

Fireproofing Marriage

Dan Nelson - pastor

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Finding fresh water usually requires getting past what's on the surface and digging deeper. Laying hold of real answers to life issues can be the same way. Bruised and battered hearts are everywhere due to a lack of training in one of the most critical areas of human existence: marriage.

There is good news to proclaim this week, however. Communication and romance is happening again in homes throughout America as a new movie hit the silver screen last weekend that delivers on every promise in restoring hope to the home. Action-packed and power filled, "Fireproof" is a film that millions of couples will identify with and gain genuine tools for addressing their marriage issues. They said more in that movie than I could have given in 12 weeks of counseling; and it was fun!

Last weekend at more than 800 locations throughout the country, crowds packed out theaters, toting tubs of buttered popcorn and severely overpriced soda. It was the "No. 4" opening movie of the weekend in ticket sales, which is quite impressive since the top three had more than triple the distribution. Showings were completely or nearly sold out. When was the last time you went to see a blockbuster in a packed auditorium? It seems like a flashback of a bygone era.

Emotions ran deep through the full two hours. I admit my own heart was gripped many times and tears ran freely throughout the room. There was actual applause at the end. What was it that pricked the hearts of people and engaged them to respond so forcefully? I think Hollywood may take notice but won't be sure what to do.

In this day of shallow thinking and celebrity-driven culture where highly compensated actors somehow transform into influencers and leaders, people actually believe that Brad Pitt's opinion on a political matter is more credulous than yours, and will pay \$3.95 to know it. We live in an environment that produces sleek, high-tech media diversions from life that often reduce mankind from our potential to our base, hypnotizing viewers toward behaviors that are less than honorable. And for many otherwise smart people who produce this stuff, it seems that they are so lost in their own personal lives that they are aghast to know what they might offer society in terms of anything consequential. This is why Fox Family, for example, has so little clue about what a healthy and balanced family actually is. Is it any wonder that a discerning parent cannot rely on what the screenwriters and media executives call "family"? No doubt, shock and awe, confusion, and all sorts of criticism must follow when a church full of volunteers make a movie that really makes a difference.

For a man and woman who want more from their relationship but don't know how to get there, "Fireproof" offers truths. In the story, divorce seems imminent and unavoidable since the relationship appears beyond any sense of repair. A local hero heralded by the community returns to a home in emotional shambles. Communication and real compassion is virtually nonexistent. While he finds satisfaction and accomplishment at work, respect at home is an elusive treasure that cannot be grasped. Worse, he thought things were all right until recently when his wife's behaviors have turned irreversibly sour. Her hardened heart reveals what happens when God's warning labels of "fragile" and "handle with care" are consistently ignored. Bitterness, bad

advice and the desire for romance, mix with real-life struggles of an Internet addiction and a smooth-talking devil to hit the bull's-eye of what so many deals with in the battlefield of their minds.

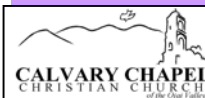
One of my favorite things about the movie is that remedies are not so simple. Those who bring their fix-it-quick, overnight delivery, on-demand consumerism mentality into their answers for relationship problems will be awaked to the hard-hitting message that marital bliss is a result of a whole lot of sacrifice, and genuine love may not be what you think it is.

At one high-impact scene, this desperate fire captain hears from his own dad that, despite his opinion of himself, he doesn't really love his wife at all because he can't give what he doesn't have. When he finally breaks to his pride and calls upon God for help, hope seems quickly dashed to pieces, as the problem gets worse. Genuine, spiritual renewal and heart-level transformation don't breed instant success. Just like in our lives, it takes more!

Walking out of the theater and into the lobby felt like a reunion of the soul for many who could more clearly see the answers they need. No doubt, Starbucks is filled with couples discussing changes this week. And for those who really get the point, Jesus is ready to hear their prayer, make his message understandable, repair broken hearts, and restore hope to life. There is plenty of poison, "sour wine" and polluted drink that is offered today in pulpits, politics and people in media. By tapping into the source of living water, there is refreshment and there is life.

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Dan Nelson is a frequent contributor to the Ojai Valley News and currently serves the Ojai Valley Ministerial Association and community as editor of the Religion Column. Permission is freely granted to reprint the article in its entirety. Dan Nelson is pastor of Calvary Chapel Christian Church of the Ojai Valley.



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9:00 & 10:45am
Calvary Chapel Ojai Valley
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Mid-Week Study:

7:00pm Thursday
Calvary Chapel Ojai Valley
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