

3(D) Review { By Julia Feeser }

Film: *The Fault in Our Stars*
starring Shailene Woodley, Ansel Elgort

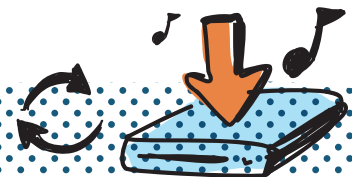
Background/summary:

The Fault in Our Stars is a film based on John Green's book by the same name. It details the complicated love story of teens Hazel Lancaster and Augustus Waters who have both been diagnosed with different forms of cancer. The film was **released in June 2014** to wide critical acclaim and grossed over **\$48,000,000** in the US on its opening weekend.



DISCOVER: What is the message/worldview?

- The film opens with young Hazel Lancaster narrating over a series of clips of she and Augustus (Gus) that we see in full later in the film. In her narration, Hazel is debunking the truth about telling sad stories: ***"On the one hand, you can sugarcoat it. And nothing is too sad that it can't be fixed with a Peter Gabriel song... it's just not the truth."*** It is revealed that Hazel, now 17, has been suffering with terminal cancer since she was 13. She is an only child to very loving parents. Her doctor and mother decide Hazel should start attending a support group for teens with cancer, which Hazel reluctantly attends.
- Hazel's support group leader is deeply religious, having suffered from cancer himself, and tells the group when they are gathered that they are literally in the heart of Jesus because there is an enormous rug depicting Jesus on the floor. The support group leader is portrayed as an overly sappy, guitar-playing Christian who doesn't truly know how to support these kids with cancer or understand their needs.
- During her time at the group, Hazel meets Gus. Gus is there to support his friend Isaac, but has also suffered with cancer in the past, which cost him his leg. Upon meeting Hazel, Gus is immediately drawn to her and makes it clear through staring at her, complimenting her and inviting her to his house to watch a movie. Gus is the classic romantic lead: good-looking, a slight underdog, and philosophical in the way he speaks and acts. For example, throughout the movie Gus consistently carries an unlit cigarette in his mouth to illustrate a metaphor: ***"You put the killing thing right between your teeth, but you don't give it the power to do its killing. A metaphor."***
- Hazel and Gus form a deeply romantic yet sweetly innocent relationship, reading books and going on picnics. Not wanting to be cliché, they choose a word to represent the unspoken agreement that their love/relationship/friendship is forever: ***"Okay."*** They say this word to each other as a sign of mutual agreement. In fact, the film ends with a voiceover of Gus asking ***"Okay?"*** to which Hazel looks up at the night sky and replies, ***"Okay."***
- In what may be the epitome of events in the film, Gus and Hazel take a trip to Amsterdam to visit Hazel's favorite, reclusive author: Peter Van Houten. Van Houten turns out to be an angry, rude drunk, and serves as a representation of the disillusionment that all things come together perfectly in life. Both Hazel and Gus are extremely disappointed in finding out Van Houten is not the man they once idolized.
- While in Amsterdam Gus and Hazel partake of a lavish dinner, during which they discuss God and the inevitability of their deaths (cancer related or not). Hazel says she does not believe in God, while Gus tells her he believes in some sort of life after death. After dinner they return to the hotel, where they sleep together for the first time. This scene is characterized by their physical limitations: Hazel must remove her breathing tubes and Gus removes his prosthetic leg. Hazel jokes about their physical conditions, but Gus tells Hazel, ***"You are so beautiful."***



- Before leaving Amsterdam, Gus tells Hazel that his cancer is back and he only has a little time left. Hazel cries and says, *“It’s so unfair.”* To which Gus says, *“Apparently the world is not a wish-granting factory.”* A few months after they return to the states, Gus asks Hazel to write a eulogy for him to be read before his death so he can hear it. Hazel obliges and composes a eulogy highlighting her love story with Gus, saying how grateful she is that Gus’s love and relationship provided some *“forever”* in her limited life: *“You gave me a forever, within the numbered days. And for that I am eternally grateful...I love you so much.”*
- The film concludes with Gus’s death and Hazel discovering a letter Gus wrote to author Peter Van Houten shortly before his death. The letter is about Hazel and his great love for her: *“We all wanna be remembered. But Hazel’s different. Hazel knows the truth. She didn’t want a million admirers, she just wanted one. And she got it.”* Hazel holds Gus’s letter as she looks up at the stars, whispering the single word *“Okay”* as an acknowledgement that yes, she will love Gus forever.



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

- The main theme of *The Fault in Our Stars* is the reality of loss. Hazel and Gus both acknowledge the realness of imperfection and the inevitable end of life, so they attempt to find lasting life (a forever, an infinity) in each other. We know that we have been created to seek everlasting life within God, who is the only being capable of providing this quality of living and hope (John 14:6; 1 John 2:25). If both Hazel and Gus adhered to a belief in Christ, their desire to experience forever with each other may have taken on a different quality. However, they both acknowledge they do not necessarily believe in God (though Gus believes in some form of life after death), so we can assume their version of everlasting life is found in each other rather than God.
- Unlike other typical teenage romance films, *The Fault in Our Stars* focuses on the physical limitations of its two lovers, particularly when it comes to their physicality with each other. During the scene where they have sex, Hazel must remove her breathing tube (something she believes makes her less physically attractive) and Gus removes his prosthetic leg (something he earlier referred to as the reason he is still a virgin). In this way, the characters are highlighting something important to human value in scripture: that outer or “typical” beauty should not be our focus (Ephesians 1:4; Psalm 139:14; Proverbs 31:25).
- However, though Gus and Hazel may be a good example of loving despite physical imperfections, they choose to have sex as boyfriend and girlfriend. We understand God’s desire for us is to experience sex to its fullest inside the covenant of marriage (Hebrews 13:4; Genesis 2:23-25; 1 Corinthians 6:13-20).



DECIDE: What do I do with it?

- There are two things we should come away with from *The Fault in Our Stars*: First, an appreciation for the film’s acknowledgement of life’s imperfections (death, sickness, ended relationships), and second, remembering that the true source of everlasting life and love is Christ. Hazel and Gus love each other very deeply; and this is awesome! However, their love and hope for more “life” and more “time” than their physical bodies will allow is found in each other rather than Christ. Our imperfections and the hard realities of life are just that: realities. And this is true regardless of a relationship with Christ. However, we as Christians look to Christ to fulfill the void our circumstances and other people cannot. *The Fault in Our Stars* is a beautiful example of love in a broken world and a broken situation. As Christians it is up to us to understand where the true source of love and life is found: Christ and Christ alone.
- When it comes to young people (and, let’s face it, many adults as well), we need to recognize that romantic relationships are put on a pedestal. The media and films like *The Fault in Our Stars* definitely contribute to this. The idea of having a star-crossed love story is something that offers hope and value, particularly to teens who may be dreaming about their future first love. Can *The Fault in Our Stars* be viewed without promoting this idea? Probably not. However, *The Fault in Our Stars* can offer a valuable perspective on reality. This perspective is not meant to make teen viewers pessimistic about real, deep love; it is instead about helping them uncover and understand the hardships even committed love inevitably faces.

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