

The Greatest Showman

A Modern-Day Parable

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Welcome back to week 3 of our “God in the Movies” series. Each week you have heard from us on how God’s truths are ever present, even in movies. First, we have learned from Gina that *Your Story Matters* from the movie “Freedom Writers”. Last week PB shared with us the *Two Great Commandments for Marriage* from the movie “Guinevere”. Today we are going to take a deep look at the movie, “The Greatest Showman” and how it portrays a modern-day parable of the greatest commandments God has given us in His Word.

How many of you have seen the movie?

For those of you who have seen the movie, you learned quickly that it is a musical. Some of you love musicals. There are some of you, unless the story line is really good, don’t like musicals because you may feel that they don’t portray a true picture of real life. Your thought may be, “Come on, when in real life do people break out in song in the middle of a situation?” Gina and I had a friend who one time shared that opinion with us in front of our daughters, who were teenagers at the time. When he said this, our daughters responded with, “It happens all the time in our house.” They were speaking the truth. When emotions or moments got tense, which happens a lot in a household of four daughters, I would break out into song, singing a song

related to the discussion, and sometime changing the words to connect with what was being said.

For example, “Feelings.” “Feelings, nothing more than feelings, trying to progress through the feelings I have.”

Regardless of how you feel about musicals, the story line in “The Greatest Showman” is really a good one and focuses on value; where we get our value and how we value others.

Let’s take a look at the movie trailer to get a quick picture.

Show Trailer

P.T. Barnum said in the movie, and in real life, “No one ever made a difference by being like everyone else.”

What a powerfully true statement! God has created each one of us uniquely different to make a difference with Him in the lives of others.

How does this truth connect with “The Greatest Showman”?

Let’s Pray.

Here is the story of Phineas Taylor Barnum, also known as P.T. Barnum, from the movie. An important side note is that not everything in this movie was true about his life. However, the movie tells a compelling story, or parable, reinforcing truth from scripture.

When Phineas was a child, after his father passes away in the movie, he begins a life on the street. To survive, he tried to steal bread. The merchant recovers his bread and slaps him.

A disfigured stranger saw this. He felt pity for Barnum and gave him a shiny, red apple. This subtle act of kindness had a transformational influence on P.T. Barnum's life and reinforces the truth found in **Matthew 25:40** that says *"Whatever you did for one of the least of these, you did for Me."*

During this time in Barnum's life, he fell in love a young girl named Charity, whose family was extremely wealthy. Charity's father refused to allow her to spend time with Phineas because of his social status and sent Charity off to boarding school. Phineas and Charity never lost connection and wrote to one another weekly. During this time, he worked hard at various jobs and came back to marry her, telling her father that he would give her life far better than the one she was living. Charity's father responded with the piercing words of "She'll be back." From there Barnum set off to prove her father wrong and to give Charity a better life. He wanted to prove to the world that a person who lived on the streets of New York as a homeless person, could be successful.

In the movie, Barnum and Charity married and had two daughters. One day the company Barnum was working for unexpectedly closed, leaving him unemployed. It was then when he came up with the idea, with some help from his

daughters, to start a circus. Through it all he and Charity talked about all their dreams and made decisions together.

Barnum started off with good intentions. He created his circus as a place for people to belong and as a means to provide for his family. As you saw in the trailer, the circus was made of people with unique differences.

Although there were some groups of people who protested against Barnum having his circus, with these unique individuals, in their town, the circus was extremely successful, and Barnum began to make lots of money. As his success grew, his love for success and money grew, and it began to distance him from his wife and daughters, although it did provide for them.

One day he heard about an opera singer named Jenny Lind, who he hired to help make a name for himself and to make more money. He did not include his wife Charity in this decision.

Shortly after this music tour began, Jenny Lind, the opera singer, read his passion to make money from her talent, as passion and desire for her, and she made a move on him. He refused. Although he was in love with his work and was seeking his value from it, he still loved Charity deeply. Jenny Lind was extremely upset that he did not return her affection and refused to complete the tour after the performance that was scheduled for the next day. After she performed the song, ironically called "Never Enough," and the audience applauded, Barnum came out on the stage to

take a bow with her and Jenny vengefully kissed him long enough for reporters to get a picture. This picture was seen the next day in the newspaper by his wife, Charity.

The following day, the building he owned where the circus was performed, and where the performers lived, burned down. Additionally, because the tour was cancelled, and it was paid through a loan which put a lien on their home, he and Charity also lost their home.

When Barnum told Charity that Jenny had staged the kiss and that nothing happened, Charity said to him "You're not in love with her or with me. You're in love with you and your show." Charity then told him that she was going to move home to live with her parents.

Ouch, Ouch, Ouch

This movie is a parable showing us so many of God's truths for our lives.

Ecclesiastes 5:10

"Whoever loves money never has enough; whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with their income. This too is meaningless."

Barnum, in the movie, sought value in the wrong things. It all left him empty and brought destruction.

I recently read in a devotional this powerful paragraph on value and what defines us:

“There is as much danger in believing your successes define you as there is in believing your failures define you. Your strength doesn’t define you anymore than your weakness does. Your abilities don’t define you anymore than your inabilities do. Your best moments and decisions don’t define you anymore than your worst moments and decisions do. Nothing you do or don’t do defines you. God defines you. And his definition for you is “Beloved.”

How would this movie have turned out if Barnum believed this about himself? How would our lives be if you and I believed this about ourselves?

It all comes down to our relationship with God. Only He can fill us. He created us to be in a relationship with Him and it’s there where we discover our unique value with Him and with others.

This truth is found in **Matthew 22: 36-39**:

*“Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?”
Jesus replied: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart
and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first
and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Love
your neighbor as yourself.”*

If Barnum loved God with his whole heart, soul, and mind, how do you think this movie would have been rewritten?

As you or I look back on our lives, how do you or I think the outcome would be in those decisions where we did not love Him or trust Him with our whole heart, soul and mind?

As we seek God, spend time in His word, follow His lead, and live out the first and greatest commandment, can we truly live out the second greatest to “Love your neighbor as yourself”?

As we go back to the movie, “The Greatest Showman” isn’t just a film about circus performers and the struggle of P.T. Barnum and his divided heart; it is a reflection of our society today divided by pain and injustice and loving people conditionally.

It is an allegory in many ways about what the church should be and what we will lose if we give up Christ’s commandment to love others in favor of our own judgements, political or personal.

What are some of the pains and injustices in the movie that still divide us today?

- Racial discrimination
- Gender inequality
- Class warfare
- Prejudice based on physical ability and differences
- The choice between family values and power
- The undying pursuit of the American dream at all costs

Jesus said in **John 13:35**, *“By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”*

Jesus’ love transformed people and so can we!

Before we close, let’s take a look at one other scene from the movie. This scene occurs right after Jenny Lind performs for the first time, before an audience of the rich and elite. In this scene, the circus performers are sad and angry because Barnum wouldn’t allow them to be a part of the after party because of who they were.

Show the scene “This is Me.”

If we are honest, just like Barnum, there are times, especially with all that going on in our world right now, where we have forgotten to love.

*To love people who look, sound, think and feel differently than we do.

*To love people who have experienced injustices in our midst and to look deeply on how we might seek to understand or need to change our behaviors to remedy this.

*To love God with humility, taking up our cross daily and following Him, no matter what the cost, even if that means wearing a mask to protect others when you think differently about wearing one.

Lettie, the bearded woman, in one of the scenes in the movie said to Barnum, “The world is ashamed of us. Our own mothers were ashamed of us. But you pulled us out of the shadows and put us in the spotlight. You gave us a real family.”

Family, that is who God created us to be as The Church, with the values we bring as His children.

“Our value doesn’t come from how much people love us but by how much love people feel from us.”

That’s how Barnum’s circus in the movie started and that’s what we need to do if we want people to experience the same freedom, grace and love we found when we first became Christians.

P.T. Barnum said in the movie, and in real life, “No one ever made a difference by being like everyone else.”

1 Peter 2: 9-10 from The Message says:

“But you are the ones chosen by God, chosen for the high calling of priestly work, chosen to be a holy people, God’s instruments to do his work and speak out for him, to tell others of the night-and-day difference he made for you— from nothing to something, from rejected to accepted.”

In the King James version, it says “we are a peculiar or unique” generation.

God did not create us to be like everyone else. He gave each of us unique gifts and as we love Him and others, we will make a difference.

Where is God calling you to make a difference?

There may be some of you here today who have never started a relationship with God and would love to discover who He created you to be. It's as easy as A, B, C.

A - Admit that you have sinned.

B - Believe that Jesus died on the cross to pay for your sins so your relationship with God can be restored.

C - Commit your life to Him and make the choice to live for Him daily.

D - Do it today for none of us know if we have tomorrow.

If that's something you want to do, simply pray this prayer with me.