

## “Once Upon a Time in Hollywood”

*God at the Movies, 2020*

### [Bumper Video 2:25]

Welcome back to our 17<sup>th</sup> annual edition of *God at the Movies*, where we attempt to search for God’s truth in some surprising places. Read the Bible and you will find that God is always speaking His truth through surprising sources. We happen to think He still does today, and one of those ways is through movies. And perhaps maybe no voice is more surprising than the controversial director, Quentin Tarantino. When I say “controversial”, boy does he cover his bases. He is “problematic” on multiple fronts.

Spike Lee has criticized him for the language he scripts about African Americans. Police Unions have organized boycotts of his films due to depictions of violence by law enforcement. Feminists wonder if he secretly – or *not* so secretly – hates women. And yet, he has depicted some of the strongest butt-kicking heroines ever pit on film. He is a walking contradiction and deals almost exclusively in moral ambiguity. His films make you cheer – and then later question what it says about your psychological health that you were cheering. But anyway you slice it, he’s earned his reputation as a genius – an auteur filmmaker.

Full disclosure, I stood behind Quentin Tarantino a few years ago as he was buying collectible robots at the old Toy Joy on Guadalupe. It’s one of my four brushes with Hollywood celebrity. I spoke to director Robert Rodriguez at the Cactus Café once. Matthew McConaughey held the door open for Deanna and I at the Four Seasons during SXSW - I told him I was glad he was back in town, to which he said, “Good to be back, man.” And lastly Sienna Miller caressed me in a Broadway theatre – which is one of Deanna’s favorite stories.

Speaking of revisionist history, this is another in a line of Tarantino films that seek to give us an emotionally satisfying rewrite to some of history’s worst atrocities. In *Inglourious Bastards* he showed us the death of Hitler – who’s not going to cheer for that? And in *Django Unchained* he unleashed a bloody slave revolt in which we got to see the oppressive plantation masters get a taste of their own medicine. These things are satisfying – cathartic really – because we know the true story was not nearly so.

And that continues with *Once Upon a Time in Hollywood*, a film that is, on one level, about the gruesome Manson Family murders that took place on Cielo Drive on August 9, 1968 – the date that many mark as the official end of the swinging 60’s. One of the main characters in the film is Sharon Tate, a name synonymous with tragedy and as you see her buoyant personality float across the screen you can’t help but be filled with dread at the inevitability that you know is coming. There’s a scene where she is shown very pregnant and happily decorating her baby’s nursery that caused me literal pain.

But I said that's only "one level" of the film, and it's not the one that I am choosing to talk about today. I want to focus on the two other main characters – fictitious, unlike Sharon Tate. Two men portrayed by Leonardo DiCaprio and Brad Pitt – in perhaps the most luminous Hollywood pairing since Robert Redford and Paul Newman teamed up as Butch and Sundance. I think the movie is really about them and their relationship. A relationship that is introduced to us in this opening clip from the film. We're on the set of a TV western for this behind-the-scenes interview. **[Carry his load 1:11]**

Leonardo - Rick Dalton – is the star and Brad – Cliff Booth – is the stuntman, he's there to "carry the load." There's some double meaning there and Cliff clearly understands it. Just from that clip alone, you're set up to wonder about just what is the nature of this relationship? Now, when I first saw that scene, a passage of scripture leapt to mind. **Galatians 6:2**, "*Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.*" So to "carry someone's load" is a scriptural command.

That's what friends do. The Bible is full of exhortations to friendships. Famously **Ecclesiastes 4:9-10** says, "*Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor: If either of them falls down, one can help the other up. But pity anyone who falls and has no one to help them up.*" This is a movie about how two are better than one. It's a movie about friendship.

But it's also a movie about the journey to friendship, because I think one of the "friends" understands the relationship a little better than the other! After that opening clip, the movie jumps from black and white to color and the actual 1968 setting of the story. And the first thing we see is the two protagonists getting into a car together. With Cliff in the driver's seat – I believe metaphorically as well as literally.

In an interesting nod, the credits begin with the lead actors names popping up on screen, but in a twist, "Brad Pitt" appears under Leo and "Leonardo DiCaprio" appears under Brad. I think it's meant to tell us that the two are really interchangeable. In real life, Leo was nominated for Best Actor and Brad for Best *Supporting* Actor. In spite of the fact that both men share the exact same amount of airtime and dialogue. The fact that Leo didn't win – bested by the star of *last* week's sermon – and Brad did, is kind of cosmic justice.

Rick lives in a fancy home in the Hollywood hills, and Cliff lives in a dingy trailer behind a drive-in movie theatre, but it's clear that the stuntman is the one with the real handle on true success in life. Cliff knows that he and his star have a special friendship. While Rick has trouble using the "f-word". Oh, not *that* "f-word", believe me, he uses that one plenty! But he seems to be unable to call Cliff his "friend" even when prompted to on multiple occasions. Here's a critical one, from that opening scene, Cliff is driving Rick to a meeting with a producer about a potential film role. In the bar, they meet the Hollywood big-wig, played by Al Pacino – so many stars in this film! Let's watch the introductions...**[I Try :30]**

“He sounds like a good friend” to which Cliff replies, “I try”. And try he does. He’s serving Rick every step of the way. And as we learn in that clip, mostly because Rick is a mess. Remember that verse from Galatians about “carrying each other’s burdens”? Can I show you the verse that comes next? **V.3**, “*If anyone thinks they are something when they are not, they deceive themselves.*” Well, that could be Rick Dalton’s life verse!

Ever since he left the hit western for a “rinky dink movie career”, he has been in decline. It’s hard to tell if the constant alcohol is the symptom or the problem, but he’s hard on his way to “has been” status. As he himself describes his career, it’s been five years of ascent, ten years of treading water and now a race to the bottom. He’s full of self-pity and arrogant bluster all at the same time. Meanwhile, Cliff takes the role of encourager. Rick may be down, but by golly, Cliff is going to do his darnedest to lift his friend up – whether Rick realizes he’s his friend or not. Because that’s what friends do. They carry the load.

My favorite scene in the film - I’m not going to play it, because you’ve already seen it unedited in the trailer before the sermon. And I say unedited because it prominently features that “f-word” we were talking about. In fact, I’ve been debating for sometime how to approach that.

I mean, you can’t say the granddaddy of all curse words from the pulpit, can you? On the other hand, one of our values a SWFF is authenticity and in context, it’s not really exploitative, it fits. I have a great deal of respect for your emotional maturity as an audience. I’m not going to pretend you’ve never heard this word. We left it in a clip last week and nobody said a peep.

So I’d almost decided to just go ahead and drop the “f-bomb” in this story I’m about to tell you. But then I watched the Presidential Cat Fight on Tuesday night. As a three-year varsity high school debater – and in my district High School was only three years – I refuse to call that debacle a “debate”. But after that show of chaos and national embarrassment, I decided, maybe there’s a place for formal public decorum after all. Maybe there’s such a thing as *too much*, “keeping it real.” So I will be sticking with “f-word” today.

That said, let me go back to my favorite scene. A little bit later, Cliff is once again driving Rick to the studio for a guest role on yet another television western. Rick is a sad sack and down on himself, and Cliff is doing his best to encourage his friend. And so when the star gets out of the car all moping, the stuntman leans through the window and says, “Hey, you’re Rick ‘f-ing’ Dalton and don’t you forget it.” Very inspiring send off. I know ladies, but it’s a guy thing.

And that brings me to a great story I have to tell you inspired by this scene. Let me set this up for you. I have a friend - one of my best friends - who pastors a large prominent church in Dallas. Before my friend pastored the church, his father pastored it for many years and was a highly respected leader in our denomination. By the way, this was the church that *my* father attended as a boy and where he became a Christian. So it is a prominent church, not just in the denomination, but in my own personal history.

So I am at a biannual denomination conference in Orlando, Florida in August of 2019, with my friend – his name is Scott Wilson - when he gets the call that his father is dying and is not expected to live through the night. Now, his dad has Alzheimer's, but nothing had indicated *this*, so it was quite a shock to my friend. And they are unable to get a flight back to DFW until the following morning. So he is pretty upset and feeling helpless and so his wife suggests to my wife that perhaps it would be a good idea for me to take him to a movie and, you know, kind of get his mind off things.

So he and I, and his son, skip the service that night and head over to a megaplex and watch *Once Upon A Time in Hollywood* - I'd already seen it, he hadn't. In the middle of the movie he gets up and walks out, because his brother back home had texted him from the hospital that this might be the end for dad. So my buddy is FaceTiming out in the lobby for what may be his father's final breath. But then he comes back in, false alarm.

So we're watching the movie, we've seen the part I've just talked about and then like five minutes later, the film stops, the lights come up and we hear alarms in the distance. Someone comes over the loud speaker and says, "Please remain in your seats, we're working through an issue and will be back with you shortly." So it's just a night of chaos.

There's about 15 minutes when we're just sitting there in the dimly lit theatre and my friend is standing in front of me, his son is sitting a couple of seats over - it's a full row, crowded theater; remember those? - and I can tell my friend is feeling anxious, so I look at him, point my finger in his face and say, "Hey, you're Scott F-ing Wilson and don't you forget it." And remember, I am self-editing for the sermon. And two beats later, a guy sitting on the other side of me says, "You're Scott Wilson? We read your book in my seminary class!"

Turns out this was a pastor couple from Utah here for the same denominational conference. And I am busted! I don't know if I mentioned, but this is not a denomination that smiles on cuss words, especially not the mother of all cuss words! But then again, this couple was *also* skipping church to see, not just a movie, but a rated R Quentin Tarantino movie, so who were *they* going to tell?

Anyway, the movie starts back up, and about ten minutes before the end, my friend steps out again and after the credits roll, his son and I walk out and he's sitting on a bench in the lobby and says, "My dad just died". And I put my arms around him and we just cried in the middle of the AMC. We decided to skip the Uber and walk the mile back to the hotel. It was raining lightly, his staff got word and several of the guys started walking towards the theatre and met us half way and we all just loved on him. It was a very cathartic experience. Felt like something out of a Hemingway novel.

And then the next week, Deanna and I drove up to Dallas for his dad's funeral - it was a big funeral - and again and again, someone would walk up and whisper in my ear, "Hey, I hear you're Anthony F-ing Scoma". There are pastors all over the country watching this sermon, because they want to hear how I'm going to tell this story. It's become one of my favorite stories. I was talking to Scott just the other day and he calls it one of his "10 times moments" - one of the greatest memories of his life. It's something that marks a time of tragedy - that was still very painful - with the soothing balm of close friendship. The bond of brotherhood.

And I think that's what this film is about. Ladies, of course this works with the strength of sisterhood as well, but let me tell the story they way Quentin did. And men especially are dealing with a crisis of friendship these days. Besides, we will literally talk about sisters in three weeks when we get to *Little Women*, so hold on.

But I want to talk this morning about friendship – and that's a topic that affects us regardless of gender, age or any other cultural qualifier. *Everybody* needs friends. You were built for relationships. I heard a piece on NPR earlier this year about the biological science of friendship, how we are beginning to understand it's relationship to both mental and physical health.

I actually wrote my doctoral dissertation around the theology of the Trinity as an explanation of how being people "made in God's image" means that we should have the same powerful relational balance that the triune God-head does and when we drift from it, we wind up in all kinds of trouble. Real quick recap, a behavioral psychologist named Murray Bowen did all of this research after World War 2 to demonstrate that every human being is born with two competing desires – the desire for independence and the desire for relationship.

You see it in the smallest infant – “mommy, mommy” and “I do it myself”. That tension is healthy. A person that holds onto a balanced tension is said to be “self-differentiated” – equally comfortable alone or with a group. That’s an emotionally healthy individual. But when anxiety enters the picture, most of us tend to drift to one extreme or another. If you drift towards the independent side, that’s called “emotional distancing.” That’s the loner, the rebel, the hermit.

And that’s Rick Dalton, by the way. He is the perfect picture of emotional distance. He lives alone, surrounded by giant posters of himself. He drinks himself silly every night and then beats himself up for it the next day. There’s a brilliant scene where, after flubbing his lines on the set, he is seen alone in his trailer, flying into an absolute rage. He threatens his image in the mirror, “Sober up and learn your lines or I will blow your brains out tonight!” That’s not healthy. I would play you the clip, but I’d have to edit out so much language there would be no clip left to play! But Rick is emotionally distant – that’s why, by the way, he’s not able to admit that Cliff is more than his stuntman, but is actually his friend. Not an emotionally healthy individual.

Now, on the other extreme of the spectrum is “emotional fusion”. This is a person who doesn’t simply have relationships, they *must have* relationships. They lose their own sense of self in the other. This is co-dependency, group think, cult-like behavior.

This extreme is brilliantly displayed in the film through...well, through an actual cult! I said it’s kind of about the Charles Manson murders and – while we catch a brief glimpse of crazy Charlie himself – his “family” are very prominently displayed in the film. Notice what they are singing the first time we meet them. [**Cult :34**]

“Always is always forever, as long as one is one. Inside yourself for your father. All is one, all is one, all is one.” That is the theme song of emotional fusion! And by the way, that is an *actual* song written by Charles Manson himself. Not healthy! *Of course* these seeming innocents are going to turn evil and murder people who aren’t apart of their cult family. Emotional fusion is very much what drives people to join gangs – looking for that sense of belonging. But whether it’s the deranged loner or the deranged cult – extreme emotional distance *or* emotional fusion can turn deadly.

What is needed is that healthy balance. And in our story, Cliff Booth is that picture of emotionally healthy self-differentiation. He is equally content to eat a box of mac and cheese by himself in front of the TV or to share a beer and a slice while watching TV with a buddy. It’s very interesting, that Cliff is the only character to interact with *both* Rick *and* the cult members before the final climax of the film. He’s able to handle himself well with each of them, not overreacting to either’s bad behavior, but carrying himself with poise.

Murray Bowen would be very proud of Cliff Booth. By the way, all of this is the foundation of what we call Marriage and Family Therapy – which is the branch of counseling that I mentioned last week I serve on the Texas State Board for. So I take a great interest in this emotional relational balance stuff. Because when I find a truth in *both* secular psychiatry *and* the Bible...well, that's at truth worth talking about.

Now, Bowen Emotional Theory applies to all kinds of relationships – obviously, it's called “marriage and family” – but I said that this morning we were more specifically focused on friendship. That's the story of the movie – Rick and Cliff aren't related and they aren't lovers – they are friends. And friendship is worth talking about because I think it gets the short shrift in studies on relationships. I mean, think about it, how many sermons have you heard on how to have a better marriage? Or be a better parent? We talk about that all the time?

But how often do we hear sermons on friendship? They're pretty rare. And that's not a new phenomena. In 1960, C.S. Lewis wrote a book called *The Four Loves*. He starts off the chapter on friendship by noting how neglected it is in the world of literature. All kinds of epic poems about great lovers, but where are the poems about epic friendships?

What Lewis does is he takes four Greek words for “love” – some of you may know there's not just one Greek word for “love” – and so he talks about how there are at least four kinds of loves or four kinds of relationships. The first kind of relationship he talks about is family relationship, which he calls “affection”. Family relationship. The love of a mother for a child or of children for their grandparents or uncles and aunts, or even for the places you grew up. It's the Greek word *storge* – affection, family love, you see.

Then secondly he talks not about family love but – *eros* - erotic love and romantic love, which is another form of relationship. We're all familiar with this definition of love. Then another kind of relationship, which you might not think of as a love necessarily, but he talks about *phileo* love, or the relationship to your neighbor. That is, your social relationships. In particular, to your people, to your ethnic group, to your culture, to your race, to your nationality. If you've been attending SWFF for a decade, you have this sense of *phileo* connection with the other long-term members whether or not you would call them true “friends”. It's collegial. Same thing with work colleagues or people who went to the same school.

Family love. Erotic love. Collegial love. But the one love that's neglected, Lewis says, is friendship love. And he gives a reason why. The first thing he points out is just straight up biological. We have a driving need for the first three – animals have sex, animals have families, most animals have a same species tribal system that is necessary for their survival – a wolf pack for example. But animals don't – outside of Disney movies – have friendships.

Lewis says, “Friendship is—in a sense not at all derogatory to it—the least natural of loves; the least instinctive, organic, biological, gregarious and necessary. It has least commerce with our nerves; there is nothing throaty about it; nothing that quickens the pulse or turns you red and pale.”

He is right. What Lewis points out and what I'm trying point out is every other kind of love except friendship has some kind of biological or sociological engine driving it. They happen to you. In friendship, you have to be a free moral agent. Friendship is absolutely deliberate. Friendship is intentional, and it stays intentional. You don't “fall into” friendship. Plenty of people “fall in love”. But nobody says, “I fell into friendship.”

And so unlike all the other loves, friendship is less automatic. And therefore, Lewis contends, it is the most human of the loves. Friendship is humanizing, and we ignore it to our peril. Yes, you need family, yes you need romance, yes you need a tribe to connect to...but don't neglect friendship.

The Bible makes a big deal of this. Back in the Old Testament, there's a very sad little spot where it says, **(Ecclesiastes 4:8)** *“There was a man all alone; he had neither son nor brother. There was no end to his toil, yet his eyes were not content with his wealth. ‘For whom am I toiling,’ he asked, ‘and why am I depriving myself of enjoyment?’ This too is meaningless— a miserable business!”* That word for “brother” in the Hebrew is not a word for blood relation, but it means a friend.

Here's a man who put personal achievement over developing relationships. And as a result, he has made partner, but he has no friends. He finds, to his absolute horror, when you get to the end of life, if you have a career, if you have personal achievement and no relationships, your life is meaningless. This is the direction in which Rick Dalton is heading. He's got a stuntman, he's got a driver, he's got a house sitter, he's got a guy to get up on his roof, take off his shirt and fix the TV antennae – Brad Pitt's looking good for 57, and all the ladies said, “Amen!” – but what he needs is a friend.



And Christianity explains why. Christianity says, first of all, it's the nature of God. The Christian God is different than any other kind of god. All the other religions believe in an impersonal god, like the Far Eastern religions - or the Middle Eastern religions, like Judaism and Islam, believe in one God.

Christianity alone says from all eternity, there has always been one God in three persons - Father, Son, and Spirit – the Holy Trinity. This is so important I spend two years of my life writing about. Listen close, this means God is a friendship. This means Christianity says in a way that no other religion does say or can say that friendship was there at the foundation of existence. Before anything existed, there was friendship. This is the bedrock of existence.

And what is the nature of this relationship in the Trinity? At first it's a little tricky, because we so often use family terms like Father and Son. But the same Nicene Creed that defined the Trinity made clear that the First person of the Trinity did *not* give birth to the Second. There was never a time that the Father existed that the Son did not. That's not true of any other father-son duo I know of! So they are not strictly speaking biological family.

Well, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit aren't just work colleagues either – although they each have their own responsibilities and roles in the creation order. And does any one want to call them “lovers”? Eww! No, the best description of the relationship of the Trinity is the deep bond of friendship.

And the need for that bond is passed along to their creation as well. This is what it means to be “made in the image of God.” In Genesis, when it says God made man, almost immediately it says Adam was lonely. Why was Adam lonely? Because he was like God. You see, Adam wasn't lonely because he was imperfect. Adam wasn't lonely because there was something wrong with him. Adam wasn't lonely because he hadn't learned to find happiness inside himself. Adam was lonely because he *was* perfect. Adam was lonely because he was like God, and God is a friendship.

So again, we have to ask what you believe about your existence? Do you believe you are the result of the direct actions of a Divine Cosmic Being? Or do you believe we are the result of, as the PBS special says, “A glorious accident”? If you believe we're a glorious accident, then how valuable can we be? We might feel valuable, but we aren't. And neither is the person next to you, so who cares about them? Might as well get while the getting's good.

But if you believe human beings are *made* for eternity...in that case, there is nothing more important than investing in the person next to you. There's nothing more important than sowing seeds in relationships because that's going to last forever, long after your trophies and your houses and your cars have turned to dust. See?

It is a proper understanding of theology – and awe for Creation - which will lead you to make nothing more important in your life than friendship-making and friendship-developing and friendship-maintaining. Friends literally will last forever, but your bank account will not. It will rust. It will go away.

Now, it wouldn't be fair for me to tell you *that* you need friends, without going a little bit into *how* you get them. We need a little essentialism with our existentialism. So let me show you two ways Christianity tells us we can be good friends. **First, friends have to be discovered rather than just made.** Why? Because friendship is the one relationship that's not about itself. Lewis says, “Though we can have erotic love and friendship for the same person yet in some ways nothing is less like a Friendship than a love-affair. Lovers are always talking to one another about their love; friends hardly ever talk about their Friendship. Lovers are normally face-to-face, absorbed in each other; Friends, side-by-side, absorbed in some common interest.”

Lovers stand face-to-face. Friends stand shoulder-to-shoulder and look at something else. What makes you a friend with somebody else is you have a common vision, a common passion, common interest, common goals. There are things friends want to do together – lover just want to do each other! Which means to some degree, you have to discover friends rather than just make them. I'm going to give you a long quote. Because Lewis says basically if you want to know the language of friendship, it goes like this.

“Friendship arises out of mere Companionship when two or more of the companions discover that they have in common some insight or interest or even taste which the others do not share and which, till that moment, each believed to be his own unique treasure (or burden). The typical expression of opening Friendship would be something like, ‘What? You too? I thought I was the only one.’

In our time Friendship arises in this same way...It may be a common religion, common studies, a common profession, even a common recreation. All who share it will be our companions; but one or two or three who share something more will be our Friends. In this kind of love, as Emerson said, ‘Do you love me?’ means, ‘Do you see the same truth?’”

Rick and Cliff were friends because they worked together in the movies. But there had to be more than that. They worked with plenty of other people whom they probably just see as acquaintances. No, there was some way in which they saw the same truth in the world. Now, let me finish with Lewis.

Here's the most important thing. "That is why those pathetic people who simply 'want friends' can never make any. The very condition of having Friends is that we should want something else besides Friends. Where the truthful answer to the question, 'Do you see the same truth?' would be, 'I see nothing, and I don't care about the truth; I only want a Friend,' no Friendship can arise—though Affection of course may. There would be nothing for the Friendship to be about; and Friendship must be about something, even if it were only an enthusiasm for dominoes or white mice. Those who have nothing can share nothing; those who are going nowhere can have no fellow-travelers."

So first of all, there has to be a common truth. If you're so needy and so desperate that you want nothing but friends, you'll never have any friends. If you have passions, if you have yearnings, if you have goals, if you have things to do, you find other friends who have those same passions and goals and yearnings, and you become friends. Are you looking for friends? Go do something you like to do...just don't do it alone. Join a club. Get in a group. And in that mix you will find one or two who, not only like to do the thing, but have the same outlook on it that you do.

So first of all, friends actually have to be discovered rather than made. But here comes the paradox – perfect fit for a sermon on a Tarantino movie to have some ambiguity. **Secondly, you *do* have to make friends.** They're not only discovered; they have to be maintained. Friendship is a discipline. And like any discipline, it requires work. How do you lose weight and get in shape? By laying around and waiting for it? Or by working at it? Exactly.

And relationships – any relationship, but particularly friendship – operates the same way. You have to *work* at it. You have to be intentional about building it and intentional about maintaining it. And how you maintain is very simple – not *easy*, but simple. You have to let them all the way in, and then you have to never let them down. Friends let you in; friends don't let you down.

Let you in – this means vulnerability. I think this is one of the big difference between a colleague – a work acquaintance, say – and a real friend. You can let down your guard. You have to be willing to do self-disclosure. You have to be willing to let people in on your secrets - not too far, not too fast - but you have to be willing to let people in. This is one of the foundations of the Rick and Cliff friendship. Rick can peel off his Hollywood hotshot exterior and be vulnerable about his anxieties and fears. Even to the point of displaying emotion. But don't cry in front of the Mexicans!

And yet, Rick still doesn't get it. He's still too emotionally stunted and distant to call Cliff his friend. In fact, while they're over in Italy for several months making "Eye-talian pictures", Rick gets married to some hot young actress who he can't even talk to. The only love he seems capable of understanding is eros. Very shallow. Even more, now that he has her – and her expensive shopping habits! - he realizes he's going to make some lifestyle choices. So he sits down with his "stuntman" and says, "We've reached the end of the trail, Cliff. I can't afford you anymore."

And we're all sitting in the theatre yelling, "You can't *not* afford him, you idiot!" I mean his Emotional Intelligence is just special needs level. But even with that, Cliff doesn't give up on him. He lugs their luggage back to the States and drives the newlyweds home. The two men decide to go out on one last drunken bender to say goodbye. Hours later, they arrive back at Rick's house to have a couple more drinks. The house by the way on Cielo Drive, right next door to Sharon Tate's house.

Yes, the same house, on the same night, that history tells us four members of the Manson Family would enter and forever end the groovy 60's. Except, don't forget, this is revisionist history. So the cult members *don't* enter Tate's house – huge sigh of relief – they come to kill fictional Rick instead. But they didn't count on stuntman, Cliff - and Cliff's pit-bull, Brandy!

And what ensues is some *extremely* violent content that is as disturbing as it is entertaining. It's like the most graphic Bugs Bunny cartoon you've ever seen come to life. Seriously, I was morally conflicted after I watched it. But in the end, Cliff takes out the bad guys and saves Rick and his new bride. But not without taking some damage himself. He'll live, but he's heading off to the hospital with a goodly sized knife lodged in his butt! And it's at this moment, that Rick *finally* has his breakthrough. And he finally says the "f-word" that has eluded him the entire film. Not my stuntman, not my driver...well, let's watch...[**Ambulance :43**]

What's a good friend do? They *try*. They work at the friendship. They let you in and they never let you down. They are there for you. There's an element of sacrifice to any friendship. And Cliff had sacrificed for Rick plenty. But it wasn't until he saw he was willing to lay down his life for his friend that Rick's eyes were opened to what was really in front of him.

How do you become that kind of friend? See it's not about *wanting* a friend, it's about *becoming* a friend. You need friends, you may even want friends, but how do you become a friend? Well, the Bible gives us an example even better than Brad Pitt! The true example is Jesus. The one perfectly self-differentiated human being. And there's a wonderful passage near the end of his story in the Gospel of John that I think is appropriate to close out our morning with.

**John 15:13-17**, is probably the ultimate passage on friendship in all the Bible. It's after the Last Supper. They're in the garden just before the betrayal and the arrest and everything that comes after. And Jesus says this to his disciples: *"Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit... This is my command: Love each other."*

Don't you see? If you know someone like Jesus who has definitely let you all the way in because he tells you the secret of the universe, he tells you he has come to die for you, and he will never let you down, he says, "I will never, never, never, never let you down. I will never forsake you." If you know a friend like that, you'll have the emotional capital to both disclose to other friends and put up with the problems of friendship but not be so needy that you want friends so badly you can't possibly have friends. It's the secret. It's the thing. It's the way to go.

We all need friends – maybe now more than ever. But now you know why friendship is so important. It's because of the nature of God and the nature of human beings. That's what Christianity helps you on. How in the world can we actually have real friendship if we need friends so badly? The answer is you need to first find the ultimate Friend, the Friend who sticks closer than anyone else.

He says he is the one who laid his life down for you, so he let you all the way in. He made himself totally vulnerable, and he will never let you down, because when he was in the garden and all the weight of divine justice was coming down on him, it was more important that he have us than that he keep the universe. He was willing to lose the universe. He was willing to lose everything for you. That's friendship.

Let's pray...