

What Women Want

(PG13)

Hollywood Jesus: http://www.hollywoodjesus.com/what_women.htm

IMDB: <http://imdb.com/title/tt0207201/>

Directed by

Nancy Meyers

Writing credits (WGA)

Josh Goldsmith (story) &

Cathy Yuspa (story)

Cast overview, first billed only:

Mel Gibson

Helen Hunt

Marisa Tomei

Alan Alda

Ashley Johnson

Mark Feuerstein

Runtime: 127 min

Country: USA

Language: French / English

Color: Color (DeLuxe)

Synopsis

A Chicago advertising executive, Nick Marshall (Mel Gibson) gets a whole new outlook on life when a fluke accident gives him the ability to read women's minds. At first, this 'gift' provides Nick with way too much information, but he begins to realise that he can use it to good effect, especially when it comes to outwitting his new boss (Helen Hunt). 'He has the ability to hear everything women are thinking. Finally... a man is listening!' The film has an enticing title*, but fails to deliver (sorry, guys, for those of you keen to find out!!). It has humour a la Mel Gibson style, but is certainly not the most profound look at the relationship between men and women. [* The film's title is attributed to a comment apparently made by Sigmund Freud before he died, 'What do women want?']

Group discussion

- What are the issues raised in the film?
- What biblical stories and gospel values/truths engage with the film's story?
- What insights do we gain into contemporary society, and the human condition?

Men and women

Nick Marshall is your stereotypical male chauvinist. He tells sexist jokes (definitely not PC - politically correct) and the world seems to revolve around him. He is divorced, and an absentee father to his daughter. Women seem to be goods and chattels for his use, rather than peers to be respected. Definitely a product of a bygone era! But this 'dinosaur' doesn't know he is on the verge of extinction until he has to contend with a new boss - a woman - who sets the advertising personnel the task of finding creative ways to market products for women.

The film's premise is that men and women are fundamentally different (given the obvious physiological differences) as popular books like *Men are from Mars and Women are from Venus* or *What Women Wish Men Knew* (and visa versa) promote. Do all women, and all men, form two homogenous and distinct groupings (ie women have more in common with all other women, and men more in common with men)? In the movie *When Harry met Sally*, the key question was - can men and women be friends, or is it always about sex? Has the women's movement, and the men's movement, helped build bridges of friendship and understanding? Does the Bible distinguish between men and women; if so, in what ways, and for what reasons? Discuss.

Is Helen Hunt's character the 'new woman' to match Mel Gibson's '(sensitive) new (age) man'? Some women have indeed broken through the imaginary 'glass ceiling' which enables them to pursue leadership at the top levels. And yet, *The Advertiser* (5/7/99) reports that surveys of young women under 20 suggest that 70%

think they will find a man who will be the primary breadwinner and will take care of them and their children. In fact, only 8% are likely to be in that category. The Federal Sex Discrimination Commissioner, Susan Halliday, said it was a matter of concern that many teenage girls had an unrealistic view of the future. 'They're of the view they will meet Mr Right and he will financially support them and stay with them. And girls believe they might contribute a smaller part-time income to the household later on in life. In fact, the reality is, most of them will work full time'. Discuss.

Changing Attitudes and Perspectives

Jesus tells Nicodemus (John 3) that one has to be 'born again'. The movie depicts the 'born again' ('death' and 'resurrection') experience Nick undergoes which enables him to see life from a different perspective. His clothes change (from black/dark to white/light) as a visual cue to his changed state of mind, attitudes and behaviour. It highlights that an academic/intellectual approach rarely convinces anyone to change attitudes, perspectives, behaviours and lifestyles. Is 'death'/'resurrection' always needed to change attitudes? Discuss.

The One who knows your inner thoughts

The film is Hollywood fiction. But God does know our thoughts (eg Psalm 139:23; Mt 9:4; Lk 6.8; Lk 11.17; Hebrews 4.12; 1 Cor 3.20) - and yet still loves us! What does this mean in our relationship with God? Discuss.

Caring for others

As if for the first time, Nick notices an office worker and hears her thoughts where she reveals how worthless she feels, and how nobody would miss her if she was gone. How great it would be if in fact we could 'hear' the hurt and pain of others. People are often very good at covering up their emotional pain, until it's too late. Suicide amongst young people is a great concern, with death from suicide now ranked just behind motor vehicle accidents, and one of the highest rates in the world. Although we can't 'hear' what people think (as in the movie), we can be open to the prompting of God's Spirit, and we can be genuinely interested in and listen to other people (and 'read between the lines' in conversations). Discuss.

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