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Theology and Film

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## Faith Review

**Film Title:** *Cars*

**Year:**

June 9, 2006 in the U.S. – however it's premier took place at the Lowe's Motor Speedway in Concord, NC, which is considered the racing hub of Nascar on May 26, 2006.

**Director(s):**

John Lasseter and Joe Ranft (co-director) who also wrote the story for the film. Lasseter is a pioneer of contemporary animated films and is most notably recognized for *Toy Story (1995)*, *Toy Story 2 (1999)*, and *A Bug's Life (1998)*. Joe Ranft actually died in an automobile accident in August of 2005, while the film was being made. Lasseter grew up with a love of cars, in part due to his father's career as an automotive parts dealer for Chevrolet. Clearly the theme of competition and acceptance is a part of Lasseter's thematic body of work in the animated films he has directed.

**Original Release Form/Venue:**

Originally released for viewing in theatres.

**Current Availability and Formats:**

Released onto DVD in late 2006 and onto Blu-ray disc in late 2007. Clips of the movie may be found on [www.hulu.com](http://www.hulu.com) and other sites such as [www.wingclips.com](http://www.wingclips.com)

**Genre:**

Animated Comedy – suitable for families to watch together, with underlying humor suited towards adults and particular attention towards making references to Nascar personalities and real life Nascar events.

**Story Elements:**

Characterization, plot, and central themes are most important in this film. Because it's an animated movie, it's not really about the celebrity status of any of the

actors/actresses but the focus is on how the characters (cars) are portrayed. Yet the car characters do get part of their identity from the actors/actresses voices.

Lightning McQueen (Owen Wilson) is a self-absorbed, immature rookie racecar that has found success very fast. His greediness and desire to win pushes away any friendships, his own pit crew, and leaves him focused only on having a celebrity status career. When he mistakenly arrives in Radiator Springs, he finds himself having to fix a road that potentially could destroy his opportunity to be the Piston Cup Champion. He is forced to stay against his will in this Podunk town. He meets Mater (Larry the Cable Guy), a rusty racecar, which Lightning despises – although his sponsor, Rusteez, caters to rusty racecars. Doc Hudson, (Paul Newman) is the judge who has sentenced Lightning to do his work. Doc dislikes Lightning because he is a racecar, but later Lightning discovers they both are Piston Cup racecars.

As the plot unfolds, Lightning realizes that this Podunk town used to be the hub of Route 66. His attitude begins to change and he wants to help bring life back to Radiator Springs. This leads him to fixing up the town and giving the first business in years to each car there. Once Lightning is found and whisked away from Radiator Springs, the town is sad that he's gone. Most of the crew, including Doc, shows up at the final race to be Lightning's pit crew and help him win. Central themes are included in the theological conversation piece.

### **Film Language Elements:**

Because the film is animated the most important piece of this film is the special effects. Pixar and Disney do a great job of making the cars look real and reflect "personalities" that each car could have. For instance, Mater is a rusty redneck tow-truck, and Sally is a former attorney Porsche. The cars use their tires like their hands and exhibit human like qualities. The color exhibited in the film is also important because it makes the atmospheres look real – Radiator Springs looks like a place off of Route 66, the racetracks mimic real racetracks with real camera flashes and pit areas. The sound in the film is also important as the cars reflect their motors, and the racetrack is life like when they are racing, with shouts and cheers, revving engines, and even tire squeals.

### **Audience/Cultural Context Elements:**

The intended viewers of this film are children, and yet the film extends beyond children to all families and adults who love animated Disney movies. The film is representative of Nascar and will appeal to those who love racing, and the attention to detail and to real Nascar characters will quickly show the average race fan that Pixar and Disney have done their homework. The other important factor at play is the relationship of the film to culture. The story itself depicts the reality of our current culture – one that glorifies independence, busyness, and self-importance. It reflects how our society's emphasis on efficiency and hurriedness often leaves no room for real community. We would rather build an interstate through a desert than take additional time to see the beauty of those areas around us, or take time to

stop and speak to others. The movie focuses on appreciating those around us and developing a real community that serves others above self.

### **Theology is Found:**

This film raises some questions that theology also addresses without necessarily being directly theological itself. There are scenes that clearly show certain theological issues such as, selfishness, humility, stereotypes, community, lack of community, winning vs. losing, etc... For instance the fact that Harv, Lightning's agent, mentions getting him tickets for his friends to the final race. Lightning quickly says, "Yes, friends, um let's see..." and isn't able to list any. Lightning has been so self-absorbed that he hasn't developed any close friendships. This is a very clear and intentional point.

### **Theological Themes for Conversation:**

What is community and why is it important?

What does community look like and who is a part of it?

Redefining Greatness: humility vs. pride, servant hood vs. being served, etc...

Dealing with stereotypes, and personalities

Is jeopardizing integrity to get ahead okay? Is winning at all costs most important?

How should we value our time?

The human condition – what drives our motivations?

### **Suggested Use of Film:**

This film is best used either as an illustration or an example of a theological theme, or even as a clarification, or deepening of theological themes. Because most of the theological themes are evident in viewing the movie, it is clear that the directors are explicitly choosing to point out particular themes for the viewer to think about.

### **Recommended Amount/Parts of Film to View & How to View It:**

This movie could be seen in its entirety and then develop theological conversation, but the plot is not complicated and the movie lends itself to show certain clips that illustrate or highlight theological points for discussion. If using certain clips, you would certainly have to set the scene and let the viewers understand the plot and characters involved in the selected scene.

### **Concluding Remarks:**

*Cars* is a film that does a great job of pointing out the reality that our lives are constantly absorbed by self-gratification. This movie would be a good movie to watch to discuss the human condition.