

Some thoughts on watching films

Stories are the stuff of life. They allow us to reflect on all sorts of issues at a safe distance as we engage with the characters, cry with them, laugh with them, get cross with them and generally share their experience. How they deal with the issues they come across may frustrate us, or give us new insights; cause us to laugh or cry; result in us hurling abuse at the screen or willing there to be a happy ending. And through it all we can encounter God in all sorts of unexpected places if we only take time to look.

Questions to ask yourself

What did you think of the film? What do you like most? Least?

Which incidents made you *think* or *feel* most strongly? How well did you think the film treated those incidents?

What issues did the film raise for you?

What character(s) do you most identify with and why?

Does the film have any echoes of Christian beliefs or stories from the Bible? Does it support or challenge Christian values?

Some trivia about the film

Nominated for the Golden Palm award at the Cannes Film Festival 2003.

The pictures shown in the final credits are from Jacob Holdt's book/documentary *American Pictures* (1984).

The idea for the film was greatly influenced by Bertolt Brecht's *The Threepenny Opera* and, in particular, the "Pirate Jenny" song, with its theme of revenge.

The original script was written in Danish.

Dogville is the first of a trilogy of films entitled: *USA—Land of Opportunities*.

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finally assumed their rightful place. No, What they had done was not good enough. And if one had the power to put it right it was one's duty to do so—for the sake of other towns, for the sake of humanity. And not least for the sake of the human being that was grace herself.

[Last lines]

Narrator: Whether Grace left Dogville, or on the contrary Dogville had left her—and the world in general—is a question of a more artful nature that few could benefit from by asking, and even fewer by providing an answer. And nor indeed will it be answered here.



**A chance to watch films together.
An opportunity to discuss the issues raised.
A time of friendship, food and fun.**

2nd Jul	Life Of Brian
6th Aug	Crash
3rd Sep	Bridget Jones' Diary
1st Oct	<u>Dogville</u>
5th Nov	The Man Who Sued God
3rd Dec	Cool Hand Luke

**Films start at 5:30pm
Followed by food, coffee and conversation**

**10 Bletchingdon Road
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Dogville

Set in an American Town in the Rocky Mountains in the 1930s, *Dogville* explores the concept of goodness and judgement. Grace arrives in the isolated township on the run from a team of gangsters. With some encouragement from Tom, the self-appointed town spokesman, the little community agrees to hide her and in return, Grace agrees to work for him. However, when a search sets in, the people of Dogville demand a better deal in exchange for the risk of harbouring poor Grace and she learns the hard way that in this town, goodness is relative. As the film progresses, we see the dark side of humanity gain the upper hand, reminding us of our flawed nature. And Grace herself, on learning the cold harsh truth in a place she expected to find the goodness that faith told her existed, then discovers that even within her there lies a deep darkness.

Some key issues

The corrupting influence of power

All of us would like to be considered good people. Yet when people put themselves into our power, it is so easy to begin to take advantage.

Accepting gifts

Grace's name is no accident. When she first arrives she wants to offer something to the community but no one admits to needing help. Nonetheless, they find things for her to do, only slowly acknowledging that she is filling a need. As always, it remains difficult to accept help from others with good grace. Likewise, we are reluctant to acknowledge our need of God.

Recognising who we are

Why do the people of Dogville react the way they do? One possible answer is that Grace forces people to face up to who they really are. Before her arrival everyone is happily stuck in a rut. Once she arrives, everything changes. Everyone is faced with their mediocrity and everyone's lies are exposed. McKay has to acknowledge his blindness, Bill his lack of intelligence (Grace plays checkers for him), Liz her unattractiveness (Grace catches Tom's eye), Ben his loneliness (Grace provides for him), Chuck and Vera their unhappy marriage (Grace catches Chuck's eye) and Tom his cowardice (through his refusal to kiss Grace even though she's admitted her love for him). But not everyone likes to be exposed. It's hard to face yourself when you don't like what you see. And the person you punish is the one that made you look at your reflection. After all, that is why Jesus was nailed to the cross.

Judgement

How much should we take responsibility for our actions? Is it fair to judge everyone by the same standards? Or should account be made of the circumstances in which we find ourselves? And if we are responsible for our actions, should we therefore bear the consequences? Listen carefully to the conversation in the car near the end of the film.

Memorable quotes

[Tom offers a piece of bread to Grace]

- Tom:** You want to eat? You must be hungry.
- Grace:** I can't. I don't deserve that bread. I stole that bone. I've never stolen anything before. So now, now I have to punish myself. I was raised to be arrogant. So, I ... I had to teach myself these things
- Tom:** Well, it may be for your education. Grace, in this town ... In these times ... It's very impolite not to eat what's set before you.
- Grace:** All I see is a beautiful little town in the midst of magnificent mountains. A place where people have hopes and dreams even under the hardest conditions.
- Tom:** Two people only hurt each other if they doubt the love they have for one another.
- Vera:** I believe smashing them is less a crime than making them. I am going to break two of your figurines first, and if you can demonstrate your knowledge of the Doctrine of Stoicism by holding back your tears, I'll stop.
- Grace:** Dogs only obey their own nature, so why shouldn't we forgive them?
- Father:** Dogs can be taught many useful things, but not if we forgive them every time they obey their own nature. You forgive others with excuses that you would never in the world permit for yourself.
- ...
- Grace:** Why shouldn't I be merciful? Why?
- Father:** Oh, no. You should. You should be merciful when there's time to be merciful. But you must maintain your own standards. You owe them that. ... Does every human being need to be accountable for their actions? Of course they do, but you don't even give them that chance. And that is extremely arrogant.
- ...
- Grace:** The people who live here are doing their best under very hard circumstances.
- Father:** If you say so. But is their best really good enough?
- Narrator:** How could she ever hate them for what was at bottom merely their weakness? She would probably have done things like those to be fallen her if she had lived in one of these houses. To measure them by her own yardstick as her father put it. Would she not, in all honesty, have done the same as Chuck and Vera and Ben and Mrs Henson and Tom and all these people in their houses? Grace paused—and all of a sudden she knew the answer to her question all too well. If she had acted like them she could not have defended a single one of her actions and could not have condemned them harshly enough. It was as if her sorrow and pain

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