



## **Positive Programming from Hollywood**

### *A Short Trend, or a Long Term Change?*

**By Phil Cooke**

Something is changing in Hollywood. You can see it in the movie theaters and on network television. And most important, you can hear it in the executive suites of network decision makers and high level producers.

It's a trend toward more family friendly programming. For instance, the box office earnings for 2002 report that the movie "8-Mile" featuring rap star Eminem was ranked number 23 on the list. What's interesting about that? It was the highest "R" rated movie of the year. That means the top 22 films of 2002 were G or PG films.

The movie studios and networks are starting to notice. The question is, will this be a short term blip on the radar, or hopefully a long term trend?

Hollywood insiders are not completely sure if the positive programming we're seeing today is a real trend, or if it's part of a regular cultural cycle. On one hand, there is no question that Hollywood studios are finally getting the message family organizations have been sending for years - that there's a huge audience out there that is pro-family, respectful of religious values, and wants positive role models. But on the other hand, we've seen cycles like this in the past when the audience is just looking for something different. Other cultural indicators, like the recent rise in abstinence among young people also support that idea.

But no matter what the reason— our challenge as Christians is to support it. When “Veggie Tales”, “Lord of the Rings”, or less widely distributed movies like “To End All Wars” hits theaters, we need to support them in a big way. Otherwise, all our efforts in Hollywood will have been without purpose. So what can we in the media to do help our audiences take advantage of this trend in positive, value-oriented programming?

**First - we can pray.** While many Christians complain about Hollywood, few actually pray for a difference. Miracles still happen, and God can make a difference. Organizations like the Hollywood Prayer Network ([www.hollywoodprayernetwork.org](http://www.hollywoodprayernetwork.org)) have been instrumental in making Christians around the world aware of the need to pray for this industry.

**Second, be cautious about boycotts.** During the last boycott of the Walt Disney Studios, their sales actually went up. Plus, boycotts are a negative influence, and I believe it's far more positive to lead by example. As one Christian industry professional noted recently, “I’ve never seen one person saved because of a boycott.”

**Third, we can let our opinions be known.** Television networks and studios actually do listen to viewer feedback, and when you write, it can make a difference. But don't criticize and complain – be a positive force and let them know that your Christian faith is important. A gracious letter or e-mail will be far better received than a hostile one.

**Fourth, we need to train a new generation of Christians to embrace the media as a tool for reaching the lost.** Right now, numerous Christian colleges and universities have media courses, and many have complete radio, TV, and film departments. We need to support these efforts to raise up a generation of Christian media professionals. A new Christian outreach in Hollywood called “Hollywood 101” (<http://www.inter-mission.net>) has started to help Christians coming into the entertainment industry with career advice, where to live, what classes to take, how to design the right resume, networking advice, and more. Right now, most churches would

rather spend money to help a young missionary to Africa, but the fact is, a young “missionary to Hollywood” might have far more impact for the gospel, so we need to reconsider the types of ministries we support.

**Finally, we can support Christians already working in the secular television and film industry.** Everyday, thousands of Christians from coast to coast work in the arena of entertainment, trying to be salt and light in a difficult and challenging place. It's a tough task, and we need your prayers and support. Plus, numerous Christian writers, directors, and producers are developing projects with a Christian focus, designed to make an impact in this culture. We as the Body of Christ need to band together to financially support these innovative efforts. Dr. Larry Poland, Director of Mastermedia International in Redlands, California ([www.mastermediaintl.org](http://www.mastermediaintl.org)) is doing a remarkable job of reaching high level executives in the entertainment industry in a gracious, non-threatening way, and his strategy is having powerful results. Considering the incredible impact Hollywood makes on our society – especially our young people – we need to support ministries like Mastermedia as they take a message of hope to the influencers and information brokers of this generation.

Likewise, every day, Christian men and women in Hollywood are writing scripts, developing movies and TV programming, and working in the trenches, often with little or no financing, trying to be “missionaries” in this volatile industry.

Christian businessmen and investors? Take note.

If we are going to make the most of this trend toward better programming, we have to teach Christians how to deal effectively with media and culture. Radio, television and movies are the greatest influence on culture today. If we as Christians want to make an impact in this culture, it has to be through the media. So let's commit to doing everything we can to make a positive difference in the entertainment industry.

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