

Extraordinary Measures (2010)

Rated PG. Our ratings: V-0 ; L-2; S/N-1. Length: 1 hour 45 min.

Is there no balm in Gilead?

Is there no physician there?

*Why then has the health of my poor people
not been restored?*

Jeremiah 8:22

There must be such a balm, John Dr. Stonehill explains his theory to John Crowley. John Crowley believes, that will save the lives of his young daughter and son, both of whom have a rare malady called Pompe's disease (pronounced Pom-pay). John and Aileen Crowley (Keri Russell) have a third son who fortunately is not afflicted. Estimated to occur in about 1 in 40,000-300,000 births, the disease kills most victims during infancy, with survivors living on only another eight or nine years at the most. Like others, the two children suffer from severe lack of muscle tone, weakness, and an enlarged liver and heart, both of them living on respirators and in wheelchairs.

Megan Crowley (Meredith Droeger) has just had her eighth birthday, so with the clock ticking away, John frantically searches the Internet for any information he can find that

would give him hope, even though no company has yet developed a medicine. If this sounds a bit like Lorenzo's Oil, then rest assured that it is, but with several significant differences—it is the father, not the mother, in this film that leads the passionate search on behalf of the children, and his obstacles are so great that he has to start his own drug research company in order to come up with the medicine.

And even then, there are further obstacles, such as his company running out of money and needing to be taken over by a larger drug firm, and then, when the drug is finally developed, dealing with the refusal of allowing his daughter to join the group testing the drug because of conflict of interest, her father being an official in the company. Based on Geeta Anand's 2006 book, *The Cure: How a Father Raised \$100 Million – And Bucked the Medical Establishment – In a Quest to Save His Children*, director Tom Vaughan and screenwriter Robert Nelson Jacobs take us on a journey that is constantly uphill.

When John kept encountering the name of a Nebraska chemist Dr. Robert Stonehill (Harrison Ford) with a theory that seems far in advance of any other, he tried, unsuccessfully, to talk with him on the telephone. Failing at that, he traveled to Nebraska and waited all day to talk with him. Then, when the scientist left for the day, John followed and finally caught up with him at a bar. Stonehill was hard to convince to work with Crowley, but when the latter produced a large check to fund his research and promised to raise a far larger sum, the scientist agreed. But, as noted above, there are a series of hurtles that seem like they were taken from an overly melodramatic TV movie than from reality.

Parts of the story have been fictionalized, Harrison Ford's character actually being a compilation of several of the real scientists who developed the drug. (The depiction of him as a super curmudgeon unable to work with anyone is the weakest part of the film.) The two children were actually still

infants when their father was struggling to find a cure, but in this case raising their ages adds to the dramatic interest. The real Aileen Crowley must be embarrassed in the way she is portrayed as less than enthusiastic in support of her husband's frantic search, especially when he quits his high-paying job and moves to Nebraska. One thing especially commendable is how the film shows the difficulty the process of developing a new drug is: there are corporate interests and FDA rules, the process of scientists working together, the uncertainty of which theory to base experiments on—all making drug development an expensive and lengthy process. The film is not an apologia for the drug industry, but it does show us why a drug company desires to hold on to the exclusives rights for a drug after expending so much work, time, and money on its development.

For Reflection/Discussion

1. How does this film compare to other similarly themed films, such as *Lorenzo's Oil*? The plot of *David vs. Goliath* is pretty common to them all?
2. How does the serious illness of a child affect everyone in a family? How must the healthy son John Jr. (Sam Hill) have felt at times? What experience have you had like this?
3. In light of the yearlong debate about health care, how is John's giving up his lucrative job with its built-in health care insurance an act of courage and faith? If the Crowley family had been an ordinary one with limited financial resources (as with the other families with an afflicted child that were shown), would there have been a story?
4. Were you comfortable with the way that Harrison Ford's character was depicted? A bit of stereotyping of the, if not "mad scientist," then of the abrasive, anti-social genius?
5. How does the film show both the necessity for unorthodox thinking and at the same time the need for cooperative

teamwork for any scientific breakthrough to occur?

6. Some people of faith might counsel the family to seek a cure through prayer: how might we see in the film that it is through human cooperation with God that healing normally takes place?