

A long time ago, in a galaxy far, far away...

SOUL FOOD

Star Wars Episode IV – A New Hope

Memorable Quote:

If money is all that you love, then that's what you'll receive - Princess Leia

Relevant Passages:

One day as Jesus was walking along the shore beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers—Simon, also called Peter, and Andrew—fishing with a net, for they were commercial fishermen. Jesus called out to them, "Come, be my disciples, and I will show you how to fish for people!" And they left their nets at once and went with him. A little farther up the shore he saw two other brothers, James and John, sitting in a boat with their father, Zebedee, mending their nets. And he called them to come, too. They immediately followed him, leaving the boat and their father behind. **Matthew 4:18-22**

Then someone called from the crowd, "Teacher, please tell my brother to divide our father's estate with me." Jesus replied, "Friend, who made me a judge over you to decide such things as that?" Then he said, "Beware! Don't be greedy for what you don't have. Real life is not measured by how much we own." And he gave an illustration: "A rich man had a fertile farm that produced fine crops. In fact, his barns were full to overflowing. So he said, 'I know! I'll tear down my barns and build bigger ones. Then I'll have room enough to store everything. And I'll sit back and say to myself, My friend, you have enough stored away for years to come. Now take it easy! Eat, drink, and be merry!' "But God said to him, 'You fool! You will die this very night. Then who will get it all?' "Yes, a person is a fool to store up earthly wealth but not have a rich relationship with God." **Luke 12:13-21**

Review:

Star Wars has not merely entertained us but has become a noticeable part of every day life, popping up in our vocabulary, spiritual conversations, and the ubiquitous merchandising, redefining the boundaries of pop culture in the process. Star Wars has proven itself timeless. It's not the special effects, the acting, or the characters as much as the story itself that has had the greatest impact. George Lucas gave us much more than a movie, he gave us a story that would transcend time and generations, made apparent, in part, by the blockbuster 20th anniversary re-release. To do this he reached back into time to revive age-old myths and story elements that have existed for thousands of years. Stories of reluctant heroes who, against impossible odds, obtain personal redemption as well as the salvation of others are not new, but they are powerful and we have always loved them. In a recent Time magazine interview George Lucas said that he intentionally set out to recreate the hero myths of western culture.

Throughout the history of story telling, the hero's involvement is often brought about by outside intervention and it is no different for our current hero, Luke Skywalker. Luke is forced into a raging war when he inadvertently buys a pair of androids that have escaped from interstellar war ships. The "droids" bring about an invitation to a local hermit, Obi Wan Kenobi, a member of old-order heroes known as Jedi Knights. Luke learns that Obi Wan was once mentor to Luke's father, also a Jedi knight, believed long since deceased, and that he taught Luke's father the ways of the Force. Obi Wan explains that the Force is "... what gives the Jedi his power. It's an energy field created by all living things. It surrounds us and penetrates us. It binds the galaxy together." In the aforementioned Time magazine interview Lucas related that he created the idea of the Force, and included it in the movie, in order to get people thinking about God and not to promote one particular religion. This would answer the detractors that accused him of sugar coating a hidden religious agenda.

But if the idea of the Force is to get us thinking about God, then from the Christian perspective this means God as revealed in the Bible through the incarnation of Jesus Christ. The Bible teaches us that God is Spirit. He is everywhere present. The Spirit of God was transferred to the first man and imbued him with life. As Luke grows in his knowledge of the Force he learns that the Jedi knights were keepers of the teachings of the Force. He learns a Jedi knight "can feel the Force flowing through him," and that while the Force partially controls his actions it also obeys the commands of the Jedi. The Bible tells us that the living Spirit of God, the Holy Spirit, will move the Christian along like wind in a ship's sails. It is up to the Christian whether or not he listens to the prompting of God. The Bible reveals that God is moved by the prayers of believers, and that authority has been given to the Christian to impact things in heaven and on earth.

It's important to remember that neither the Force nor Star Wars are Christian allegories and direct correlations can't be drawn for the sake of spiritual instruction. But Star Wars is an important and powerful spiritual allegory in general.

As Obi Wan Kenobi awakens Luke to a spiritual realm that he never knew existed, Luke begins a quest to find his own destiny as well as to rescue a princess from the clutches of evil, embodied in the person of Darth Vader. Along his way he meets with a reckless pilot, Han Solo, who has little use for the Force or its spiritual significance, relying entirely on his own survival skills. As a Christian progresses along his own path he is counselled by the Bible to trust only in the Spirit of God and not in his own strength. By doing this he grows in the knowledge of the provision that God has made for him.

Luke's furthering quest brings him to the space fortress where the Princess is being held by Darth Vader. Vader, Luke has learned, was once a Jedi Knight until he allowed himself to be taken over by the "dark side" of the Force, following a path to power through evil. It is certainly easy enough to see a symbolic connection between Darth Vader and Satan.

Satan was once an important servant of God until pride turned him against God. Satan was expelled from the presence of God for all eternity and spends the time until his final judgment by luring people to an evil path that is apart from the Spirit of God. When Satan tempted Jesus he offered him wealth and power. Jesus countered all of the attacks by relying on the truth of the Bible and exalting the Spirit of God.

With the princess rescued, the band of adventurers is in need of a miraculous escape. In order to achieve such an escape, Obi Wan Kenobi confronts Darth Vader in battle. Through an intimate understanding of the Force, Obi Wan realizes the best way to propel Luke to the limits of his own spiritual journey is by allowing himself to be killed.

Obi Wan, as a Christ type, allows himself to be killed in order to win the freedom of others. Before he is struck down, Obi Wan informs Vader that his death would allow him to become more powerful than was imaginable. As Vader strikes the death blow Obi Wan vanishes, seemingly absorbed into the Force itself, only to reappear in Luke's thoughts later on, to direct him in the ways of the Force.

Many times throughout the Gospels of the New Testament, Jesus says that only through His death and resurrection would His true ministry be done. The death of Christ on the cross was a substitution for the payment of man's sins. After Jesus' resurrection he ascended into heaven leaving an empty tomb behind, but before He ascended He promised the gift of the Holy Spirit that would impart the will of God into believers and direct them in their lives.

During the final climatic scenes Luke is reminded by Obi Wan's presence through the force not to rely on his own judgment or that of computers but rather to "use the Force". The Bible reminds Christians not to rely on what they see but rather to walk by faith, and that the greatest strengths of all come from surrendering your weaknesses to God. ""Not by might, not by power, but by Spirit" says God".

While Star Wars is not a film about Christian allegory it is a very powerful movie with lasting imagery and a timeless story to which we can all relate at some level. We see ourselves as the young Luke Skywalker trying to figure out how he fits in with the physical and spiritual worlds around him. And while our quests may not be intergalactic in scale we are all constantly faced with decisions that will impact our futures and our relationship with God, the ultimate "force" in our lives.

Star Wars Episode V – The Empire Strikes Back

Memorable Quotes:

Yoda: Yes, a Jedi's strength flows from the Force. But beware of the dark side. Anger, fear, aggression; the dark side of the Force are they. Easily they flow, quick to join you in a fight. If once you start down the dark path, forever will it dominate your destiny, consume you it will, as it did Obi-Wan's apprentice.

Luke: Vader... Is the dark side stronger?

Yoda: No, no, noquicker ... easier ... more seductive.

Luke: But how am I to know the good side from the bad?

Yoda: You will know... when you are calm, at peace, passive. A Jedi uses the Force for knowledge and defence, never for attack.

Luke: I don't believe it!

Yoda: That is why you fail.

Relevant Passages:

Jesus also said, "Here is another illustration of what the Kingdom of God is like: A farmer planted seeds in a field, and then he went on with his other activities. As the days went by, the seeds sprouted and grew without the farmer's help, because the earth produces crops on its own. First a leaf blade pushes through, then the heads of wheat are formed, and finally the grain ripens. And as soon as the grain is ready, the farmer comes and harvests it with a sickle." Jesus asked, "How can I describe the Kingdom of God? What story should I use to illustrate it? It is like a tiny mustard seed. Though this is one of the smallest of seeds, it grows to become one of the largest of plants, with long branches where birds can come and find shelter." **Mark 4:26-32**

"Oh, there is so much more I want to tell you, but you can't bear it now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not be presenting his own ideas; he will be telling you what he has heard. He will tell you about the future. He will bring me glory by revealing to you whatever he receives from me. All that the Father has is mine; this is what I mean when I say that the Spirit will reveal to you whatever he receives from me." **John 16:12-15**

Review

While the first movie introduced us to the major players and forces at work, The Empire Strikes Back showed us more depth to the characters and more importantly more depth to the Force, the spiritual fabric of their world.

A true friendship has developed between Luke and Han Solo, to the point that Han is willing to risk his life to save Luke. Moreover, we see how Luke has gained a greater understanding of the force when he musters its power to retrieve his light sabre in a life and death escape from a snow beast. Soon after his escape we see a greater depth to the force when Obi-Wan Kenobi appears to Luke encouraging him to study with a great Jedi teacher on a distant planet. The apparition that appears to Luke is not merely a vision parroting a religious message, but rather responds directly to him. Although in the original movie Obi-Wan was struck down during a climactic confrontation with Darth Vader, he now appears to Luke as a lucid being surrounded by an aura of energy though still disembodied. This transfigured apparition gives us our first insight into the eternal nature of the force.

After helping the rebels battle and narrowly escape from the Imperial troops, Luke leaves his friends and heads for the planet that Obi-Wan told him about in the vision. Upon arriving there, Luke and the audience are thrust headlong into the realm of The Force. The planet is a thick, overgrown swamp teeming with every form of life imaginable and unimaginable. It is here that Luke begins his true study of the Force and what it means to be a Jedi. Like Adam awakening in the Garden of Eden, Luke begins his new life.

He quickly meets a native of the area, a small wizened creature whose wisdom seems to be lost on the impatient acolyte. Soon it is revealed that this small and curious resident of the swamp that Luke has all but dismissed is the one-and-the-same Yoda, the Jedi master that Obi-Wan told him about. Luke's amazement at this discovery proves that he was expecting someone much different. The Bible warns about judging by only what we see and how God measures the heart of man while man measures the appearance.

While Luke's training begins on the remote planet of Degobah, darker events are unfolding in another corner of the galaxy. The Emperor himself appears to his chief minion, Darth Vader, and convinces him that due to the strength of the force in Luke that the young Jedi must either be killed or turned to serve the Dark Side of the force. Although the force is the universal energy that binds all living things, the Dark side is its evil counterpart, providing a fast track to power but extracting the ultimate price of consuming the soul of its practitioner. Whereas a quick comparison may be made between the two sides of the Force and with God and the devil of the Bible, it's important to note that the Bible makes it clear that it is God who is all powerful. Despite the fact that Satan may have quite an array of powers it's very clear that is far beneath the power of God and Jesus Christ. Moreover, Jesus didn't appear on the earth to counter-balance the power of the devil but rather to defeat him. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work.

As Luke's training progresses he learns about the Dark Side from his master, Yoda. Yoda points out that the Dark Side is not more powerful than the "light" side of the force, but it is a quicker, easier and more seductive path. These words are very reminiscent of the teachings of Christ as he told His disciples that broad is the road and wide is the gate that leads to destruction, while the path to righteousness is "straight and narrow". Midway through his training, Luke must venture into a forbidding cave that embodies the Dark Side of the Force. Though Yoda tells him that he won't need his weapons, Luke takes them anyway, still relying more on the strength of the material rather than the spiritual. While he is in the cave, Luke encounters a vision of Darth Vader. A battle ensues resulting in Luke striking down the image of Vader, who, when his mask is stripped off, is actually Luke himself, a lesson that will have strong repercussions later in this movie and the rest of the trilogy.

While Luke is learning the ways of a Jedi, his friends, Han, Leia, and Chewbacca, are fleeing the clutches of the ever-present empire. They head for a spaceport that is operated by a former friend of Han only to find that Vader has arrived there first. It's the Emperor's intention to use them as bait in a trap that will lure Luke directly to Vader, who will bring him before the Emperor. Han's friend betrays the party and turns them over to Vader at a banquet table, reminiscent of the Last Supper when Judas left to betray Jesus to the Pharisees.

Due to his increasingly greater sensitivity to the force, Luke senses the danger his friends are in. But Luke still has a long way to go before he can call himself a Jedi. Yoda counsels him about his constant weakness in judging things by how they appear. Luke takes the lesson to heart and says he will try the seemingly impossible task of raising the sunken fighter ship from the swamp. Yoda reacts angrily to Luke's words. "No, try not! Do, or do not. There is no try!" And while Luke fails at the task Yoda is able to perform it successfully. He explains to Luke that he is able to do it because his ally is the force. He tells Luke that people are really luminous beings, far more than the mere flesh and blood that we see with our physical eyes. In a similar fashion, the Bible teaches that we are much more than human vessels. We are spiritual creations of God, with an eternal soul.

But Luke can't dispel the image of his friends suffering from his mind and chooses to leave his training and rush to their aid. As Luke makes his decision the transfigured Obi-Wan appears to him and interacts with young Jedi having never really died but rather been "caught up" by the Force. In the Gospel of Matthew while Jesus is praying with his disciples he appears as transfigured, changed from an earthly being into a spiritual one, along with Moses and Elijah. (An interesting side note is that while Obi-Wan has "crossed over to the other side" as a spiritual being, he sits on a log while talking to Luke, proving that though you might be a transcended spiritual entity your feet still get tired.)

Luke leaves his training and arrives at the space station where his friends are held, walking right into the trap that has been laid for him. And while Luke and Vader begin battling it out, Luke's friends are able to make an escape, although Han Solo has been flash frozen and given to a bounty hunter.

The battle between Luke and Vader reaches a feverish pitch, leading to a point where Vader cuts off Luke's right hand, meaning almost certain death for our hero. It's at this point that Darth Vader reveals his true identity. He is actually Luke's father. Luke tries to deny it but senses that it's true. Luke discerns the hopelessness of his situation as Vader has him cornered at the end of a catwalk high in the air. It is here that Luke realizes that he has indeed learned a lot about the Force and for the first time ever wholly submits himself to the power of the Force. He releases his grip from the catwalk and is drawn by the Force to place of rescue. A message that rings clearly throughout the Bible is that turning over our self-will to the will of God is how we achieve the great blessings that God has in store for us. Matthew 11:28-30

Star Wars Episode VI – Return of the Jedi

Memorable Quotes:

Yoda: Remember, a Jedi's strength flows from the Force. But beware - anger, fear, aggression - the dark side are they. Once you start down the dark path, forever will it dominate your destiny. ... Pass on what you have learned.

Luke: Soon I'll be dead, and you with me.

The Emperor: [laughing] Perhaps you refer to the imminent attack of your rebel fleet? Yes, I assure you, we are quite safe from your friends here.

Luke: Your overconfidence is your weakness.

The Emperor: Your faith in your friends is yours.

The Emperor: [to Luke] The alliance... will die. As will your friends. Good, I can feel your anger. I am unarmed. Take your weapon. Strike me down with all of your hatred and your journey towards the dark side will be complete.

Relevant Passages:

Then Jesus was led out into the wilderness by the Holy Spirit to be tempted there by the Devil. For forty days and forty nights he ate nothing and became very hungry. Then the Devil came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, change these stones into loaves of bread." But Jesus told him, "No! The Scriptures say, `People need more than bread for their life; they must feed on every word of God.'" Then the Devil took him to Jerusalem, to the highest point of the Temple, and said, "If you are the Son of God, jump off! For the Scriptures say, `He orders his angels to protect you. And they will hold you with their hands to keep you from striking your foot on a stone.'" Jesus responded, "The Scriptures also say, `Do not test the Lord your God.'" Next the Devil took him to the peak of a very high mountain and showed him the nations of the world and all their glory. "I will give it all to you," he said, "if you will only kneel down and worship me." "Get out of here, Satan," Jesus told him. "For the Scriptures say, `You must worship the Lord your God; serve only him.'" Then the Devil went away, and angels came and cared for Jesus. **Matthew 4:1-11**

The human body has many parts, but the many parts make up only one body. So it is with the body of Christ. Some of us are Jews, some are Gentiles, some are slaves, and some are free. But we have all been baptized into Christ's body by one Spirit, and we have all received the same Spirit. Yes, the body has many different parts, not just one part. If the foot says, "I am not a part of the body because I am not a hand," that does not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear says, "I am not part of the body because I am only an ear and not an eye," would that make it any less a part of the body? Suppose the whole body were an eye—then how would you hear? Or if your whole body were just one big ear, how could you smell anything? **1 Corinthians 12:12-17**

Review

The final chapter in the Star Wars saga begins with the construction of a newer, deadlier Death Star. The scene shifts to Luke's home planet of Tatooine, where he has returned in an effort to release his friends from the clutches of Jabba the Hut, a merciless and disgusting crime lord. He enters as a Jedi Knight, using his newfound powers to gain an audience with Jabba. But Luke's ability to use the force is not as strong as he imagines, and he too is quickly taken captive. In much the same way that Proverbs 16:18 warns that pride goes before destruction, Luke has overestimated his own powers. But by working together and by calling on his powers as a Jedi, Luke and the others are able to escape and rejoin the forces of the rebellion, preparing for their final showdown with the Emperor.

The Emperor, the puppeteer controlling Vader's strings, tells Vader of his plan to turn Luke to the Dark side of the force, much the same way that Vader was turned. During Luke's previous Jedi training with Obi-Wan Kenobi and Yoda he learned that Vader was once a Jedi Knight serving truth and justice but turned to the dark side of the force after being seduced by its promise of power and fast results. The Emperor tells Vader that only together can they turn Luke to the Dark side. The Emperor knows that Luke's devotion to the force, his religion, is too strong and that Luke's biggest weakness is in his feelings for his father. He knows that "his compassion will be his undoing." Throughout this discourse Vader seems resolute in his dedication to the Emperor. Vader, it seems, has resolved himself to the path that he has chosen even if it means killing his own son. He is to be used to deliver Luke to the Emperor to face certain death. An allegorical application to Christianity would of course be Satan's use of Judas to betray Jesus and deliver him up to those who wanted him dead.

After Luke's escape with his friends, he returns to Yoda, the Jedi master, to finish his training. When he arrives he finds Yoda very old and frail. Luke is told that his training from Yoda is complete, and that Vader is indeed his father and that he must confront him. The only thing keeping Luke from becoming a true Jedi Knight is not training but his unresolved feelings for his father. Luke must confront his own fears by facing Darth Vader. Some of Yoda's last words are warnings to Luke about the Dark Side of the Force and that once someone starts down its path it will consume them and that the Emperor's powers are not to be underestimated just because he serves the Dark Side. As Yoda dies he urges Luke to pass on what he has learned. Yoda dies and disappears, consumed by the force in the same way that Obi-Wan Kenobi disappeared when killed by Vader. He returns to join his friends and ready himself for the inevitable confrontation with his father and with himself.

With Luke's return the group of heroes stage a raid on a nearby moon base that houses a force field protecting the new Death Star from attack. The team is separated and quickly captured by the local inhabitants, the Ewoks. They are able to convince the Ewoks to join in their struggle to destroy the Empire and its forces. But Luke senses Vader's presence through the Force and knows that Vader in turn is aware of his, jeopardizing the outcome of the mission. Luke tells Leia that he must confront Vader. Luke's awareness of the innate good in Vader is like that of Jesus ability to see the value in the soul of man despite the wickedness in which he lived. The Bible reveals that Christ died to earn the redemption of humanity when humankind was at its worst and was hopeless and helpless.

As the rest of the team and their new allies plan the attack, Luke surrenders to the local forces without a fight knowing that they will bring him to Vader. Luke stands face to face with his father and tells his father of his feelings for him, his belief that his father is truly good, and that he won't turn him over to the Emperor. Vader informs him that he has seriously misjudged the situation and that he must present him to the Emperor. It's at this point that we get the first glimpse into the struggle going on inside Vader's soul. Luke surrendered himself as Christ did, not putting up a fight and not trying to escape his destiny. For Luke it was to face Vader, for Jesus it was to die on the cross.

Father and son begin a battle that holds in the balance not only the fate of the galaxy but also the fate of the souls of both men. At the height of the battle, Luke puts down his weapon, refusing to fight his father any more, and trusting in his father's feelings for him. But Vader redoubles his attacks and Luke is forced to defend himself, severing Vader's hand in the same way that Vader had earlier cut off Luke's hand. As Luke looks down at his wounded father and compares the wounds of the two men, he realizes the oneness that he shares with his father. Luke throws down his weapon for the last time, proving to his father, to the Emperor, and most importantly to himself that he will not succumb to the power of the Dark Side of the Force even if it means his death. Luke has learned his final lesson and now stands as a true Jedi Knight. Luke's identification with Vader, the one whom he went to redeem, is not unlike the identification that God made with man through the incarnation of Jesus Christ.

But the Emperor refuses to accept the fact that he has misjudged Luke's true heart. He musters all the power of the Dark Side of the Force and attacks Luke himself. In desperation Luke cries to his father for help. While Vader watches his son being killed he realizes the ultimate cost that the Dark Side extracts and the real meaning of its power. Vader musters his strength, snatches up the Emperor, and hurls him to his death far below. Vader collapses as Luke rushes to him. For the first time he can remember, Luke sees his father, Anakin Skywalker, and not Darth Vader, evil henchman of the Emperor. Luke insists that he will stay to save his father. Anakin tells him that he has already saved him by believing in him as he has. He tells Luke that he was right about his father, that he wasn't pure evil and compels Luke to tell his sister the same. Anakin dies in the arms of his son. But as he dies his body remains and is not consumed by the force. The evil side of the force has used Vader for all it could and throws him aside when he is of no further use. Luke lifts the body of his father and makes good his escape.

As Luke escapes with his father, his friends have just completed their greatest victory by destroying the forces of the Emperor once and for all, promising peace to the galaxy. At the end of the victory celebration, the friends join Luke as he cremates the body of his father. It is then that Anakin reappears through the Force as a Jedi Knight at the side of his former mentor Obi-Wan Kenobi and their master Yoda. Anakin's redemption is now complete as every trace of what he was as Darth Vader is consumed in the flames of the funeral pyre. Like the thief on the cross who was crucified next to Jesus, Anakin has gained redemption at the last moment.

Although the Star Wars saga is not, and was not intended to be, a "Christian" allegory it does contain a lot of powerful ideas on life, truth, and spirituality. As with any great story we can take these ideas and try to see the truths and reality of Christianity in a different way. It opens the doors to discussions that may never have happened otherwise and causes us to think about those forces outside of ourselves.