

# Letters to God (2010)

Rated PG. Our ratings: V- 1, L- 3, S/N-4. Running time: 1 hour 54 min.

*You yourselves are our letter, written on our hearts, to be known and read by all; and you show that you are a letter of Christ, prepared by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.*

*2 Corinthians 3:2-3*

Eight year-old Tyler DohertyBrady, the new mailman, certainly could qualify as “agreeted by Grandmother and letter of Christ.” His briefTyler.

life, to continue the apostle’s words, is one of those “written 2010 Vivendi Entertainment not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.” Stricken with a deadly form of cancer, the boy finds support and consolation from his best mother, his best friend, and a wise older man and mentor Mr. Perry (Ralph Waite). Tyler also finds consolation in writing a series of letters to God, which he mails each day. They serve also as a diary in which is revealed that the boy is as concerned for his anguished single parent mother as for himself.

Brady McDaniels is almost the opposite of Tyler, as empty of

faith and hope as is the boy full of them. An alcoholic whose divorced wife is trying to keep their son away from his influence, Brady works at the Post office. When the regular postman for Tyler's neighborhood goes on a leave of absence, the lackluster Brady is sent out as a substitute. Eventually his supervisor places Tyler's letters to God in Brady's hands, but the troubled man has no clue what to do with them. His first idea is to leave them at a church, but when the pastor discovers him in the empty building, he refuses to take the letters. He tells the hapless man that God must have placed him in his hands for a reason.

Brady tries to forget the letters, but as he becomes acquainted with the boy and his mother, and a crisis looms in his own life, a series of events occur that has a great impact on them all.

Director David Nixon, who was a producer for the two Sherwood Pictures films that became unlikely hits, *Fireproof* and *Facing the Giants*, has teamed up with writer/co-director Patrick Doughtie to create a story that show both the innocent faith of a child and the testing of faith of adults—two, as not only does Brady go through a crisis of doubt and faith, but so does Tyler's single-parent mother Maddy (Robyn Lively). The fictional story is based on Mr. Doughtie's real life experience. The film shows that Tyler does not suffer alone, a very important fact in sustaining his faith. Along with his mother and grandmother, Tyler has a cheery girl neighbor his own age, and perhaps most important spiritually, an older mentor in Mr. Perryfield (Ralph Waite). It is the latter who suggests that Tyler has been given a special mission from God. I wish that the film could have shown more of the church as a more integral part of the boy's support system, other than the brief scene with Brady and the pastor, but this is a minor quibbler. The straightforward faith talk will be offsetting to some. I myself prefer the more subtlety and ambiguity of such a film as *Schindler's List* or *Tender Mercies*, but as I

remember my own introduction to the Christian faith at an age close to Tyler's, I find his God-talk understandable and acceptable. This is a film for families prepared to laugh and cry and to face together the meaning of faith in the face of death.

## **For Reflection/Discussion**

There is a spoiler or two at the end.

1. What character do you identify with? One such as Tyler with deep faith? Or one going through an intense struggle such as Mom or Brady?
2. How is Tyler a good illustration of what Jesus meant by having faith like a child's? How is his mother's struggle reflective of what happens when we are confronted with a loved one's suffering?
3. How is Brady a good example of the experience of many people in our society? How might he have used his alcoholism as a crutch or an excuse for his other failings?
4. What do you think of the pastor giving the letters back to the postman? How is Brady's reaction similar to that of Moses at the burning bush? At what point in the film does he at last assume responsibility for his life?
5. What kind of a "support system" does Tyler have? How does each of the following contribute: his mother; his siblings; his grandmother; his best friend; Mr. Perryfield; and ultimately, Brady? Also, though we do not see much of his church connections, his pastor and church?
6. What roadblocks to faith have you encountered? Illness; accident; or—? What has sustained you during a faith crisis?
7. How must writing the letters have been a help for Tyler?

Like a diary? Have you found that writing down your prayers/thoughts/feelings helpful? Of course, in Tyler's case when he actually mailed them, what were the results?

8. What do you think of Mr. Perryfield's advice to Tyler? How does God in the Scriptures often use adversity to bring about his will? (Cases in point: Joseph's being sold into slavery; the enslavement of the Hebrews in Egypt.)

9. If you have seen Gary Marshall's 1996 film Dear God, compare the two.

10. Why do you think we fear death so much? What is it that Tyler "sees" that apparently has banished his fear? (See 1 Cor. 15.) How does his faith affect those around him? How is faith "catching" ? Do you see Tyler's fate as a tragedy or a victory?