

The Wager (2007)

Rated PG.. Our ratings: V- 2; L- 0; S/N -2. Running time: c. 2 hours

The LORD said to Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man who fears God and turns away from evil." Then Satan answered the LORD, "Does Job fear God for nothing? Have you not put a fence around him and his house and all that he has, on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land. But stretch out your hand now, and touch all that he has, and he will curse you to your face. "The LORD said to Satan, "Very well, all that he has is in your power; only do not stretch out your hand against him!" So Satan went out from the presence of the LORD.

Job 1:8-12

"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

"Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Matthew 5:9-10

The weeks between the announcement of the nominations for the Academy Awards and the night of their presentation must be tension filled ones for all of the nominees. For Best Actor nominee Michael Steel (Randy Travis) it is an especially stressful time. His wife, fed up with his obsession with his career, has left him, intent on obtaining a divorce. He feuds with the director of his new Michael and the troubled Charlie.
(c) 2007 Pure Flix

movie, and is asked to leave the set. His seductive co-star, Cassandra (Candace Cameron Bure), would like to be more than an on-screen lover.

A paparazzi shoots photos that show the two stars in a compromising position, and even Michael's attempt to help a little boy is twisted by the press so that it looks like a case of child molestation. His strong Christian faith is used against him, the press painting him as another fallen celebrity Christian. His sister Annie (Nancy Stafford) is his rock, until—

If the above sounds like something from the book of Job, that's because the story is based on that Biblical story, with God accepting a wager (hence the title) from Satan that his servant Michael will not break down. Randy Travis, with that rugged stoic face of his, is a good stand-in for Job. The plot, of course, is a good one, but the film's script is a bit too sketchy in places. We should have seen a little more of Michael's career obsession so that we can sympathize better with his wife; the incidents in which the incriminating photographs are taken and then published on the front page of a scandal magazine (a newspaper would have been more believable) are far too rushed, the magazine appearing the very next day after Michael had innocently been talking with Cassandra ; and the character of the little boy Charlie is far too underdeveloped for us to appreciate the bond between the boy and Michael.

However, despite this, the film is a good one for its intended market—churches equipped with DVD projectors. Check out the article in the Winter VP, soon to be posted on line also, describing the unique program, Outreach Cinema, in which a church can acquire the right to show the film before it is released to the public. For full information on this, including even the opportunity to watch *The Wager* in its

entirety on your computer, log onto www.outreachcinema.com)

For Reflection/Discussion

Spoilers below.

1) We are not given much background as to Michael's wife deciding to leave him, so why do you think she has done so? How can a career be a wedge dividing a marriage?

2) How does the pastor's sermon affect Michael? What part of the Sermon on the Mount challenges Michael? You? How does Michael try to become a peacemaker?

3) Why do you think the press seems to enjoy the fall of a Christian celebrity? What temptations confront Michael?

4) What do you think of the answer that Michael is given in regard to the possibility of his following the Sermon on the Mount? Do you agree? If we could fulfill all of it, would our salvation be a matter of law or grace?

5) What does his wife's agreeing to accompany him to the Academy Awards ceremony reveal about her? What do you think of Michael's choice in regard to Charlie?

6) What do you think of this updating of the ancient story of Job? How is Annie's fate the cruelest blow suffered by Michael?