

This year Hallmark is debuting 41 new Christmas movies. If you view only the occasional Hallmark movie like me, it might seem like there is only one Hallmark Christmas movie. They all seem to follow a similar plotline. Big city girl with a promising career returns to her small town roots to help with her grandmother's bookstore as her health is failing when she meets a rugged family man with a devoted, but broken heart. From a guy's perspective, the message I get is that you will find true love if you chop wood, dress out of an LL Bean catalog, and save a girl from tripping on an icy sidewalk.

The movie builds with a little "will they or won't they" tension. They nearly kiss, but an ill-timed, but humorous interruption stops them. A potentially disastrous miscommunication threatens to forever rip them apart, but the problem is soon resolved with no hard feelings. She passes up her once-in-a-lifetime career opportunity to enjoy a traditional, small-town Christmas with her rugged, but sensitive new man. All in 90 minutes, and all with something Christmasy in every shot.

Wash, rinse, repeat this tried and true formula every two hours from Halloween through New Year's day, and there you have a Hallmark's Countdown to Christmas. Yes it's the same formula again and again, but Hallmark knows it, and they are using it to great effect. As many as 85 million people will watch a Hallmark Christmas movie this year. They often pull in audiences bigger than anything else on television, and the formula is so successful that Lifetime, Disney and others are offering sincere flattery with imitations of their own.

You can make fun of Hallmark Christmas movies all you want. Yes, they're cheesy. Yes, it's the same character with a new name, but for millions of people, turning on a Hallmark Christmas movie is like slipping into a hot bath filled with bubbles. It makes you feel warm all over, and you settle in for a cozy, relaxing hour and a half.

People love soaking in the warm nostalgia, the comfort of actors that have become almost like friends over the course of many movies, the simple, stress-free small town setting, the coziness of family traditions, and, of course, the effervescent happy ending. It allows us, for just a couple of hours, to forget our own stress, our own strained relationships, and our own traditions fraying at the seams.

In a Hallmark Christmas, Christmas is good. It's good to know that your family is getting together. It is good to reminisce about how good grandma's stuffing was before she passed away. As the number of Christmases in your past grows ever larger and the number of Christmases in your future grows ever smaller, it's good to celebrate Christmas now, because there might not be a next one.

Hallmark movies always take place in a comfortable, upper middle class world. There's no struggle with unemployment or debt collectors. There no conflict that can't be resolved in 20 minutes. There's nary a word of political strife. But that's part of what we like about these

movies. They are pure escapism from our everyday problems. They feed our nostalgia for a Christmas past viewed through our rose colored glasses, or at least the fantasy of the Christmas we never had but always wanted.

But every hot bath eventually grows tepid. So it is with every Hallmark Christmas movie. Gretchen Saffles admits in a piece on the *Well-Watered Woman*, that she loves Hallmark Christmas movies, but then confesses, “When the movie wraps up and the credits roll, there always seems to remain a tinge of disappointment— a feeling that there’s got to be more to love and the holidays than these movies have to offer.”¹

There’s a reason a Hallmark movie offers a satisfaction that is shallow and fleeting. For a channel so devoted to Christmas, it’s amazing how little actual Christmas there ever is in any Hallmark movie. (Advance Slide) Don’t expect any signs of Christmas beyond cozy fireplaces, time with family, decorating trees and giving gifts. It’s a Christ-less Christmas. No one ever mentions Jesus. If you’re lucky you might get a verse of Silent Night sung in a caroling scene or a glimpse of children in shepherd’s costumes in the background. It’s all style and little substance.

The movie ends, but life goes on. We need more than fuzzy feelings for a life that isn’t lived in a 90 minute window. Suffering and sorrow are still a real part of our lives. For many of us, the holidays are the most painful days of the year. The reality is that family gatherings often bring out the worst in some people, and Christmas has a way of straining our finances to the limits. Hallmark movies can’t offer you a hope that doesn’t disappoint, even when life does. That kind of hope is only found in Jesus.

I want to talk for a few moments this morning about why Jesus is better than Hallmark, and real Christmas is better than fake Christmas.

Jesus Changes Our Reality Instead of Offering An Escape?

The first thing that makes Jesus better than a Hallmark movie is that Jesus changes our reality instead of just offering an escape.

Hallmark offers an escape from reality. It’s a temporary escape. For an hour and a half to two hours you can forget your own stress live in a make believe world where everything is beautiful and everyone is happy. A little fantasy might be fun for a couple of hours, but you must always return to the real world.

This is where Jesus comes in. He doesn’t ignore reality. He confronts it. He doesn’t run from it. He transforms it. The whole point of Christmas is that God came to earth. He was born as one of us to live and experience life as one of us.

The opening words of the Christmas story in the Gospel of Luke read like this, “*In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world.*” It’s rooted in history. It’s rooted in time and place. This is reality, not fantasy. This isn’t “once upon

a time” or “a long time ago; in galaxy far, far away.” As John writes in his Gospel, “*The word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.*”

Rather than escaping our reality, Jesus fully entered into it and became a part of it, in order that he could change it. He changes water into wine. He changes a man lame from birth into a man who runs and leaps and dances for joy. He changes the downcast soul into one that rejoices.

Ezekiel 36:26 (4 Slides)

And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.

Romans 12:2 ESV

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

2 Corinthians 5:17 ESV

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

Ephesians 4:22-24 ESV

Put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, 23 and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, 24 and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

Sometimes, Jesus changes reality. Sometimes, he changes your perspective on reality.

Sometimes, he changes you to better face reality.

Jesus loves you for YOU.

The second thing that makes Jesus better than Hallmark, is that Jesus loves you for YOU.

This one I stole from Drenda Keese and her series of articles on the 12 emotions of Christmas.ⁱⁱ And emotion 12 is loneliness. She spoke of her tradition of watching Hallmark Christmas movies with her daughter and how these movies speak to our longing for love.

These movies appeal a deep longing within us— a longing to truly love and be loved, to find a love that will not fail us, leave us, or disregard us. With Jesus, you are part of a real life love story that’s better than any Hallmark movie. It is a love and relationship not dependent on your looks or your charming personality. It’s not based on what you can do for him. It’s about what he does for you. Paul writes in Titus 3:4-7:

(2 Slides) *4 But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, 5 he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, 6 whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, 7 so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.*

Jesus knew every mistake you would ever make. He knows your deepest, darkest secrets. He knows your most embarrassing moments. He knows what you look like with no makeup on, dressed in your favorite sweatpants and ratty old tee shirt.

Even with all of that, his response is “I love you so much and I want to be with you forever.”

Jesus Gave up Everything For You

The third thing that gives Jesus the win over Hallmark is this— Jesus gave up everything for you.

In the Hallmark Movies, the girl always has this awesome job in the big city with a great opportunity for more. She’s a literary agent whose on the verge of signing the big name author that sells millions of books. She’s an attorney that’s about to be made partner. That’s always one of the sources of tension in the story. Will she choose the great career opportunity? Will she leave the small town and go back to the big city to sign the author, to become partner, or will she stay and choose Mr. Rugged and Handsome?

Of course, she ends up giving up all of that to be with the Brawny Man. This is why the woke, feminist crowd loves to hate on Hallmark movies. Why does the girl always have to give up her career to be with him? There are a few where he goes with her to the big city, but not most. Hallmark doesn’t want to mess too much with their recipe. It speaks to a deeper longing for traditional values and traditional family.

But we have a longing for a relationship that’s WORTH giving up everything for. I’m willing to drop everything, to leave anything to have that kind of love, to have that kind of relationship. We want something worth leaving everything.

That’s Jesus. He is that love. He is that relationship that’s worth leaving anything and everything to have. In Matthew 13, Jesus tells a couple of two sentence parables that show you how much he is worth. They are called kingdom parables, because Jesus talks about the kingdom of heaven. That means you’re a part of Jesus’ kingdom. He’s your king. Here’s what Jesus says that’s worth:

(2 Slides) 44 “The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field. 45 “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. 46 When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it.

So, Jesus is worth giving up everything to follow him, but that’s not my point. Here’s where Jesus gets better than any Hallmark movie. Your Savior is so madly in love you, He already gave up EVERYTHING He had for you? His glory, His place in Heaven, the worship of millions of angels, even His life. He gave all of it up for you. Philippians 2 says that Jesus...

(2 slides) Who, being in very nature[a] God,

*did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;
 7 rather, he made himself nothing
 by taking the very nature[b] of a servant,
 being made in human likeness.
 8 And being found in appearance as a man,
 he humbled himself
 by becoming obedient to death—
 even death on a cross!*

You know how the Hallmark movie will end before you ever turn the television on. The Christmas story is much the same. You've heard it so many times, you know how it ends before the sermon even starts. But the original Christmas story is better in every way. Jesus offers more than a Hallmark Christmas movie ever could. A movie filled with fake and fantasy can only stir up the desire in our hearts, but Jesus delights the longing of our souls.

Deep within our hearts is a desire for love and connection and belonging. Hallmark Christmas movies touch on those longings. But have you noticed how the movies never carry on after Christmas. You never get to see real life after the holidays. You don't hear how a couple that fell in love in two weeks suddenly hits bumps in their relationship. No one mentions that relationships are hard and they aren't always hot chocolate, sleigh rides, baking cookies and Christmas concerts.

I know we don't want to watch that stuff in a movie. It's not attractive. It's not fun, and it's boring. If every Hallmark Christmas movie featured a bill paying scene, nobody would watch. We don't want to know about the reality of relationships. We'd rather be swept up in a fantasy reality where love is easy and romance requires no effort from me.

But Christmas, real Christmas is where Jesus entered our reality— in all of its brokenness, in all of its mess, and in all of its boredom, and he transforms our reality, and makes us a part of his.

ⁱ <https://wellwateredwomen.com/what-jesus-offers-that-hallmark-movies-cant/>

ⁱⁱ [This Love Story Is Better Than Hallmark - Drenda Keese Ministries](#)