

CPYU 3(D) REVIEW

Movie: *Admission*

By Derek Melleby

Background/summary: Tina Fey and Paul Rudd costar in *Admission*, a comedy/drama about the college admission process and the “surprising detours we encounter on the road to happiness.” The movie follows Princeton University admission counselor Portia Nathan (Fey) as she travels to high schools, reads student applications and navigates the competitive world of elite college acceptance. On the road, Portia reconnects with a former college classmate, John Pressman (Rudd), who is teaching at an alternative school and trying to convince Portia to accept one of his students.

Discover: What is the message/worldview?

- The college admission process at elite colleges (i.e. Ivy League) is intense and pressure-filled. Students build resumes and transcripts to compete for minimal open spots and look for any advantage or key insight to gain acceptance. In this environment, a student’s GPA determines their value and worth.
- Parents are just as competitive as the students and they do everything they can to help their son or daughter get into college. Portia makes this observation about parents: “The college application is the final referendum on their parenting skills.”
- During her reluctant visit to New Quest, an alternative high school in New England, Portia encounters a different understanding of education and motivation for a college degree. Students think that Portia is operating from a “societal approved definition of success” and suggest to her that life is about “leaving the planet better than we found it.”
- The film portrays tension and unrest in respect to each character’s vision of happiness and the good life. Portia wonders if she is “boring” because she has had the same job for 16 years and has no desire for starting a family. John has traveled the world trying to “save it” but is still depicted as discontent and “running from something.”
- Even in the midst of a competitive academic and work environment, the most important thing about life is relationships. Ultimately, commitment, attachment and stability are seen a “good” while a life of rootlessness and mobility is called into question.



Discern: How does it stand in light of the biblical message/worldview?

- God’s people are all given gifts that are meant to be used to give God glory and benefit neighbors. Some people are given intellectual gifts that should be cultivated and nourished. The college admission process can be seen as an opportunity to give God glory or to glorify the self. This movie should challenge viewers to consider *why* they pursue educational goals.

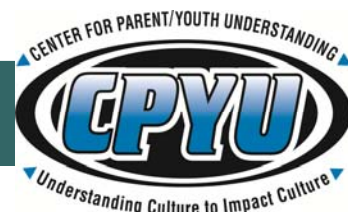
- A person's value and worth should be found in knowing that he or she is a child of God. In his first letter, John writes "How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!" (1 John 3:1). An academic transcript or a college degree does not determine a person's worth. God's unconditional love for His people, along with the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, empowers believers to live lives of faithfulness.
- A biblical vision of learning is to grow in wisdom so that we can be of better service for God. For followers of Jesus a college degree should be about increasing one's serviceability for God and others. In a subtle way, through the students at the New Quest alternative school, viewers are introduced to a different reason for going to college: "to leave the planet a better place than you found it." A biblical worldview pushes us even further: we go to college to learn how to serve God and neighbor more.
- Jesus summarizes the meaning of life and the way to "true happiness" like this: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind... And Love your neighbor as yourself" (see Matthew 22:37-40). According to the biblical story, a life that is not built on these words will find happiness fleeting.
- People who are shaped by the biblical story better understand the "wisdom of stability" that can often be missed in our mobile culture. Speaking through Jeremiah, God's exiled people living in Babylon are commanded to "Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce. Marry and have sons and daughters" (Jeremiah 29:5).
- One of the implications of being created in the image of a Triune God is that we are made to be in relationship with other people. Without deeper, intimate relationships, it is difficult to experience and understand God's love and faithfulness. Community is essential to the life of faith.



Decide: What do I do with it?

- *Admission* can be used to spark many conversations for students about life after high school. It forces viewers to examine more deeply the reasons behind their desires to go to college or pursue a career.
- The movie will also challenge parents as they think about their role in helping their son or daughter get into college. Do parents (and students) see a college acceptance for their child as a status symbol or as a way to bring honor and glory to God?
- What does it mean to be happy? What is the good life and how to we get it? Even though the movie *Admission* is about the college admission process it also invites viewers to wrestle with these bigger questions. Although the characters take a windy road to reach these conclusions, the movie ultimately portrays commitment, attachment and stability as something worth striving for.

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