



the TRUMAN show

Rated: PG • **Running Time:** 1 hour, 43 minutes
Starring: Jim Carrey as Truman Burbank; Ed Harris as Christof; Laura Linney as Meryl; Noah Emmerich as Marlon; Natascha McElhone as Sylvia
Director: Peter Weir

Themes: Media exploitation, the search for truth, the

power of fear and guilt, manipulation by a deceiver, voyeurism, caged safety vs. the dangers of freedom

Cautions: About a dozen profanities, including several misuses of the Lord's name. Marlon frequently offers Truman beer.

Story Summary

We've become bored with watching actors give us phony emotions. We're tired of pyrotechnics and special effects. While the world he inhabits is in some respects counterfeit, there's nothing fake about Truman himself. No scripts. No cue cards. It isn't always Shakespeare, but it's genuine. It's a life. —CHRISTOF

That life belongs to Truman Burbank, a naive insurance salesman unaware that his hometown of Seahaven Island is actually an enormous television soundstage, and that 5,000 hidden cameras have been broadcasting his every move, 24/7, to the world for his entire life. Nearly 2 billion people witnessed his birth live via satellite. Truman's friends and family are actors. The significant events of his life have been orchestrated for dramatic effect. His closed-off community is a convincing collection of sets and props. And the ratings for this show, of which he knows nothing, are huge.

Christof, the producer/director of this global reality show, is equal parts artist, sociologist and entrepreneur. At one point Christof refers to himself as "the creator," [slight pause] "... of a television show," briefly hinting at his own megalomania. His godlike task is singular, if complex: He must continue a 30-year ruse, manipulating Truman's surroundings to make him believe in this created reality.

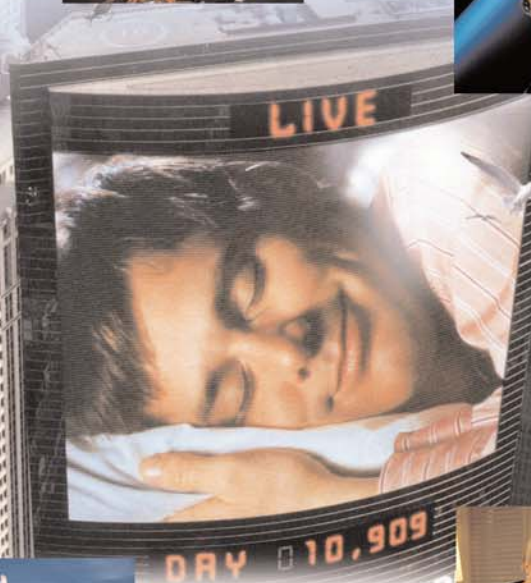
As the story unfolds, odd occurrences in the production cause Truman to suspect that something weird is going on. A rain-storm is somehow isolated over his head. At another point, he finds a radio station describing his every move. Bizarre obstacles keep him from leaving town. In one of the film's most powerful and unsettling scenes, Truman sits beside his lifelong friend Marlon and describes his frustration and confusion. "It feels like the whole world revolves around me somehow," Truman explains. "Everybody seems to

be in on it!" With an understanding look and affirming tone, Marlon reminds Truman of how close they've been over the years, assuring him that there is no "it" to be in on. While the two talk, we discover that Christof is feeding Marlon every line through a tiny receiver in his ear. A chilling moment finds Marlon repeating Christof's cue, "I would gladly step in front of traffic for you, Truman. And the last thing I would ever do is lie to you."

Later, during a Larry King-style interview, Christof is confronted by a caller angry over the prison-like life Truman has been forced to lead. Christof's reply is telling. "He can leave at any time," he says. "If his was more than just a vague ambition, if he was absolutely determined to discover the truth, there's no way we could prevent him. I think what distresses you ... is that ultimately, Truman prefers his 'cell,' as you call it."

After unraveling the deception, Truman summons that absolute determination, confounding the watchful eye of Big Brother and making his move. A manhunt ensues. Truman overcomes his lifelong anxiety about

water and sets sail—literally—on a search for truth. In the master control room, Christof activates a violent storm. Truman refuses to turn back. After Christof causes his boat to capsize, Truman manages to survive and reach the outer edge of his counterfeit world. The voice of Christof bellows forth, desperately trying to convince Truman to stay. He warns of the dangers on the outside, suggesting that it's safer where he is. Even so, Truman Burbank boldly leaves this "cell" to take his chances with whatever may exist in the unpredictable real world.



continued ➤

Before You Watch

Use dinnertime conversation to ask teens what they see as obstacles that keep people from accepting the truth. Examples might include the following:

- Ignorance (They've never heard it.)
- Apathy (They don't care about it.)
- Rebellion (They're too proud to listen.)
- Fear (Concern that newfound knowledge will demand something of them.)

Bible Bookmarks

Matt. 5:11-12; Mark 4:13-20; Luke 4:1-13, 18:17; John 8:31-32, 44; 1 Cor. 4:11-13; 2 Cor. 2:11, 10:5, 11:14; Eph. 6:10-17; 1 Pet. 5:8

Talking Points

1 How is Christof similar to Satan as the master of deception exposed in John 8:44, and in 2 Corinthians 2:11 and 11:14? Consider this statement: "If you are tempted, you know it. If you are oppressed or abused, you know it. But if you are deceived, you don't know it." Satan's lies can only be countered by seeking and embracing truth as God has revealed it in the Bible (Luke 4:1-13). Be sure to identify ways we're told to arm ourselves for spiritual warfare (1 Pet. 5:8, Eph. 6:10-17).

2 We often sense a reality beyond what we see and experience but must overcome the obstacles of complacency and deception Satan throws our way. How is Truman like individuals described in the parable of the sower (Mark 4:13-20)? Read Jesus' words in John 8:31-32 and talk about how Truman's experience is similar to mankind's search for truth.

3 Christof says Truman could discover the truth if he were "absolutely determined" to do so. Can a person discover the spiritual truth of the gospel without being deeply determined? What does the Bible say is required (read Luke 18:17)? What "cells" hinder people's progress?

4 Christof cautions Truman against leaving the safety of deception for the dangers of reality. With the help of verses such as Matthew 5:11-12 and 1 Corinthians 4:11-13, discuss how encountering and living in truth can be more difficult and dangerous than living a lie.

5 Is Truman's obsession with finding Sylvia appropriate? Since it seems to be the most genuine relationship he's ever had, it's easy to root for them to reunite. But until Meryl leaves him, Truman is (as far as he knows) a legitimately married man. Talk about that moral conundrum.

6 How did the producers prey on Truman's fears, and how did that keep him from becoming anything more than what they had planned for him? Consider the subtle messages crafted to undermine Truman's self-confidence. Discuss the ability of the media to manipulate people's emotions and why Christians must follow the words of 2 Corinthians 10:5.

7 Who is ultimately to blame for Truman's years of bondage? Christof? The actors? The sponsors? Or is it the multitude of viewers riveted to their TV screens? Explore the culpability of each.

8 Look closely at Christof's statement at the beginning of the story summary. How is his opinion of the public's appetite for entertainment reflected in the popularity of reality TV shows today?

9 When *The Truman Show* was first released, director Peter Weir said, "I think there's a kind of image virus. Images are so manipulated now. You can't be sure what you're looking at. Is it a re-creation? Is it actual? Is it fiction? Does it matter? Children see violence on TV so much that they don't know what's real or unreal." Would you agree or disagree with his statement? Why?

10 Ask teens what they make of the security guards' responses to the end of "The Truman Show" in the film's final scene. Then ask what they think about the countless viewers like those who passively observed Truman's life at the expense of their own adventures. If necessary, suggest some things both Truman and the show's viewers could have missed out on (truth, suffering, love, reality, etc.).

11 Some young viewers might compare Christof to a controlling parent afraid to let go of an adolescent who is eager to explore a dangerous, cruel world. Take a moment to talk about Christof and Truman's relationship from that perspective.

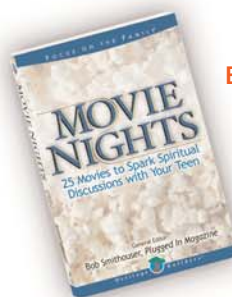
Follow-Up Activity

Consider visiting a local music or video store. Some artists and producers overtly and unapologetically promote immoral or satanic messages and themes. Look at CD covers, song titles, movie and computer game concepts, magazine covers, etc. Identify several that promote themes or send messages that are part of our enemy's "grand deception." Examples can be as obvious as attacks on God or as subtle as suggestions that sex outside of marriage is fun and harmless.

Just for Fun

In the role of Christof, Ed Harris won a Golden Globe and was nominated for an Oscar in the Best Supporting Actor category. His acceptance speech should have included a great big "thank you" to fellow thespian Dennis Hopper. It seems Hopper was originally cast as Christof but walked off the set after only one day on the job. His loss proved to be Harris' gain. —by Kurt Bruner

A **plugged** Resource
online



BY THE BOOK: "Perhaps symptomatic of a culture continuing its shift away from words on a page in favor of images on a screen, even college literature majors now learn how to 'read film,' though usually apart from a biblical worldview." —*Movie Nights*

You can request this resource by contacting Focus on the Family at 800-232-6459 (in Canada, 800-661-9800).