



## The Judge: A Modern Prodigal Son Story

*The Judge* is a film that explores the complicated relationship between father and son, made even more complicated by external factors. Robert Downey, Jr. and Robert Duvall captivate audiences, drawing them into the inner workings of this relationship and compelling moviegoers to root for this father and son to find redemption. The film tells a wonderful story with strong Christian elements of sacrifice and forgiveness.



Robert Downey, Jr. plays Hank Palmer, a defense attorney who has seemingly lost his way. He defends the worst type of people, without consideration, and struggles to be the husband and father he should be.

When Hank's mother passes away, he returns home where he sees his father, referred to as "the Judge" (Robert Duvall), with whom he has a very complicated relationship. The Judge, Judge Joseph Palmer, has presided over the Carlinville court for decades and is very critical of Hank, over even the most minute things. And the two men know how to hold a grudge. Judge Palmer even missed his son's own graduation from law school because of his inability to let go of his anger.

However, when the Judge finds himself in one of the most trying periods of his life, including a murder trial, he realizes he needs his son in a way he never thought he would, and Hank becomes the man he knows he must be for his father.

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Judge Palmer stands accused of running over one of his worst former defendants with his car. The man's blood was found in the vehicle's battered grill, but there are no skid marks at the scene of the accident.

Unfortunately, Judge Palmer cannot recall the evening in which the accident took place, claiming he is "missing time."

Despite Hank's resentment toward his father, what else can he do but employ his usual defense prowess to help his father maintain his freedom? After all, regardless of everything, the Judge is still his father.

The focus of this film is far less about the murder trial and much more about this father/son dynamic. *The Judge* presents strong moral concepts, such as forgiveness and sacrifice. It offers insight into the significance of perspective. Hank never quite puts himself in his father's place, which in part is what contributed to their difficult relationship. And Judge Palmer's efforts to raise his children properly often came across as critical and judgmental, furthering the divide.

The film also showcases just how much of an impact the father/son relationship has on that son's relationship with his own family. It is often so vital for a son to respect his father and to feel respected in order for him to be a good husband and father in his own family.



Written by [Raven Clabough](#) on October 10, 2014

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But despite the positive elements of this story, the film does include some foul language and violence. The accusations that take place throughout the film, both between the father and son and those found in the courtroom, present an ugly depiction at times of its characters. In this way, however, the film's presentation of this relationship is realistic, and in the end, the movie remains a story about sinners seeking forgiveness.

Robert Downey, Jr. and Robert Duvall are impeccable in their roles. Their performances are nothing short of what one would expect from these titans of the industry. They do an excellent job of portraying men who are both despicable and lovable, and viewers will likely find themselves caring about what happens to both.

I confess to having a tremendous amount of personal respect for Downey, Jr., who is an outspoken conservative in a place where conservatism is treated like leprosy. Downey, Jr., does not pretend his stint in prison did not happen but rather uses it to affirm his conservative values.

"You can't go from a \$2,000-a-night suite at La Mirage to a penitentiary and really understand it and come out a liberal," Downey admits. "I wouldn't wish that experience on anyone else, but it was very, very, very educational for me and has informed my proclivities and politics ever since."

Some criticisms of the film from other reviewers note the film's overuse of exposition, as well as trite characterization, and in some ways, they are right. However, it is my belief that many critics are simply too jaded to appreciate a film about an estranged family that finds a way back to each other. If you do not count yourself amongst that category of moviegoer, you will likely enjoy this film.



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