



Alex Kendrick and Kevin Downes search a home for criminals.

Fathers who are heroes

Courageous (M, 2011)

Integrity, Strength, Love, Forgiveness, Faith. All the elements of previous Sherwood movies like *Fireproof* and *Facing the Giants* come to the fore in *Courageous*. Previously the characters were primarily concerned with their own occupations and lives, the characters in *Courageous* are often dominated by the lives of others; that is, until a tragedy impacts on them. Co-Writer and Director Alex Kendrick stars in the film as Sheriff Adam Mitchell.

He and three other officers are continually confronted by questions arising from their public service, and increasingly see the connections arising from a broken world in which teenagers move into gang-related and petty crime, with the gang leader often seemingly taking the role of the father they never had.

This will be a helpful and challenging movie for many people, and encouraging for men (who are fathers) to consider what it is to be a father, especially to their sons.

How do you bring up boys today? How do we address a society in which many fathers have abnegated their responsibilities?

Courageous is having a commercial release in Australia from November 10 (though it may have finished by the time this review is published), following the American release in late September, where it performed well at the US box office, being the highest grossing new film release and fourth overall on its opening weekend.

The film has had substantial media contact, including help from the now well-known Duggar family, some of

whom were extras in the 5km race.

I have mentioned before that the acting in Sherwood films is mainly non-professional, and there are some parts in *Courageous* which illustrate the limitations of this approach. A tighter script and editing down to about 100 minutes (approximately 130) would help this to reach a broader audience (especially if it appears on cable or TV).

Courageous wants to call men to take their part in the raising of children

The Christian theology presented by Sherwood Pictures is conservative, and no doubt there will be questions over the occasional male headship reference.

It does not centre on this, and is similar to the first film *Flywheel*, which is referenced in *Courageous* in a minor way, as Adam Mitchell's pickup truck carries a Jay Austin Motors license plate. Alex Kendrick played Jay Austin, the Zacchaeus like used-car dealer.

The theme of fatherhood, and the questions that this often raises can be challenging. There are some scenes and comments which for some people may be emotionally confronting.

If you have a group see the film, it would be worth ensuring there are some members available for counselling. A related group of resources has been produced, based around the resolution that the men in *Coura-*

geous agree to jointly take and hold themselves accountable to.

Overall, *Courageous* wants to call men to take their part in the raising of children, and hopefully to raise a new generation which respects women, and themselves.

Christmas with a capital C: Putting Christ back into Christmas (PG, 2011)

Member of the Baldwin acting family and identifying Christian, Daniel Baldwin plays Mitch Bright, a 'high-flyer' returning to the small town in Alaska where he grew up. Most people are not sure why he is back, let alone his former high school rival and now town mayor Dan Reed, played by Ted McGinley.

Mitch uses his business background to try to bring some of the locals to his side, and begins to raise issues in the town regarding the use of Christmas images and signs in public places, especially the long-established nativity scene display on city hall property at Christmas time.

While the film considers certain American-oriented legal matters, the question of the content and display of religious greetings and the place of religious symbols (especially Christian) in public places has also become a common issue of debate in Australia.

The title of the film is linked to the Go Fish song *Christmas with a capital C*, which has a much more forceful message.

This film is a mostly reasonable and at times quite graceful debate and illustrative comment about Christian responses to these issues. Overall there is a critique of the consumer focus that Christmas has become, and a highlighting of love for all, peace and serving others. I especially liked the role of, and focus on the gifts and love that a child can offer at Christmas.

This film certainly helps to raise questions about the meaning and purpose of Christmas and the cultural traditions that have developed and may be a good conversation starter for your local church. I have already noted the wider potential use of the idea behind using "Merry Mas. What's Missing?"

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