



Written by [Eric Egan](#) on March 31, 2014

God's Not Dead Continues Steady at Box Office

God's Not Dead, starring Shane Harper and Kevin Sorbo, is a worthy effort but suffers from too many story lines and characters, many of which come dangerously close to crossing over from character to caricature. At times, *God's Not Dead* feels like it wants to be two or three different movies with some of the multiple story lines receiving short shrift. Some of these story lines were more interesting than what the makers intended to be the main story arch.



The primary story line of the movie is that of college freshman Josh Wheaton (Harper), who, on his very first day of class, finds himself in a Philosophy 101 class taught by the tyrannical Professor Radisson (Sorbo). The professor requires students to write on a piece of paper the words, made famous by German philosopher Nietzsche, "God is dead." He then requires each to sign the paper. Wheaton, being a Christian, is forbidden by his religion to ascribe his name to these words and refuses. The professor and the student make a pact that if the student can convince the rest of the class that God exists then the professor will not fail Wheaton.

The rest of the movie involves the student dealing with pressure from his parents, friends, and girlfriend to "just sign the paper." This is one of the primary failures of the film. The parents are never seen pressuring their son. The girlfriend can only be described in terms that cannot be uttered in polite society, and she seems to be almost pathological in the way she attempts to control Wheaton's life. These are the relationships that the protagonist must risk if he is to continue with his proof of God to the professor and the class. The risks a protagonist takes are what provide a film its primary drama. The protagonist must have something to lose. In a well-written film, the audience must feel that the loss of the thing that the protagonist loves most will be absolutely detrimental to the protagonist. In *God's Not Dead*, however, the audience is never given a reason to hope that Wheaton's relationships survive. In fact, audience members are very likely to find themselves cheering for Wheaton to ditch his girlfriend entirely. When the inevitable happens, the reaction is not devastation but relief. This robs the central act of defending the existence of God from much of its dramatic impact and deflates the drama in the film.

Some of the other story lines in the film have truly high-stakes conflict, the most gut-wrenching example being the story about a young Muslim girl who must hide her Christianity from her father or risk losing everything. This and the other story lines feel squeezed and vie with one another for enough screen time to reach maturity, which none does in quite satisfactory ways.

That being said, there are truly touching moments in the film, and it is the end of each of the stories in the film that manages to achieve some level of emotional depth. The film attempts a sort of tapestry-of-life throughout in which God's handiwork as "Grand Weaver" is evident. There are other films, such as *The Tree of Life*, that succeed on a much grander scale in this genre, but *God's Not Dead* does at least tie all the story lines together in the end. It would have been nice, however, had the filmmakers cut out some unnecessary story lines that add nothing to the plot to allow others to achieve maximum



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emotional impact.

The film also includes appearances by Willie Robertson, of *Duck Dynasty* fame, and the Newsboys, a well-known Christian rock band. Their presence in the film detracts somewhat from the story and lends a feeling of marketing triteness to the movie. Their appearances do feel very sincere, however. It is also their presence in the film that should clue the viewer in to what the purpose of this film is and the primary reason to watch it. *God's Not Dead* should not be viewed as a movie, *per se*, but more along the lines of an experience intended to strengthen and reinvigorate the Christian base. This film will be very useful for, not preaching to, but educating the choir. The film will most likely not convert atheists. It will most certainly provide fodder for less educated, budding apologists.

That the film continues to resonate with core believers is evidenced by its negligible and very rare one-percent drop in box office take between its first and second weeks in release. The cumulative total for the film is \$22 million, which is far from shabby for a movie of this size. It has constantly remained the outperforming underdog, cracking into the list of top five films both weeks of its release.

As a film, *God's Not Dead* fails and succeeds at various points. In short, it is very far from unbounded cinematic success. As a cultural phenomenon, it may just be the spark of life that will resurrect a debate our society needs. For this reason alone, it is worth supporting. Go see *God's Not Dead* with the whole family and enjoy the conversation it is bound to fuel on a philosophical and artistic level.



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