

Some thoughts on watching films

Stories are the stuff of life. They allow us to reflect on all sorts of issues at a safe distance as we engage with the characters, cry with them, laugh with them, get cross with them and generally share their experience. How they deal with the issues they come across may frustrate us, or give us new insights; cause us to laugh or cry; result in us hurling abuse at the screen or willing there to be a happy ending. And through it all we can encounter God in all sorts of unexpected places if we only take time to look.

Questions to ask yourself

What did you think of the film? What do you like most? Least?

Which incidents made you *think* or *feel* most strongly? How well did you think the film treated those incidents?

What issues did the film raise for you?

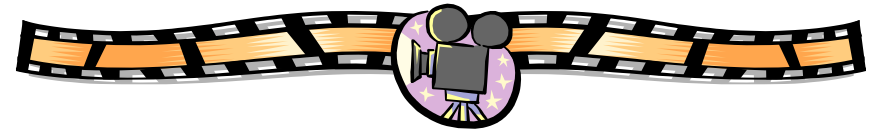
What character(s) do you most identify with and why?

Does the film have any echoes of Christian beliefs or stories from the Bible? Does it support or challenge Christians values?

Some facts about the film

- The real Chris Gardner can be spotted at the very end of the film walking past the characters of Chris and Christopher as the latter swap jokes.
- Dan Castellaneta, the voice of Homer Simpson, co-stars in the film as one of Gardner's superiors (Alan Frakesh) and requests a doughnut from Gardner. This is a reference to Casellaneta's animated counterpart who shares a similar taste for doughnuts.
- Will Smith plays the part of Chris Gardner and Jaden Smith, Will's real-life son, plays Christopher.
- Glide Memorial United Methodist Church has been providing meals and shelter for homeless people for forty years and continues to do so. The Reverend Cecil Williams, founder of Glide Memorial, plays himself in the film, and the homeless people were played by those who use the centre. For many, the whole experience was a great boost to their self-esteem and the money they earned being film extras the first money they had earned for some time. See www.glide.org for further details of Glide's continuing work in the city.
- Chris Gardner went on to be a successful businessman and millionaire. After meeting with Nelson Mandela in 1995, he now works in South Africa creating business opportunities for young people there.
- The Rubik Cube began appearing in the shops in 1980 and was an overnight success. With over 43 trillion different combinations, it remains a popular puzzle with "speedcubers" competing together to try and solve it in record time. The current world record is 7.08 seconds set at the Czech Open in 2008. For the film, three speedcubing champions were hired to teach Will Smith how to solve the cube in under two minutes.

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**A chance to watch films together.
An opportunity to discuss the issues raised.
A time of friendship, food and fun.**

30th Mar	The Queen
27th Apr	The Simpsons Movie
1st Jun	Shooting Dogs
3rd Aug	<u>The Pursuit of Happyness</u>
7th Sep	Dead Man Walking
5th Oct	This is England

**Films start at 5:30pm
Followed by food, coffee and conversation**

**10 Bletchingdon Road
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The Pursuit of Happiness

Set in San Francisco in 1981, *The Pursuit of Happiness* tells the true story of Chris Gardner who longs to be a good father to his son, Christopher. Struggling to make ends meet selling medical equipment, he decides to pursue a dream of becoming a stockbroker. To achieve his goal he secures a place on a six-month internship with a prestigious firm where only one of the twenty candidates will secure a job at the end. However, during that six months, no salary is paid. His wife, fed up with trying to hold things together, leaves him, but Chris insists on custody of his son. Together, they struggle to make ends meet. Will things finally work out in the end?

Being a father

The strapline for the film was “for his son, one man will reach for the impossible”. However, the Italian director, when he read the script, saw it more in terms of “the American dream”. How do you react to Christopher’s story? Is it only heart-warming because he finally achieved his goal? Would people have considered it good parenting were he to have failed and ended up miserably in debt? Where is the dividing line between doing all you can to ensure a good future for your family and exposing them to unnecessary risks and hardship?

The pursuit of happiness

What makes you happy? What are the ingredients of a happy life? Does it involve money? Could the family have found a way to stay together and still be happy? Is there a difference between happiness and contentment? What about joy?

A recent survey on “well-being” listed six factors as keys to happiness: money, work, good government, levels of trust, good family and other relationships, and religious belief. What things appear on your list? The beatitudes (Matthew 5: 1—12), in some translations, begin “Happy are ...”. How do these qualities relate to your list? What kind of happiness do you think Jesus is talking about? And how does that relate to Chris’s pursuit?

Work in the community

The church at Glide are committed to reaching out to the local community. How well do we as church communities meet the needs of those around us?

Welcoming churches

The activities at Glide are open to all and the church does it best to demonstrate God’s all-inclusive love. One small way that happens is seen in the film, with a glimpse of someone signing during worship, enabling an often neglected part of the community to share in what is going on. Churches in tourist areas sometimes have Sunday material (eg. lessons, responses) available in several languages. Some such material may never get used but one needs to be prepared before the event (Matt 25), otherwise it may be too late. How good is your church community at welcoming all and making everyone feel included?

Ambition

Chris is prepared to let nothing get in the way of achieving his ambition. We all have dreams and ambitions. Indeed, it is good to “dream dreams” (Joel 2:28). But in order to fulfil them we will have choices, and sacrifices, to make. And sometimes the dreams we have are simply unrealistic (eg. just think of those who appear on *Pop Idol* and other TV talent shows convinced they can sing). Chris tells his son to pursue his dream no matter what others say. But sometimes we need someone to give us a reality check. How do we determine whether something requires giving it our all (cf. “the pearl without price” - Mt 13:45), and when (and, indeed, how) do we allow ourselves to hear the gentle word of realism?

A helping hand?

It is good to be generous to those around us, something we should do without thought of getting anything in return. However, Chris finds himself in a situation where he feels he can help only those who can help him (ie. his immediate bosses), lending them money while insisting on the repayment of previous loans from other friends. Do you think he should have paid such a price?

Memorable quotes

Chris I met my father for the first time when I was 28 years old. I made up my mind that when I had children, my children were going to know who their father was.

Chris Hey. Don't ever let somebody tell you... You can't do something. Not even me. Allright?

Christopher All right.

Chris You got a dream... You gotta protect it. People can't do somethin' themselves, they wanna tell you you can't do it. If you want somethin', go get it. Period.

[*about Chris' bone-density scanner*]

Homeless Guy It's a time machine... I know it's a time machine...

Chris [voice-over] This machine in my lap? It is not a time machine.

[*repeated line*]

Chris Christopher is staying with me.

Chris Probably means there's a good chance. Possibly means we might or we might not.

Christopher Okay.

Chris So, what does probably mean?

Christopher It means we have a good chance.

Chris And what does possibly mean?

Christopher I know what it means! It means we're not going to the game.

Chris It was right then that I started thinking about Thomas Jefferson on the Declaration of Independence and the part about our right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. And I remember thinking how did he know to put the pursuit part in there? That maybe happiness is something that we can only pursue and maybe we can actually never have it. No matter what. How did he know that?

Christopher What are you doing?

Chris Paying a parking ticket.

Christopher But we don't have a car anymore.

Chris Yeah, I know...

Chris There's no salary?

Jay Twistle No.

Chris I was not aware of that. My circumstances have changed some.

Rev Williams The important thing about that freedom train, is it's got to climb mountains. We ALL have to climb mountains, you know. Mountains that go way up high, and mountains that go deep and low. Yes, we know what those mountains are here at Glide. We sing about them.

Christopher Hey dad, you wanna hear something funny? There was a man who was drowning, and a boat came, and the man on the boat said "Do you need help?" and the man said "God will save me". Then another boat came and he tried to help him, but he said "God will save me", then he drowned and went to Heaven. Then the man told God, "God, why didn't you save me?" and God said "I sent you two boats, you dummy!"