



Written by [Raven Clabough](#) on April 16, 2014

“Heaven Is for Real”: Thought-provoking and Inspirational

Heaven is for Real is a heartwarming tale about an incredible happening. The film adaptation of Todd Burpo’s best-selling book of the same title describes his son’s story about encountering the afterlife at the age of four as well as the profound effect this story has had on others. With a talented cast and amazing story driving it forward, the movie is sure to move audiences and have them running to their local bookstore to buy the book, both the adult and children’s versions.



The story is told by Colton’s father, Todd. When Colton was four, he was rushed to the hospital for an emergency appendectomy, and his family was unsure if he would live. But survive he did, and when he awoke, he regaled his astounded family with a beautiful and extraordinary story about visiting Heaven.

The film opens showing Todd Burpo (Greg Kinnear) as a hard-working father and husband, who serves not only as a pastor but also as a fireman and a garage-door installer. He and his wife, Sonja (Kelly Reilly), have two children: daughter Cassie (Lane Styles) and son Colton (Connor Corum).

A loving and devout Christian family, the Burpos are generally happy, though in financial straits despite Todd’s various jobs. And their money problems have just escalated because of the hospital bills as a result of Todd’s recent broken leg.

It is at this juncture that they are challenged even further.

Without warning, Colton comes down with an acute case of appendicitis, and his parents fear that they may lose their son. However, not only does the boy survive, but he begins to talk about what happened to him during that interim when he teetered between life and death.

Colton tells his parents that he visited Heaven. He describes seeing Jesus, who, according to Colton, has a horse. He also relates that he saw angels, and astonishingly, that he visited with an older child who told him that she was the baby Colton’s mother Sonja had miscarried.

Colton’s story is a difficult one to refute, since he is able to tell his parents about things that he would not have otherwise known. For example, he recounts he witnessed his father’s emotional outburst in a chapel during the surgery, and that he also saw his mother call relatives.

The Burpos are overwhelmed by their son’s story. But while for some, Colton’s astounding story about encountering the afterlife may serve to strengthen their faith, it initially has the opposite impact on Colton’s parents. They find themselves more confused than ever and struggle to understand what happened and why.

Todd becomes fixated on discovering whether Colton’s journey was real, manufactured, or simply the result of an overactive brain function. His fixation on this subject, however, is placing a strain on his congregation, and his wavering faith is only exacerbated by the heavy media presence once news of his son’s amazing story becomes public.



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Colton's tale seems too hard to believe, but his parents cannot ignore its precise details that preclude the possibility that it was simply a product of brain activity.

Heaven is for Real is a refreshing and positive spiritual experience. While the film will likely draw more Christians to theaters than any other type of audience, there are elements to the movie that should be appreciated by all moviegoers. It does not take any stance on non-believers nor does it attempt to "win them over." While a significant portion of the film focuses on cynicism, it is not the cynicism of non-believers, but of Christians who believe in the existence of heaven while questioning if anyone still living could actually have seen it.

The film's wholesome tale and sincerity, coupled with the beautiful innocence of a child, are refreshing elements that should touch the heart of even the most rigid cynic.

Colton tells his parents that Heaven is a lot like earth, but more beautiful and colorful. He recounts that everyone in Heaven is young and there are a lot more animals.

And for professing Christians, there are moments in the film that will be thought-provoking and force some to ponder their own walk with Christ.

Todd's poignant address to his congregation at the end of the film seems to refute the notion that his son's visit to Heaven should serve as the ultimate proof of an afterlife, because as he points out, that proof has been there all along.

"Haven't we already seen heaven? In the first cry of a baby ... the love of a mother or father?" he asks.

Todd's sermon goes beyond addressing simply proof however but gets to the crux of the matter.

"Haven't we already had a glimpse of heaven and so often chosen the hell of hate and fear?"

These few words deftly articulate the daily struggles that Christians face. Each day, believers face choices that can either move them closer to God or further from Him. So often they choose the sinful road.

Director Randall Wallace, screenwriter of *Braveheart* and director for *Secretariat*, excels in translating this extraordinary tale to the big screen, and the cast is full of endearing and relatable performers. It is just a pure pleasure to watch the adorable Connor in each of his scenes.

Kinnear captures the heart of audiences with his thoughtful and touching performance, convincingly portraying the angst of a pastor in the midst of a crisis of faith.

The entire story seems to culminate in one very important message: that is simply to have faith, and have it completely. The film may not change the hearts of non-believers, but for Christians who may have experienced a spiritual crisis, Colton's story is likely to reaffirm their faith.



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