



Movie Review: “Fireproof: Never Leave Your Partner Behind”

In measured response to all of this comes another feature film from Sherwood Pictures in Albany, Georgia (their last film was *Facing the Giants*), a project of the Sherwood Baptist Church. The low-budget independent film is written, produced, and directed by pastors and siblings Alex and Stephen Kendrick. It is not your usual Hollywood flick that romanticizes immorality and infidelity, with a few special effects thrown in. Instead, it is a film that attempts to offer steps toward salvaging troubled marriages. It is a soundly good story, filled with some decent action, comedy, and love.



Kirk Cameron, of the TV sitcom *Growing Pains*, plays the lead role as Caleb Holt, a firefighting captain. At his job he is a great leader — understanding, compassionate, and courageous. He seems to be almost obsessed with perfection at work, but at home is less than perfect in the role of husband. He brings to the relationship some anger, frustration, and selfishness, and is often hypercritical. When the relationship with his wife, Catherine, reaches the apparent point of no return — she wants a divorce, and pursues the legal particulars of it — Caleb accepts a challenge, a 40-day plan, from his father in a last-ditch effort to save the marriage.

Initially his heart is not into the steps outlined in the 40-day plan called “The Love Dare.” But he doggedly pursues most of them anyway, in what is truly a noble effort to help restore the mutual bonds of love that are supposed to exist in a marriage. Midway through the dare, he positively wants to give up, but after several talks with his father, he comes to accept that he cannot face the demands of the dare on his own, and does indeed need God. He realizes that his marriage must be based on love of God, and almost unknowingly enters into the spirit of self-sacrifice so necessary in a marriage.

Catherine, on the other hand, rejects him at every turn, and enters into a very dangerous flirtation at work — a flirtation that progresses toward an inordinate attachment which actually accelerates her desire for divorce. The constant rejection from Catherine really sends poor Caleb into fits of frustration and temper, but his father explains that Christ too is constantly rejected by us, His creatures, and yet continues to show His love for us.

Caleb’s father lectures his son on the gravity of breaking the commandments of the Almighty, and notes that all transgressions of the laws of God must be accounted for someday. He particularly upholds the sanctity of marriage, dismissing the civil-style contract aspect of it, putting emphasis on the covenantal or sacramental aspect of marriage.

Caleb’s father also makes the point in words and by example for today’s overly emotional and feeling crowd that love should not have as its foundation feelings or emotions. Love, true and abiding love, is an act of the will. It is not a slurpy, silly, juvenile non-stop kissing affair. A mature love is mutually deep-



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seated and most often doesn't need outward physical expression. It hums along quite nicely on respect and self-sacrifice. Charity, that soul of all virtues, and another act of the will and not of emotions, is the basis for the love dare. Practicing acts of charity every day according to the 40-day plan develops in Caleb the habit of charity; he grows emotionally and spiritually which later enables him to realize a change in himself.

The acting for this low-budget production is not stellar, but not badly done either. Cameron is the best by far, being the only professional. Catherine, played by Erin Bethea, an original member of the Sherwood Baptist Church, is easily out-performed by Cameron, but still furnishes us with a decent representation of a modern-day young woman, despite her slight lack of voice projection and articulation.

The rest of the cast are members of the Sherwood Baptist Church or other Baptist churches. And they all double as backstage crew for costumes, make-up, lighting, props, etc. This helps keep the costs down and, according to the cast members, also furnishes them with the opportunity to bond socially and spiritually. Many had never acted before, so given that, their performances are really quite good.

There are several humorous scenes in the movie. I found the scene rather amusing where Caleb, having suffered skin burns on his arm while rescuing a little girl from a burning house, called his father at home. His mother answered, and of course, he could hardly get to his father because his mother shifted into hyper-concerned mom, questioning him about the burn and how it was being treated, and if he was in pain, etc., all so very true to life.

Caleb's addiction to Internet porn is treated gently and discreetly. If one were to let a youngster view the movie, and there's no reason why older grade-schoolers couldn't, their innocence would not be compromised because they simply wouldn't understand what's being implied.

The kissing scene is more than tastefully done. Kirk Cameron, a committed Christian who has forsaken roles that might lead people to sin, truly practices what he preaches. Married to the same woman for 17 years and with whom he has six children said, "I love my wife. I promised to love and cherish her to the exclusion of anyone else. A lot of actors will justify a lot of stuff in the name of art. I don't feel that way, so I won't kiss any other woman other than my wife." His wife, Chelsea, was brought in as substitute for Erin, and that's who Cameron was kissing.

While the movie probably won't help a couple whose marriage is devoid of any spirituality and who are unwilling to try to salvage the bits and pieces of their life together, it will probably help those who don't give their personal behavior in their relationship much thought. And for those who are looking for a tune-up or preventive maintenance, it will certainly give them more than a lift, reaffirming the sanctity and indissolubility of marriage, with a few tips on self-sacrifice and charity to make the path a little smoother.



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