The limited vision of *I Am Michael*

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Last month, I spent some time at the Sundance Film Festival. [In a recent post](#), I noted the difference between marketing films to Christians and the possibility of film as a transformative space in the life of a Christian. Instead of imagining Christians as a set audience whose worldview we don't want to disturb, I wonder if we could use Christianity's specific theological language to enliven our understanding of film. Could Christianity's theological lens illuminate elements of film that other cultural perspectives miss?

Perhaps the best example of this possibility that I saw at Sundance came from watching the Justin Kelly film *I am Michael*. This dramatic film stars James Franco and deals with the true story of Michael Glatze's journey from gay activist to ex-gay pastor.

I watched the film with my good friend Sam Curley, who runs [Level Ground](#), an organization that uses film to create rich dialogue around LGBTQ issues within Christian communities. As we walked out of the theater together, Sam and I observed that the filmmakers seem oblivious to the question of scriptural interpretation. They simply take Glatze at his word that the Bible condemns homosexuality.

Sam wondered whether a film like this could *question* Michael's assumptions along with depicting them. Are there other ways that Michael could have viewed the relationship between his faith and his sexuality? Instead, the film takes this trajectory: at the start, Michael perceives that scripture is irrelevant to his life, and at the end, he concludes that scripture is incompatible with life as a gay man. The viewer is left to imagine these as the only options.

An [Into the Noise](#) participant asked Kelly where he stands in relationship to various biblical interpretations. The director didn't seem to know how to respond. On the surface, at least, it appeared that he hadn't really thought about it. This exchange illuminates, I think, a need for better theological engagement with culture, whether

we are producers or consumers.

I came away from Sundance with a conviction that we need to start having these conversations and enriching the public dialogue with theological perspectives. Filmmaking, film watching, and film critiquing will all be better for it.