

## Transcript 112

Shea Houdmann

Welcome to the Got Questions podcast. Today's episode we are going to be discussing a fun topic but also a topic that can really lead into some really good conversations about faith about Christ. About life. We will be discussing the topic of superheroes and the popularity of superhero movies, TV shows and comics. And all of those things hugely popular, right now.

Shea Houdmann

Also, joining me is Frank Turek. We've had Frank on before and he's as recently with his son. Written the book Hollywood Heroes, so Frank. Welcome back.

Frank Turek

Shea, thanks for having me on. Glad to talk about this. This is a kind of a fun topic. Movies and fantasy movies, superhero movies. It's great that so many of these movies can actually help us discuss theology, biblical life lessons, and apologetics. So that's what this book tries to do.

Shea Houdmann

For sure, so wait to start out. What do you think is the root cause behind such a fascination in superheros?

Frank Turek

I think since God has put eternity on our hearts and he's also put on our hearts, the idea that we want to be taken from this world of pain, evil and suffering, to a place of bliss, that these superhero movies do that and so that's why they resonate with us. We all want to be taken out of this world of pain and suffering and taken to a place of bliss and that's of course, with Christianity promises. And that's what these superheroes do.

Frank Turek

In fact, it's interesting Shea if you look at the top 25 grossing movies of all time. 23 out of the top 25 are in some way fantasy movies. They have an element of the paranormal or supernatural in them. There's only two on there that I don't think have any supernatural aspects in it. That's Titanic and and Furious 7 out of that, the other 23 all have supernatural elements in it because people want to be taken from this world to, as I say, a place of bliss. And that's of course with Christianity promises, and it makes these movies so so likable and so enthralling and so enchanting. Because it fits what's what's on our heart. So CS Lewis famously said, if I find myself with a desire for something that this world can't satisfy. It probably means I was made for another world and we are.

Shea Houdmann

Yeah, absolutely. And just to let you know so fast and Furious 7, I'm pretty sure I've seen that one, but with some of the ridiculous things they do with cars and those movies, they would take it.

Frank Turek

I see.

Shea Houdmann

Take the supernatural to accomplish some of the things to do with those cards, but so yeah, there's 24 out of 25. How about that so?

Frank Turek

That's right. That's right, that's right. I agree. I agree with you, OK.

Shea Houdmann

Oh so I'm a, you know, a big fan of the genre. I grew up reading comic books, and so I really enjoy the super movies now, 'cause now it's like all the stuff that was going on in my imagination as a kid. Seeing it on the screen. So really enjoy it, but also kind of struggles. I've heard a lot of people give like the Jesus is the greatest superhero speech and trying to stretch the analogy just a little bit too far. And at the same time I see how can be used positively.

Shea Houdmann

Just really quick example, my wife is the director of our churches Awana program and we had a special night where everyone came in just as superheroes and I actually have a Captain America costume. So I dressed up in Captain as Captain America and then went to each of the age groups and actually presented the gospel. And I found out later that a little boy who was also dressed as Captain America thought I was the real Captain America and he was so enthralled that he at least made a profession of faith in Christ as a result.

Shea Houdmann

So I recognize how God can use something like this, but at the same time I don't want to take the superhero thing too far and replying to Jesus well. What have you learned kind of in comparing the two and there are some analogy, but you don't take it too far.

Frank Turek

Yeah. I think that when you look at these superhero movies, they do demonstrate aspects of what we call the ultimate hero Jesus. Now Jesus is not a superhero, he's God, and we draw a distinction in the first chapter of the book Hollywood Heroes, we draw a distinction between the true God and the attributes of superheroes. And we say they're in two different categories, but there are some things that parallel God in these superhero characters. They're just not to the same degree quite obviously, and so so many of these stories. And here are the stories we go through the movie franchises we go through in the book Hollywood Heroes. How your favorite movies reveal God.

Frank Turek

We cover Captain America, Iron Man, Harry Potter I know some Christians have problems with Harry Potter. We can talk about that if you want. Lord of the rings, Wonder Woman, Batman, Star Wars. Superman is in there as well, and we say the storylines, the good versus evil, and the idea that somebody has to come in and sacrifice to save people, that all points to the greatest story ever told. It's partially borrowed from the greatest story ever told, and the attributes that some of these heroes

exhibit primarily sacrificed being the biggest one is of course the greatest form of love. As Jesus said before he went to the cross.

Shea Houdmann

Yeah. So kind of as an example of that I'm sure you're familiar with the Matrix trilogy, the original series. The directors producers were as die hard atheists, anti Christian as you can get. They produce a series of movies where a hero who is known as of the one has to sacrifice himself to save all of humanity from. And it's like it's this amazing how that's so interwoven I think into our very being. The recognition that we have a problem that needs for which we need a savior.

Frank Turek

Yeah, in fact, if I could use an example from the book to illustrate the power of that in our hearts and minds. One of my favorite movie franchises is Iron Man, The Avengers because Tony Stark starts out a lot like us Shea, he starts out as a flawed individual who never thinks going to become a hero, right? He's he's a Playboy. He's a billionaire. He's an amoral arms dealer. He's got what we think we would want to be happy. He's got money. He's got power. He's got a great girlfriend, you know sex, money and power. The three big things that we think are going to make us happy, but Tony Stark isn't happy.

Frank Turek

Why is he not happy? Because he has no purpose in life. He has no identity. He doesn't even know where he's going or why he's here. He has everything to live with and nothing to live for. And then an event occurs that turns his life around. One of his own weapons that his company sold to terrorists explodes near him and put shrapnel in him, in his chest. And he has to have a device installed in his chest to guard his heart from encroaching shrapnel. If that device fails, he dies now for me, I, I don't think the movie writers intended this, but for me, what a great visual illustration of what I think is the second most important verse in the entire Bible. Second, only to the gospel itself.

Frank Turek

For today's generation and it's Proverbs 4:23, which says above all else, guard your heart. Because everything you do flows from it. Our culture says follow your heart. The Bible says guard your heart. Tony Stark has been following his heart and he's miserable. You know he's full of anxiety. He's he doesn't know where he's going. What he's doing. He's about to be alone because his girlfriend's about to leave him for what he's done. You know, he, he's just not dialed in. But as soon as he begins to guard his heart eventually through a long series of sanctification acts becomes a hero too. At the end of end game spoiler alert, he sacrifices himself to save the world and that resonates with audiences.

Frank Turek

Now imagine this Shea. If instead of that at the end of end game Tony Stark got to the end of end game as Iron Man with his other Avenger buddies and they're about to take on Thanos and he looks at his Avenger buddies and he goes guys, I'm just not interested in taking on Thanos today. I'm just not feeling it. You know what? I gotta get back to following my heart and taken care of just me. I'm out. And then the movie ended. Would anybody be enchanted with that movie? Would anybody be inspired with that movie? No, even though the culture says follow your heart, follow your heart. Follow your heart. As

soon as we see someone follow their heart and make it all about them. That's not inspiring. That's disparity.

Frank Turek

We don't like that, right? What inspires us is sacrifice. What inspires us is love. What inspires us is this story like Jesus that's why we say in the book Hollywood Heroes. If you like Iron Man, you're gonna love Jesus. If you like Harry Potter, you're gonna love Jesus. If you like Batman, you're gonna love Jesus, why? Because they're all sacrificing in order to save people from evil, and that's what Jesus does.

Shea Houdmann

Yeah, absolutely. So I'm I'm more of a Marvel guy myself. I'm familiar with the DC as well, but I was interested in your portrayal of Captain America. What's a few things you've noticed in Captain America story that you found?

Frank Turek

Well, unlike Tony Stark, Steve Rogers doesn't need moral development, right? He's good from the beginning, even though he's so weak in a as a physically when he starts out. Uh, that nobody thinks he can be the super soldier, except this one doctor. Even though he starts out really weak, he's the guy that agrees to dive on the grenade to save his friends, even though it was a fake grenade. He thought it was a real grenade. All the other folks scatter and he dives on the grenade right? And then we see in Iron Man. I'm sorry in Captain America character, he's always ready to sacrifice to save somebody else from the very beginning. He's even ready to take on Iron Man who wants to take out Captain America's friend Bucky, right? He's gonna sacrifice to save Bucky. He's gonna sacrifice himself to save the world. Captain America is always ready to do that.

Frank Turek

You never have to worry what Captain America is gonna do. Like Jesus, right? He's always righteous. You never have to question that. You do have to question whether Tony Stark's gonna do the right thing. He needs a lot of sanctification, but iron but Captain America doesn't. But Jesus goes further than Captain America, where Captain America will die for his friends only. Jesus will die for his enemies. So while there are parallels, Jesus is perfect and Captain America isn't. Captain America can still, even though he's righteous, come across as a self-righteous hairsplitter, right? He can annoy people. Notice, Jesus never does that, even though Jesus is righteous, completely righteous. He's also full of grace. Right, he has both sides of what appeared to be opposing attributes. He is completely mission focused, but he's also loving and people focused. He's fully confident, but he's also humble. He is quite powerful, but he's also tender. You don't see this in other characters, only in Jesus do you see it. Nobody in the history of fiction or nonfiction other than Jesus has these kind of qualities.

Shea Houdmann

Yeah, again the two chapters that resonated most with me were the Captain America and Iron Man prism. Just so familiar with the franchise, but the some other people in the office would not forgive me if I didn't give you an opportunity to talk about Wonder Woman briefly. So well what are some of the parallels you see in the story of Wonder Woman?

Frank Turek

Well, Wonder Woman her two superpowers are unlike the superpowers of the other superheroes. Her two superpowers are love and truth. Right? She carries the Lasso of Truth and she's trying to get people to love one another. The other characters are just trying to use force to overpower their enemies, but not Wonder Woman. In fact, in the second feature movie with her in it Wonder Woman, 1984 the villain is Max Lord and I don't have time to tell you the whole plot, but basically this guy is in it for himself and he's ignoring his son and the way Wonder Woman defeats this villain, who, by the way, is really causing the entire world to about to go into a nuclear exchange the way he or the way she overcomes him is not by power it's by getting him to repent of what he's done and to focus back on his son and she has the lasso of truth that helps him. Helps her do that. And of course the fact that she's trying to ensure that she shows him the proper love to get him to repent. This is unlike any other superhero.

Frank Turek

Also Wonder Woman is not someone that follows her heart. Wonder Woman would love to keep her romantic life alive with her love interest, Steve Trevor. But she knows if she does that, that a lot of people are going to die, so she doesn't follow her heart. She follows the truth, which is another thing that is a great lesson for our culture. You don't follow your heart, you follow the truth and that's what Wonder Woman does.

Shea Houdmann

Absolutely, and I enjoyed that movie as well. And even like I can enjoy movie just for entertainment purposes. But then often I like to get together with my wife or whatever friend up to see it with and kind of talk. So it's like, what do you? What do you think about this and what what's the movie trying to communicate in in contrast, what should we actually take from it.

Frank Turek

You know there's there's a lot of things I would not have noticed unless I was writing this book with my son. But in writing the book it takes you into a place where you have to analyze the movies a little bit more closely than just sitting back and using it as entertainment. 'cause I'm like you when I go to a movie, I just want to relax. I don't want to try and figure out, you know, what's the moral behind this even though sometimes it's obvious.

Frank Turek

Well sometimes it isn't, but there are so many parallels once you look at these movies. And some of them are put in deliberately. Some of them are not put in deliberately, but they're still there because the movie makers are still living in God's world. They know intuitively what inspires people and what doesn't.

Shea Houdmann

I know a lot of the ministry that God has called you to is focused on apologetics, on the defense of the Christian faith, and I was surprised to see how much apologetics there is in Hollywood Heroes. But what you see is the connection there and what leads you to include so much apologetics in Hollywood Heroes.

Frank Turek

Well, first of all, every fantasy movie and almost every superhero movie I guess every superhero movie when you think about it, it's always a fight between good and evil. And that's what makes it interesting. And so you have to be able to address what is evil. Why does evil still exist if God exists? What is good? What is the purpose of life? Why do these stories resonate with us?

Frank Turek

So we fold in all those questions into the into the chapters in Hollywood Heroes. Why does God allow certain evils that we can't explain? We answer that in the book as well. In fact, one of the questions we deal with in the introduction is why does evil even exist if God is so good? Why doesn't he just stop all the evil in the world? And so these questions seem to just flow right out of these movies. If you're going to analyze these movies, you've got to deal with that question. In fact, that question is explicitly brought up in a movie called Batman versus Superman, Lex Luthor actually quote to Epicureans, who basically says if there is a good God, why is there evil in the world?

Shea Houdmann

Right?

Frank Turek

And the movie actually explores that. So we of course explore it in in the in the chapter on Batman and Superman in Hollywood Heros. So these questions naturally come up. Right and wrong come up, so we deal with morality in the book. We deal also with the beginning of the universe and the design of the universe that comes up in the Star Wars chapter. You know, in fact, one of the things we ask is suppose you're in the Millennium Falcon with the with Han Solo and Chewbacca, and Han Solo gets out of his seat and he goes kid get in, so you get in his seat. And he goes punch it. We gotta outrun this imperial warship, right? So you immediately go to Lightspeed. How long does it take you to get across our Galaxy at 186,000 miles per second?

Frank Turek

And so we ask, what is he thinking? Like 10 minutes, 15 minutes, an hour, a day, how long does it take it here across the Galaxy? If you could go at 186,000 miles a second, you know how long it would take. 100,000 years just across our Galaxy and so then we start talking about how big the universe is and what could have created the universe. So we fold it right into the Star Wars, chapter.

Shea Houdmann

Its fascinating to like I said earlier, I I don't go to movies to engage my brain that much, but you know me, knowing enough of science that I do.

Frank Turek

No, I don't either

Shea Houdmann

It's knowing like that wouldn't work at all, and even some of the scenes in I think it's some Captain America Civil War where Spiderman is commenting about what Captain America does with his shield. It's like that is not obeying the laws of physics at. All so it's it's it's it's fun to disengage, but it's also fun to think about, huh? And what a wonderful universe God has created that we can even dream these type of things and think about them and try to discover the meaning behind them.

Frank Turek

Oh yeah, yeah. And the beauty of this is that when young kids especially or teenagers really get into these movies. This is a tool you can use to get them more interested in God. In Christianity, I mean, we anticipate parents and youth pastors using the book Hollywood Heroes to do movie night every now and then, and I think that's a good way to communicate biblical truths, biblical life lessons. Apologetics by watching movies and then discussing them after reading the chapter in the book. I mean, you're probably not going to get it. Get an eyeroll from your teenager. If you say, hey, let's do movie night tonight rather than, let's have another lecture about why it's wrong to do XY or Z.

Shea Houdmann

Yeah, absolutely.

Frank Turek

So why don't we just see it on the big screen and then we can talk about it.

Shea Houdmann

Yeah, that's awesome. That's that's one of the things I was thinking through is like I wish more youth pastors would get ahold of this because getting teenagers interested in movies is usually pretty easy and getting to talk about afterwards. Now that would be fantastic. Maybe ask you this question for kind of our closing question here. Of all these different superhero stories, you've either watched or read or even thought through, which is your favorite and why?

Frank Turek

Well, my favorite Iron Man, as I said earlier, because Iron Man is most like us, you know he's fallen. He's flawed and I I just like the way Robert Downey junior actually played the character. In fact, Robert Downey junior really was Tony Stark. In real life. I mean, we say in the Iron Man chapter how there's probably there hasn't been a parallel between a person in real life and the character he plays onscreen any better than Robert Downey junior played Tony Stark, but if you're going to say which movie series out of all of the series parallels Jesus the most, this is going to be shocking to some Christians.

Frank Turek

But believe it or not, it's Harry Potter. People are going to go what? This is the movie that Christians boycotted. I know. They boycotted it because of the magic in it. And look, I agree with parents if parents don't want their kids watching that, then I support that completely. But I'd notice there's a bit of a double standard Shea and some Christians because on one hand they don't like Harry Potter. The magic in Harry Potter, but they're fine with it in Lord of the Rings and Chronicles of Narnia. I mean, why is that? I mean, after all in Lord of the Rings, Gandalf is a wizard. Well, so is Harry Potter.

Frank Turek

There's all sorts of stuff going on in there. And I, I think one of the the things that cause parents to immediately shut off from Harry Potter is 'cause when she wrote when JK Rowling wrote Harry Potter, she she wasn't known. Nobody knew her. This didn't come out of a Christian publishing house, but everybody knew Tolkien was a Christian, Catholic. Everybody new CS Lewis was a Christian, so they just so it's got to be OK, right? But they didn't know that with Rowling. But Rowling herself said the entire series of Harry Potter can be epitomized by two Bible verses that you see both in the books and in the movies. One is the last enemy to be destroyed is death from First Corinthians 15 and the other is where your treasure is your heart will be also. From Jesus's Sermon on the Mount. She said, those appear in the books in the movies, but he never wanted to talk about them that much because I didn't want readers to be tipped off as to where we're going.

Frank Turek

Say, well why? Because the story line in Harry Potter is basically the Bible story line. Think about it this way. There are four attributes about Harry Potter that are parallels to Jesus. Big ones. Number one. He's prophesied to be the savior of his world before he's born and then an evil force tries to kill him as an infant. Does that sound familiar? Second, you have to live a moral life in order to be the savior of his world. Thirdly, he sacrifices himself in order to defeat the Satan figure Voldemort, and then fourthly he then resurrects from the dead and his followers then have to put their faith in him, Harry, in order to ultimately defeat Voldemort.

Frank Turek

This is to basically the biblical story. And so you say, what about the magic in there? Most of the magic in the Harry Potter series is not the kind of a cult the Bible is talking about. We don't think that anybody can get on a broomstick and fly around and play a a modified game of soccer like they do in the Harry Potter story, right? It's just made-up of it out of JK Rowling's mind, just like it was made-up out of Tolkien's mind and made-up out of Lewis his mind when he did Chronicles of Narnia.

Frank Turek

But again. If you think watching this stuff is going to cause your young child to get involved in the occult and don't let him watch it, but I don't think that's really what the movies are about. In fact, JK Rowling herself says the movie is really about human nature. She said Harry has to be a moral being in order to save his world. She said, you you, you can't overcome human nature even if you have a wand. You've got to overcome human nature in another way, and that's what the whole movie is series is about.

Shea Houdmann

That's that's fantastic. I I didn't read the books, but I did see all the Harry Potter movies, and I even notice some of the the themes. But then reading through Hollywood Heroes is like WOW makes even more sense. And then I knew a little bit about Rowling story, but not until really I after I had read all the books that I hear about her faith background. So that' that's fascinating.

Frank Turek

Yeah, she's an Anglican, actually. Whether she's born again, I have no idea, but she's an Anglican. Although she's been standing very strong on this trans issue, I don't know if you've noticed that she's actually. Uh, just excoriated by the left because she said, look, if you're going to say that that transwomen, really biological men or women, then you're just erasing women. You're racing all the gains women have made you, you. You're saying there are no genders that there are no genders. There are no women, so she's been pretty strong on that issue.

Shea Houdmann

She has. Well Frank again, I thank you for both writing the book Hollywood Heroes and will include links in the show notes at [podcast.gotquestions.org](http://podcast.gotquestions.org) and also at the YouTube description when this video goes online, where people can purchase the book and learn more about you and cross examined and the different apologetics ministries you're involved in. But thank you for joining me on the show today. I truly enjoyed our conversation.

Frank Turek

Oh thanks Shea. I enjoyed it as well and thanks for telling other folks about the book. We hope it's going to be useful for particularly for young people and other people interested in movies.

Shea Houdmann

Yeah, Hollywood Heroes. I think it's a fantastic book and I think how do kind of what we discussed so far to say who this book most be useful for? I think the context of like a parent or a youth pastor wanting to discuss movies with their child or with the kids in their ministry. We'd probably be amazingly effective use of this book and even training you how to recognize Christian themes and other movies as well so.

Shea Houdmann

Frank again, thank you. This has been the Got Questions podcast. Got questions? The Bible has answers and we'll help you find them.