture Association of America, the average budget for a Hollywood film in 2006 was just over \$100 million (MPA, 2007).

In recent years, independent films have fared well at the annual Oscars. In 2008, four of the five nominees for Best Motion Picture of the year were associated with independent film companies, including the best picture, *No Country For Old Men* (2007). In fact the entire list of Oscar-nominated films were littered with independent movies (Oscar's Winners List, 2008). To show that the content of independent films general exceed the quality of the Hollywood blockbusters, none of the best picture nominated films even made the top 15 list of domestic grosses in 2007. *Juno* (2007) finished the year as the 17th highest grossed film bringing in around \$130 million. The film only saw seven screens on its opening weekend, compared to the more 3,000 screens that the 18 film, *American Gangster* (2007), premiered on (Box Office Mojo).

So, an independent film is one that is on the other side of the spectrum from Hollywood. While Hollywood looks to produce films that can raise a lot of money and is treated as a product, independent films place the emphasis on the content and less on the business side of the film industry. Not to say that independent filmmakers do not want to make money, of course money is always going to have its importance in any film because of the cost of production. The majority of independent filmmakers will sacrifice the bigger budgets that they could be using in Hollywood in order to tell the stories they are most passionate about. Directors of independent films are less likely to pull their punches when it comes to creativity; they know exactly what they want out of the film and will stand for nothing less. The artistic value of the film holds much more weight than the normal Hollywood films hold. The themes also tend to be different than your traditional blockbuster, focusing on subject rarely explored in Hollywood because they are more difficult to market or more risky for business. While Hollywood has narrowed their list of genres to action, drama, comedy, romance and horror, independent films tend to find other themes that Hollywood can shy away from, like Christianity.

This chapter is a look at the definition of an independent film. It is important to the rest of the essay because *Facing The Giants* (2006) has been labeled as an independent film. In order to understand where this film came from and what it is battling, having a definition of independent film is necessary. *Facing The Giants* (2006) was made without Hollywood intervening in any step of the process, thus making this film a prime example of the term independent.

Chapter Five

Christian Film

Christianity has had an ongoing battle with the secular film industry. Since film's conception, Christianity has been a theme presented by the visual medium. In fact, the Bible is full of mainstream themes. Just look at the Old Testament, it is full of stories about sex and violence, elements that mainstream media feeds off of. Unfortunately, Christianity has been unable to make the impact the secular themes have successfully done. But recently, the secular studios have discovered that there is a Christian audience to appeal to and has begun producing more Christian themed films. The Christian film industry's motives are far different from those of Hollywood. While big studios, owned by conglomerates, are in the business of making money, the Christian film industry is supposedly made of and for the church, not financial success or earthly glory.

Christian film scholar Terry Lindvall wrote, "Christian films are films of, by, and for the people of the church, not aspiring to high aesthetic values nor aiming for economic profit, but seeking to renew, uplift and propagate" (Lindvall, 1, 2007). These films are the retelling of stories within the Christian community in order to carry on traditions and values (Lindvall, 1, 2007).

It is important to note before getting too deep into this section that when the terms 'Christian film' are mentioned, it is referring to films that found their way onto secular screens. This essay is not talking about small Christian films that never make it to big screen, but rather the films that were able to compete for box

office money against the larger films, mainly from Hollywood. So, there will be little about smaller Christian films in this chapter because the main focus is on films that are able to compete on a higher level. Some of the films not considered are those produced by Billy Graham's World Wide Pictures and Bob Jones' Unusual Pictures because they do not compete against secular films on the big screen.

Christian film has been around just as long as secular film has. The earliest Christian film company began in 1918 with the International Church Film Corporation. The company started in San Francisco and released its first film, *Finger of Fate*, in 1919 and leader of the church, Dr. Paul Smith, was excited about the chance to reach millions who never stepped inside a church. Nine films later, the company went bankrupt. After the failure of the International Church Film Corporation, other companies tried to remedy their mistakes with their own films, but all were just as unsuccessful. As of 1925, most religious companies had failed, the longest lasted only a few years (Bowen, 2008).

Venezuelan-born Carlos Octavia Baptista found success in Christian film in the late 1940's through the 1950's. He focused most of his career on making animated films; his most popular was Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress. It was an hour-long animation that took Baptista four years to produce. Baptista would also produce other documentaries about missions until the 1960's (Bowen, 2008).

Then in 1956, Christianity in film got a huge boost when Cecil B. DeMille directed the number one grossing film of the year and Oscar-nominated, *The Ten Commandments*. DeMille's film was the top money-earning film in 1956, grossing over \$43 million, which is about \$20 million more than the next closest film, *Around the World in 80 Days*. DeMille's earlier films included his production of *Samson and Delilah* in 1949. The film also was the top-grossing film of the year, making \$11.5 million, but was not nominated for the best picture (Box Office Mojo).

The next Christian film to make some noise in theaters is a film called *The Omega Code* (1999). The film opened in 304 theaters around the nation and grossed more than \$12.5 million. Providence Home Entertainment Video teamed up with Goodtimes Entertainment to produce their first film together, TBN's *The Omega Code* (1999). Trinity Broadcasting Network debuted trailers on their station along with putting together a \$2 million campaign to advertise the film on BET, the Family Channel, PAX Network, WGN, USA Radio Network, Odyssey, USA Network and Salem Network. Two and a half thousand volunteers met with different church groups to discuss the film and assist in spreading the word for the film (Pesselnick, 1999).

The Omega Code (1999) is written about the book of Revelation. It tells of an ancient code that is embedded in the Bible and predicts apocalyptic events that are supposed to take place around the turn of the millennium. The film starred Michael York who portrayed a media mogul who wants to use the code to gain personal wealth (Givens, 1999).

The film cost \$7 million to produce. The week it opened, the church supported the film so much that tickets sales per theater its first week were higher than Brad Pitt's *Fight Club* (1999). The film marked the beginning of the Christian film industry's ability to compete with the Hollywood blockbusters (Givens, 1999). It also opened in the top ten overall films of the week and was the top independent film the week of its release (Cullinane, 2003).

In 2002, Artisan, which produced *The Blair Witch Project* (1999), one of the most successful independent films in the history of the business, produced a Biblical animation about a cucumber and a tomato called *Jonah: A VeggieTales Movie* (2002). The children's film became the highest grossing Christian film of all time to that date, bringing in more than \$25 million. A Hollywood-made actor by the name of Mel Gibson would soon shatter those numbers with his retelling of the last hours in the life of Jesus Christ (Box Office Mojo).

Gibson and independent film company Icon Productions teamed up for the 2004 Oscar nominated *The Passion of the Christ* (2004). Released on Ash Wednesday, it raked in \$23 million on opening day becoming the biggest religious film since *The Ten Commandments* (1956). The movie almost paid for itself in one day; the total cost of the film was \$30 million. By the end of its first weekend, the film had earned more than \$125 million. It easily surpassed *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (2000) as the highest-grossing foreign-language in the history of United States film (Scott, 2004).

Historical Accounts vs. Modern Day Application

After researching Christian film, it appears that there are three different categories in which all Christian films are placed. The first category is fantasy or children's films, the second category is historical accounts and the third is modern day application films. This section will give an explanation of each and then discuss the latter two in more depth.

The Chronicles of Narnia; The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe (2005) and *Jonah: A VeggieTales Movie* (2002) would fall into the fantasy or children's films category. It is categorized this way because the films take morals or stories from the Bible and write them in a way that children can relate. The characters are fabricated in order to make the story more comfortable and simpler for children to understand. Of the top 12 Christian films since 1980 in revenue, four of them fall into this category; two of which are in the VeggieTales series and the other two are in the Narnia series (Box Office Mojo). These films are usually made with a younger audience in mind and are not as important to this essay as the other two categories are.

The popular Christian film industry tends to display more historical accounts. The majority of popular Christian-based films deal with an actual event that happened in the past or one that is forecasted for the future. Of the top 100 films of all (adjusted in ticket price inflation) only two Christian films make the list. *The Ten Commandments* (1956) sit in the number five position, nearing a billion dollars in ticket sales. *The Passion of the Christ* (2004) was the second Christian film to make the list at number 56 earning almost 430 million dollars in ticket price sales (Box Office Mojo). Those are the only two Christian films to

reach the top 100 films in revenue and both of them are historical accounts and not modern day application films.

Of the top 12 Christian films since 1980 in revenue, five of them are historical accounts. The first is *The Passion of the Christ* (2004) about the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. Behind both *Narnia* films and fourth on the list is *The Nativity Story* (2006), a historical account of Jesus' birth. At number seven on the list is *One Night with the King* (2006), chronicling the book of Esther from the Old Testament. Ninth on the list is *The Omega Code* (1999) following the prophecies written in Revelations. Behind that film at ten sits *End of the Spear* (2006), which is the historical account of a missionary killed by tribesmen in Ecuador in 1956 (Box Office Mojo). So, of the top 12 Christian films, three fourths of the spots are filled by fantasy or children's film and historical accounts.

A survey conducted by the Rasmussen Reports in 2005, it found that only 63 percent of Americans believe the Bible is literally true. Of Evangelical Christians, 89 percent think the Bible is true, only 4 percent do not (WorldNetNews, 2005). Since film is primarily viewed as a form of entertainment and the majority of the public believe that the Bible is true, that leads to the conclusion that if a movie were done based on the teachings or the stories in the Bible, the chances of it being a historical account is much higher than being a modern day application film. Captivating stories of history that involve very little thinking would tend to draw more viewers than a film that you have to process and spend time thinking about.

This leads to the last type of Christian film, modern day application films. Three application films fall into the top 12 Christian films, *Fireproof* (2008) at number five, *Facing The Giants* (2006) at number eleven and *Expelled: No Intelligence Allowed* (2008) rounding out the field at number 12. *Fireproof* (2008) is the last of the three films that Sherwood Pictures has released; it is a movie about how to save your soul and your marriage. *Expelled: No Intelligence Allowed* (2008) is the only documentary on the list, written by Ben Stein, which discusses why Intelligent Design has been booted from all major science research.

As mentioned above, *Facing The Giants* (2006) is a modern day application Christian film, which is one that shows how people can apply Christianity in the modern setting. Instead of telling a story from the Bible, it takes the principles of the Bible and applies them to people's everyday lives. It is easier to relate to because it shows how Christians would handle situations today. For example *Fireproof* (2008) handles a problem that 40 percent of Americans (Emery, 2009) face, divorce. The film is a guide for struggling couples and says that the answer to their problems is something bigger than them. If they take the films "love dare" and trust in God to get them through it, their marriage is almost assured to mend. It is set in present times, not thousands of years ago during Biblical times or not in the future. The film takes fictional characters and applies what the Bible teaches in order to serve two purposes; primarily to enlighten and, second, to entertain.

It is important to know the different kinds of Christian films and not just lump them together because they serve different purposes. Secular film has different genres such as thriller, comedy, drama, action and etcetera. Since very little literature exists as to what genres there are in Christian film, these three came out of extensive research into what types of Christian films are available.

Role of the Church

One of the biggest keys to the success of *The Passion of the Christ* (2004) is the work of the church. When the church unites for one goal, especially in relation to film, it often has a noticeable impact. Churches began calling movie theaters in mid-January to order their tickets to the February 25 release of the film. Some churches even bought up thousands of seats for the movie that only opened on about 2,000 screens. AMC Theatres' corporate office had to hire five new people just to deal with *The Passion's* release. The idea for churches was to rent out entire theaters of the film and encourage members of the church to bring friends. For the movie theater industry, it meant a lot of money would be coming in, but for Christians it was a tool to help convert non-believers to Christ. Campus Crusade for Christ, based in Orlando, developed their own website dedicated to *The Passion*, which went online more than two months before the actual film hit the screens (Tubbs, 2004). This marketing concept is one that showed how effective the church could be when it gets behind something and unites as one. Gibson would have to credit much of the success of the film to the church.

The church can also pull the support from a film and have a negative effect on the box office. New Line Cinema released *The Golden Compass* in 2007. To most who were unaware of the premise of the movie, it visually was similar to another children's film, *The Chronicles of Narnia; The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe* (2005). The visual clues led many to believe *The Golden Compass*'s story was similar to C.S. Lewis' classic Christian children's film. What many did not know is that film actually portrayed the Catholic Church in a negative light. At the end of the series, the characters actually kill God. The Catholic Church led a boycott of the film and was successful. Producers said the \$180 million film would have to make between \$30 to \$40 million in the first weekend to consider it a success, but the film fell short of that mark, only making a little over \$26.1 million (McClintock, 2007). This is a significant effect on the earnings of the movie. As of February 25, 2008, the film has only grossed \$69 million, less than 50 percent of its cost. The church proved once again that when different denominations band together, they could make a difference in the mainstream media world.

Disney released C.S. Lewis' *The Chronicles of Narnia; The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe* in 2005. The 1950 fantasy novel has sold more than 95 million copies worldwide. But it was the dream of a Denver billionaire and Evangelical Presbyterian Philip Anschutz that became a reality in 2005 when *Narnia* finally hit the big screen. Anschutz headed for Hollywood to make a change. He was tired of his grandchildren watching vulgar movies, so he started Walden Media in order to produce wholesome films for children and people who

do not care for the sex, violence and vulgarity that has become a given in the world Hollywood has created. One of the first projects of the Walden Media and Anschutz was to put a \$150 million version of the best-selling book on the big screen. Their marketing strategy was modeled after *The Passion's* marketing approach. Everyone discovered through that film that Christians have money and enjoy spending it on Christian films (Bing, 2004).

Disney had not created a successful franchise like other major companies had with *Spiderman* (2002) and *Harry Potter* (2001), so they went to work on Narnia in hopes of creating as much revenue as possible through ticket sales, DVD sales and merchandise from the movie. When Disney began marketing the film, they focused on three different types of people: Christians, video gamers and Disney's core audience. So Disney hired Christian-identified Motive Marketing, the same group who worked with Gibson on *The Passion*, to hold screenings at churches as a way to build support for the movie from the Christian audiences (Grover, 2005). A promotional magazine sent to tens of thousand of congregations read, "Invite your community to explore the inspirational truths found in *Narnia*" (O'Reilly, 2005). The marketing strategies were similar to *The Passion* because Hollywood finally discovered that Christians have money and want to spend it on something to feed their souls.

Fox has begun its own Christian film company now called FoxFaith. The company hopes to distribute about a dozen films a year. To date, FoxFaith has distributed DVD's such as *The Passion of the Christ* (2004), *One Night with the*

King (2006) and *The Ultimate Gift* (2006). All three of these films fall into the Christian film category.

The people involved in the films also play a huge role in Christian film. Michael York, the star of *The Omega Code* (1999) was quoted saying "Bible stories have an enormous resonance," he says. "Perhaps not as much for me as for someone who practices that faith. But I'm very much in favor of having a story where the moral truths are unambiguous." Even though the story was Christian in nature and was produced by a Christian company, the film starred a man who did not follow the faith that he was representing (Givens, 1999). This disconnection between Christian films and the people involved in Christian filmmaking is present in Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ* (2004).

Mel Gibson and Newmarket Films teamed up to do *The Passion of the Christ* in 2004 and yet the worldview of Newmarket did not match that of the films. Gibson, a self-proclaimed Catholic hooked up with a company that's only interest in the film was to make money. The production company's track record is not that of a group that some one thing to produce one of the most influential Christian films in the history of the business. Other films produced by Newmarket that do not seem to share the same morals and values of Christians are the teen comedy *American Pie* (1999) and *Cruel Intentions* (1999). *American Pie* (1999) follows four high school seniors who form a pact with one goal in mind; each is looking to lose their virginity before they graduate from high school. The film is rated R because of language and nudity. The other film, *Cruel Intentions* (1999), tells the story of a young woman who bets her stepbrother that

he will not be able to steal the virginity of new student at their high school (Newmarket Films).

Conclusion

These examples seem to show that Christian film is one the forms of film that is on the rise. If such imperfect examples as those cited can succeed, then so can Christian film in its purest form, meaning Christian films made by born-again Christians to not only entertain but also to teach Christians how to lead a Biblical life. One thing Sherwood Picture's films are proving is that Christian films can transcend from just a Christian audience to secular audiences. Christians face the same everyday problems that non-believers day. They have trouble with relationships, they go to school, they lose friends and family members, they have financial problems and have good days and have bad. A few recent Christian films have discovered those universal issues and found a way to use Christianity to help those issues. This might be the future of Christian film as an evangelical tool. Instead of just preaching to people, they will show that Christians have the same troubles as non-believers and give an alternative ways to handle these problems. This might also help abolish that "holier than thou" image that many non-believers have about Christians.

In an interview with Alex Kendrick, he stated that he believes that Christian film is still in the infant stages and sees about 15 more years until it can compete with secular film production wise. Kendrick compares Christian film today to where Christian music was in the 1980's. Many media researchers will

agree that Christian music has become a competitive force against secular music. It is a self-sufficient medium in which production value has reached the mark set by secular music. In Kendrick's mind, contemporary Christian music began in the 1970's as an inexperienced infant. The 1980's were the teenage/high school years for contemporary Christian music; the 1990's were the college years, and now Christian music is a mature adult and competing with secular music, especially production wise. Kendrick says contemporary Christian film today is in the teenage/high school years, at the same point that Christian music was in the 1980's. He believes that the production values of Christian film will reach the same level as secular film in the next few decades.

Chapter Six

Facing The Giants (2006)

The only fitting way to talk about the film *Facing The Giants* (2006) would be to break this section into two different subheadings. The first of the two is about the film itself. The first section will discuss the steps taken to form an idea, put it on film and get it distributed so that audiences can view the product. The second section of this chapter will focus on the involvement of the church in the entire process. Both of these sections are equally important in the making and success of the film, so it would only be appropriate to divide this chapter for each.

Starting with the pre-production, this essay will provide insight into how the idea for *Facing The Giants* (2006) was created and the many steps taken by the writers and directors in order to prepare for the filming process. Next comes filming, the time spent in front of the camera capturing the images that would later become what was seen in theaters and on DVD. The last step in the process is post-production and distribution. After capturing all of the footage on set, the editing process begins to piece together the raw footage, add effects and finally begin distributing the film to theaters and to DVD.

The second section of this chapter will be devoted to the involvement of the church in the entire process of the film. The people of Sherwood Baptist Church and others in the community were vital in the producing of what became *Facing The Giants* (2006). Every step of the process involved assistance and devotion from the church including the budget, props, set locations, set designs,

film crew, catering, wardrobe, actors and so much more. It would only be fitting to talk about the people of Sherwood Baptist Church and Sherwood Christian Academy when discussing the creation of *Facing The Giants* (2006).

The Film

The Big Four

The roots of *Facing The Giants* (2006) stem from two men thinking outside of the ‘traditional’ Christian box and taking a risk on something rarely done, and two other men that would help create that dream. They called themselves the “Big Four.” It was these “Big Four” that all of the ideas had to be agreed upon and had complete control over the creation of films at Sherwood Pictures. The model of the “Big Four” was not something that any of them planned, it just happened to come together and work, so they stuck with it (J. McBride, personal communication, February 24, 2009).

Michael Catt, executive producer, was a heavy believer in the power of the media. He believed he could reach the world from his small city in South Georgia. Alex Kendrick, director, grew up as a Christian who wanted to make Christian films. He felt like it was something no church would ever support him with, so all but gave up hope on a film career. The vision of Catt paired with the drive of Kendrick created one of the most successful Christian films in history. Stephen Kendrick played a big role in the creation of the film as producer and co-writer. Jim McBride was an executive producer of *Facing The Giants* (2006). These figures made up the Big Four for Sherwood Pictures.

Michael Cameron Catt was born on Christmas Day in 1952 in Pascagoula, Mississippi. He is the father of two daughters, Hayley and Erin, and husband to Terri since 1974. Terri is the head of the women's ministry at Sherwood Baptist. Hayley is a graduate of the University of Mobile and is now working at Sherwood as the Assistant to Media and Technology. Erin also graduated from the University of Mobile and is working for the Disney Corporation as an entertainer. Michael Catt is the Senior Pastor of Sherwood Baptist Church (Michael Catt, 2006).

Catt received a Bachelors of Arts from Mississippi College in 1975. Then he attended New Orleans Seminary and received a Masters of Divinity from Luther Rice Bible Seminary and a Doctorate of Ministry from Trinity Theological Seminary. Catt spent 15 years in student and youth ministry, serving at Roswell Street Baptist Church building the fourth largest youth group in America (Michael Catt, 2006). He served as the pastor of First Baptist Church of Ada, Oklahoma, Associate Pastor of Sagamore Hill Baptist Church in Fort Worth, Texas from 1985-87 and the leader of a number of Student/Youth Ministries, including the student ministry at Roswell St. Bapt. Church in Marietta, Georgia from 1981-85. He led the student ministry at First Baptist North Spartanburg in Spartanburg, South Carolina from 1978-81; student ministry at First Baptist Church in Yukon, Oklahoma from 1976-78 and student ministry at Ruskin Heights Baptist Church in Kansas City, Missouri from 1975-76 (Marquis Who's Who, 2008).

Michael Catt brought that impressive resume with him when he joined the staff at Sherwood Baptist Church in 1989 (Michael Catt, 2006). Not only did he

bring his past achievements with him, but also he brought with him countless new ideas that he would pursue in Albany, Georgia. Since arriving at Sherwood, some of his accomplishments have been starting the Alpha Center for Women (Crisis Pregnancy Center), 24/7 Intercessory Prayer Ministry, leading the church to reach out to multi-generations and other cultures, establishing the Ron Dunn Center for Biblical Studies (site of the New Orleans Seminary Extension in Albany), doubling the size of the ordained staff, acquiring acres of land around the church including 90 acres for a sports complex (funded by the revenue of *Facing The Giants*) and building the 2,250 seat Worship Center and renovating current facilities (Michael Catt, 2006).

He believed that he could “reach the world from Albany, Georgia” (The 700 Club, 2008) and that is what he did. He believes in using your talents and making your plans big (Atlanta Live, 2008). Since arriving in Albany, Catt has been establishing as many media outlets as he possibly can. Today, Sherwood has its hands in almost every aspect of the communications field. Sherwood runs its own radio, television and film production within the walls of the church.

The Sherwood Channel is a 24-hour television station that broadcasts from Sherwood Church. It reaches more than 50,000 homes in Southern Georgia. It broadcasts the weekly services by Senior Pastor Catt or Senior Associate Pastor Stephen Kendrick entitled *Path to Truth*, a Bible Study talk show with Associate Pastor Alex Kendrick and Director of S.O.S. & Homebound Ministries Ross Powell called *Home Connection* and *Walking In The Light* with

Pastor Daniel Simmons. The Sherwood Channel is also an affiliate of Family Net and Faith TV (Sherwood Media, 2009).

Most certainly the most influential and successful part of Sherwood, during Catt's term, has been the birth of Sherwood Pictures. Since its inception in 2003, Sherwood pictures has produced three feature length films, sold millions of DVD's and has been able to teach people about the Word of God in more than 50 countries all over the world (Sherwood Media, 2009). The first film produced by Sherwood Pictures was *Flywheel* (2003) about a crooked used car salesman who became a Christian and turned his life and his business around. The next production came in 2006, *Facing The Giants*, the story of a Christian high school football coach who gets tired of being average and gives all of his troubles to God. The most recent and most successful film by Sherwood Pictures is *Fireproof* (2008), a film about a heroic fireman struggling to keep his marriage alive.

Michael Catt is a visionary who thinks outside of traditional thought in order to achieve his goal of reaching the world for Christ. He uses all forms of media in order to get the message out to the people who need to hear it. He has built large youth ministries, expanded congregations and has been willing to take risks in order to reach his goals. He has taken chances on new ideas and areas that have not proved to be successful strong points of Christians. He is an innovator, an entrepreneur and most of all a motivator to others. One of the men he motivated and took a chance on was Alex Kendrick.

Alex Kendrick was born in Athens, Georgia, but raised in Smyrna, Georgia, a suburb of Atlanta. During his childhood, Alex and his brothers Shannon and Stephen (producer and co-writer of *Facing The Giants* [2006]) wandered around their suburban neighborhood with a VHS video camera to capture short videos of them and their friends. Alex's fascination followed him through his life in college. He attended Kennesaw State University, just outside of Atlanta, where he majored in Communications because the school did not have a film program. While in college, Alex got a job as a Christian radio deejay, where he worked for five years. Upon graduating with his Bachelors in Communications, Kendrick got his first post-college job working with college students at the Roswell Street Baptist Church in Marietta, Georgia (A. Kendrick, personal communication, February 21, 2009).

Working with college students in Roswell gave Alex Kendrick the chance to go back to one of his first loves, making videos. As a way to reach out to the college-aged crowd, Kendrick began writing and shooting small youth videos with his kids. They were nothing too professional, just a way to give the students something exciting to do and help peak the interests of others, engaging them into the college class at Roswell. Kendrick also attended class at the New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, Atlanta campus, because he felt called to the ministry (A. Kendrick, personal communication, February 21, 2009).

It was while Alex was working at Roswell Baptist Church that he got a call from Sherwood Baptist Church, and former Roswell youth leader Michael Catt, offering him a position as the Associate Pastor of Media. Baffled at the invitation,

Kendrick turned down initial offers, believing he was not qualified for the position, lacking experience in television. He prayed for certain things to happen in order for him to feel called to the position. Those things happened and in March of 1999 he joined the staff of Sherwood Baptist Church as the Associate Pastor of Media (A. Kendrick, personal communication, February 21, 2009).

It was three more years before Kendrick would come up with the ideas for making films. He read a survey by the Barna Group, founded by George Barna, showing the power the media had gained over society. These striking figures led Kendrick to ponder why, if movies are so powerful, there is not more entertainment aimed towards Christians. Since he was a child, Alex had wanted to write and direct films, but he never thought a church would allow him to do so. When he presented the findings of Barna's study to Michael Catt and said he wanted to produce a film, Catt's reply was "why not?" Catt told Kendrick that as long as it did not interfere with his regular job, he would be free to explore film (A. Kendrick, personal communication, February 21, 2009).

Alex thought he had a lot of good ideas for his first film, so he prayed about them. After prayer, he did not feel like any of the ideas would be successful until that summer when he was finally given the right idea, which became Sherwood Pictures' first film *Flywheel* (2003). The difference in the ideas is what Kendrick called "A good idea versus a God idea." Alex starred in both *Flywheel* (2003) and *Facing The Giants* (2006), and plays a smaller role in *Fireproof* (2008). The film was co-written by Alex's brother Stephen Kendrick,

who would also play a big part in the following two films from Sherwood Pictures (A. Kendrick, personal communication, February 21, 2009).

Stephen Kendrick, the younger brother of director and co-writer Alex Kendrick was the third big player in the process of creating *Facing The Giants* (2006). Stephen was raised in a suburb of Atlanta (A. Kendrick, personal communication, February 21, 2009) and spent his childhood shooting short videos in his neighborhood with his brothers Alex and Shannon. As a teenager he and Alex took their video camera to Christian camps and made promotional videos for their church (Darlington, 2008).

After college, Stephen worked at Roswell Baptist Church with brother Alex, heading up the middle school department. While at Roswell, he, too, took classes at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. Stephen would leave Roswell in 2001 and join his brother, Alex, at Sherwood Baptist as the Senior Associate Pastor/Preaching (Stephen Kendrick, 2006) where he now leads the church's prayer ministry, major ministry events, an adult Sunday school class, and The Great Adventure, an adult discipleship program that he developed (Darlington, 2008). Stephen fills in and preaches when Catt is unavailable to preach at Sherwood Baptist (A. Kendrick, personal communication, February 21, 2009).

Stephen played the role as co-writer with Alex for the films *Flywheel* (2003), *Facing The Giants* (2006) and *Fireproof* (2008). In addition to being the co-writer, Stephen produced all three of the films and guest directs in *Fireproof*

(2008). He also played Alex's double during game scenes in *Facing The Giants* (2006) and minor roles in *Fireproof* (2008).

Jim McBride is the fourth member of the "Big Four," as he calls it. McBride is on staff with Sherwood Baptist Church as an Executive Pastor. His main duties include supervising of the staff and finances of Sherwood Baptist Church and serving as the chairman of The School Committee of Sherwood Christian Academy. For *Facing the Giants* (2006), McBride shared the duties of executive producer with Catt and Terry Hemmings. His main focus was handling negotiations, contracts, helping out with casting and was in charge of finances for the film (J. McBride, personal communication, February 24, 2009).

McBride relocated to Albany, Georgia, due to being transferred by Coca-Cola (J. McBride, personal communication, February 24, 2009). McBride joined Sherwood Baptist in 1994 and six years later he felt called to the ministry. He joined the church staff in 2000 and is now the Executive Pastor (McBride, 2006). In addition to serving as the executive producer for the film *Facing The Giants* (2006), McBride played the antagonist, Bobby Lee Duke, the coach for the undefeated Giants. His signature for his role in the film was his arrogant actions and always sucking on a lollipop.

Michael Catt, Alex Kendrick, Stephen Kendrick and Jim McBride make up the "Big Four" for Sherwood Pictures. Even though the Kendrick brothers do most of the writing, all four have to be in complete agreement before any action is taken towards making a film. This system was started during the creation of

Facing the Giants (2006) and carried over into *Fireproof* (2008). According to McBride, this practice is most likely going to repeat in future projects by Sherwood Pictures because of its success with the last two (J. McBride, personal communication, February 24, 2009).

Flywheel

When talking to the writers and producers of the film, one phrase kept popping up in each of the conversations, “A good idea versus a God idea.” The difference between the two is what the “Big Four” attribute all of their success to. This section will survey the events that led to the idea that became *Facing The Giants* (2006) and span through the pre-production, production and post-production process until the film finally reached theaters.

The entire process began in 2002 when Alex Kendrick read a survey by the Barna Group showing evidence that films, television and the Internet were more influential than the church. Kendrick did not say which study, or article he read, but research for this thesis has found an article released by the Barna Group in 2002 that states the Christian message reaches more adults through the mass media than churches do. In the month the Barna Group gathered research, it found that six out of ten Americans went to church, but more astounding, two out of every three Americans used some sort of Christian media, whether that be books, radio or television in one way or another (Barna Group, July 2, 2002). One medium left out of this equation was film, an avenue that Christians have rarely explored, mainly because of expenses.

With the information in hand, Alex Kendrick approached Senior Pastor Michael Catt asking for his approval to venture into the film business. Catt, being a strong believer of thinking out of the box and finding new avenues for ministering to people, agreed to let Kendrick pursue a film project as long as it did not take away from Kendrick performing primary job as an Associate Pastor with the church.

A verse that is commonly referred to by people associated with these projects is Ephesians 3:20 which reads “Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us” (New International Version). Similar to Philippians 4:13, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” (New International Version). The main players in the making of these films believe they can do things beyond themselves if they seek the favor of God. This mentality led all of them to continue the film process

By this time, Alex Kendrick had nothing to work with, he had no money for the project, he had no equipment and he had no idea to use. Having no real experience in film, Alex, and brother Stephen, started the process of searching for an idea. They believed they had a few good ideas, but none of them seemed like the right idea (A. Kendrick, personal communication, February 21, 2009).

After months of prayer, the idea for *Flywheel* (2003), a feature length narrative film, came to them in the summer of 2002 (A. Kendrick, personal communication, February 21, 2009). Kendrick came up with the story about a

used car salesman, who pretended to be a man of God, ripped off a minister when he sold him a used car. The minister, thinking he was getting a good deal, and then prayed for the salesman to be treated as he was. Piece by piece, the Kendricks added parts of their own pasts into the film to take it from a small plot to an entire film. The film was shot on a functioning used car lot owned by one of the members of their congregation at Sherwood, and many actual events on the lot were written into the movie (Kendrick, Kendrick, 2003).

After coming up with an idea that they thought would work, the Kendricks approached Tracy Goode, Director of Media at Sherwood Baptist. At the time, Alex and Goode were working together on television programs from the church, but had never ventured in to anything as big as a movie. Excited, but nervous, Goode stepped into help the brothers tackle this new project because of their lack of experience with filmmaking. One of the biggest concerns for Goode, and the others involved, was the equipment; they did not possess any of the equipment needed to shoot the film, and it would cost around \$20,000 to get the cameras, lenses, etcetera needed to get this project off of the ground. Even though it was connected to the church, the funds were not available for them, so they prayed for the money needed. Soon, members of the church came forward, gave the crew \$15,000, and with that money they were able to get the equipment on November 20, 2002, five months before the premier of the film, including the XL1S digital video camera used to shoot the film (Kendrick, Kendrick, 2003).

The cast, crew, equipment and all other accessories came from people in the church giving to this film in order for it to be used to minister to others. The

crane was built from scratch with parts bought from Home Depot, as was the dolly. The lights came from Home Depot and were set up by the untrained eyes of the Kendricks and crew. The actors came from the people of the church who had the spare time to help out with the film. Make-up came from the women's homes and was applied by church members, not by make-up artists. The film was shot on a functioning used car lot, so at times the crew would stop a scene in order for the owner to sell a car and then they would resume shooting (Kendrick, Kendrick, 2003).

Tracy Goode was the primary cameraman for the film, but when his character was in front of the camera, Alex Kendrick would take over filming duties. When Alex and Goode were both on screen, Stephen Kendrick was responsible for running the camera (Kendrick, Kendrick, 2003). Continuity of shooting a film was another area in which the crew had no prior knowledge; Alex Kendrick said that was their biggest mistake (A. Kendrick, personal communication, February 21, 2009). They spent every morning in prayer asking for help so that the film would glorify Him and not themselves. Even though the crew went into the filming process blindly, their needs were met and they were able to produce a product that would only be the launching of Sherwood Pictures (Kendrick, Kendrick, 2003).

Upon completion of the filming of *Flywheel* (2003), Alex Kendrick and crew entered the post-production stages of the film. The first was editing the shots together, using Apple's Final Cut Pro editing software, by Alex Kendrick and Mark Mitchell. Next, Mark Willard, Senior Associate Pastor of Music at

Sherwood Baptist, Alex Kendrick and Heather Spence produced the soundtrack for the film (Kendrick, Kendrick, 2003). They used all new arrangements because of their lack of funds for copyrighted music. Last, came distributing the film.

Alex Kendrick's goal for distribution was to get *Flywheel* (2003) on local movie screens at the Carmike Cinemas in Albany, Georgia. One of the biggest problems facing them was that movie theaters project films, not tapes or DVDs. In order for *Flywheel* (2003) to find its way to the big screen, Carmike would have to allow them a theater to rearrange in order to show their film. Luckily, Carmike complied and allowed *Flywheel* (2003) a few days in one of its theaters.

Expectations were not too high for the producers; they only expected a few curious people to come see the local film. But more than a few people showed up; in fact it was the second highest grossing film at the theater that week. What started off as a few days of screen time turned into six weeks of success.

Carmike then offered another screen in another of their theaters in a different city, then another theater in a third city. Then churches started calling to show to their congregations. Family Net and FaithTV aired the movie on their cable networks (Kendrick, Kendrick, 2003).

During the weeks in theaters, the producers were able to make the money back from their cut of the ticket sales to the movie. Of the money left over, they used that to produce 1,000 DVD's of the movie to sell. They sold out of the DVD within 30 minutes of releasing it to the public, so they used that profit to make 2,000 more. They continued to reinvest the money they made back into the

distribution of the film. The local Blockbuster got a hold of a copy and put it on their shelves. The film did so well that Blockbuster asked Kendrick for a copy for all of their stores, more than 7,000 in the United States (A. Kendrick, personal communication, February 21, 2009).

Facing The Giants

The producers of *Flywheel* (2003) learned a lot from their rookie film. They learned continuity, they learned technical aspects of film, they learned about lighting, writing and acting. Overwhelmed and recovering from the success of their first film, Alex and Stephen began seeking out the idea for their second film. They decided to follow their same formula that worked in their first film. It would be no sophomore slump for Sherwood Pictures, in fact their second film would put them on the map and their third film would put them on an even bigger stage.

In seeking out the next plot, the Kendricks followed the same process, not settling for good ideas, but searching for God ideas. That idea turned out to be about a Christian high school football coach who was struggling in his personal life and in his professional life. Grant Taylor (played by Alex Kendrick) is the varsity football coach for Shiloh Christian Academy. The plot begins with Taylor finding out his star player has transferred to a rival high school. For the coach and his Eagles, it looks to be another average year. After losing the first few games of the football season, he starts to feel pressure from the parents of players. He overhears the parents confronting one of his assistant coaches

(played by Tracy Goode) about taking over as head coach. Not only are things tough for Taylor at work, but he is also having trouble in his home. He finds out early in the film that he is the reason why he and his wife are unable to have children. Taylor is also having financial problems, he has an old car that is difficult to start and he is having trouble paying his bills (Kendrick, Kendrick, 2006).

It is these pressures that break down Taylor to the point where he realizes he cannot control his life, so he hands it over to God. He decides to change the purpose of his team from winning games to serving God in all things they do. Slowly his team starts to buy into his new team philosophy and wins start to follow. Not only does the team start winning, but also Grant sparks a spiritual revival at Shiloh. The team racks up enough wins that the Eagles earn a spot in the playoffs, and eventually wins the state championship against the heavily favored and undefeated Richland Giants. The win came as the undersized kicker, David (played by Bailey Cave) booted in a 51-yard field goal as time expired (Kendrick, Kendrick, 2006).

Taylor's personal life began to turn around as well. One of the fathers that had been trying to get him fired had a change of heart when Taylor witnessed to his son. He gave Taylor a brand new truck as an anonymous gift of his appreciation. When his team made it to the playoffs, the school gave him a \$6,000 raise for his achievements for the school. After winning the championship game, Taylor finds out that his wife is pregnant with their first child.

When asked if the story is over the top, Alex Kendrick breaks the film down like this. At the beginning of the film, they are a one-car family, at the end they are still a one car family, but with a functioning car now. Taylor makes \$24,000 at the school and his wife makes \$6,000 working part time at the flower shop. When the movie ends, Taylor has gotten a \$6,000 raise and his wife has had to quit working because she is having more children, so they are still a \$30,000 household. At the end of the film Grant's wife gets pregnant after they were told they could not have children, something Kendrick has seen happen many times in his church. The Taylors struggled with these issues for six years before God blessed them and met their needs (A. Kendrick, personal communication, February 21, 2009).

When the Kendrick brothers came up with the idea for the plot of the film, they began thinking about putting together the story, so they looked no further than their own Albany, Georgia. Almost all of the events portrayed in the film took place within three years to different people in the area. They heard about all of the stories and wrote them into the storyline for *Facing The Giants* (2006). A football at a high school in one of the schools around the Albany area was given a truck by a parent of one of his players, much the same as Taylor. Sherwood Christian Academy experienced a revival a few years earlier. And a state championship was decided on a 51-yard field goal as time expired. There were couples in the church that were medically proven unable to bear children and yet they did. All of the stories were laid out for the Kendrick brothers, all they had to

do was rearrange them and fit them all together to produce *Facing The Giants* (2006) (A. Kendrick, personal communication, February 21, 2009).

The “Big Four” followed the same formula that provided so much success in their first film. They asked God for the ideas; they did not settle for a good idea, they waited for a God idea. They trusted Him to bring together the cast and crew, which He provided from the church just as He has previously. Last they relied on God to provide the fruit for the film (Kendrick, Kendrick, 2003). They prayed for the resources and the money needed for equipment and professionals to aid in the technical side, which were also provided.

Now that the story was in place, there was a need for cast and crew, which would come from the church. The Kendricks had already written the characters and now it was time to cast actors. Commonly in Hollywood, interested actors would submit headshots and go through an acting audition to find the right person to exactly fit the role, but Sherwood is independent of Hollywood so it operates differently. There is an interview process that prospective actors have to go through in order to be cast in a role. Alex Kendrick says he does that for many different reasons. One is the simple fact that Christians could portray themselves a lot easier than a non-believer could because Christians already lead that lifestyle. Another is because he does not want anyone involved in the film who may only be trying to further his or her own career and not focused on giving the glory to God. For this process he asks applicants two questions. 1. Where are you with your walk with the Lord? 2. Is there anything in your life that might prevent God from blessing the movie? After

answering the questions, they enter an audition stage and are cast in the roles (A. Kendrick, personal communication, February 21, 2009).

In an interview in February about the creation process of his films, one of the first things Alex Kendrick said was “We are never going to win acting awards for our films” (A. Kendrick, personal communication, February 21, 2009) and he is happy with that. His goal is not to win awards, but win souls for Christ. The Kendricks cast closely to the parts they have written in order to make the character as believable as possible, but find time when the dialogue seems awkward for the actor. To help make the actor feel more comfortable on set, if the lines are not flowing naturally, Alex will have the actor read the lines how they would normally say as they would in an everyday conversation. He is willing negotiate the script for his actors because he places more emphasis on the person rather than the role (A. Kendrick, personal communication, February 21, 2009).

The shooting for the film took six weeks, with a two-week break in the middle, shot in and around Albany, Georgia. The crew upgraded from the XL1S digital video camera, lights from Home Depot and home-built dollies to a high-definition Panasonic Vericam Camera and other professional equipment. In addition to better equipment, they hired five professionals to help them with technical aspect of the film like cinematography and lighting. When finished filming, they again edited this film on Apple’s Final Cut Pro (Facing The Giants Official Website, 2006).

Upon completion of the film, the original plan for distribution was similar to the last film. The hope was to get the film in local theaters and see where it went, but that all changed. Stephen contacted the Provident Music Group to get permission to use songs from Christian recording artists Third Day and Casting Crowns. It just so happened that Provident was looking for Christian movies to release in theaters. After watching the film, Provident who partnered with Sony for Provident Pictures, let the people at Sony view the film. The people at Sony enjoyed it and offered to distribute *Facing The Giants* (2006) (Facing The Giants Official Website, 2006).

The film landed on 441 screens on its opening week and was the number 12 film of the week in gross behind *The Illusionist* (2006) and *Little Miss Sunshine* (2006). *Little Miss Sunshine* (2006) had the smallest budget (\$8 million) of the film ahead of *Facing The Giants* (2006), which was 80 times more than *Giants*. In the first 11 days it brought in \$2.7 million, 27 times the cost to make the film (Glaister, 2006). As of February 2008, *Facing The Giants*, grossed more than \$10 million in theaters, making it the ninth most successful Christian film in money earned ever and earning more than \$12 million in DVD sales for the first two months of its release (Box Office Mojo).

Sherwood Baptist Church

Sherwood Baptist Church played such a huge role in the success of *Facing The Giants* (2006) that it deserves its own section in this chapter. In fact, the movie would have never gotten past the idea stage if it were not for the

church; they had a hand in almost every aspect of the moving making process. More than 1,200 members of the church banded together in order to make the film (J. McBride, personal communication, February 24, 2009). The church started by bringing all of the major players, then it helped fuel the process of making the film and finally they built support for the film. Since the success of the film, the church has been playing a part in the dispersion of the profits of *Facing The Giants* (2006) as well. Therefore, a brief examination of the history of this church seems appropriate.

In 1955, there was a need for a church in the northwest part of Albany, Georgia, so a group of men and women began to meet at the Army Reserve Building for Sunday school every week. A year later, they were give more than six acres of land in the Sherwood Acres Subdivision where Sherwood Baptist Church was formed with 309 original members. The first man to pastor the church was Albert Cardwell, who expanded Sunday school and helped build a 750 seat educational building in 1958. The third pastor, Curtis Burge, was key in the building of a new 1,000-seat sanctuary, including a bell tower, library, bridal and music suites, pipe organ, adult Sunday School department and all the furnishings and equipment. The building program cost \$1,386,745 and was completed by February of 1976 (A Taste of Sherwoods History, 2006).

Sherwood had been broadcasting over the radio for years, when in 1982 they began broadcasting on television, on cable Channel 8 in Albany. In 1983, the church completed a building program with the dedication of the Family Life Center. This \$1.2 million facility included two handball courts, a basketball court,

running track, weight room, ceramics room, offices and education space. In 1985, it announced the opening of the Sherwood Baptist Christian School raising \$100,000 of its goal of \$400,000 for the school in just one month (A Taste of Sherwoods History, 2006). Currently the church has more than 3,000 members and averages 1,850 in attendance every week (J. McBride, personal communication, February 24, 2009).

Sherwood Baptist Church is the reason for the uniting of the Kendricks with Michael Catt. Catt just seemed like the perfect fit for the church in 1989 when he brought with him new ideas of how the church should function. His views were different from most traditional views, but that just seem to go right along with Sherwood's philosophy. He had the idea of reaching the world from Albany, Georgia. The way he would achieve that goal is through the media. He built up a large media department at Sherwood so he could broadcast radio and television to everyone he could reach. Since he had a large media department, he needed someone to run the department for the church. Going back to his roots at Roswell Street Baptist Church, he hired Alex Kendrick to take over the media department at the church (A. Kendrick, personal communication, February 21, 2009).

Alex Kendrick moved to Albany in 1999 to head up the media department at Sherwood. He, too, had ideas that were not accepted in traditional churches, but were a perfect fit for Sherwood because they had a reputation for thinking outside the box. It was a perfect fit for Kendrick, which he would not realize until 2002. Kendrick wanted to be a movie director, but felt that no church would allow

him to do so, but Michael Catt said “why not?” A project as big as a movie is too much for one man, two men or even four men to handle, he would need an entire body of people to help him succeed. In fact, it would take 1,200 people to make *Facing The Giants* (2006) and all but five of those people would come from the congregation at Sherwood and donate their time and resources (A. Kendrick, personal communication, February 21, 2009).

When Kendrick came up with the idea for the film, *Facing The Giants* (2006), he and his brother had to come up with a script on their own. With a script on hand, the Kendricks were at a point that they could go no further on their own. They had no actors, equipment, make up, crew, sets or most importantly, money. Just like in their earlier film, they went to the church body to help them, just as before in *Flywheel* (2003). The church provided them with everything they needed in order to begin the process, starting with the money.

Members at Sherwood gave past their usual tithes in order to help raise sufficient funds for the film. With all of the equipment and professional crewmembers, the total budget would end up around \$100,000. The generous offerings of the congregation at Sherwood Baptist were able to assist in the financial needs of the film. The people saw the recent success of *Flywheel* (2003) and were excited about what God had in store for the next cinema venture of Sherwood Pictures. It was this gift that allowed the film to move from just a script to a film (J. McBride, personal communication, February 24, 2009).

The next responsibility that the people of Sherwood took on their shoulders was calling for actors. Executive producer Jim McBride said in an interview, if you need people to act like Christians, then who better to cast than Christians (J. McBride, personal communication, February 24, 2009). It was that attitude that led the producers to cast Christians in their films and without the money to pay for actors; what better place to find those Christians, but their very own Sherwood Baptist Church. All of the actors volunteered their time to play a role in the film and almost all of them were from the church. One of the only exceptions was Mark Richt, the head football coach at the University of Georgia. Richt, a born again Christian, was a fan of the first film and accepted an invitation to act as Taylor's mentor in the film. The rest of the actors were picked from the congregation and had little acting experience (A. Kendrick, personal communication, February 21, 2009).

As stated earlier, everything in the film came from the people of the church, which includes most of the sets. Probably the biggest set that was donated to the film was the use of Sherwood Christian Academy. As a branch of the church, Sherwood Christian Academy plays the role of Shiloh Christian. The regular season football games were shot on Sherwood's football field, with Sherwood and other schools students as the players. The crew and coaching staff in the movie went to some practices and shot footage as if they were actually coaching the players, when in real life the players were having a real practice. During parts of the filming process on campus, students walked through the shots on their way to class, interrupted shooting. The championship

game stadium was donated by a neighboring high school. The people in the stands were all volunteers from the church acting like fans. The uniforms and football props were borrowed from the school as well (Kendrick, Kendrick, 2006).

All of the houses in the film were donated either by the church or by members of the church to use as sets. The doctors and business offices were actually functioning offices in which Sherwood members worked. In one scene, where the doctor is telling Grant he is the reason they are unable to have children, the actor is a doctor in real life. When the sets needed painting, members of the church would roll up their sleeves and do what needed to be done in order to make the sets look as real as possible for the film (Kendrick, Kendrick, 2006).

In addition to sets, the film needed staff for many different aspects of the project. The producers needed make-up and someone to apply it. They called on the women of the church because they had more experience with make up than the men did. They needed catering, which was taken care of by different Sunday school groups. There was a need for security, which, too, was met by the church members. Church members, many of whom had no experience with the equipment, but they were eager to learn, made up the crew. Wardrobe usually consisted of what the actors had in their own closets (J. McBride, personal communication, February 24, 2009).

The last thing, and probably the most important thing, that church did for the film *Facing The Giants* (2006) was shower it with prayer. Before filming

every scene, the people involved would pray over the actors. During the shooting of difficult scenes, members of the church would be in constant prayer for the actor and the crew. The team spent more time seeking God than it did shooting the film because the importance was not with shooting a movie, but having a reflection of Christ through the images on the screen (A. Kendrick, personal communication, February 21, 2009).

It is important to point out that the church did not allow the film to consume it. Sherwood Pictures is only one ministry of many at Sherwood Baptist Church. The congregation made sure to keep everything in perspective and not neglect other ministries at the church. Making a film can be all encompassing, but the church managed to find that balance between creating a film and running a church (A. Kendrick, personal communication, February 21, 2009).

It is clear to see that without the church, the chances of this film getting off the ground and taking form is very slim. More than 1,200 members of the church came together to offer money, resources and their own time in order to serve God through the film. It was only with the help of these Godly men and women that the film ever got out of the pre-production stages.

The contract set up before the film gave the Kendricks ownership of the scripts and the church ownership of the films. After the film was finally completed, distributed and bringing in revenue, the “Big Four” already had a plan for what to do with the revenue of the film. First, the big distribution companies took their share of the profit. With what was left over, the church first paid off all

of the debts. The money left over would be used for evangelism and for a project called the Generation Campaign (A. Kendrick, personal communication, February 21, 2009).

The Generation Campaign was designed to reach the younger generation of people in the Albany community. The film was successful at reaching people around the world, but Sherwood wanted to start something to reach the people in its own community. The church built an 82-acre sports park called Generations near the Sherwood campus. The sports park consists of a fishing pond, hiking trails, baseball/softball fields, volleyball courts, soccer fields, tennis courts and much more. The campaign has brought together the people of Albany, Georgia. More than 1,100 children have been involved in activities at Generations and of that, sixty-three have made salvation decisions (A. Kendrick, personal communication, February 21, 2009).

Conclusion

It was a long road for the producers of *Facing The Giants* (2006), with humble beginnings, each was able to find his way to Albany and to Sherwood Baptist Church. That unity of these figures, along with the amazing work of a body of believers, helped and idea Alex Kendrick had become a reality and garner as much success as it did. God-fearing men, believing that nothing is too big for God, conquered what looked like an impossible feat. They aimed high and refused to settle. By doing every step of the film process in their own church, they were given 100 percent freedom to do whatever they believed was

right for the film. The final product became one of the most successful Christian films of all time.

The success of *Facing The Giants* (2006) was not a fluke. Using the same formula with its third film *Fireproof* (2008), Sherwood Pictures far surpassed the success of its previous success. This proves that the formula used is actually an effective way to make an independent American narrative Christian film and be successful at it. The success will be broken down in later chapters in order to give future Christian filmmakers a hint at what makes this formula work.

Chapter Seven

The “Death Crawl”

The previous chapters explored the outside influences that made the film, *Facing The Giants* (2006) a relative box office success. The remainder of this paper will discuss about how the content of the film played a part in the success of the movie. Instead of going through every scene of the film, this paper will focus on one scene, which is the defining scene of the film.

Every film has a defining scene, which captures the entire theme of the plot. The defining scene can be placed anywhere in the film but most of the time, will be placed towards the middle and act as a turning point. The scene usually takes the main element of the film and condenses it down to a five to ten minute scene. If the audience misses the entire film except watches one of the defining scenes, the message of the film should be clear. The defining scene serves as an abstract of the film summarizing what came before and is to come.

To give some examples as to what a defining scene is, here is the defining scene of some classic films collected by Chris Fujiwara in the book “Defining Moments in Movies.” The “Over the Rainbow” scene in *The Wizard of Oz* (1939) is the defining moment of the film. Studio heads originally wanted to cut the song, but it was left in and won an Oscar for Best Original Song. Kim Newman, an award-winning novelist, critic and broadcaster said “Without “Over the Rainbow,” the *Wizard of Oz* would be just a madcap fantasy comedy; with it, the film is a multi-leveled masterpiece as melancholy as it is joyous” (Fujiwara, 122,

2007). Another example is the final scene of *The Graduate* (1967) when Elaine breaks out of the church where she is to be married in order to be with Ben. This scene is not only a definition of Benjamin breaking out and becoming a rebel, but a reflection of the breaking away from the norm during the late 1960's (Fujiwara, 409, 2007).

Facing The Giants (2006) too has a defining scene, which can sum up the rest of the film. This important scene can simply be called the “death crawl” scene. To better understand the effectiveness, first is a quick explanation of the scenes leading up to the “death crawl.” The information is vital in realizing the value of the defining scene in relation to the rest of the movie. This scene plays such an important role in the plot that the readers will have to know the framing of the scene. Here is first a description of the plot and scenes that are leading up to the defining scene of the film, the “death crawl.”

Grant Taylor is football coach at a private Christian high school in southern Georgia. Since he works for a private school, he has a relatively low salary. Grant's wife, Brooke, is working part-time at a flower shop to help bring in some extra money. The Taylors have a car that is failing on them, they have to keep jumping it to get it started and it is missing a rear window. But they are not making enough money to fix their car or buy a new one.

Another problem facing the Taylor family is their inability to have children. We find out early in the film that the couple has been trying to have a baby for quite a while, but has been unsuccessful. They learn from the doctor that Grant

is the reason why they are unable to have a child. Even though the couple is still in love, the issue of having children is one that has affected their relationship and pulled them further apart from each other.

The last problem staring the Taylors in the face is the status of his job. He is the coach of a failing team that struggles to reach .500 every season. His best player has transferred out to a rival school before the season began and Taylor admits that it will probably be just another average season. When the other players find out about the transfer, they lose hope in the team too. The players begin to goof off in class and at practice, showing that they do not take either very seriously.

Taylor begins overhearing a number of the parents of the football players approach the assistant coach asking him if he would be interested in taking over the head coaching position in place of Taylor. The assistant, Brady Owens, hesitates to answer the parents' request; he knows the team is struggling and would like to be the head coach, but at the same time he is loyal to Taylor and knows that he would not have much to build a team with either. For the first half of the film, Owens seesaws back and forth as to whether he wants to listen to the parents or stand behind Taylor.

These three elements are the conflicts that will be resolved in the remainder of the film. The resolution begins after the team loses its first few games. Grant Taylor has just received the test results from the doctor and found out that he was the reason why he and his wife could not have children. He went

back to his office at school to avoid telling his wife. It was there that he saw a light on and found some parents talking with Owens again about taking over as head coach. Taylor goes home and breaks down with his wife about everything that is happening in his life. The break down that began that night is the beginning of a transition that would end with the scene that will be analyzed later in the paper.

Later that night, we see that Taylor has never gone to bed; he is up late reading his Bible and praying for God to help him with his situation. Next we see the football team narrowly lose again. After the game another parent is talking to Owens about the head coaching position when Taylor finally stands up to the parent and tells Owens that he needs to stop sitting on the fence, decide which side he wants to be on and stick with it.

An elder from the church comes to Taylor one evening with a scripture telling him to prepare his team because God has something in store for them. Later that night Taylor begins researching the meaning of his team according to the Bible. He restructures his reasoning for his life, his coaching and the purpose of the team. The new motto of the team is to honor God in everything, including playing football.

His preaching begins in the locker room asking the players what they think the team is fighting for. He asked them what it means to actually win a championship, stating that people will remember you for a while, but forget you in a couple years. Taylor asks them to shift the focus from the team to God

because “championship trophies will one day collect dust and be forgotten” (Facing the Giants, 2008).

Taylor’s speech carries out of the locker room and onto the field. The players still are not buying into his new team philosophy; they are still skeptical of what he is saying so Taylor decides to wear them down like God has done to him. He implements a football drill that he called the “death crawl.” The death crawl will be the tool that Taylor uses because it wears the players out and takes a huge physical toll on the body.

When listening to the producers’ commentary on the DVD, Stephen and Alex Kendrick state that they made up the death crawl. After researching it, the only references found were from the film and nothing about it before then. Since there are no official descriptions of the death crawl, the following paragraphs will attempt to describe it from the film because it is vital to the scene that will be analyzed later in this essay.

The death crawl begins with a four-point stance for the player executing the drill. Both of his hands and feet are touching the ground, but no other part of the body is allowed to touch. Next, another player will lie on him back-to-back with his feet sticking up and grabbing the down-man’s shoulder pads to stay on. With a person on his back, adding another 160 or more pounds of weight, the player has to crawl without letting his knees touch the ground. The death crawl is taxing on a number of muscles throughout the body making it an incredibly difficult maneuver.

The whole team takes part in the death crawl for ten yards. Then the film cuts to the team sitting on the sidelines and we are introduced to Brock Kelley. His character is a natural leader in the film. We see Brock earlier in the film pranking a student in one of his classes who has fallen asleep at his desk. He puts the sleeping peer and his desk on top of the teacher's desk. All of the students and football players follow in Brock's steps, but up to this point Brock has done nothing positive. He is the first to give up on the season when they find out they are losing their star player and in the classroom he competes for the lowest grades.

After the team death crawl, the film cuts to the players sitting on the sideline getting ready for another speech by Taylor. While seated, Brock pours water on another player's head and everyone gets a kick out of it except for Grant. Another player asks the coach how strong their next team is and Brock is the first to say "A lot stronger than we are." Taylor snaps at Brock, asking him if he has counted his team out for the game and Brock replies with "Not if I knew we could beat 'em." That sequence of statements is the straw that breaks the camels back for Taylor. He knows that if his team glorifies God in football, God could give them the strength to win.

Grant demands Brock to get up and do the death crawl. Taylor wants to see Brock's best effort at the death crawl and he wants Brock to do it for 50 yards, a distance that none of the team has ever done. Brock promises he will do his best, which is surprising to Taylor, so the coach asks his player again just to make sure he heard right. Brock sarcastically says he will give his best. So

Taylor says Brock will not only have to do the death crawl longer than ever before, but he will have to do it blindfolded so he does not give up a certain point when Taylor believes he can go further. The other player, a tall lean receiver or linebacker named Jeremy, gets on his back.

The Defining Scene

The ensuing scene lasts for over four and a half minutes and captures the entire movie in it both visually and contextually. Brock, under the intense urging of his coach Grant Taylor and with a man on his back that weighed more than he originally thought, crawls 100 yards, the entire length of a football field, with a blindfold on, 50 more yards than he was asked to crawl. Brock finds out that he can accomplish a lot more than he gives himself credit for because he has faith to walk blindly down the field and essentially trust in God. The team and coaches see that faith and begin to follow their leader.

Stated earlier, the scene lasts exactly four and half minutes and is composed of 55 different shots. I have studied each shot using the angles, positioning of camera, movements of the camera and the action that happens in each shot. Now I want to give an overview of the shots, point out the key shots and then explain what they mean in relation to the rest of the film.

The defining scene in *Facing the Giants* (2006) begins with Brock Kelley getting down in the aforementioned death crawl position and Jeremy getting on his back. At about the 20-yard line, Brock starts asking where he is, but Taylor said to forget where he is, just keep giving his best effort. Around the 30 or 40-

yard line, Brock stops for a second, but Taylor keeps urging him on while standing above him.

As Brock passes mid-field, he starts struggling when his muscles start to burn, so Taylor gets down on his hands and knees and screams at Brock to keep pushing. The rest of the team has stopped laughing at him and is now standing in awe of what they are seeing from their teammate. After all of the pain and crawling, Brock finally collapses where he believes is the 50 yard line but when he takes off his blindfold, he is lying in the end zone, 100 yards from where he started.

While he is laying in the end zone, the rest of the team looks on in disbelief that the one person who has counted them out the most has just discovered that he is capable of such a feat. The team has discovered that they are also capable of much more than they first thought and that will carry over into their play. Their play and faith in God and themselves will inevitably lead them to a state championship against none other than the Giants.

When Brock reaches the end zone, he is exhausted and beaten down, just like many people are right before they accept Christ and become a Christian. He is lying, face down and has just been awed by the power of faith and the power of Christ and that is when Taylor asks him to accept his role as the leader of that team. Brock, with just enough energy left in him to speak, accepts that responsibility to take over as the leader on the field and among his peers.

After this scene, the football team is completely transformed into a more confident team that believes they can beat any team standing in their way. The team, after a 0-3 start, begins to win football games; in fact, they forget how to lose. They sweep the rest of the season's games and make it to the playoffs. In the first round of the playoffs they lose, but find out the team they lose to is ineligible, so they get to advance into the later rounds of the playoffs and have to faceoff with the defending state champions, the Giants. Kicker David Childers hits the winning field goal against the Giants as the clock expires, giving the school the state championship.

The school is also transformed by the change in the football team's behavior. A revival sweeps throughout the school, changing the lives of many of the students attending Shiloh Christian Academy. A day of classes is suspended so that students can get into prayer groups and just pray and worship. Many of the students, including one of the troublemakers on the team, Matt Prater, make a commitment to change their lives and follow Christ. Matt came to Shiloh because he had been kicked out of a number of other schools for behavioral reasons. But now, because of Coach Taylor, he has become a Godly man.

Grades are also affected by the recent revival at Shiloh, Brock who was once in competition for the worst grades, is now one of the best performers in the classroom. He has inspired other players and students to follow his lead and excel in their studies.

Grant's life is also transformed by the events of that scene. His trust in God helps him accept the fact that he and his wife may never parent children. Matt Prater's father gives Taylor a truck as appreciation for the work he has done in his son's life. Taylor is offered a raise for his outstanding achievements on the field. His attitude for the game becomes much more faithful, as long as he puts forth all that he has, God will provide or not provide and he will be thankful. He understands that importance of the team is not to win games, but to glorify his Father.

Breaking Down the Scene

The sequence that makes up the "death crawl" scene begins after Taylor has called out Brock, put on the blindfold and is getting into position. This sequence of shots lasts through the entire crawl and then ends after Grant tells Brock how much he needs him to lead the team. This scene is shot from both the field level and above from a crane. The scene consists of 55 different shots over exactly four minutes and 30 seconds.

The positioning of the camera plays a big role in this scene because it sits very low, almost on the ground for the entire scene. The only time that camera appears to be higher than one or two feet off the ground is two of the last shots of the sequence in which the camera is in a crane overlooking half of the field and making the actors look like ants.

The camera stays low most of the shots and shoots up at Brock and Taylor. Every single shot of them moving down the field is shot from a lower

elevation than the actors themselves. This angling of the camera makes you see what the team sees. They are small little ants looking up at the giants, which is the way the team has felt all year. They feel like they are nothings and are looking up at all of the competition and controversies surrounding them. The angle of the camera lets the audiences see what the team sees and feel as small as the team feels.

Throughout the scene you can also see a shift in height levels with the coach. Brock is down on the ground pushing his way down the field while the coach is his giant that is making him do this crawl. The coach has been riding Brock very hard and pushing him to be a better person, but to this point, Brock does not respect him much. He sees the coach as just another authority figure that does not know what is the best for him and trying to keep him down.

At the beginning of the crawl, the camera is set low, angled up at Brock, but all you can see of the coach is his legs and feet. Taylor towers over the player, standing like a giant figure in the screen. The fact that the camera is angled up just makes the coach seem even taller. As the scene progresses and Brock works harder and harder to move him and another player on his back down the field, Taylor comes down to his level. The symbolism of the coach kneeling at the same level shows that Brock is now starting to buy into the fact that he is not as weak as he did believe. When Brock nears the end zone, Taylor is laying on his belly, even lower than Brock is. Taylor, who was once a giant to Brock, is now laying lower than Brock and having to look up to him. Brock has

taken control of his life, found that his potential is limitless, especially with divine intervention and now is the giant.

Another important aspect of the sequence is the direction of the action. We are used to seeing things from left to right and not right to left. Just like we read a book, we read from the left side to the right side. Visual studies have shown that if you look at an image, you first notice what is in the center, then your eyes shift to the left and across to the right side (Zettl, 98, 1999). This scene of *Facing the Giants* (2006) features motions from the right to the left, an uncommon directional movement for an action scene. The camera follows that action, moving from the right end zone of the field to the left one, staying tight on action.

One of my favorite examples of this right to left asymmetry is in the Steve Martin film, *Leap of Faith* (1992). The film is about a group of con artists whose new device for making money is setting up tent revivals. Martin's character is a smooth talking king of con artists named Jonas Nightengale who preaches the word of God just to reap the financial benefits of it. His "ministry" uses lights, music, trickery and a lot of hope so patrons will donate wads of cash that they cannot afford to Nightengale's ministry. The scene opens with Martin smooth-talking a police officer out of giving him a ticket for speeding. From the start, the audience can see that Nightengale makes a living off of reading people and not being the genuine article.

After Martin talks his way out of the ticket, the crew gets back in the buses and speed off to their next trick, which turns out to be a small town facing a drought. As the bus flies down the interstate, the camera is positioned low on the side of the road, angled up. The buses zoom past the camera going from left to right, just like you would read. At the same time, closer to the camera, a turtle is slowly moving from right to left in the shot. The analysis of that one shot shows that even though it seems like the Nightengale ministry is heading for great wealth and prosperity, in actuality, it is slowly going in the wrong direction.

I used that example not because I think that Brock Kelley is going in the wrong direction in this scene. I used it because I think the direction of images on a screen; even though they do not look like they mean anything, actually do have a meaning. The movement of Brock from right to left shows that Brock, Taylor, this team and this film are not average as we think of it. They are all going against the grain of the secular world. Brock, Taylor and the team are going to face the giants they are presented with and they are going to come in with more confidence than the Giants could ever possess. These giants are not only a football team that has dominated that state, but they are also facing giants that will question the faith that some have just gained and others have renewed. The fight ahead of them is going to be different and harder than any other, but they are going to go against the norm and dare to be different for something they believe in.

The giant that the movie faces is very similar to that of Grant Taylor and his team. A small film like *Facing the Giants* (2006) from the small town of

Albany, Georgia with the small budget would have many giants to face in the film industry. They have to face the large companies like Warner Brothers, MGM and FOX in the box office in order to make money back from this film. They have to face distributing giants who will take a chance on sending a unique film like *Facing the Giants* (2006) to theaters and hope the risk would pay off. As Christian film scholar Terry Lindvall writes, the makers of Christian films “go against the grain of mere entertainment to produce a genre of religious cinema that is remarkably political: political because it subverts the secular city by envisioning, however inartistically or superficially, the City of God” (Lindvall, 1, 2007)

During the crawl, there are periodic shots of the rest of the players sitting on the sidelines near the end zone where Brock first started his journey down the field. The first few cuts to them have them laughing at him because he is just being a clown and getting punished. As he nears mid field, the smiles drip off of their faces and each one of them has more of a questioned look on their face. As he pushes pass mid field and well past the pre-assigned 50 yards, their looks become more of a stunned expression because they discover that Brock really does have a lot more power than they originally believed. When Brock nears the last quarter of the field, each player begins to stand up, beginning with the small kicker David, and slowly walk toward Brock.

The purpose of these actions by the players is to show that, first they will stand up for something they can see and have faith in, second they will also stand behind their leader, Brock, because he has proven himself as a strong

captain. He has beaten his demons and crawled the distance of a football team with a man on his back, symbolizing that he can carry the team down the field on his back, so they can now trust him as a leader and as an icon for themselves.

I believe that the last shot of this sequence has two different meanings to it. The shot I am referring to is a crane shot high above the football field. Brock is lying on the ground to the left of the shot and the audience can see most of the rest of the field in the right side of the frame. At first glance, it comes off as just an establishing shot, giving the audience a peek at the distance that Brock has covered. Though, it does serve that purpose the true meaning is deeper than just establishing a distance.

The more purposeful meaning of this high, wide angled shot, looking down on the field is a shot from Heaven. Brock Kelley has put his faith and all of his strength into the death crawl and he is now exhausted and beaten down to the ground. He is lying facedown in the grass, motionless. God is proudly looking down from His throne in Heaven at His child who has just accepted that he needs faith in his life if he wants to prosper into the strong leader that he was made to be. It also shows how small we are compared to the power of God and the strength He has over us. Brock, who is a fairly hefty guy, looks like an ant in the scene because compared to God he is nothing.

Conclusion

As the Death Crawl scene and the secular examples demonstrate, an entire movie can be summed up in one of its scenes. The scene we looked at

not only serves the purpose as being the turning point of the movie, but it also embodies the overall theme of the film. At the beginning of the scene, the coach did not really have much faith in turning a class clown like Brock Kelley around into a someone who could use his gift of leading into something more positive. Brock did not think he had the strength to carry a man down an entire football field. And the team did not think Brock would change his focus from always being laughed at to being someone who could lead them into being successful in and out of the classroom. But as we saw by the end of that scene, everyone's perception has been changed and each has a new vision

In an interview with Alex Kendrick, he denied setting up the scene to serve this purpose. He said that it just happened that way because of the lighting, because of the background and because of the sun. He humbly stated, "I don't think we're brilliant" but gives the credit to all of the prayer poured into the scene by the church. Kendrick has gotten calls from large corporations to use that scene to help motivate their employees, companies like Wal-Mart, Avon and Coca-Cola. Kendrick has gotten letters from people who said the scene changed their life. One woman contacted Kendrick saying she was about to go through a divorce. When she felt the power of the "death crawl" scene, she decided not to follow through with the divorce and to stick it out. After a while, God changed her life and fixed her marriage. The woman was not a football fan, but a football scene was able to change her life and keep her marriage intact (A. Kendrick, personal communication, February 21, 2009).

Kendrick did not plan every single aspect of the scene, but what happened can be summed up in parable told by Mr. Bridges in *Facing The Giants* (2006). “I heard a story about two farmers who desperately needed rain. And both of them prayed for rain but only one of them went out and prepared his fields to receive it. Which one do you think trusted God to send the rain?” (Kendrick, Kendrick, 2006). That story speaks to the scene and to the entire film. The people of Sherwood were not “brilliant” but they were prepared for the rain. Kendrick wrote a scene that he hoped would be a key moment in his film, but it became so much more than that. Sherwood produced a film and let God take over, they were preparing their fields and seeking God’s hands and when it rained, it poured.

Chapter Eight

Conclusion

Now that the background and all of the elements of the film have been established, this last chapter will breakdown the key ingredients that came together to create one of the most successful Christian films of all time in something called the Sherwood Method. The uniqueness of this film was that its success came from outside of Hollywood. There are many different reasons for that, one of which is the application of Christianity to our daily lives is a subject that Hollywood rarely touches. Another reason was because the purpose of the film did not align with the business scheme of the Hollywood studios. Hollywood is in a moneymaking business and Sherwood is in a soul-saving business.

The Sherwood Method is the combination of the formula devised by the “Big Four” (Kendrick, Kendrick, Catt and McBride) for Sherwood Pictures, which has three parts to it, and the elements of the process that has been replicated that led to continued success. The first is to ask God for His ideas and not just come up with something believed to be a good idea. The second is to trust Him to bring together all the people necessary for the project. The last is to allow Him to bring the fruit and resources needed for the project. In addition to that formula, I have concluded from my research of Sherwood Pictures and *Facing The Giants* (2006) that the elements presented below are what is necessary in order to apply the Sherwood Method of filmmaking to future endeavors. Following are the

components that are vital in order to make a feature-length independent Christian film using the method that proved successful by Sherwood Pictures.

1. Good Idea vs. God Idea

One element heavily stressed by Jim McBride and Alex Kendrick was finding what they call a “good idea versus a God idea.” Early in the brainstorming process of their movies, they went through a lot of ideas. They found ideas they believed were good ideas, but after prayer realized they were not God ideas. Since making the films, they receive books and manuscripts in the mail everyday about people wanting them to make movies from their ideas. Kendrick said many of the ideas were good, but after spending time in prayer, he discovered that they were not the ideas that God inspired him to create. This is not saying that books and manuscripts are not God ideas for their respected authors, but they are not the ideas God is telling Sherwood to pursue. Finding the story that God wants you to tell is more important than finding a story you believe people would want to hear.

This goes back to the idea of prayer that McBride and Kendrick both expressed. Spending more time in prayer than the actual filming process is something advocated by Sherwood. The films are not the creation of man, but rather the work of God through man. Seeking God’s approval and allowing Him to work through the filmmakers is what produces a successful product. The ultimate objective of the film should be to glorify God and tell others about Him,

fulfilling what Matthew 28:18-20 (New International Version) calls “The Great Commission.” The verses read

“Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. Then Jesus came to them and said, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.’”

When asked if he would ever venture west to Hollywood, Kendrick said that as of right now, he did not feel called to do so. But if he were called by God to enter the Hollywood world, he would not hesitate to fulfill that calling. He said that if he did enter the world of Hollywood and the big studios, he would not pull any of his punches when it came to the content of the film. Whatever he felt God wanted him to say through his film would be written into the script. However, Kendrick said he would embrace the bigger budgets of Hollywood studios by pouring it into the production side of the films. He is always looking to make his films easier on the eyes but firmly states if that means he has to sacrifice in content, he would prefer the lower budget.

2. Trust God to Bring The People Together

When the Kendricks finished writing their first film *Flywheel* (2003), the next step in the process was to find people in order to put the ideas on film.

Instead of taking the tradition route of calling an agency to find the actors needed, they allowed God to provide them with the actors. Their faith in God to provide them with people the actors and crew led them to the church instead of an agency. God provided the Kendricks with all of the people needed to handle all of the responsibilities needed for filming *Flywheel* (2003) from right in their own church of Sherwood Baptist.

For the production of *Facing The Giants* (2006), the Kendricks, McBride and Catt exercised the same discipline from their earlier movie. They allowed God to bring them the people they needed in order to make a film that glorified Him. God provided over 1,200 church members to assist in everything from acting and running cameras to catering and babysitting. He even provided people to pray during all of the shoots. In fact, only six of the crew and cast were not members of Sherwood Baptist, five were experts hired to assist in the technical side of production and the sixth was Mark Richt, head coach of the Georgia Bulldogs football team. Besides those six people, Sherwood trusted God to bring them the people they needed and He provided for them.

3. Allow God to Bring the Fruit

The other thing that the Kendricks needed after writing a film and finding cast and crew is equipment. Cameras, lights, wardrobe, tapes, music, food and many other things were needed for the production to take place. In order to get those things they either need money or someone to donate them to you.

Sherwood believed if that project was in the best interest of God, he would provide those things to them and He did.

Private donations and offerings from the church members raised about \$100,000 towards the production of *Facing The Giants* (2006). That money was used to get equipment and pay for five professionals to come in to assist with the usage of equipment and lighting. A lot of the food used for catering was from the different Sunday school groups who would designate different days to cook for the cast and crew. The wardrobes belonged to the cast, they were asked to wear their own clothes to the set. The uniforms and facilities were donated by Sherwood Christian Academy and neighboring high schools for use during the football scenes of the movies.

The producers of the film trusted that God would provide them with the resources they needed, whether that be monetary or physical needs. God did bless their project but not through traditional practices of having a huge production company finance and supply their project, but rather through non-traditional methods.

4. Think Outside the Box

The first quality a Christian filmmaker who chooses to follow this approach must possess is the ability to think outside of the box. That means to not just follow what tradition says to do because Christians making films that can compete in a postmodern culture is something that has barely been done with such box office success. It took creative and bold thinkers like Michael Catt and

Alex Kendrick to realize that just because Christians had not really embraced the medium before, that does not mean its off limits. The medium itself is not secular but rather neutral, it is the way people use the medium that makes it Christian or secular. Until recently, the medium has been heavily saturated with secular films.

Most filmmakers are creative people to begin with. Their objective is to create a narrative based off of events in a way that offers something new to the audience. Filmmaking by definition demands an element of thinking outside the box, but mostly in the writing process. In order to create a film the way Sherwood did, one must learn that traditional practices are not always the path to take when creating something rare.

Christ was not a traditional thinker, he was always thinking outside of the norms. Jesus spent much of his time on Earth with people who were not normally known as moralistic. It was not normal for a leader in church to be seen spending time with shady people, but Christ was not like other people; he stood out because of his radical actions. Take Luke 19:1-10 (New International Version) when Jesus invited himself to Zacchaeus' home. Associating yourself with a tax collector was not something the church encouraged, but Jesus knew that these were the types of people who needed to hear about God.

5. Think Big

Thinking big is the next quality for a Christian filmmaker. When working with the talents or the passion that God gave you, one thing you have to rely on

is what the Bible says in Philippians 4:13, “I can do everything through Him who gives me strength” (New International Version). Thinking big is not just for Christians making films, but Christians in general. The University of Georgia’s football coach Mark Richt has a line in the movie that sums up the idea of thinking big, he says “In God’s word He said 365 different times ‘do not fear.’ If He says it that many times, you know He’s serious about it” (Kendrick, Kendrick, 2006). Why not reach for the stars? What is stopping a Christian from winning an Oscar for a Christian film? Why not believe you have the ability to make a Christian film that can change the world?

One of the verses that came up in both interviews with director Alex Kendrick and executive producer Jim McBride was Ephesians 3:20 which reads, “Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us” (New International Version). People who follow the teachings of Jesus Christ have an enormous advantage over others because they have the most powerful Being working through them. Like what Alex Kendrick said, “we’re not brilliant,” but they trust in a God who is omnipotent and omniscient. That alone is better than anything a Hollywood studio could ever hope to offer a filmmaker. Thinking big is definitely something Sherwood Pictures practiced when making their films. If someone is truly called by God to make films and is pure in intention for the film, God will show favor and anything is possible.

6. The United Church

The next ingredient for creating a film using the Sherwood Method is church involvement. Sherwood Baptist Church played a major role in the success of *Facing The Giants* (2006) so in order to duplicate the success of the film using the same methods that Sherwood Pictures did, the Church would have to be present. The church was enormous in the making of Sherwood's films. Almost all of the resources for the film came from the church or individuals in the church. The church is vital to the equation for a Christian filmmaker following in Sherwood's footsteps. The body of believers at Sherwood provided the money, actors, crew, sets and just about everything else necessary for the film. It acted as the part of the studio in offering all resources to compliment the writing. Having a large backer like that is almost essential to create a film in a reasonable amount of time. Building your own budget and supplies would take so much time and energy that it would take years to get your project off the ground.

One of the most important things the church offered the producers was constant prayer. Kendrick emphasized how important prayer was in the producing of the film; the church really came together and purely sought after God's blessing on the project by spending more time with Him than working on the film. God favors those who seek Him whole-heartedly, especially when it is an entire church congregation. Having a large church body would favor a filmmaker with the sheer number of resources available, but with God's favor a small number could accomplish the feat. Acts 12:5-7 (New International Version) reads,

“So Peter was kept in prison, but the church was earnestly praying to God for him. The night before Herod was to bring him to trial, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, and sentries stood guard at the entrance. Suddenly an angel of the Lord appeared and a light shone in the cell. He struck Peter on the side and woke him up. "Quick, get up!" he said, and the chains fell off Peter's wrists.”

The power of the united church can be enough to not only meet the physical needs of Christian filmmakers, but also can spiritually uplift a film. God loves nothing more than to see Christians united for His cause. God united man and woman in Genesis for His glory; He united the people of Israel against Gibeah in Judges and Jesus united people during his time on this earth. Everywhere Jesus went, a crowd would assemble. This brought God favor because it was for Him that the people had come together, for His glory.

Applying this Essay

It is important to note first that this is not the only structure that can be used to produce a feature length Christian film; it is the way Sherwood found success. One other way to produce a film like this would work with a Christian film production company, not directly associated with a specific church. Another avenue would be to raise the money and resources through private donations or have a principle backer. There are many different ways to produce a Christian feature length film; this opens up the opportunity for future research for other film scholars.

Another area that might be worth looking into the in theme of Christian film would be the effect that acting has on a film. This thesis has concluded that the content of the films were up to par with the rest of their secular film counterparts. But when it comes to acting, Christian films cannot always compete. Sherwood used all amateur actors for its film *Facing The Giants* (2006), all of which came from Sherwood Baptist or friends of the church. Christian filmmakers usually have to work with a limited budget, meaning they will have to make cuts in some area. So future research could try to discover how Christians can find better actors who are Christians are represent that characters they are portraying.

What all of this research is leading up to is to show Christian filmmakers a Scripturally based and demonstrably successful approach to creating an American narrative feature length independent Christian film. This method did work, not just once, but three different times. The levels of success were different each time, but the producers never lost money with any of the films. It is also important to know this is not the only way to produce a Christian film, because there are other ways to make a Christian film and possibly be successful at it. This thesis documents how the Sherwood Method was assembled, analyzes how it works and explains how it is applied to Christian filmmaking and can be used to create future Christian films.

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