

Seven Pounds (2008)

Rated PG-13. Our ratings: V- 1; L- 2; S/N-3 . Running time: 2 hours 3 min.

If anyone of the ordinary people among you sins unintentionally in doing any one of the things that by the Lord's commandments ought not to be done and incurs guilt, when the sin that you have committed is made known to you, you shall bring a female goat without blemish as your offering, for the sin that you have committed.

Leviticus 4:27-28

For I am ready to fall, and my pain is ever with me. I confess my iniquity; I am sorry for my sin.

Psalms 39:17-18

Director Gabriele Muccino bringsDespite his intention to just his European sensibility to thishelp people, he is drawn to intriguing, keeps-you-guessingEmily.

film written by Grant Nieporte.

Judging by a few things that I²⁰⁰⁸ Columbia Pictures

have read, some reviewers are too impatient, wanting to have everything laid out for them right from the start. Well, the film does have an attention-grabbing beginning. Will Smith's Ben Thomas dials 911 to report a suicide. When the operator asks whose, he replies, "Mine." Thus begins a puzzling series of encounters with various persons on a list he carries around. But the director take a while in reaching the point where he

brings together the strands of the film.

Ben Thomas apparently is able to obtain a lot of information through the IRS, where he has full access to computerized tax files on people. He questions and insults call center operator Ezra (Woody Harrelson) and senses that he is blind. He visits the manager of a for profit nursing home, apparently to see if the man is a worthy person, and when he learns from an elderly patient that the cost-cutting manager has refused her a bath, crosses the man off his list and leaves him with a message no one wants to hear from the IRS.

His involvement with two other people is shown in more detail, one a needy woman to whom he gives the deed to his seaside home, and the other, with whom he becomes romantically attached despite his intention to avoid such entanglements. Emily (Rosario Dawson) is a beautiful cardiac patient who seems doomed because the hospital has not placed her on the list to receive a heart transplant operation. And, lest I forget, there is a recurring brief flashback to a car wreck; shots of a jelly fish and a warning never to touch one (Ben has keeps one in a fish tank); and meetings with his brother Dan (Michael Ealy) to make some arrangements.

Different critics have responded in various ways to how all this comes together—the NY Times critic rated it “F,” whereas Roger Ebert a “B.” I would fall between these two, suggesting that if you want a film dealing with the theme of atonement, then *The Fisher King* is a better one to watch. This one stretched my credulity a bit, and yet also moved me at various points., the love story between the two stars being the most touching and believable part of the film. Gabriele Muccino also directed *Mr. Smith in The Pursuit of Happyness*, a film far more grounded in reality. In some ways Ben reminds me of the tree in Shel Silverstein’s 1964 book *Giving Tree*, both of them giving unconditional love—well, in ben’s case, not quite unconditional love, as he does say, “It is within my power to

drastically change his circumstances, but I don't want to give that man a gift he doesn't deserve." This in the case of the profit-minded, rather than patient-minded, supervisor of the nursing home. Some viewers might even be led to think of another who suffered even more than Ben in giving love to the world, in which case they will see Ben falls a bit short.

For Reflection/Discussion

Beware, there are spoilers in what follows.

1. How confused were you in the first part of the film? Did the recurring shot of the car wreck provide you with a clue as to where the film was headed?
2. How does he relate to people? Not very open, is he? What do all of the persons he contacts seem to have in common? What does he seem to want to do?
3. What do you think of Ben's plan for atoning for his past? Could he be a bit unhinged with the pain of his loss, perhaps mistaking pain for guilt? What good comes out of his sacrifice? (Compare this to the ending of Jesus of Montreal.)
4. Are there things in your own past which haunt you, or for which you wish you could atone?
5. How does what happened on a hill outside Jerusalem around 30 A.D. help you deal with your past misdeeds? Is Ben an agent of grace, or a rewarder of those who behave well? (I am thinking of his comment: "It is within my power to drastically change his circumstances, but I don't want to give that man a gift he doesn't deserve." What makes God's grace so "amazing" ?