



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: Reel to Real: How Families Can Become Discerning Moviegoers – Part 1

Guest(s): Dr. Ted Baehr

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Dr. James Dobson: Welcome, everyone, to Family Talk. It's a ministry of the James Dobson Family Institute supported by listeners just like you. I'm Dr. James Dobson, and I'm thrilled that you've joined us.

Roger Marsh: Have you and your family been out to the movies recently? If so, you were probably faced with the same dilemma a lot of Christian families are, how do you find something that's appropriate for the whole family and has strong Christian values? Unfortunately, it's really tough to find those films today and still stay true to your beliefs and convictions. Welcome, everyone, to this Monday edition of Family Talk with your host, best-selling author and well-known child psychologist, Dr. James Dobson. I'm Roger Marsh.

And, today, Dr. Dobson welcomes to the studio Dr. Ted Baehr, the publisher of Movieguide, a Christian family guide to movies and TV. He's also the author of the new book, *Reel to Real: 45 Movie Devotions for Families*. On the first part of this conversation, the two men will discuss the vileness of the entertainment industry and the dangers of what kids watch and listen to. Dr. Baehr will also explain his approach to redeem this medium and how the good news of Jesus Christ is transforming hearts and lives.

With that said, let's listen now to part one of their informative conversation right here on Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk.

Dr. James Dobson: We have talked extensively on this program about the moral decline in this country, and we continue to see Western nations, not just America and almost all Western nations deteriorating. And it's alarming to see just how wicked and perverse the culture has become. And a large share, not all of it, obviously, but a share of that decline is related to the entertainment industry, and the attribution of the moral deterioration can be traced to that source. That's an overstatement. I know the news media and the book industry and many other sources play a role, but certainly Hollywood and the entertainment industry are certainly at the top of the list. And this wickedness is given center stage today and is regularly celebrated by the culture. When horrible, evil things take place, it's as though there's been some kind of victory. Christian parents are on the hook today because they have to identify the threats to the value system that's being taught to their children in public schools frequently, and just certainly on

the internet, and it seems like it's coming from every side, and their job is to protect their kids from these influences.

And we're going to talk about that today because we have, in the studio with us, a man that I respect very, very highly. I've known him for many years. I call him Ted, but his name is Dr. Ted Baehr, and he's doing as much to defend righteousness in the culture, and especially in the entertainment industry, as anybody I know. He's a film critic and an author. He has actually written 35 books. He's the founder and publisher of Movieguide. We're going to talk about that today. It provides families with an in-depth look at movies through the lens of biblical teaching. He's also chairman of the Christian Film and Television Commission, which seeks to redeem culture by informing the public of the efforts of media and the entertainment industry to change the culture.

Dr. Baehr has a wide educational background. I'm going to take the time to tell you what it is because I think you need to know. He graduated from Dartmouth College summa cum laude with a comparative literature degree. Then he received a Juris Doctorate from New York University School of Law, and attended the seminary for a while. He is also the recipient of a Doctorate of Humanities from Belhaven College. And, like I said, he's authored 35 books. Ted, I'm delighted to have you back with us today.

Dr. Ted Baehr: Oh, it's great to be back with you. I consider you one of the great friends and one of the great blessings to the Christian community, so thank you, Jim.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, you're kind. Did I overstate what's happening in the culture today? I know that you feel that there's a lot of good that's going on too, and I don't disagree with that.

Dr. Ted Baehr: Look, there's always been people that are attacking Christians. In Rome, it was abhorrent, as they were persecuting, but you had a small group of apostles who overturned the Roman Empire, which, in the fullness of time, it was a kairos moment, what we call it.

Dr. James Dobson: A lot them paid for it with their lives,

Dr. Ted Baehr: They paid for it with their lives, and we need to be able to do that today to stand for it, and Wilberforce and people throughout history have stood against the forces. I think that you would agree with me that we've got the wheat and the chaff. The wheat is always growing up with the chaff. There's some good wheat out there. When the evil triumphs, it breaks my heart. Usually the Christian films do better. The more Christianity you put, usually it does better.

Last year, just as an example, movies with positive Christian content, strong Christian content, mentioning Jesus, a strong Christian worldview, and all of that averaged about \$55 million at the box office. Movies that were anti-Christian averaged about 7 million. In the top 10 movies, 80% of them had strong

Christian content or worldview in the United States, and in the top 25, there were only one with perverse content, what you would consider perverse content. They don't usually do well, but sometimes audiences get confused.

This is why we do Movieguide. We're concerned about audiences so they can make wise choices. I was on a radio show, you know the host, and somebody called in, and the boy said, "I've got discernment. That's why I can go to these bad movies." We have to reach these kids and the parents. And then the host said, "My daughter was going to a movie, read the Movieguide review, and decided not to go because of what she read in it." And I want to see these people make the decision, the kids, the 14 to 24-year-olds, to support the good and reject the bad.

Dr. James Dobson: And the Movieguide does a review of the movies and warns parents about what's not good for their kids and so on.

Dr. Ted Baehr: Yeah, and we don't tell people to go or not go, because you immediately get the backlash from kids. What we do is we try to help people develop discernment, so we say, this could be great quality, but it's an abhorrent film, or it could be not so good quality, but it's a wonderful Christian film that you should support for its acceptability, and we go into the acceptability. We do 150 criteria, and the criteria help you make a decision that, "This is what I want to see. This is what my children should see," and give you a reason for it so you can argue the case for what you want to support.

Dr. James Dobson: You've been at this a long, long time, as long as I've known you, but you did not grow up in a Christian home.

Dr. Ted Baehr: No, I grew up in the entertainment industry. My parents were stars, and I loved my parents.

Dr. James Dobson: Your father was Tex Allen.

Dr. Ted Baehr: Tex Allen, he made 12 Texas Ranger movies. He rated next to Tim McCoy, another star that people don't remember, but he was a great star, and he did 62 movies. He won the Box Office Award in 1936, and my mother won the WAMPAS Award, the Western Association of Motion Picture Distributors. And so they were significant, fame is fleeting, but I grew up as, really, in the far left in a world that didn't have faith and values.

Dr. James Dobson: You had all that academic training, but you really never encountered Jesus Christ, or at least you never understood who he is.

Dr. Ted Baehr: Well, I wouldn't have found him in any of the schools I went to. I found him much later. After getting out of law school, some friends of mine, I won't tell you the backstory, but we were doing a lot of nefarious activity, and they said, "Can you help us start a film company? Would you do the legal work?" I did the

legal work, just like the form I signed for your organization. And I said, "Now you got to pay me," and they couldn't pay me, so I had to raise the money to pay myself. And, during that process, which was really a horrendous process, the industry is built on this whole house of cards, and so, during that process, four women were interested in my father, my mother died when I was young, and they were all Christians. They'd all come to Christ through Billy Graham. They all loved Billy Graham. One of them supported Billy Graham to the millions of dollars.

Dr. James Dobson: What a testimony.

Dr. Ted Baehr: And they witnessed to me, and I would reject it. And finally they said, "Read the Bible. You've had all this education." I didn't want to read it, but when I did, when I started reading Matthew, halfway through Matthew, it changed my heart. And then I went to one of their friend's house and she said, "Would you like to accept Jesus as your Lord and Savior?" And I said, "Yes," and I married my wife a week later, so it took. I stopped the...

Dr. James Dobson: Now, why did you do that, Ted? What drew you? What voice did you hear inside that said, "I want a friendship with you?"

Dr. Ted Baehr: If you had to boil it down to the simplicity of the gospel, one, that all these things that I had done, which were nefarious, a lot of drugs.

Dr. James Dobson: How bad?

Dr. Ted Baehr: Bad enough that, if you had talked about it here, they'd kick you off the air. I threw a big drug party at Dartmouth and I showed one of my father's movies, one of his old horror films, and one boy whose father was the head of MGM blew his brains out, and another boy lost his brains, and so it hurt a lot of people. And, when I read the good news, one, John 10:10, that the thief comes to steal, to kill, and destroy, and that's often the case in our lives. He wants to steal our happiness, our joy. He wants to steal our possessions. He wants to steal our marriages. He wants to steal our children. And, when he can't do that safely, he kills and then he destroys. And Jesus says in that verse, He said, "But I come to set you free and give you abundant life." And all the things I had before are nothing compared to what I have now. Now I don't have a big salary, I'm a missionary, but I have more today. I've got a loving coop of children. And my children are all missionaries and conservative. And my son in Iraq, who's a major, preached at his little church service last week. I'm happy about this.

Dr. James Dobson: You actually-

Dr. Ted Baehr: I'm enjoying it.

Dr. James Dobson: You actually went to seminary, but not to become a pastor or a member of a church.

Dr. Ted Baehr: I didn't know anything about Christianity and I figured this would be the ... I love school. Look-

Dr. James Dobson: Yeah, and I do too.

Dr. Ted Baehr: ... I've studied at a lot of schools, not on my resume is I studied at Northwestern University Graduate School of English with Torciano. When I was working for NASA, I studied at Columbia University Film School. I just like school. You throw me into a school and I'm equipped to do well in school. Some of my favorite people who are successful in life are not successful in school. But seminary was terrific. I had some great professors. Very few of them knew the Lord. One had gotten a double Ph.D. from Lund, and I don't know whether you know about Lund, but that was the most conservative seminary in Europe for many years. When you preached, they had a cross built in front because one person in the 17th century forgot to talk about the crucifixions and they put a cross in front of the pulpit.

Dr. James Dobson: I wonder if we don't share something in common with regard to the work that we're now doing. If I had to answer the question, "What do people say about you when they come up to you?" and it's usually about raising their children. And then, if I ask them, "What do you think I do? What do you think?" Focus on the Family in the previous life and Family Talk now. "What's my primary objective?" And they will say, "To save families, to make marriages better, to raise children." All those things are good, but they're secondary. My number one objective is to introduce people to Jesus Christ, and that powers what you're doing, doesn't it?

Dr. Ted Baehr: That's what I want to do. We do this big gala in Hollywood. We give out awards. One of the heads of a studio came and said, "You're the only one that'll give us an award for the studios anymore for a big film," like Incredibles 2, or Boss Baby, 490 million. We give out awards, we get there, all the team, and we preach the gospel. We just give them the good news, and it's like going to church. And we have wonderful people come. CeCe Winans came last year.

Dr. James Dobson: How common is it for a producer or director or somebody of substance in Hollywood, if there is such a thing, to call you on the phone and say, "Ted-"

Dr. Ted Baehr: Every day.

Dr. James Dobson: "... I want to know more about your faith?"

Dr. Ted Baehr: Well, about faith, it's probably once or twice a month or so, but ask for help to reach the Christian audience is almost every day, and sometimes it gets to be so many. Today I had a director who's been directing for 25 years and he wants me to look at something, and another one who is a star in television wants me to help him with this. Every day, somebody's asking and every one of those-

Dr. James Dobson: Are they open? Are they open? Are you winning people to the Lord?

Dr. Ted Baehr: We see people coming to Christ the most. At my class that I'm teaching in two weeks, I have one of my best friends, and he had written and directed over 150 films, including some of Oliver Stone's best movies. He did *In Path to 9/11*, which was a great success on ABC. He was Muslim. His son came to my class and took the class, a little four-day class that I do. He wrote a script that was abhorrent and he came to Christ and then went to reform seminary, and his father has come to Christ and he went from making very violent movies to making *Young Messiah*. We see people coming to Christ all the time. The person-

Dr. James Dobson: Is there anything that gives you a greater thrill than that?

Dr. Ted Baehr: Nothing. The more these people come to Christ, the better, and every time we see them is an opportunity to witness. It's good news. When I go out on stage, which is what I was going to say, to talk to them, to tell them that the good does better at the box office, my message is to bring them good news. I'm there to help them see the truth that'll set them free.

Dr. James Dobson: People really get a fix on you, the name of the organization, the primary organization, that you founded and are running now in Hollywood is?

Dr. Ted Baehr: Well, we have two parts. One is Movieguide, and one is the Christian Film and Television Commission, and those two parts correspond to how we fulfill our mission of redeeming the movie industry specifically. And, if you want to talk about television, which is a disaster and other things. Television is a disaster.

Dr. James Dobson: It is.

Dr. Ted Baehr: And we can talk about why it's disaster. But the two parts, one is to influence the people making movies, because they're a small tribe of people who need Jesus, they're just like a tribe in the middle of Laos or Cambodia or anywhere else, they need Jesus, and then to influence people to make wise decisions. It always breaks my heart, even with people that I know well, to have them go to a bad movie. Life is short. Hollywood used to come out with 2000 movies a year. You couldn't see them in a lifetime. You've got to be discerning, and that means making wise choices.

Movieguide reaches the public, and the Christian Film Intelligence Commission is the restatement of the purpose of the old Protestant Film Office, which we inherited all the files. We're listed with the Writers Guild, we're listed with different guilds, I'm a member of the Producers Guild, and we go in there and say, "We're here to help you reach a bigger audience." Let me make that as clear as I can. Every week, about 25 million people, 22 to 25 million people, go to movies, and about 118 million people go to church, and then that increases

at Easter and Christmas up to about 141 million. Used to be bigger, we know that, Jim, but it's still seven times bigger than the box office.

When Bill Mechanic or anybody's talking about the Producers Guild and saying the most powerful audiences is kids and Hispanics and African-Americans and et cetera, how do you reach these people? If you're reaching, my wife's Argentine, that culture, the Spanish-speaking culture, you're reaching about 18 million people, 20 million people if you're reaching the African-American, and all of those are increasing. But the church is the biggest people group in this country. We've taught Hollywood that this is the group that they have to reach.

Dr. James Dobson: When we had lunch together a while back, I told you that there is a world-famous photographer in Hollywood who's made his living photographing stars and significant people in Hollywood, and he is very well known and very well paid for what he does. I've known him for a long time. He's a solid Christian man. I don't want to give his name because I haven't gotten permission to do that, but I don't think he would mind because what he said to me that day really made an impact on me. He's left Hollywood. He closed down his photography studios and gave up the lucrative assignment that he had with people and moved to Denver, and I said, "Why did you do this?" And he said, "Hollywood has become so evil and so wicked, I couldn't stand it anymore." How do you cope in that world?

Dr. Ted Baehr: Well, Hollywood is a term that covers a lot of people. It's just like talking about the church in the United States. When Hollywood talks about the church, I try to tell them there are many different groups within the church. There's the Catholics, which are about 63 million strong, and then there's the Southern Baptists, which are close to 20 million strong, and then the Lutherans, which are about 12 million strong, and they all have different makeup, and if you take one and extrapolate for the whole ... and the same thing is true in Hollywood. You've got probably the most debauched and cynical group happens to be actors because actors are in the most vulnerable position. And we were talking about, at lunch, how actors control the Academy Awards and they are the window dressing on the set. They're often forced to do things that are terrible, and they become inured of doing things that are terrible. However-

Dr. James Dobson: Is the casting couch still in effect?

Dr. Ted Baehr: I love the new rejection of the casting couch. I think it's one of the best things that's happened. I think there's some excesses there, like any movement, but it's a great thing. But, on the other side, there are producers. One of them is sitting here, worked for one of my favorite movies, *The Perfect Storm*. And there's some great producers. Most of the stuntmen I know are very strong Christian. My friend Bob Yerkes, one of the founders of the Stuntman Association, trained Circus of the Stars, and he'd get somebody up there who was famous, like Brad Pitt, and he'd get them up on the trapeze four stories up and he'd drop them. And he said, "Have you accepted ... You know where you're

going if you fall." There are a lot of good people and we just have to reach the other people. They all need Jesus. They all need Jesus.

Dr. James Dobson: Do they sneer at you-

Dr. Ted Baehr: No.

Dr. James Dobson: ... for what you believe?

Dr. Ted Baehr: I've said this to you before the last time we did an interview. I think sometimes it's more difficult within the Christian community than it is within Hollywood. I'll give you an example. I was doing witnessing in Africa, and I was doing four films, and I came through a little village, and a lot of people have had this happen, and this woman comes out and she says, "How do I accept Jesus?" And then I was in Sri Lanka shooting a film and the guide said, "How do I accept Jesus?" And the man said, "Well, it never changed."

In Bombay, I taught at the Bombay Communications Institute, 99% of them came to Christ. The man who ran it said, "You shouldn't have talked about Jesus. This is terrible." And one of them was a banker. He stayed a banker. He led over 60 people to Christ. Another one started churches for 20,000 people, took lepers into his home. They made a difference. Now I don't see them as being the enemy. I think sometimes the difficulty is, in the community of Christians, there are Christians that are living a double life. They're going to bad movies, they're doing nefarious things, but they've put on the patina of being a Christian. And our goal is to live the cross every day so that we can reach people for Jesus Christ. That's our whole goal.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, I'm always lifted by talking to you, Ted, because, in the midst of a very, very pagan world, you see what Jesus said, that the field is white unto harvest-

Dr. Ted Baehr: Amen.

Dr. James Dobson: ... and that we really still can introduce people to Christ even in a world like that. Ted, this time passed very, very rapidly, and there's more that I want to talk to you about. You've written a book called *Reel to Real*, R-E-E-L to R-E-A-L, and the subtitle is *45 Movie Devotions for Families*, including Scripture and the values that we've been talking about. Would you come back and let us talk about this book and make people more aware of what it is? Not only this book, but you've written 35 others, and I want to hear more about what's on your heart.

Dr. Ted Baehr: Good.

Roger Marsh: You've been listening to Family Talk and part one of an insightful conversation Dr. James Dobson had with Dr. Ted Baehr. Visit our broadcast page at drjamesdobson.org to learn more about Dr. Baehr's organization Movieguide, where you can read and follow the latest reviews on hit movies and popular TV

shows. While you're on our site, you can also find out how to get any of Dr. Baehr's popular books about Christianity and the entertainment industry, including his latest devotional called *Reel to Real*. That's R-E-E-L to R-E-A-L. That's drjamesdobson.org, then tap onto the broadcast page for that information.

As we close for today, I want to remind you that you can now listen to our daily broadcast through Amazon Alexa as well. It's an easy and hands-free way to keep up with the latest interviews from Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk. Go now to drjamesdobson.org/alexa to learn how to get started with your Amazon Alexa.

I'm Roger Marsh. Thanks so much for joining us today. Be sure to tune in again tomorrow to hear part two of Dr. James Dobson's conversation with Dr. Ted Baehr right here on Family Talk.

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