

Ten Great Films to Watch Again with Your Family and Why by Caleb Blair

I'm sure when you saw the title to this article, several films came to your mind and you are slightly disgruntled that they didn't make my list. The reason these were chosen was because they contain strong themes that honor families, fathers, marriage, life, and conservative values. These are not the ten greatest films, the ten most family friendly films, or even ten films that everyone will enjoy watching. These films made the list because they are excellent discipleship tools for your family in which the filmmakers actually got a lot of issues right. Each one of them contains some of the nine dangerous themes I've written about before, so use this as a time for not only identifying many good themes, but also discerning the bad.

The Adventures of Robin Hood (1938)

Errol Flynn's Robin Hood is a true man who swears to defend women, children, and the weak "whether Norman or Saxon." He is an exemplary leader willing to risk his life for his men, lead from the front, and fight for his king. He treats the poor and destitute with grace and courtesy, is a gentleman to women, can laugh at himself, and is willing to face the consequences of his actions. The film treats manhood and womanhood with dignity and does an excellent job of portraying honor and duty. There is a good deal of violence that may not be suitable for young viewers (though nothing gratuitous.)

Made for Each Other (1939)

This is probably the only "Top Ten" list this film ever appeared on. It deals with the sanctity of human life as well as the hard fight to maintain a strong marriage. John and Jane Mason have a bright and happy marriage as they work through joy, disappointment, and the plain ordinary. When life begins to bottom out, everything, even their marriage, comes into danger. Soon their baby becomes deathly ill. Putting all at risk, the Masons and those around them take drastic measures to save the life of the baby. The Masons realize how much they need each other even through the most difficult times, and renew their undying commitment to their love, making it a powerful story of marriage and life.

Sergeant York (1941)

One of the few Hollywood biographical films of a Christian that actually does justice to the character's spiritual walk. Credit must be given to the filmmakers for the reverence they show to religion, the Bible, and York's pastor. In fact, one of the best aspects of this film is the portrayal of York's pastor. He is a true shepherd, one whom the community goes to for advice, and interacts lovingly with truth and understanding. Strong themes of patriotism, freedom, and laying down one's life for others are also well taught. The film provides a good reminder to all about the perspective one should have regarding the price of freedom. Some mild war violence and drunkenness may not be appropriate for young children.

It's a Wonderful Life (1946)

Often mislabeled as a Christmas movie, this film is too good to be watched once a year during the Yuletide. Its themes of life and family are packaged in a masterpiece of drama, antagonism, romance, and suspense. George Bailey tends to value life according to an individual's grand achievements, but learns that all life is precious and a person's importance is based on the fact that he has life itself. The film honors fathers and marriage and even does well in presenting the true nature of man, making this an excellent choice for families to analyze together again.

The Stratton Story (1949)

What makes The Stratton Story so good (besides Jimmy Stewart of course) is its handling of the marriage relationship. Monty Stratton is continually thinking about his girlfriend/wife, Ethel, and works to learn and do things for her. The only time he thinks of himself more than her is a short time after he loses his leg where he goes through the bitter realities of losing all he wanted to do in life. Ethel is always supportive of Monty, brightens up whenever she sees him, and encourages him to be the best man he can be. Through thick and thin,

this couple clings to each other and demonstrates what self-sacrifice looks like in the marriage relationship. The themes of devotion and unconditional love of marriage make this film worth learning from.

Cheaper by the Dozen (1950)

This is an interesting film from the perspective of family and fathers. The two oldest daughters of this large family spend most of their screen time defying and disrespecting their father, yet the filmmaker portrays Mr. Gilbreth as a dignified and respectable man who has the hearts of his wife and children. The film shows both good and bad examples of parenting and addresses many topics relevant to families such as education, fashion, relationships, character, and more. This may actually be one of the more dangerous films on this list from a worldview perspective since so many of its antithetical themes are hidden in a grand mixture of family values. Though Mr. Gilbreth does not always respond well to the situation, he is a hearty family man filled with spunk, love, and zest.

Room for One More (1951)

This Warner Archive classic starring Carry Grant and Betsy Drake is a rare gem well worth digging up and watching as a family. It focuses on foster care and does an honest job of showing the pains and joys of families with foster children. Grant and Drake have a playful husband/wife relationship and though the parents aren't treated with respect 100% of the time, the children do honor them far more times than not. As might be expected, the first half of the film is somewhat heavy as problem children try to adapt to a loving family, but those who stick with it will be well rewarded for their patience. Carry Grant is sure to keep the whole family laughing as he disciplines viewers in a touching portrayal of family, orphans, and foster care.

To Kill a Mockingbird (1962)

Atticus Finch is a beloved father whom the filmmakers treat with the highest dignity. He is willing to stand up to the prejudices of his culture and defend a black man's life because it is the right thing to do. He looks on all men with compassion and faces opposition and defeat with self-control. His primary concern is for his family, taking every opportunity he can to discipline his children. Parents should be aware that there are a few instances in which harsh language is used regarding black people as well as a few intense moments that would not be suitable for young children. The rich lesson of doing what is right no matter what and the respectful handling of fathers, however, makes this classic worth revisiting.

Sound of Music (1965)

Another popular classic, this film is a praiseworthy piece on fathers, family, and patriotism. Here is another strong father who has the hearts of his children and is encouraged to become more involved in their lives. He learns to value his family above himself and make personal sacrifices on their behalf. He is bold enough to defy the Nazis and will not back down in the face of betrayal, intimidation, or impossible odds. This film shows a well-rounded man capable of tenderness, affection, and wit as well as courage, sternness, and leadership. This beloved musical is worth pulling out again and analyzing as a family.

Sense and Sensibility (1995)

Surprisingly, this film is a better example of manhood than of womanhood. The heroines spend most of the film idly waiting for a dashing man to rescue them from a life of boredom and singleness. Edward Ferrars and Colonel Brandon, however, are compassionate, honest, courteous, and self-sacrificial; willing to do the hard thing because it is right rather than the comfortable thing which may be more popular or agreeable to their feelings. Edward exemplifies keeping his word even to his own hurt while Colonel Brandon demonstrates a true love that seeks the well-being and happiness of others rather than satisfying his own desires. Their noble character and hard work are contrasted with the pleasurable, self-seeking Willoughby and Mr. Dashwood as good pictures of true manhood.