

Film, Faith and Love

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[0:00] Amen. Good morning. When I was in my teenage years, Indiana Jones was absolutely huge.

The biggest sort of movie franchise out. And Indiana Jones was very formative for me in working up my game plan for attracting a girlfriend. Because I watched these movies and what I learned from these movies was this, was that girls loved guys that did dangerous things.

So I spent all my teenage years doing dangerous things, trying to attract women, and remained girlfriendless for that entire time, of course. Now I finally learned my big lesson when I was in my early 20s and I invited a group of girls to watch me do a bungee jump, which was about the most dangerous thing I thought I could do.

So there was this big group. I liked them all. No one in particular. It was a numbers game for me. So I invited them all to watch me do this bungee jump.

And so we go to this mountain. I climb up the big ladder. There's a platform and a big gangway plank. And they strap me in. They strap me around my chest so you could actually run down the gangway plank if you wanted to.

[1:17] So I'm watching people in front of me do the bungee jump and they're walking slowly to the end, letting themselves fall off and yelling a bit. And I figured I could do a better job than that.

So my strategy was this. I thought I would sprint to the end of the gangway plank and launch my buddy off as far out as I can, throw my arms and legs back like a parachutist, and yell out, freedom. Freedom. Quoting Mel Gibson from whatever that movie was called. What's that called?

Braveheart. That's right. So I thought freedom is what I'll yell out.

That's very manly. So I start my run. Now everything that happened afterwards all happened within the space of about two, or probably about 30 seconds actually.

So I start my run. What I hadn't really thought through at this point is I hadn't actually looked down. And the problem is this gangway plank was on the edge of a cliff. And so from the bottom it doesn't look so bad.

[2:15] When you're up high, it's quite a reasonable distance. So I start my run. I look down and I go, goodness, I'm very high. And it's almost like this voice came into my head and said, Aaron, you are going to die.

But I've got to keep running because I've got these girls to impress. So I keep running and this voice has kept saying to me, you're going to die. And then, see, what's happening is my brain is trying to talk me out of this stupid thing I'm about to do.

And it realises it can't talk me out of it. So it just speaks directly to my legs. And it says to my legs, stop what you're doing. Now my plan was get to the end, crouch slightly, launch out.

I get to the end, I crouch slightly, I try and push up. I cannot feel my legs. And I end up just collapsing on the end of the gangway plank, lying there.

Trying to salvage some dignity, I just roll myself off. And instead of yelling, braveheart, I just start crying. And instead of a parachutist, I'm in the sort of the embryonic position.

[3:23] I did not date any of those girls. Movies often lead us astray in the area of love.

But sometimes, there are very poignant moments. Very poignant moments. Ones that help us understand the human condition. So what I want to do this morning is I want to look at a few films which help us understand the human condition.

And I just want to explain a couple of scenes out of these movies. And think of them as like little windows, little windows, into truth. And then I want to look at a Bible passage which gives us the big picture on love.

Alright, a couple of movies. I found it hard to choose movies so I just chose randomly Hugh Grant movies. So, the first one, he doesn't feature hugely in this movie but it's a movie called Love Actually and it's eight interconnected love stories.

And one of the more thoughtful storylines is the story of Sarah who has a very mentally unwell brother who is institutionalised and called Michael. And Michael is constantly calling Sarah up when he's really agitated.

[4 : 40] And Sarah always drops everything to talk to Michael to calm him down. Sarah is in love with a designer at her company called Carl. And at the Christmas party it's all looking quite good for Sarah and Carl.

But Michael calls up in the middle of a romantic moment. And Sarah takes time to speak to him. And calms him down and it's all okay.

Sarah goes back to Carl. Once again, Michael calls up and Carl says, please, don't take the phone call. And she does.

And effectively ends any chance of a relationship. And it's a very frustrating scene. I've watched the movie several times now and I keep thinking, come on Sarah, why don't you just choose Carl? Why don't you choose Carl this time? But I know in my heart that she chooses the right thing. She sacrifices greatly. And great love does require great sacrifice.

[5 : 45] But it's one of these scenes in a movie which holds a mirror up to us, I think. And it says to us, who would you choose? What would you do in this situation? And I find it very confronting because it makes me think, I don't know whether I would do that.

I don't know whether I would choose well like Sarah chose well. And I think it's fair to say the first little window simply is this, that often we don't love as we should.

And secondly, that great love requires great sacrifice. Another movie. This movie features a quote by a gentleman called John Donne.

John Donne was a preacher and a poet in the 1600s. He had this famous line. The famous line was this, no man is an island. In the movie About a Boy, Hugh Grant, Hugh Grant twists that quote in his opening monologue.

And he says, I am an island. I am Ibiza. The movie is about two disconnected people, two islands.

[7 : 00] The first island is Hugh, plays a character called Will, who's very wealthy. And very disconnected. He doesn't have to have a job. He doesn't have to have any particular relationships in his life.

So he chooses not to. He is completely disconnected. The other character is another disconnected person who is not disconnected by choice but by circumstance. It's Marcus, who's a young lad who's a social outcast.

And he longs for healthy relationships but he just can't seem to find them. Now Will and Marcus become friends and it's all beautiful and there's lots of healings and that's nice.

So on a shallow level, on a shallow level you could say that this summary of the movie would be something like Will teaches Marcus how to be cool and Marcus teaches Will how to be responsible. However, there is something much deeper going on in this movie. and it says something profound about what it means to be human. And it says this, is that our tendency is towards disconnection.

[8 : 07] I know that sounds negative but I think we know it's true. Is that our tendency is towards disconnection. We don't want to be vulnerable with people.

We expend a lot of energy pretending everything's okay when it's not. and we're afraid of real relationships and yet our heart cries out for them.

The movie ends very redemptively though. There's a great scene at the end. Everyone's having Christmas dinner together. Marcus, Will, another outcast from school, Marcus's very unwell mother and a few other oddballs that have turned up in the movie.

But this only happens, this redemption only happens as a result of a very sacrificial act of love on the part of Hugh Grant.

Marcus, the young lad, enters a talent show at his school and in front of the whole school has decided he will sing the song Killing Me Softly. And he does, he wants to do it for his mum because his mum loves the song.

[9 : 16] but Hugh Grant realises this is absolute social suicide. He'll be even more outcast than he already is. So Hugh Grant rushes to the school, he jumps up on stage as Marcus begins to sing the song and he sings it with him.

And then at the end of the song Hugh Grant keeps singing by himself. He makes a complete spectacle out of himself. The reason being so that the crowd will remember him and not Marcus. He takes the shame upon himself to save Marcus. It's a wonderfully redemptive moment in the story and it's because of that they have this wonderful community at the end. It brings them together. So it's a great scene in the movie. So, so far great love requires great sacrifice. Our tendency is towards disconnection but sacrificial love can transform a community and it can transform people.

Moving along. Notting Hill. I really do like this movie. It's a movie starring Hugh Grant and Julia Roberts who is a very distant cousin and and and and so these folks these folks fall in love with each other and and one scene that's just fantastic is is Julia Roberts has gone to Hugh Grant's house for dinner and everyone's very excited and at the end of the dinner there's dessert and there's one piece of brownie left and they're trying to work out who gets the last piece of brownie and they decide it's the person with the worst life who'll get the brownie and so they start going around and they start describing their lives and it's a moment of of um vulnerability when they all start saying what they really really think about their lives let me read out to you some of the things they say so Hugh's friend

[11:30] Bernie begins and he says well obviously it's me isn't it I work in the city in a job I don't understand and everybody keeps getting promoted above me I haven't had a girlfriend since puberty and the long and short of it is nobody fancies me and if these cheeks get any chubbier they never will Max to Bernie says unless I'm much mistaken though Bernie your job still pays a rather lot of money while honey here earns nothing flogging her guts out at London's seediest record store and honey says yes and I don't even have hair I've got feathers and I've got funny googly eyes and I'm attracted to cruel men and no one will ever marry me and then Bella chimes in and she's a character that um they're the only sort of married couple in the film and she's had a car accident and she's in a wheelchair and she says this yes honey but your but your limbs still work whereas I'm stuck in this thing day and night in a house full of ramps and to add insult to serious injury

I've totally given up smoking my favourite thing and the truth is we can't have a baby then Anna the movie star begins well I've been on a diet since I was 19 which means I've been hungry for a decade I've had a sequence of not nice boyfriends one of whom hit me and every time my heart gets broken it gets splashed across the newspaper as entertainment meantime it costs me millions to get me looking like this and one day not long from now my looks will go they'll find out I can't act and I'll become a sad middle-aged woman who looks a bit like someone who was famous for a while I've watched this movie a lot and I always find that scene very moving and the reason it is is because it's just the vulnerability shown by these characters I find very confronting and I wish that I had this kind of vulnerability with my friends and I want to say to you that this kind of vulnerability although it sounds a bit depressing is very very good it is a good thing to be real and it is a good thing particularly to be real with our father in heaven which I'll get to in a moment okay so we've looked at we've looked at a couple of movies here we've opened up a few little windows into some truths about love that it requires sacrifice that we don't love as we should always our tendency is towards disconnection and that relationships really good meaningful relationships require vulnerability and these things are all true but it is not the complete picture on love there's a lot more to say about it so I want to turn to the scriptures now and have a look at the and have a look at 1 John 4 7 to 12 it's printed out in your service sheet there when I was a teenager and I was admitting to you my sort of early romantic failures even when it did look like you know I might get a girlfriend and it was always that young love was always very immature and so fleeting and very dependent on them loving me and I don't know if you ever used to play this game but you know you'd get your best friend to ask their best friend to see if they liked you and if they liked you then you liked them but only if they liked you like if they didn't like you then you didn't like them you hated them they're weird what you know what I'm saying one of the great things about love described in this passage the love of God is that it's not like human love it's not like young immature human love it's not dependent on being loved back even which is just a radical thing there's none of this

I like you if you like me let me point out two really amazing things that this says about God's love in verse 10 this is love not that we loved God but he loved us God loved us even when we ignored God even if we pretend he doesn't exist even if we cast him aside in our lives God loved us that's amazing verse 9 this is how God showed his love among us he sent his one and only son into the world that we might live through him God's love for us cost him his son that's how much he cared

for us God loved us even when we ignored him and that love came at a great sacrifice on his part I want to spend just a couple of minutes just looking at that last part because I think that's a difficult one to get our head around sometimes the end of verse 10 it says this it says that God sent his son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins now I know that that line there might be jarring for some of you I mean up until that you probably thought yes I'm sort of enjoying this talk but that is just Aaron really you have to say sin it's just such an archaic word and atoning sacrifice like it's just can sound ridiculous sometimes I think and why doesn't God just forget about our even if I have done something wrong God's huge why don't it just like forget about it forget about all the naughty things I've done let's just get on with being cool with each other and sin is there really sin I mean isn't it all just relative I want to spend a bit of time just looking at this concept here of sin and this whole atoning sacrifice stuff okay sin is simply this it's a way of describing our internal posture towards

[18:11] God so sin is saying to God God I am going to be in charge of my life it's and when we cut off the creator like that when we don't let him have a say in our life when we break this vertical relationship between us and God it is going to affect our horizontal relationships as well our ones with other people I mean surely that sounds very reasonable and the passage talks about that because it says like in verse 11 God so loved the world we also ought to love one another that was 11 verse 7 let us love one another for love comes from God it's saying that our love for people is grounded first in our love for God and God's love for us more to the point so when that is kind of broken when we disrupt that sort of vertical relationship it affects these horizontal ones as well that is what's called sin and

God can't actually just ignore that the reason being that God is perfectly loving absolutely loves us but is also perfectly just as well the film Magnolia is I'm not necessarily recommending Magnolia it is a very difficult movie to watch I think if you all watch it half of you would hate it half of you would think it's very profound but I'm sure all of you would be offended by something in it it's a very difficult movie to watch but there is some profound moments in it and it's a good film for helping us understand this idea of sin it's a story of nine interrelated people nine interrelated stories and all very broken people as a result of decisions they've made and also the decisions of others and it's all set on one day in LA and in one strange but moving scene the characters all begin to start singing the song out loud it's kind of a surreal moment a song by a woman called Amy Mann and the song is called Wise Up it's a very surreal moment in the movie let me read out to you the line that they sing the verse they sing here it is it's not what you thought when you first began it you got what you want now you can hardly stand it by now you know it's not going to stop it's not going to stop it's not going to stop I'll read it to you again it's not what you thought when you first began it so you start out on this journey in life trying to take charge of your life setting up your plans it's not what you thought when you first began it you got what you want you arrive at this place where you think surely I would have been satisfied by now I've got a job I'm in a relationship everything is cool but now you can't stand it you arrive at a point in your life and you go I'm actually not happy I've accomplished what I thought I needed to accomplish to be happy I feel very unsatisfied and the final line repeated it's not going to stop it's not going to stop these characters realise that they have arrived at a point in their life where they recognise they are broken and that there is nothing they can do about it it's a beautiful little window into the human condition I think and the Bible agrees with it there is nothing you can do about your brokenness and God can't just ignore it because love great love which God has for us does not forget about our wrong doings it doesn't pretend that we're okay it doesn't try and sweep our brokenness under the carpet this whole Jesus dying for our sin stuff that is that's all about God dealing with our brokenness let me remind you again of the verse we're trying to get our head around

God sent his son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins so let me just say this as clearly as possible you have wronged God by ignoring him God loves you by ignoring God it has resulted in brokenness and disconnection and God doesn't want to leave us broken but he can't ignore that wrong doing because he's perfectly just so he sent his son to die for us to pay the price for our sins and this great act of sacrificial love was done so that you could know the love of the father now I don't know what you think about all that but so let me let me force you to think about it let me ask you a question quite directly do you think that rings true does it ring true for you what I've just said does it sound right let me remind you of some of these windows we looked at early on do they line up with what

[24 : 00] I've been talking about here firstly love requires profound sacrifice is that true absolutely the story of the bible that god loved us so much he would rather send his son to die than be without us I don't know of a greater sacrifice than that the second and third little windows we don't love as we should and we have this tendency towards disconnection that's the result of us turning away from god that's why we're like that Martin Luther the great church reformer described it as in cravatus it's a latin word it means we're curved in on ourselves because we've turned away from the father in heaven relationships require vulnerability absolutely that is absolutely true and you know that's true and it's absolutely true with god but us to reconnect with a father requires a great vulnerability on your part it requires an admittance of wrongdoing and a coming to god and saying i'm sorry and when you do that that's called repentance and when you do that you heal your relationship with the heavenly father now if you've connected with some of the things i've said this morning i want to give you a chance and this is going to sound quite abrupt but i do i'd love to give you a chance to make peace with god and to make peace with god is come simply by praying to him and asking for his forgiveness and accepting what christ has done on the cross so i'm going to pray this very simple prayer we'll bow our heads in a moment i'm going to say a very simple prayer and if you would like to make peace with the father you simply have to make this prayer that i will pray out loud the prayer of your heart does that make sense great let's bow our heads together father thank you that you love me i have not always lived as i should i'm sorry forgive me thank you that jesus died for me i want you to be in charge of my life now amen if that is the first time you have prayed that prayer or this has raised a lot of questions for you about the christian faith then i'd like to invite you to come back here on thursday evening i run a short course called christianity explored it goes for seven weeks for two hours on a thursday night we eat this great meal together we have a bit of a laugh i'll ask you some deep questions have a great conversation and we'll talk about jesus and we'll learn more about him you can bring any questions you like the harder the better i love it it's all explained on this right here so just before the service ends if you'd like to attend you can take this away with you and you can just email me and say i'd like to come it's totally free or you can fill your name out before you leave and just hand it to me at the door great well it was wonderful spending some time with you this morning happy valentine's day would you sit or kneel to pray father we can live without many things but we cannot live well without meaning we ask ourselves of our own lives is this

all there is father we can live our lives without many things but we can't live well without love our own hearts know that deep longing for connection for relationship for intimate friendships of vulnerability and support father we can live well without many things but we can't live well without your power heart at work at work in our lives give us the humility to repent to turn to know your power lord in your mercy we are a christian fellowship a body that aches and grieves when friends brothers and sisters in christ are suffering we pray especially for david and bronwyn for ken and gail for ramona and harold and we commend to you richie spidell working with the navigators and karen ramsey working with living waters father in your mercy care for these people provide for them continue to speak into their life your meaning your love your power we ask this for the glory of your son our savior jesus christ amen