

Wizard of Oz

Welcome to **Week 1 of Screens to Sacred** as we look at some moments in entertainment that can be good reflections and reminders for us to turn our gaze back to the Word of God. What's neat about what we are going to do over the next 5 weeks is we are going to be looking for impressions of God or godly principles that we find in pop culture. Even though many of the creative entertainment works that we are going to be looking at are secular in nature and in some cases not even produced or written by people of faith, we can still find helpful spiritual principles and see glimpses of God throughout these creative works. And this should not surprise us. In fact, it proves that man (no matter what his or her belief may be) has been created in the image of God and as image bearers we all reflect His glory whether it is through art, music and movie entertainment. Another reason this is a profitable exercise for us is that it gives us a natural bridge by which we can have spiritual conversations and share the Gospel with other people even though they may not be believers or may have ever read the Bible themselves. These movies and shows can create a platform with which we can cultivate further conversations about God.

We're kicking off our series with the cinematic masterpiece the Wizard of Oz. This movie premiered in 1939 and had nearly a \$3 million budget which is huge for it's time, and technically wasn't a success because it barely broke even. It didn't make a profit till it was rereleased in 1949, and then once it premiered on TV in 1956, it became a solid piece of Americana. It is considered to be the most seen film in history.

So spiritually what can we learn from the adventures of Dorothy and her friends in the land of Oz? Well, if we look closely at each of the main characters we see 4 basic needs regarding the human experience. What do you do and where do you go when your HEART feels empty or broken inside? Where do you turn and what do you look to when you feel INADEQUATE or LACK WISDOM and KNOW HOW to deal with the challenges of adult life? How do you overcome crippling FEAR that is robbing you of the freedom to live life to its fullest? What do you do when you feel LOST and far from HOME? These are all questions and tensions we all have had to deal with at some point along life's journey. The question is, WHERE DO WE GO FOR ANSWERS and WHO IS GOING TO HELP US? For Dorothy and her friends they had similar needs and so they went searching for the all powerful Oz to get answers along the yellow brick road. We don't have the yellow brick road but we do have God's word so let's take a look at these 4 characters and see what Oz offered them and compare that with what God's word has to say on each matter.

The FIRST NEED we encounter in the Wizard of Oz that we can all relate to is the need for **A HEART**

There are 2 great lines from the Wizard of Oz about hearts that should strike a cord in ours. **"A heart is not judged by how much you love; but by how much you are loved by others."** and **"Hearts will never be practical until they can be made unbreakable."** These are lines spoken by Oz with the Tin Man of course. One of Dorothy's encounters with the

allegorical vagabonds of the yellow brick road puts her in connection with the Tin Man searching for a heart so he can love his munchkin maiden, among other things. He joins with the frolicking sojourners of the yellow brick road and after defeating the wicked witch confronts the eventual humbuggery of Oz and rather than receiving a tangible heart replacement for his hollow chest, he receives a Flavor-Flav style alarm clock on a chain as a testimonial. That works well in terms of a musical, but it is a little less functional when dealing with our own hearts.

Tin Man was in a place where he recognized his heart wasn't right and he wanted the situation remedied. If we're honest and moderately self-aware, most of us have been in the same place. We know our hearts are broken in some fashion or another, and we want to find healing. Sometimes we think relationships, status, or achievement can fix it but it usually just serves as a temporary distraction and eventually leaves us feeling more empty. The reason is because our hearts are broken and spiritually empty as we talked about in our last series.

Jeremiah 17:9-10 (NIV) "The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it? "I the Lord search the heart and examine the mind, to reward each person according to their conduct, according to what their deeds deserve."

God makes it clear that while we may not have hollow tin chests, we do have a heart that is corrupt, and He is in full observance and awareness of our hearts. He would go even further in His discussion with the prophet Ezekiel. God was speaking hope to the nation of Israel, and I believe it is hope that is available for us today as well.

Ezekiel 36:26-27 (NIV) "I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws."

God wasn't going to settle for an alarm clock like Tin Man was given, He wants to give His people a new heart. To remove what's broken and holding us back, and give us a heart that's able to actually live and draw close to Him. Our new hearts can still be broken and falter, but He is the one who can restore them above all else. Even though God can restore our broken Hearts, God does warn us to guard them.

Proverbs 4:23 (NIV) "Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it." -

Oz said hearts that can be broken aren't practical, and he's right, our hearts definitely aren't practical. But when we allow God to restore them, and when we are intentional with how we use and guard them, they are exceptionally powerful and beautiful. And if how much our hearts are loved determines their worth, then they are priceless because of the depth of the love God has for them.

Ephesians 2:4-5 (NIV) "But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved."

Like the Tin Man we all are in search of **A HEART** that is restored and full. And only Jesus can heal us and fill us!!

The **SECOND NEED** we encounter in the Wizard of Oz that we can all relate to is the need for **A BRAIN**

Scarecrow, like the other slipper sidekicks, feels he is lacking something too, even though time and again the character shows they are actually incredibly intelligent, he is convinced he needs a brain. Scarecrow has discounted himself into believing he is inadequate. So many people will stay away from big steps in life, and even steps towards God because they don't think they have enough knowledge or that they have what it takes. They always limit what they think they can do, or what they think God can do through them because they may lack training or degrees. This is one of those times Oz nailed it on the head.

“Why, anybody can have a brain. That’s a very mediocre commodity. Back where I come from we have Universities - where men go to become great thinkers. And when they come out, they think deep thoughts, and with no more brains than you have. But - they have one thing you haven’t got - a diploma!”

People are convinced they don't have wisdom, without a piece of paper.

Once receiving the diploma scarecrow spouts out complicated math equations, but it really does illustrate the fact that it wasn't knowledge or a brain scarecrow needed, but the confidence and wisdom to use what he had. I think that's the big difference between knowledge and wisdom. **Knowledge is simply information, wisdom is the understanding to use knowledge, and the confidence to execute and apply it.** Just as the crows mocked Scarecrow to the point he lacked confidence in his judgements, the world is constantly ready to mock and ridicule us for our ideas, opinions, and beliefs. This makes it hard for any of us to feel confident in what we know or feel certain within ourselves.

In 1 Kings 3, Solomon is visited by God in a dream and told to make a request, this is Solomon's reply, **1 Kings 3:9-12 (NIV)** **“Give me an understanding heart so that I can govern your people well and know the difference between right and wrong. For who by himself is able to govern this great people of yours?”** The Lord was pleased that Solomon had asked for wisdom. So God replied, **“Because you have asked for wisdom in governing my people with justice and have not asked for a long life or wealth or the death of your enemies— I will give you what you asked for! I will give you a wise and understanding heart such as no one else has had or ever will have!”** -

Solomon had a very Oz like opportunity to ask for a brain, for wisdom, for discernment. And more than Oz's fake diploma, Solomon actually got what he asked for. Now, sadly, even though Solomon was wiser than anyone to live, he still made terrible life choices and acted foolishly at times. Just because you possess something, doesn't mean you will always use it well. What I

love though is that Solomon and Scarecrow aren't the only ones that have this opportunity. Scripture teaches us that we have this same access and opportunity to get wisdom.

James 1:5 (NIV) "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him."

It's a beautiful thing to know that we don't have to feel shame or like we are lesser than because we don't have all the answers. In fact, if we are humble enough to acknowledge our need by actually asking God, He will give us the wisdom we are searching for. It's only when we think we already have all the answers that we are likely just stuffed with hay like the Scarecrow.

1 Corinthians 8:2 (NIV) "Anyone who claims to know all the answers doesn't really know very much."

Like the Tin Man we need **A HEART** that is restored and full. Like the Scarecrow we need **A BRAIN** that is full of wisdom rightly applying the knowledge it has. And that brings us to our third need.

The **THIRD NEED** we encounter in the Wizard of Oz that we can all relate to is the need for **COURAGE**

When we meet the Lion in Wizard of Oz he makes a big dramatic entrance as the other 3 companions are singing and skipping. They are aware that danger could be a possibility. They are aware they could be in trouble, but they proceed with very little caution and end up downplaying their potential of being attacked. They make a joke out of the threat, and that's exactly how Satan wants us, lulled into a false sense of security and open to bigger attacks.

Peter, someone who had much experience with this subject, warns believers of it, **1 Peter 5:8 (NIV)** "Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour." When we know that we should be mindful of our dangers around us, we act differently.

So often we live without guard or caution until we know we are already in danger, we don't need to live in fear, but Peter's warning was serious. His warning didn't stop there though, it came with more instruction. In verse 8 Peter warned us of the dangerous roaring enemy, but verse 9 and 10 come with the instructions to fight back.

1 Peter 5:9-10 (NIV) "Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that the family of believers throughout the world is undergoing the same kind of sufferings. And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast."

When the lion finally attacked, all it took was one slap, and the “roaring enemy” was turned away. We need to be careful of a dangerous enemy not because we need to live in fear, but more so because we need to be able to fight back. The same sentiment is in

James 4:7 (NIV) “Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.”

Bullies bully because they think they won't meet opposition, and when we are able to stand boldly, the enemies lose some of their thunder. As the show goes on the Lion steadily, or sort of steadily, builds courage. There's a lot more hollering and whining than bravery, but it's definitely more balanced. That's the goal and direction for believers. To move beyond the dandelion, and into the roaring lion. The lion was scared by Winkies, scared by floating Oz heads, scared by flying monkeys, and even scared by pulling his own tail. He ran and hollered from everything. Which lines up with what Solomon shows in

Proverbs 28:1 (NIV) “The wicked flee when no one pursues, but the righteous are as bold as a lion.”

The lion spent a lot of time fleeing when no one pursued, and I think there's times we all can be in that same place. When we feel guilt, shame, insecurity, regret, can all make us run when we have no reason to. Please understand that with God in your life, you don't need to run, you can stand, you can be bold, that doesn't mean you need to go pouncing and roaring at every musical trio and their dog, just like you don't need to pick a fight with everyone you disagree with. It does mean though, that fear shouldn't be your motivation to back down in any circumstance.

Like the Tin Man we need **A HEART** that is restored and full. Like the Scarecrow we need **A BRAIN** that is full of wisdom rightly applying the knowledge it has. Like the Lion we need **COURAGE** to be on guard against Satan and to overcome the fear that wants to paralyze us.

And lastly, we need **HOME**

Dorothy spends the first 15 minutes trying to get away from home, and the next hour and a half trying to get back. Right before she heads back home, Tin Man asks her what she learned, and she states this **“If I ever go looking for my heart's desire again, I won't look any further than my own backyard, because if it isn't there, I never really lost it to begin with. Is that right?”** There's this innate thing written into us to wander, to roam. To look for more. That's not a bad thing at all. It becomes a bad thing when we think we can run to something else because we don't want to deal with what's in front of us. If we aren't willing to deal with the people and conflicts here, we won't do it anywhere else. The same is true If we aren't willing to deal with our own personal issues, resentment, mental health, spiritual health, bitterness, etc. It won't matter the location if we aren't ok with who we are. Dorothy ran from her problems, which seem minor from a distant perspective, but the reality is that all our problems seem bigger to us than they will to anyone else. Luke 15 has a brother with some similar traits with Dorothy, packs up his

stuff, hits the road, has a less than pleasant experience, and then desperately wants to come home. When he was at his lowest scripture shows us this,

Luke 15:17-20 (NIV)““When he came to his senses, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired servants have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired servants.’ So he got up and went to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.” -

Like Dorothy, the brother realized he needed to go home, and like Dorothy, he was met with loving open arms. There are going to be times and seasons in our lives where we are going to wander from home. Whether that be our immediate family, our friends, our church, or relationships, our jobs, our school, whatever it may be, we are prone to wander. Take just the wisdom and example, and learn that whatever we are looking for inside of ourselves, isn’t going to be found by running away. But also take this wisdom and example, and know that if you have run away, you can come back home. Dorothy was received with open arms, the brother was received with open arms, and let me tell you wholeheartedly that God wants to welcome you back as well. Arms wide open. Love unending, ready and willing.

We see this in **1 John 1:9 (NIV)**, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

You don’t even have to click your heels, just turn around and go home. Go back to your father, He’s waiting. Dorothy made it back home safely because of friends that stood with her (also partially cause she never went anywhere). She found friends along the way that were committed to help her back where she belonged. Not only did they help her, but she helped them along the way. Let me encourage you, find people like that in your life and hang on to them. Dorothy’s friends were dedicated, even when they were afraid, rusted, or their legs were torn off by flying monkeys. Find the people that will make sure you get back safely even when it’s difficult. We see this modeled in the famous passage from Ruth,

Ruth 1:16-18 (NIV) “But Ruth replied, “Don’t urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May the Lord deal with me, be it ever so severely, if even death separates you and me.” When Naomi realized that Ruth was determined to go with her, she stopped urging her.”

Those are the people that we need in order to make it home. Sometimes when we are lost, it’s simply a matter of direction. At other times, it’s because we’ve completely taken the wrong direction by choice. Regardless of how, we need people who will not only stay with us, but who will bring us back.

James 5:19-20 (NIV) “My brothers and sisters, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring that person back, remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of their way will save them from death and cover over a multitude of sins.”

There is no place like home, and the ones who help us get there, and the ones waiting for us, they make it all worth it.

Worship Comes Back Up

Invitation:

What's your biggest NEED right now?

Remember from last week's message we said that we find ourselves vulnerable when we try to meet a legitimate need in an illegitimate way. What are you looking for in order to do that? Jesus is ready to meet that need!

Follow up with lead in questions