

Definitive Proof Hollywood Is Slowly Embracing the Heart of Christianity

In the independent Sony Pictures Classic release *The Hollars*, directed by actor/director John Krasinski and written by Jim Strouse, a family is brought together to deal with its matriarch Sally Hollar's (played by Margo Martindale) declining health and how it affects her husband Don (Richard Jenkins) and sons John (Krasinski) and Ron (Sharlto Copley).

Although not marketed as a faith-based film, the movie does feature a strong Christian witness in the form of Rev. Dan (Josh Groban), a youth pastor dating Ron's ex-wife, whose kindness in the face of ridicule and aggression changes the course of the film. Producer Tom Rice (*Begin Again*, *The Way Way Back*), a believer himself, says even beyond Rev. Dan, the film features a strong undercurrent of faith, reconciliation and redemption.

Sometimes in a film, we are surprised when we see such a positive portrayal of a Christian in a mainstream film, such as Rev. Dan.

I agree. The character was written as is in the script and when I read it and I just found that so refreshing. It did draw me to the script. Nobody was making fun of this character on one end of the spectrum, and then nobody was making this character agenda-driven preachy character on the other end of the spectrum. It's just real life. It's just truth and real life and relatable. So many times in the movies, it's so preachy in the dialogue where this is a character who has a really big impact on another character that needs it just by exuding grace and patience and support without ever preaching, without ever making it about a sermon or lesson that needs to

be learned.

You want to talk about the whole theme of faith and redemption in the film?

I think the faith of the film is exuded in the grace. Everybody's family is messy. Everybody's life is messy. The world is messy. So often, that's portrayed in films very cynically and we're portraying that with levity and with heart. So in the same way that *Terms of Endearment* and *Steel Magnolias*, where people that love those movies love them because you're tonally dealing with that mess in a way that's not snarky, it's not cynical, it's not gritty and dark and depressing. You're not brushing it aside. Two of my films, *Begin Again* and *The Way Way Back*, also deal with redemption and the reconciliation and the need of that humanness. That's kind of a theme that I tend to respond to when I'm reading a script. This film is full of a family that needs to be held together in the wake of what would be a tragedy. The mom finds a brain tumor growing and she's going in for brain surgery and that's a really big deal. This family comes together and everything from the past has to come to the surface. The film is just full of wonderful scenes of reconciliation and redemption.

Give us an example of one of those scenes.

There's a scene where John and Don are sitting on the back of the pickup and Don is just having what is a very mild and common regret of, 'I regret working so hard my whole life and not being as present as I wish I was in your life. It's too late to do anything about that now.' And John exhibits grace in that scene and says 'Dad, it's not too late. This is not too late and we have plenty of time ahead for whatever.' So that's wonderful, on the surface and secular level. It's a wonderful father-son moment. But Christians can look at that and see what that scene represents in an allegorical sense is that's about meeting God wherever you are in your life. You

can meet God and free yourself from your past. Your past does not define you. I think so often in society, our past defines us. Part of that is because we let our past define us. (Note: this scene is available for churches at).

What do you hope people will get from this film when they watch it?

I think people in general, and therefore Christians in general, are craving movies that are just a little more wholesome, that don't sacrifice truth and honesty for the whole thing but that also don't pander to that cynical (side). We live in a very cynical time right now. Everybody's comments on social media are all judgy and snarky and condescending and I think as a society I think I see people craving less of that. So this movie is worth supporting. Every film that Hollywood puts out is not going to have an evangelical message at the end of it. But if people support movies like this in the way they support *Steel Magnolias*, then maybe we'll get a cycle coming up of more wholesome movies like this. That's why we're wanting to make sure the faith-based audience knows that this movie is made by Christians. It is not a Christian movie. This movie is absolutely a faith-friendly movie and is very much in that thematic world. My hope is that people walk out the theater and first of all call their mom and then say they want more movies like this.

How did you get involved as a producer?

Actually John brought me on to produce. This script was written for John, Margo and Richard and there was a version of the three of them five years where John was just going to act and nothing happened with that. A couple of years later, this was a story that still existed with John. He never forgot about it. He wanted to do it. It was just one of the best things he'd ever read so he reached out and got the rights. Then he decided he wanted to direct it. He kept the gang together and then he needed a producer and financing and

that's when I became involved. He sent the script out to a few producers and I read it on an airplane on a Sunday, and I was sitting in his office on a Monday. I had to pitch myself to him. So it was me saying 'I love this project, I've been through this with my family. Pick me! Please, pick me!' I was on my knees begging him for me to do this, because of how much I as a believer responded to it. These type of films don't come around that often. You don't know how many bad scripts I've read that are supposed to be for the faith-based audience. This is it! This is what I need!

***The Hollars* is a Sony Pictures Classic release and is rated PG-13 for brief language and some thematic material.**

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