



Written by [Raven Clabough](#) on July 31, 2010

## Charlie St. Cloud: A Film Celebrating Life

Everything about Burr Steven's Charlie St. Cloud is predictable, except for the spiritual gravity and Christian undertones, rendering an otherwise teen "chick flick" a worthwhile expenditure. Based on a 2004 Ben Sherwood novel, *The Death and Life of Charlie St. Cloud*, Charlie St. Cloud is a film about the consequences of a single promise.

Charlie St. Cloud (Zac Efron) is a college-bound young man, and the quintessential brother and son. After Charlie's father abandoned the family, Charlie stepped up to the plate as the "man of the house," acting as a paternal figure for his younger brother, Sammie (Charlie Tahan). While his character's perfection is a bit hyperbolic, most viewers could not help but wish for a son/sibling like Charlie.



With a sailing scholarship to Stanford University, and plenty of good looks and charm, all the pieces of Charlie's life seem to fall right into place. That is until Charlie and Sammie are in a car crash that changes their lives forever. Charlie toes the line between life and death until he is ultimately saved by a persistent EMS worker, Florio Ferrente, played by Ray Liota. Unfortunately, Sammie was not so lucky. Defeated by guilt and grief over the loss of his beloved brother, Charlie retreats into himself.

However, Charlie's near-death encounter provides him with a wonderful gift: He is able to communicate with the deceased, most notably, his brother Sammie. Maintaining a promise he made with Sammie prior to his death, Charlie meets Sammie every evening at sunset to practice baseball and spend quality time.

It is this promise that prevents Charlie from pursuing his own dreams and living his own life. He is content with that arrangement until he begins to fall in love with the lovely Tess Carroll (Amanda Crew). It becomes painfully obvious to Charlie that he cannot continue to straddle the line between both reality and fantasy. He is faced with a decision that nobody should ever have to make: hold on to the past or pursue the future.

Surprisingly, *Charlie St. Cloud* does not allow Zac Efron to rely solely on his much-touted good looks, but demands a commanding performance from the young star. Efron, for the most part, rises to the occasion, though years of experience will teach him that despair requires a bit more effort than blank stares.

The religious undertones of *Charlie St. Cloud* add another layer to its depth. In an encounter with Florio five years after the car accident, Charlie is forced to question why God chose to give him another chance. Florio points out, "God doesn't just show off.... There had to be a reason He gave you a second chance." He tells Charlie that he is wasting his life, which has been given to him as a gift from God, forcing Charlie to contemplate the choices he has made.



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Later, Florio gives Charlie a necklace of St. Jude, the patron Saint of lost causes, insisting that it will help Charlie to figure out why he was spared. And it does.

In a wonderful, yet predictable and all too perfectly packaged way, all of the pieces come together for Charlie once again.

The director made some unfortunate choices in the film, however, allowing both Charlie and Sammie to use inappropriate language, and interweaving sexual innuendo, into an otherwise genuinely touching story.

Fortunately, these lapses in judgment distract little from the movie's overall achievements. *Charlie St. Cloud* is a film that reminds its viewers that miracles happen everyday. It also forces moviegoers to recognize the role God plays in our lives, and exemplifies the often-overused adage, "everything happens for a reason."



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