

# 500 Words or Less Reviews: The Secret Life of Walter Mitty

I watched *The Secret Life of Walter Mitty* in August of 2014. It was a passion project for Ben Stiller, the director and lead actor on the film. It is an adaptation of the short story by James Thurber. It is a very sincere film. If earnestness gets on your nerves then you probably won't like it. It was rejected by most filmgoers and I am unsure why.[1. The film was not well received, scoring only [51% at Rotten Tomatoes](#) and grossing only \$58 million in the US box office on a \$90 million budget.] It's not perfect and there are a few missteps along the way, but overall, I think the film accomplishes what it sets out to do.

Walter Mitty is a negative assets manager for *Life Magazine*. *Life* is in the process of publishing their final edition – and the negative that is intended to be the cover photo is lost. Walter is tasked with finding it. The film is an interesting blend of reality and whimsical, day-dream type fantasy. Walter loves his job but he yearns for his life to matter more – to be more fulfilling. As the film progresses we get to watch Walter step out of his comfort zone and start to live the life he has long lived in his dreams.

Few films have challenged me the way this one did. I wrote the following after watching it:

“I have a job that I don't love. I would rather be doing something else, though I don't know what. I am not unhappy with my current job. In fact, I am more content at work now than I probably have ever been in my adult life. Yet sometimes, I feel like I ought to be doing something more spiritually rewarding. At least, that is how I feel when I

hear Christians talk about jobs and careers.

This movie helped me take stock of my life. I don't find my identity in my career. I find it in relationships. My standing with God. My relationship with my wife, my kids, my family and my friends. I find my identity in service in my church and outside of it. But, I still feel like there is something more that I should or could be doing.

So, I am going to try to figure that out. I loved how Walter pushed himself and discovered new ways of viewing his life. I want to try to push myself in ways that might make me uncomfortable at first. How that will look is beyond me right now, but I'm going to try to figure it out. I am very comfortable and I don't think that is a place that God really wants any of us to be. So, I am going to change that, if I can."

While it was still a year before any real changes happened, this movie was the impetus to getting [Rambling Ever On](#) off the ground. It was an idea we had toyed with for some time, but this movie pushed me to make it a reality. Depending on your opinion of REO, you can thank or curse Walter Mitty.

---

## **A Book Review: Free Will Revisited**

I tend to talk about Dr. Robert Picirilli in sycophantic tones. I suppose it is hard not to come across that way even though I am sincere in my praise of him and his influence in my life. I actually had him as a professor at a small school

with intimate classes. Beyond that, he has been humble enough to answer my emails about Greek long after I graduated. And then there's his published works, which have a special place on my bookshelves.

I've read all of his works at least once, and *Grace, Faith, Free Will* at least 20 times—mostly because it takes many, many readings for a man like me to absorb the fire hydrant of material. And even then I do not think I understand it all. Anytime I feel like I'm getting a little too proud of my intelligence, one chapter of that book will bring me down a notch.

So it was with great joy my Senior Pastor told me not to buy Dr. Picirilli's new book, *Free Will Revisited*, because he already had a copy for me. And despite it being a slim 135 pages, it still took me days to get through it. Because this treatment of a crucial difference between two major branches of orthodox Christianity cannot be discussed simplistically. The reasoning gets into deep waters at times. I will be rereading.

I want to say up front that yet again, just as with *Grace, Faith, Free Will*, Picirilli goes to admirable lengths to make sure he presents his opponents views accurately and fairly. Like a champ, he takes on three of the heaviest weights of the last 500 years of church history in Martin Luther, John Calvin, and Jonathan Edwards. And he spends probably 35-40% of the book trying to express their views in their own words. There are no straw men being batted down. In stark contrast to the Social Media Debate Generation, Picirilli reads to understand, articulates the other position, and does not jump quickly to his responses. And by all means note the subtitle of this book is a "respectful" response to Luther, Calvin, and Edwards. I implore all of us to take a note from Picirilli's format and approach. Listen or read carefully. Do not misrepresent your opponent's views. Be humble and respectful.

As far as the content itself, there are times where Picirilli makes a more simple and straightforward argument against the writings of these three men opposing human free will. As when he notes that it is very difficult to get around teaching that God coerces us if we believe our will is completely against God prior to salvation and that God by his grace changes our will to His. Yet there are other times Picirilli shows how complex the debate can get, as on pages 86-87 when he talks about how things that are certain are not “necessary” and how God’s knowledge of the future is like our knowledge of the past. He dealt with this in the early part of *Grace, Faith, Free Will* but I believe Picirilli to be a very self-aware man, knowing that many of his readers would have read that volume and in my opinion avoids rehashing that part of his previous book but instead explains it with a fresh perspective.

[In the past I have written for REO on Arminius’s own words and how much overlap there is to Calvinism and Arminianism.](#) I did so based on what my professors, like Picirilli, have taught me. Here again, he accomplishes the same goal. He does not cite Arminius yet he still makes the point plainly and necessarily that Arminians believe that man is totally depraved, that God draws us to Himself by grace, that man does zero to contribute to his salvation in a way that could be called “works” and that God is completely sovereign over all creation, including human will. The difference lies, in large part, on the focus of the book. Do Christians accept salvation like a drowning man who realizes he cannot swim and chooses to take a rope to save him or are they saved completely void of any free, self-determined choice?

Tribalism can be dangerous in politics and Christianity. I consider myself an Arminian because I think the doctrines are important. Yet I attended a Calvinist seminary, have close Calvinist friends and will gladly lock arms with them in worship and ministry any day. But I consider this topic important enough to read and write about a couple of times a

year. And I am thankful yet again to Dr. Picirilli for the impetus to think about, react to and create in the sphere of theology. I recommend this book to anyone who wants to have their mind stretched, even if it is by Jonathan Edwards more so than Robert Picirilli. Because the point of the book is to debate, not pontificate. I only wish the other three men were alive to respond.

---

## **“Luther: The Life and Legacy of the German Reformer” – A Review**

In celebration of the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the *Ninety-five Theses* by Martin Luther, filmmaker Stephen MacCaskell made the documentary *Luther: The Life and Legacy of the German Reformer* (2017). Many scholars of the Reformation may criticize the film’s evangelical bias, but it is refreshing to see a well-executed historical documentary that celebrates the same doctrine that drove Luther. Just as Luther was dedicated to the authority of Scripture and the doctrine of Justification by Grace through Faith, so are the Reformed theologians (including R.C. Sproul) who provide consistently insightful commentary.

I write this commentary as an Arminian Christian, a historian of the Reformation era, and a High School History teacher. From an Arminian perspective, there is nothing to shy away from in this documentary. Like all forms of Reformation Christianity, Arminianism fully agrees that salvation is the work of God and not a product of works. This film should serve as a catalyst for the discussion of many foundational

theological truths.

An hour and a half is not sufficient to do justice to the life and influence of the “monk who changed the world.” The film was certainly made more for a congregation than for historians. Even so, the film is historically accurate and doesn’t avoid difficult issues. One section deals with Luther’s temper, untamed tonged, and his “Jewish Problem” (anti-Semitism). Many may find the film’s treatment of the “Jewish Problem” as unsatisfactory, but I am impressed that a short celebratory film took the time to point out Luther’s significant flaws. It even uses the words of Scripture and John Calvin to do so.[1. See [this article](#) for a good discussion]

This treatment of the Reformation follows a typical Protestant, specifically Reformed, approach. Late Medieval Religion is understood to be works based and pervasively corrupt. Corrupt Popes, such as Julius II, and greedy clergy members like John Tezel, are portrayed as normative. While I don’t disagree with this general narrative (examples of corruption abound), I was disappointed that the film didn’t make any attempt to discuss examples of late medieval Catholic reformers like the fiery preacher Savonarola, the mystic Thomas a Kempis, or the humanist scholar Erasmus. Rather than complicate the story with a richer view of late medieval piety, the film simply discussed the condemned pre-reformers, John Wycliffe and Jan Hus and their impact on Luther. While a simplified narrative is easier on its audience, from a historical point of view, it’s unsatisfying.

I teach 9<sup>th</sup> grade World History. Aside from being a little slow for an audience with the attention span of a poodle, one of the significant flaws of *Luther* is that it assumes far too much knowledge of theology and history. While it may be a great resource for a theologically educated congregation, 9<sup>th</sup> graders, even at a Christian school, lack the previous

knowledge to make this video a good use of time for a classroom. This, of course, can be addressed as long as the teacher uses the video to reinforce what they have already learned of Luther and the Reformation and not to introduce it. This approach might also help the teacher facilitate a discussion of the film's historical interpretation that could also help to mitigate some of its shortcomings.

Overall, I recommend *Luther: The Life and Legacy of the German Reformer*. It is well made, which is rare for Christian films of any kind. It makes effective use of some simple computer animation as well as crisp on-location footage. Although its interpretation of the Reformation is too simplistic to satisfy the historian and too advanced for the high school student; it can be a great resource for the man or woman in the pew. Hopefully, this film will only be the beginning of a deeper exploration into the Reformation.

(Editor's note: You can rent or buy the movie at Amazon by clicking [this](#) link.)

---

## **My Post-Binge Review of Stranger Things 2**

Yes, my wife and I have finished with Season 2 of Stranger Things already.

Actually, we've been finished for over 36 hours. We are obsessed with this show and we didn't waste much time blowing right through it in two nights.

I'm going to divide this review into two parts. The first part will be spoiler free and then I will get into spoilers. That

way those who haven't watched or finished can enjoy and those that have finished can have some fun dialoguing about the whole thing without fear of saying the wrong thing.

## **SPOILER FREE COMMENTS**

Right off the bat I will say this sequel is, to me, as entertaining as it gets. I have almost zero true complaints and there was definitely no letdown after the massive build up. Which is rare in my experience. I'd give it an A for all the key categories: acting, storytelling, character development, use of music, conflict, intensity, special effects, etc. I feel like this is as well as TV can be done and we are truly fortunate to live in a time when the Duffer brothers used inspiration from all the best sources (it goes way beyond obvious 80's movies), their own special talent and incredible unknown actors to bring to life a story I can't get over. There was a moment in episode 8 where I was literally shaking with excitement and anxiousness.

I enjoyed all of the cast additions to varying levels, and especially Sean Astin. The character as written and his acting wheelhouse were a perfect fit. He is nearly impossible not to adore and in a town with so much drama and stress, he brings the levity. And what a Mount Rushmore of big roles for him now with *The Goonies*, *Rudy*, *Lord of the Rings* and *Stranger Things*. And join me in appreciating how those four works span four decades.

I will say this season seems to focus more on action than mystery, which I would have guessed would have disappointed me but it didn't. Because they use allusions to my absolute favorite action movies. There is also less development for some characters and more for others but the shoulders they had to stand on from Season 1 in this regard are so tall that it wasn't as essential to me that we learn more about the past to



appreciate the lead roles. This season is not in competition with Season 1 to me at all. It is a beautiful continuation and they work together with a cohesive synergy that I have never seen in a TV show before. So if you want to know if it is better than Season 1, I am the wrong person to ask.

This season is by design bigger, scarier, more intense and more adult (without a bunch of gore or sex, but there is a lot of language), even though it was all of those things before. And it works. On every level, in every way, it works. The only drama that has ever captured my attention like this was *Lost* and they are so different I won't compare them otherwise. Perhaps the biggest compliment I can give it is that after we finished it Saturday I didn't want to continue our Halloween marathon on Sunday. I just wanted to reflect on what I saw the previous two nights. Anything else would have been lame. I am thrilled to have these 17 gifts of entertainment to watch over and over again. They're even better than all those He-man men I got for Christmas in 1983.

### **SPOILER COMMENTS** (You have been warned!)

Let's jump right in...

Episode 8 rocked my world. It reminded me so much of *Jurassic Park*, one of my 10 favorite movies ever. Notably, the scenes with the demo-dogs reminded me of the uber-intense face off with JP's velociraptors. With Bob playing a cross between Samuel L. Jackson and Laura Dern. I am sure all my vital signs read like I was the one in danger that whole episode. I loved every millisecond of it.

And speaking of Bob, I am quite torn on his death. He was such an impacting addition to the cast. He was great as a role model for the science-loving kids. He was utterly lovable. He

was a man of integrity and as safe a love interest as possible for the mother who had been through the fire, literally and figuratively.

Yet if you don't kill off important characters, I think you lose something in suspense. If they had killed off a Season 1 holdover, the fanbase would have rioted. If they killed off Steve I would have jerked my TV out of my wall and thrown it out the window. So someone really needed to be the hero who sacrificed it all. And Bob the Superhero was a great choice. He died because he knew how to do something that mega-testosterone Hopper didn't. He died because he loved others more than himself. He died in truly one of the great heroic acts in TV lore and left a legacy for those kids. I would love more Bob, but the payoff was worth it.

The other casts additions were fine to me. Paul Reiser was his usual charming self and as an old man, he still can still bring it. Max, if nothing else, allowed us to see more of Lucas and Dustin and I hope Eleven is eventually able to get over her jealousy and welcome Max into the party. As far as Billy...wow. I don't know what to think. I can only guess there is more where they are waiting to unleash in Season 3. But man what a complicated villain. A victim of abuse who clearly needs a new way to get therapy.

The scenes with Hopper and Eleven were epic. "A clash of the Titans," I heard one of the shows producers say and a perfect match for a man in need of a daughter with a girl in need of a parent. And a perfect contrast of a man who needs to protect and a girl who needs to rebel. I loved the fights as much as the apologies. But is there anything more tear-jerking than Hopper humbling himself to say he's sorry? I can't wait for more of the two brightest stars of the show interacting as a family.

I'm not sure how I feel about the side plot with Kali and especially a whole episode for it. I realize it's already

polarizing but there were things to love—the opening of Episode 1 reminded me of the Dark Knight and The Strangers (two of my other 10 favorite films ever) and Eleven meeting a “sister” who helped her to come into her own was a wonderful touch. And watching Eleven refuse to descend to the abyss of morality was absolutely worth the trip to Chicago. The only complaint is that to do this episode you lose time with the other cast. We love Stranger Things for the ensemble cast as much as anything. But this episode was a risk worth taking, especially if they explore “008” more in the future.

It was in one of the trailers, but I love, love, LOVED the scene where the four boys have “Dart” trapped in the Ghostbusters toy containment unit and they step away from it as it bounces around, just as you see in Ghostbusters. The hat tips to the 80s are sometimes subtle but other times very obvious and they are all magnificent.

The pairing of Steve and Dustin was just magical, and it seems to have happened by accident according to the Duffers. Both characters really had nothing else to connect them to the other characters and the main plot so viola! Put them together and let the good times roll. So much laughter. So much enjoyment.

And on that note, I’ll give my five favorite characters through two seasons. After Season One here was my rankings and comments:

1. Hopper – The Alpha Dog, the Man, the tough guy many men long to be...and his past trauma just cinches the title of best character
2. Eleven – So few complete sentences and yet so much depth
3. Jonathan – Every show and movie seems to have someone I relate to and the awkward guy is usually him, but he is an inspiration in this series
4. Mike – a true hero, willing to do anything for his friends

5. Steve – Yes, you want to hate him and love him at the same time...what a performance

After Season 2, here are my rankings:

1. Hopper – winner and still champ...in Episodes 8 and 9 just about every time Hopper did something incredible, my wife would shout “G.O.A.T!” (Greatest of All Time) as I do when watching sports
2. Steve – When he tells Dustin how he does his hair...he vaulted to nearly the top of this list
3. Eleven – her growth in this season was a huge part of why it was endearing...when she comes in and saves the day at the end of Episode 8, there was major applause in my house
4. Jonathan – not quite as big a role to me this time but he’s still the anti-social hero who gets the girl so I’m still on board
5. Will – he didn’t get as much screen time the first season but that set him up to shine this time around and he did. The kid can act and this was an extremely difficult role to pull off. He tasered it out of the park.

I know some will clamor for Dustin’s inclusion and he is great. It’s very hard to find room for all the greatness.

So, what did you think? If you have spoiler comments, please say so up front in your post below!

---

# 500WoL Reviews: 12 Ways Your Phone Is Changing You

There are two types of information that cause me realize where my weaknesses lie and convict me into wanting to change: well-researched statistics and well-reasoned arguments from the Bible.

So, being a confessed smartphone addict (which I have written about [here](#)) Tony Reinke's new book *12 Ways Your Phone Is Changing You* really impacted me through the use of both.

I had seen it recommended on Twitter several times by people I consider to be wise. And I read it quickly yet carefully. I will probably read it regularly. That is how badly I need the material.

The book is written clearly and unashamedly from a Christian worldview. And as such is able to tie numerical data and Bible together. Reinke doesn't just tell you that people check their smartphones every 4.3 minutes of their waking lives, but also that 73% of smartphone users do so before they do their spiritual disciplines. As someone who believes time with God is important yet still feels deep temptation to check my phone constantly, this speaks to me. The author weaves dozens of Scripture references throughout his profound points about how smartphones affect behavior and thinking. I do not want to think through this issue without theology because I am convinced Christians cannot truly compartmentalize their lives. Reinke makes sure Truth is the main goal and not secular thought on how we change and control our habits through goodness and effort.

The smartphone phenomenon is so new (about 10 years old now) that this book is groundbreaking to me. The smartphone addiction snuck up on me so quickly and subtly. I was not

ready for it. As with all major cultural changes, Christian leaders need to be on the front lines, thinking and researching and communicating their findings. This is definitely that.

This book is peer reviewed; the foreword is by John Piper and has endorsements by people like Russell Moore and Jackie Hill Perry. So you can be assured that even if you do not agree with it all, people who get the Bible and are on the front lines of technology and social media have expressed their appreciation for what Reinke has written.

I have made conscious decisions about how to deal with my addiction as a result of this book and you can read them in the article I linked above. I am very thankful for the inspiration to repent.

If you have a smartphone, and especially if you check it constantly, I strongly recommend this book. Every culture has their sinful vices that are so common that we basically ignore them and I am convinced that time-wasting and narcissism are legitimate threats of the social media and smartphone movements. Yet they are so common they can become invisible, much like the “gossip” prayer request.

Thanks to Tony Reinke for causing people like me to see this issue for the first time.

---

**“Reclaiming the Lost Art of  
Biblical Meditation”: A**

# Review

*“I wish I could single-handedly revive the art of Scripture memorization in our homes and our churches. There’s no greater legacy to bequeath to our children than a storehouse of memory verses to draw upon their whole lives through.”* (Robert J. Morgan)

## **The Title Made Me Feel Bad (In a Good Way)**

I can’t recall a time in my life when a book title convicted me like this one did. If there is one thing I know I should do but don’t do often enough, it’s biblical meditation. So I got this book as quickly as I could and read it carefully.

I’ll go ahead and abandon any pretense that this “review” will offer any substantial critique of what Dr. Morgan writes here. I think it is dangerous to put people on pedestals where they cannot be critiqued, but my main goal here is to try to influence people to read this book because the content is so important. Any criticisms I have are extremely superficial and will succumb to the weight of the Dr. Morgan’s central message.

## **Evangelical Crusades and Hannibal Lector Bring it Home**

The content portion of the book is a tidy 123 pages and I knocked it out in a couple of days in probably less than three hours total. It reads simply enough that I would think an average 9-year old could understand it. But that is not an insult because it’s chock full of extremely helpful advice, Scripture references and practical illustrations that I hope not only inspire me but also guide me at 39 years old to make Scripture meditation a bigger part of my life. I’ve been a

pastor for 15 years. I have attended two exceptional Bible Colleges. I have memorized and meditated on Scripture before. But as I alluded to above, I have never made it a habit and such an integral part of my life as you can tell Dr. Morgan has.

Anyone who knows Dr. Morgan or has sat under his preaching knows that you can count on two things with everything he teaches: First, he will incorporate a ton of Bible. I remember once when I was at a service at Donelson, Dr. Morgan's church in Nashville, his ministry cohort Jeff Nichols joked from the stage that when he takes notes on Rob's sermons he can count on there being like 17 well thought-out Scripture references in support of each point. Secondly, he will show you how diversely read he is by citing an insane amount of biographical information and quotes from people from centuries ago and people from today. Just look at the footnotes in the back of this book and marvel not only of his use of Billy Graham and J.I. Packer, but also Anthony Hopkins and Stephen King. And also his use of people I do not know but that he knows personally and had invaluable wisdom to offer for this book.

And what he does by quoting the sacred and the secular is build a very simple yet very powerful case for how valuable meditation is for learning and behavior. The amount of times the Bible refers to meditation, even if it doesn't use that word, is legion. Old Testament, New Testament, historical books, psalms, prophets, gospels, letters...every section has significant contributions here and that makes this material impossible to ignore.

**We Don't Meditate Because We Are Good; We Meditate **Because We're Not****

I confess I appreciate as well how Dr. Morgan weaves in at



times his own personal weaknesses and struggles that have led him to be a better meditator. It is easy for someone like me to look at his lengthy pastoral and preaching ministry and to idealize it. But he does not allow for that. He no doubt practices biblical meditation as well as anyone I know and has earned the right to write this book, but he allows us to see that meditation exists in large part because we are so flawed and weak. We must meditate because we know God so poorly on our own. Our minds are so bent to evil and darkness, worry and anxiety, that meditation is as much like medicine for the sinful soul as it is exercise for the mind. I daresay that is what separates Christian meditation from things like Zen Buddhism. The book is definitely written humbly and not haughtily and I am positive that when a person meditates constantly on the Bible, teaching others to do well will likely be from a place of humility. That's how the Bible works in teaching us about how we relate to God.

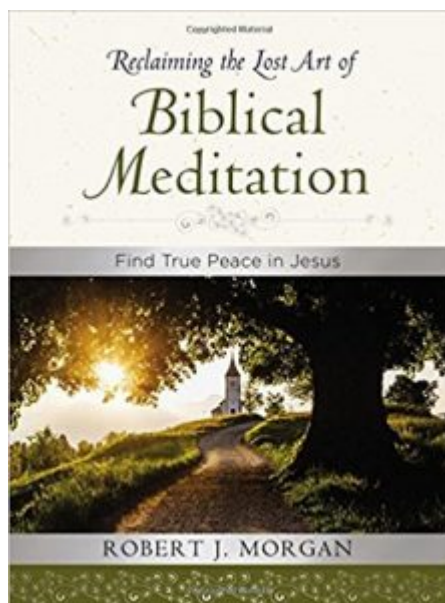
The 'tips' interspersed are so practical, yet not often practiced. At least by me. I am praying that will change. Sticky notes will be easy. Sharing my meditation with people I come across during the day will be hard. But I will try both, and many other things he advises.

Dr. Morgan lists several times we should meditate—when we wake up in the morning, when we wake up in the middle of the night, when we are lonely, when we are on a plane, when we drive, etc. Basically, we can mediate constantly. At that point the conviction of the book title came and hit me full in the face. I meditate so infrequently. I am too easily distracted. I have little doubt the content of the book, notably the Scriptures within, will change my course on this. I pray that it lasts til I die and is not a short lived emotional response.

**Buy It. Read It. Do It.**

I hope this book helps millions as it has helped my thinking (and, in theory, my behavior). I am challenged to put the phone down more and to focus my thoughts on Scripture and the nature of God more often. I know that Biblical meditation is not a quick fix to all anxiety and depression and crises. But it is a way to know God better and to allow him to change us even if he does not change our circumstances. These things will always be better for us than having everything “fixed”. If we are to know him in the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his suffering and if we are to take every thought captive, we must meditate. Dr. Morgan’s book is an extremely beneficial resource to challenge and guide even older Christians in this discipline.

Buy the book by clicking the picture below:



# Five Movie Resurrections and Why They Matter

In honor of Easter and our celebration of the resurrection, I have decided to compile five of my favorite film resurrections. Now, some of you more pious and holy readers might be shaking your heads right now wondering if you should continue reading this, with its borderline-sacrilegious-sounding premise. I assure you, no sacrilege or disrespect is intended. I just happen to be a huge movie fan and I believe strongly in the concept of art imitating life. Or in this case, art imitating death-then-life. I am convinced that resurrection, in a variety of forms, is a powerful storytelling device, primarily since it is grounded in the truth of the greatest story ever told. This will not be an in-depth exploration of these films. There is simply too much ground to cover. I do reserve the right to revisit these films down the road with a more thorough examination. With that in mind, here are five of my favorite movie resurrections. Warning: Many spoilers ahead. You have been warned.

## Gandalf (The Lord of the Rings)



Tolkien scattered Christ figures throughout his most popular work, with Gandalf being one of the most obvious and powerful. Director Peter Jackson, though not sharing Tolkien's faith,

fully embraced many of these allusions and in some ways, upped the ante. When Gandalf falls to the Balrog in the Mines of Moria, in the first film in the trilogy, he “dies” with his arms extended in cruciform. He gives his life to save the fellowship. When he returns in The Two Towers, he returns transfigured. He descended into the bowels of death and is raised up again in power and glory.

## **E.T. (E.T. The Extraterrestrial)**

Everyone knows about E.T. If you don't, stop reading this and go watch it right now. It is one of the greatest films ever made and you are less of a person if you have not watched it. The film includes one of the best Christophanies, which is ironic considering it was directed by a Jewish man who had no intention of making that connection. E.T. dies, comes back to life, performs miracles, and ascends to the heavens by films end. Awesome stuff which is only helped by the incredible John Williams's score.

## **Neo (The Matrix)**



Whoa! I realize that the religious symbols, words, and imagery that are liberally sprinkled throughout the film were included not out of any devotion to the truth, but more in an effort to tie the film to older and deeper archetypes. For the most

part, it is effective. The final scenes in the film step into the eternal conversation about death and rebirth and while the filmmakers divorce their exploration of these things from Christian ideals like selflessness and sacrifice, they do touch upon the concept of Messianic necessity.

## Truman (The Truman Show)



At some point, I am going to do a deep dive into the spiritual and social truths layered into this film, but for now, we will just hit some highlights. The Truman Show is the story of one man – Truman Burbank – who lives a false life. He doesn't realize his life is fake, but everyone around him does. He is the unwitting star of a television show that has followed his every move since the day he was born. His entire world is fake; the makers of the show even construct a city-sized studio to preserve the illusion. Late in the film, once Truman has discovered that things are not what they appear, he is confronted by Christof, the creator of the show. Christof summons a storm to destroy Truman's boat, leaving Truman tangled in ropes and unconscious under water. For the lack of a better word, Truman dies. Then he rises from the dead. Truman continues his attempt to escape, using the still

floating boat and Christof, in a final, desperate attempt, uses the studio's sound system to speak to Truman. He is the very voice of the god of this fake and empty world. He tries to convince Truman to stay. Every plea and bargain rings hollow and Truman remains steadfast in his desire to leave. There is imagery throughout the final moment of the film that are clearly signposts to the crucifixion, Jesus, and the empty tomb. Combined with the thematic ingenuity of the film, the ending makes for a powerful and satisfying resolution.

## **Thor**

Scoff if you want, but in my mind, there are few films that incorporate the ideas of self sacrifice and resurrection better than Marvel's Thor. Without getting too specific, Thor, the god of Thunder, goes through a massive character transformation; going from arrogant and foolish to noble and selfless during the course of the film. The emotional climax of the film occurs when Thor offers his life to save his friends. He is rewarded with death and then a return to life in a powerful and triumphant bit of cinematic magic. In the clip below, the elements that truly sell the moment are the amazing score by Patrick Doyle and the radiant smile on Lady Sif's face when she realizes that her friend is not dead.

So there you have it. Those are a few of my favorites. I would love to hear your thoughts on them. Or, you can tell us about some other resurrections in popular culture that mean a lot to you.

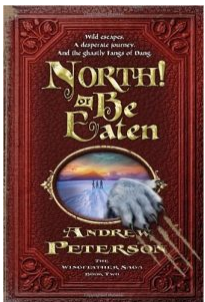
---

# Reading Ever On: March 2017

Here are the books we read last month and what we thought of them...

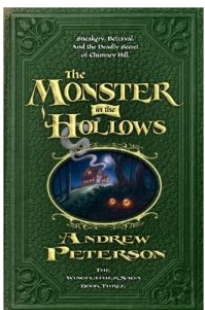
## Gowdy Cannon

### ***North! Or Be Eaten* (Wingfeather Saga Book 2) by Andrew Peterson**



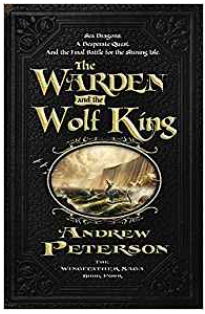
I wrote about the first book in this series last month and I finished the other three in March. They are excellent and get better with each volume. They will be added to my rotation of favorite fantasy series, of which I read at least a little every day. This one has my favorite scene of the Wingfeather Saga, when Janner faces a situation so dark and discouraging it was like Andrew Peterson read my journal from my worst days and made it into a fantasy plot. This book is hard to put down start to finish.

### ***The Monster In The Hollows* (Wingfeather Saga Book 3) by Andrew Peterson**



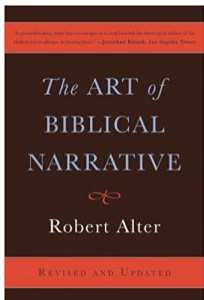
The action-packed adventure continues in the third installment and it gets really good with the three main character siblings starting at a new school. Having done this before in my personal life, I was enthralled. And the climax, centering around the book title, is wild and unpredictable. I am ready to read this again.

## ***The Warden and the Wolf King (Wingfeather Saga Book 4)*** **by Andrew Peterson**



Peterson set the bar high in the first three and the pay off in this concluding volume (much longer than the other books) is worth it. There are secondary characters developed in an alternating scene (this happens in prior books but not as in depth as this one). I admit I didn't appreciate this as much as I could have if I had loved those characters as much as the main ones, but the overall story and ending is emotional and satisfying. I recommend this series to anyone who loves Narnia, Hogwarts or Middle Earth or even if you do not.

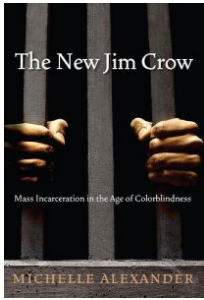
## ***The Art of Biblical Narrative*** by Robert Alter



Written by a Jew and rather short for a volume on biblical interpretation (183 pages, since it focuses on one genre of the Bible), the thinking in this book is levels beyond what I am capable of and I thoroughly benefited as a result. A professor at Moody recommended it to me years ago as a book way out of the common Christian sphere on the topic and this was at least my third reading. Highly recommended for hermeneutics junkies and anyone interested in how to get into the world behind the Bible text to get its meaning. If nothing else, I would read it just to see how the author explains why the Genesis 38 story of Judah and Tamar interrupts the Joseph narrative.

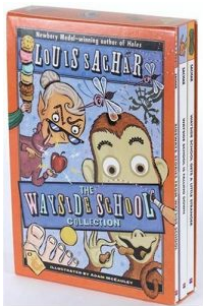
## ***The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*** by Michelle Alexander





I'm nothing if not teachable so I read this in an attempt to try to understand the thoughts behind many who maintain that there is still a significant amount of racial injustice in the US, notably in the judicial system. As a white male I want to read what people who think differently than me have to say but also to filter it critically.

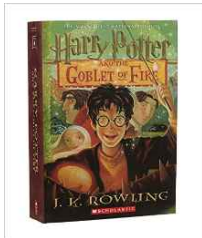
## ***The Wayside School Series by Louis Sachar***



Weird and random is my wheelhouse and so this trilogy of children's books has been my absolute favorite since the late 80s when they first came out. You have a boy who counts with the wrong numbers but always gets the right answer. You have a girl who loves dead rats. You don't have a 19th story to your building (the builder said he was very sorry). The original, *Sideways Stories from Wayside School*, was so popular Sachar wrote the sequels due to an avalanche of fan demand. I wish he'd never stopped. *Wayside School Is Falling Down* and *Wayside School Gets a Little Stranger* take the character development of the first book and add in zany and nonsensical plots that make me laugh and leave me giddy. Perfect reading for small kids who love silliness and for adults who are under great stress (hand raised for me these days buying my first house), I will be reading these til I die. I can't wait to read them to my kids.

## **Ben Plunkett**

***Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* by J. K. Rowling**

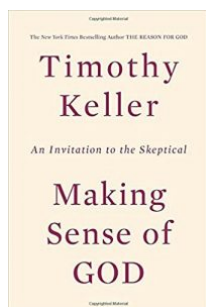


Just a few days ago I reviewed *Goblet of Fire*, which you can see [here](#). I will dispense with regurgitating everything I said, but I will warn you once again that you should be prepared for a big book. But that will very likely mean nothing even if you are, like me, normally a very, very slow reader. What would usually take me several months to read, only took me a little over one. And I promise you won't regret the adventure. There is a nearly seamless flow and flawless writing from section to section. The only flaw in this book is Rowling's traditional information vomit courtesy of our big baddy Lord Voldemort.

If you haven't read [The Sorcerer's Stone](#), [The Chamber of Secrets](#), and [The Prisoner of Azkaban](#) yet, you will want to read those classics first before delving into this masterpiece.

## Mike Lytle

### ***Making Sense of God: An Invitation to the Skeptical* by Tim Keller**



I am not a Calvinist, but I firmly believe I am predestined to enjoy anything that Keller writes. Whether he is discussing prayer, dealing with pain and suffering, or the importance of work in our lives I always find his books thought provoking and convicting. That being said, I especially like the way he handles apologetics. His newest book, *Making Sense of God* tackles many common objections that religious skeptics have and explains how rational and reasonable the Christian faith really is. Keller doesn't belittle those he disagrees with and always presents his arguments in a calm,

measured tone. I also appreciate how he is more focused on the big picture than trying to prove each and every small point. This is a good read for believers and skeptics alike.

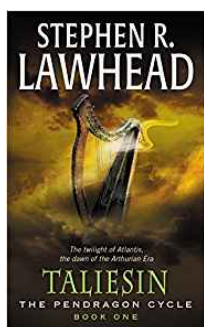
## Phill Lytle

### ***The Bands of Mourning: A Mistborn Novel* by Brandon Sanderson**



This is the third installment of a four book series. It's the second series set in the Mistborn world. At this point, Sanderson is working at a level most authors would envy. His writing is at turns exciting, intense, funny, emotional, and always interesting. With great characters and a wonderfully complex plot, *The Bands of Mourning* is further evidence that Sanderson is at the top of his game and he isn't going anywhere any time soon.

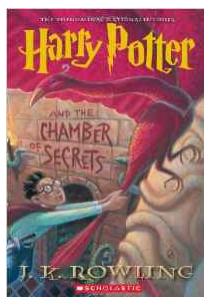
### ***Taliesin (The Pendragon Cycle, Book 1)* by Stephen R. Lawhead**



*The Pendragon Cycle* is Lawhead's unique take on the Arthurian legends. He weaves the myth of Atlantis with Fifth and Sixth century Britain to create a world that is both believable and fantastic all at the same time. The story is engaging and vibrant. The themes are rich and complex. The characters are bigger than life yet completely relatable. I've read this series at least seven times and I never tire of venturing back into the world of bards and warriors, princesses and prophets, priests and kings.

## Nathan Patton

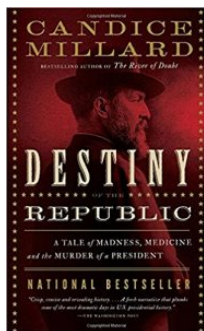
### ***Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* by J. K. Rowling**



I am continuing to read this series with my sons (their first time, my billionth), and they are continuing to enjoy it immensely.

Check out fellow REO contributor Ben Plunkett's review of this book [here](#).

### ***Destiny of the Republic: A Tale of Madness, Medicine and the Murder of a President* by Candice Millard**



I didn't really know anything about James Garfield, other than that he was a president of the United States and was assassinated, before reading this fascinating book. Not only does the author tell Garfield's history, but she also includes a biography of his murderer, Charles J. Guiteau, and a selective biography of inventor Alexander Graham Bell who worked tirelessly to help save Garfield's life. In addition to the political history, this book also explains much of the scientific and medical history of that time and how the medical practices of that time especially may have contributed to Garfield's death.

The story of James Garfield the man was absolutely captivating. He could have been one of the greatest leaders of our country rather than being remembered only for having died while in office.

I hope to find a good biography on Alexander Graham Bell to read soon.

---

# 500 Words or Less Reviews: Harry Potter and The Goblet of Fire

The Harry Potter books have been climbing in page length ever since *The Sorcerer's Stone*. The biggest gulf is between *The Prisoner of Azkaban* and the present book, *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*. Like the massive fifth book, *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* (which I will review at a later date), the 734-page *The Goblet of Fire* is a veritable Monster Book of Monsters. I freely admit that I am a very slow reader and that it would normally take me six months to read a book this size. It says a heaping helping about it that I finished it in just over a month.

I'll go ahead and say it: The first 145 pages are a masterpiece, with the Weasley's reigning supreme. I could have spent the entire book with that family—especially Mr. Weasley. His encounter with the Dursley's in the fourth chapter (“Back to the Burrow”) is one of the funniest incidences...ever. But this is not the only reason these pages are awesome. There is a nearly seamless flow and flawless writing from section to section: The dark opening with Voldemort and Pettigrew; the Dursley and Weasley encounter; the International Quidditch Cup; and the debacle with and introduction to the Death Eaters. Yeah, for this bit Rowling surely summoned the superhuman writing powers.

But like Superman, Rowling has her kryptonite: tedious information relation. What makes it especially ridiculous in *Goblet of Fire* is that it is done this time by Lord Voldemort,

making him come across like the stereotypical villain who has to reveal his whole long story so the hero has time to foil his plans. That is pretty much exactly what happens here. While I loved the scene, it was kind of ruined with Voldemort makes his tedious rant: “First I blah, blah, blah” then I “blah, blah, blah” then “This really long thing happened” and “blah, blah, blah, etc., Mwahahahaha!” All of this leaving Harry ample time to formulate and carries out his escape plan.

I more often go in for the view that with works of writing less is more. The writers of smaller works have successfully honed their craft, cutting out all fat of any kind. This certainly does not mean that a longer work *can't* be great. *The Goblet of Fire* is a perfect example of this happening. Rowling is one of those authors who absolutely needs room to spread her creative wings and shows that more can really be more. The abundance of space here not only allows her to completely flesh out the central Triwizard Tournament plot but also to flesh out more amazing side plots than you can shake a stick (or wand) at.

But like all of the preceding books, the fault I mentioned was still far, far outweighed by the greatness. In part because of the first 145 pages, but also *almost* every single paragraph, character, and plotline of the following 589 following pages, this is definitely my favorite of these first four classics.

---

## **500 Words or Less Reviews: Beauty and the Beast (2017)**

*For an explanation as to why we went to see this movie in spite of controversy surrounding it, please go [here](#).*

After a two year wait to see this "tale as old as time," we were not disappointed in the least. I (Kayla) have played Belle in the musical before and have seen the 1991 animated feature more times than I have fingers and toes for. And I'll admit: there are minor differences in plot, conversation and music in this version that were a tad unnerving for about the first 30 minutes. Yet once the movie settles in, the novelty of live action and the heart of the classic story make this an exceptional viewing experience.

There was some public doubt about whether Emma Watson could pull off this role. Whether or not you wanted her to get this part, most would agree she is a fantastic actress and her European roots give her an advantage as Belle. At the very least we both agree she has separated herself from the 10-year role she had as Hermione Granger in the *Harry Potter* movies.

The plot altering showdown with wolves and the Beast is cinematography at its finest and incredible to behold in live action. As a first time viewer, I (Gowdy) was mesmerized by this scene and how the story unfolds from there. The Beast becomes captivatingly sympathetic that he is extremely attractive from that moment on. The magic of Disney storytelling is absolutely at its finest during this stretch of the two main characters interacting, culminating with the renowned images of them dancing together. Fans of *The Beauty and the Beast* story in any version will appreciate how easy it is to get lost in fantasy of those few moments. The perfect lyrics, the immaculate music, the heart-stopping improbable romance...this is why Disney has made a gazillion dollars over the last few decades. They capture the absolute best of human imagination and make it feel so real.

Not to be outdone at all is the castle staff-turned-castle objects, who are utterly endearing and show how far our uninhibited technology has become at making anything possible

on the big screen. Lumière, Cogsworth, Mrs. Potts, et. al, add much depth and humor. Luke Evans as Gaston is a fine antagonist and Josh Gad as LeFou brings plenty of laughs and personality. We have very few criticisms with the film in general, especially with acting and the portrayal of the characters.

And, on a final note, we are sure people are curious about the aforementioned controversy. It is our opinion that it was much ado about nothing. Nothing about LeFou is stated plainly in regards to sexuality. You can make assumptions (we try not to in real life) and the "moment" that caused the headlines can be interpreted how you wish, but we are both doubtful that many people can find any of it offensive. If you have questions you may ask them below.

We plan to see it again, and I (Kayla) have never seen a movie twice in the theater. It's that good.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ out of Five