



WALL STREET: MONEY NEVER SLEEPS (Cert 15)

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Overview: Sequel to Oliver Stone's *Wall Street* of 1987, this latest incarnation shows fallen money guru Gordon Gekko ending his eight-year prison sentence for insider trading. It appears he wants to make peace with friends and family, but in reality he's planning a return to the stock markets – with a vengeance.

Producer and director: Oliver Stone (2010).

Length: 127 minutes. **Cautions:** includes swearing.

THE FILM

Financial wizard Gordon Gekko – played once again by Michael Douglas – has paid his biggest bill yet. He's just completed an eight-year custodial sentence for money crimes. He leaves prison and enters a world that appears to be quite different from the one he inhabited in the 1987 epic *Wall Street*.

The first movie showed Gekko promoting his money-making mantra 'greed is good' in the 80s boom. But since then, seeds of doubt have been sown amid the bitter harvest of the credit crunch and the downturn in the global economy. So now he writes a book about his experiences, and it's called, *Is Greed Good?*

Gekko has been among those who spread the rot causing the markets to crumble. Yet now he presents himself as a watchman or guardian. He points out everyone has played their part in the crash – such as the bartender who uses his income to invest in property. 'The truth is, we're all part of it now,' he tells an audience.

Along comes Jake (Shia LaBeouf), a young trader engaged to Gekko's daughter Winnie (Carey Mulligan).

He's a 'green' version of Gekko's former protégé Bud Fox (Charlie Sheen) – who also makes a cameo in this follow-up. Jake meets his prospective father-in-law, who expresses a need to be reconciled with his daughter.

Gekko shows Jake how to take revenge on merciless finance executive Bretton James (Josh Brolin), who was behind the downfall of Jake's mentor Lou Zabel (Frank Langella). However, as always, there is much more to Gekko than meets the eye. Eventually it emerges he's really after a fund belonging to his daughter.

Jake persuades Winnie to sign over her money, thinking it could help fund an eco-friendly power scheme. But Gekko makes off with the loot. He vanishes, leaving an empty apartment behind. Jake and Winnie split, and it looks like life is over for them. The turning point comes when Jake tracks him down and shows him a video clip of his baby grandson, growing in Winnie's womb. Everything changes.

FIRST REACTIONS

- **Read Matthew 6.19–20.** The first movie caused a stir when it came out. Oliver Stone had aimed to portray Gekko as a villain, but he became a hero and allegedly inspired young adults to head for the finance markets. Several of his catchphrases entered the world of media-speak – from 'greed is good' to 'lunch is for wimps'. By inventing Gekko, did Stone create a Frankenstein monster that was beyond anyone's control, or is he reflecting the reality of our consumer culture with a composite character? Compare Gekko's quest for earthly riches with Jesus' challenge to invest in heavenly treasure. How do we do that?
- **Read Luke 12.34.** The second film may not be as ground-breaking, but packed out cinemas on general release. There have been mixed reviews – it

appears the critics either love it or hate it. But *Money Never Sleeps* presents the aftermath of Gekko's runaway trading. The world has changed for the worse, not the better. Do we share responsibility for the world's financial mess, as Gekko maintains, with our own personal greed? If so, how do we make the necessary 'heart' adjustments to correct that?

- **Read 2 Corinthians 4.5–7.** Most of the movie focuses on money, until Jake hands over a disc to Gekko. Clearly thinking it is a spreadsheet or some financial secret, Gekko immediately plays it on his computer. It turns out to be a clip of the scan of Jake's and Winnie's child, growing in her womb. It is Gekko's grandchild. And although there is no immediate transformation in him, the discovery does seem to have a longer-term effect on the ruthless trader. The film is saying the real treasure is the life within us. How do we live out that message ourselves, and promote it to those around us?

INTERACTIONS

- *Money Never Sleeps* is about both money and meaning. The opening scene gives it all away. As Gekko faces a new world on leaving prison, Jake's voiceover offers an interesting narration in the background. According to him, the biggest bubble that ever burst was the Cambrian explosion. This is the theory that 545 million years ago, an explosion of diversity led to complex, multi-celled organisms. People appeared on the world's landscape. Why does a film mix ideas of human origins with a story based on the sins of the stock market? What is the connection?

- Like the first film, the sequel focuses on a David-and-Goliath scenario where a young trader brings down a giant investor. Bretton James is a similar character to Gekko. In his study is Francisco Goya's disturbing painting of Saturn Devouring His Son, based on the Greek myth of the Titan Cronus, who, fearing his children would overthrow him, ate each one upon their birth. It is a grotesque image, possibly depicting conflict between youth and old age – or even between a deity and humankind. Where can we find more positive examples of healthy and wholesome relationships between mentor and mentee?
- The ringtone on Jake's phone is the theme tune from the classic western *The Good, The Bad And The Ugly*. That famous Clint Eastwood film from the late 60s is about a hunt for treasure buried in a cemetery in America's wild west. The 'good' is Blondie, a professional gunslinger trying to earn a few dollars; the 'bad' is Angel Eyes, a hit man who kills to order; and the 'ugly' is Tuco, a wanted outlaw trying to take care of his own interests. In *Money Never Sleeps*, these characters become, respectively – Jake, James and Gekko. The message is that Wall Street is merely a modern take on the Wild West, an image reinforced by spectacular shots of the canyon-like, tombstone-marked landscape of New York's skyscrapers. What is the hope for the suited savages of Oliver Stone's perception of the financial markets? Are there contemporary stories of good things being done there?

CLIP TO DISCUSS

Chapter 7, 00.28.40–00.32.43 (about four minutes)

Gekko's speech is perhaps the key moment in the film. For it touches on some of his previous life, his life in prison and his life in the grave new world of the cash crisis. Consider these three main points –

- Gekko labels this present culture as 'the ninja generation' – 'no income, no jobs, no assets'. Is that a correct observation? What's right with it and what's wrong with it? What hope does Scripture offer?
- The US government's response to 9/11 was to encourage people to go shopping again, according to Gekko. What would have been a better response for governments to make? How should we live our lives in the wake of such crises?
- 'The truth is we're all part of it now,' Gekko says of the culture of greed. How true is that? If we are part of a problem, surely we can also be part of a solution? In what ways can wealth creation be used for the greater good?

OTHER ANGLES TO TALK ABOUT

Read Hebrews 11.24–26. Moses regarded 'disgrace for the sake of Christ' of greater value than 'the treasures of Egypt'. What other things do we value highly, which could mark us out from the consumerist culture? How did some Bible heroes use their position of wealth and influence to benefit others? What do you think of John Wesley's exhortation to 'gain all you can, save all you can, give all you can'?

Clive Price is a writer, editor and lecturer who has written about film and TV. He has taught media production at Chichester College, business media at the London College of Communication and has written a course on Irish cinema for the Irish Cultural Institute. A qualified journalist, he is sub-editor of Bible Society's Word In Action magazine.

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