

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.

So here are some questions you can apply to any film. Sometimes, you may feel that there is nothing much to say—but that itself can be its own message. Other films can be truly life changing! But whatever film you are watching, enjoy the experience!

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? How does the Bible tackle the issues the film raises?

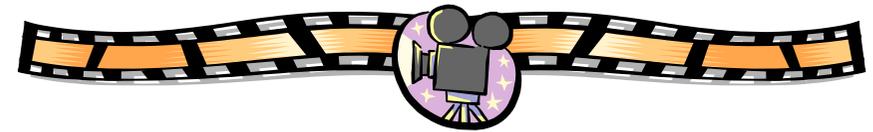
Some trivia about the film

The plot outline is borrowed from Krzysztof Kieslowski's "Blind Chance" (1987). The future of the main character depends on whether he catches a train or not, and develops three different scenarios each depending on what happens at the railway station.

Rowers from London Rowing club, Cygnet, were chosen to be John Hannah's crew mates in the film. The casting director initially went to Imperial College, but when it was noted that they were "all over two meters with flat stomachs" it was decided that lesser rowers than the elite set of internationals would be cast. This is deliberate in order to make Hannah look like the tall athletic one in the boat.

Jerry makes a joke about withdrawing Helen's Class One Drugs. Great Britain uses an alphabetical classification system so class one should be class A.

At one point Helen chastises her house mate for asking her "more questions than Jeopardy". Jeopardy is an American quiz show that has only been briefly aired on British television. Even though it is well known in the UK, it isn't sufficiently part of popular culture that two British women would use this show as an analogy.



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

7th Jan	Harry Potter & the Prisoner of Azkaban
4th Feb	Pulp Fiction
4th Mar	Pleasantville
1st Apr	Man dancin'
3rd Jun	<u>Sliding Doors</u>
1st Jul	Little Miss Sunshine

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

**10 Bletchingdon Road
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Sliding Doors

The film opens with Helen being unjustifiably sacked from her PR job. She returns to the Underground to catch a train back to her flat but, as she runs down the stairs, we suddenly see her life split into two. In one version, she catches the train. In the second, she doesn't. Throughout the rest of the film we see what would have happened in each scenario. Her whole life changes in that split second. In one version of her life, she meets a charming man called James and gets home to find her boyfriend Gerry in bed with another woman. In the other, she gets mugged and ends up with a poorly paid job as a waitress. Both stories are cleverly weaved together and, ultimately, one has a hopeful conclusion while the other does not.

Behind the whole premise of the film is the question of providence. Is my destiny mapped out for me? Can I escape what fate has already decreed? Some of the events which happen appear to be "coincidences", others less so. Sometimes we seem to be in control of our fate; at other times we seem to be victims of circumstances beyond our control. How much do our lives happen to us? Do we in some sense direct them, or at least partially direct them? Or does some higher purpose, or perhaps impersonal fate, shape our lives in whole or in part? And, turning the question on its head, how much can God tinker with the world he has made? And what does that mean for intercessory prayer?

Reflections

- ⇒ The sliding doors of the title, which feature at both the beginning and the end of the film and indicate crucial points of the story, perhaps remind us that our actions are to some extent always irreversible and mutually exclusive: the doors close on some possible outcomes whilst also opening up new possibilities.
- ⇒ We do not know what the future holds for Helen and James as the lift doors close in the final scene, but we can certainly hope things will turn out well. Compared to the alternative scenario where their time together was tragically cut short, it could be argued that this second alternative was the preferable one. However, it was the much more painful journey.
- ⇒ Both stories have parts which are very similar—pregnancy, an accident. Is it possible that our lives are indeed mapped out and all we can do is tinker with the details?
- ⇒ 'Life must be lived forwards but can only be understood backwards' (Kierkegaard) Can we see the hand of God at work only at a later date?
- ⇒ Do you think God has a purpose for your life? If so, is that something God imposes? Or might it be that God, whom we affirm knows best for us and works with us, just keeps on offering us the opportunity to actualize that purpose. It is then up to us to take those opportunities.
- ⇒ The idea of providence is often thought to refer to the notion that God's care for us provides for our needs and shelters us from harm. For some this simply refers to the *macro* conditions—creating the good world in which we live. Others would focus on God influencing or determining *micro* events in human lives. Either way, God looks ahead and puts in hand that which needs to be done in order to provide for us (see Psalm 27). Yet there remains a difference between foreseeing the future and determining it. God allows people space—and thus the opportunity to mess things up. How can we then have hope in the future?

Memorable quotes

- Russell: You want my opinion?
Gerry: Will I like it?
Russell: Well, of course not! It'll be based in reality.
- Russell: Sorry, let me just... Lydia's becoming more and more demanding and you feel bad because Helen's working night and day to keep the money coming in. But you've asked Helen to come on a research trip to Dorset with you - knowing that she wouldn't be able to - to cover up the fact that you're really taking Lydia. And despite the fact that Lydia gave you an out on the phone - which you didn't take - you're having a moral dilemma.
- [*pause*]
Russell: Gerry, you are a morality-free zone.
- Lydia: Gerry, I'm a woman! We don't say what we WANT! But we reserve the right to get pissed off if we don't get it. That's what makes us so fascinating! And not a little bit scary.
- James: Cheer up. Remember what the Monty Python boys say.
Helen: "Always look on the bright side of life"?
James: No, "Nobody expects the Spanish Inquisition."
- James: What are you doing two weeks on Saturday?
Helen: Probably killing myself.
James: Excellent. What time does that finish? Do you like boats?
- Helen: I-I'm not - I'm not very good at - at, you know...
James: Constructing sentences?
- Anna: Are you okay?
Helen: Yes, just going quietly mad.
Anna: Thank goodness for that. I was worried.
- James: Go on, try it. All things work for the best. (cf. Rom 8:28)
- Helen: For God's sake, Gerry. I asked you a simple question; there is no need for you to become Woody Allen.
- [*Helen walks into the room holding a pregnancy test*]
Anna: James?
[*Helen nods*]
Anna: Since last night?
[*Helen stares*]
Anna: Sorry.
[*pause*]
Anna: You can't tell from one. They can be inaccurate.
Helen: I bought three packets. Two in a packet - that's six. You can tell from six.