

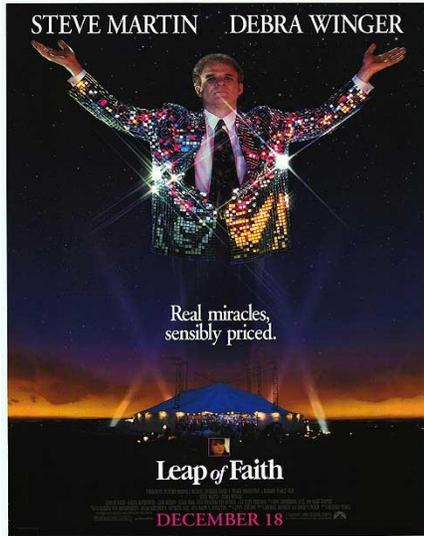
## Leap of Faith

(1992, 1 hour, 42 minutes)

Directed by Richard Pearce

Starring: Steve Martin, Debra Winger, Lolita Davidovich & Liam Neeson

Rated PG-13 for some language



I don't remember when I saw this movie for the first time. I know it was some years ago, and I first watched it because I am a fan of Steve Martin's comedy movies. I wasn't sure what to expect, but I certainly got more than I bargained.

Martin plays a traveling "evangelist" who markets himself as a healer and "prophet" who can read the minds of his audience and perform "miracles." His buses break down in a down-and-out, dust bowl of a town that is enduring drought, and instead of taking a few days off, he decides to conduct his "revival" in town.

Throughout the movie, you see the behind-the-scenes con job that Jonas Nightingale performs in the town, and you also see a whole host of 'gullible' people in the town who are drawn into the spectacle. At one point in the tale, Nightingale says that his

"revival services" are no different from the entertainment that a person could get in a Manhattan Broadway show.

And yet there is something more going on here...

A boy, who became disabled in an accident where his parents die, is befriended by the charlatan and at the end of the movie, the disabled boy walks again, unaided by his crutches and his cane. This actual miracle, which was outside of Jonas' control, causes him, his crew and even the townspeople to wonder about the whole matter.

Martin had studied the miracle working ministries of Peter Popoff and Benny Hinn in preparation for his role. You see the manipulation of people's faith, trusting natures and their hope in something more in this life. The experience was a confrontation between what is real and what is fake when it comes to issues of faith and religious experience.

I went into the movie thinking it would be a couple of hours of entertainment. But theologically, experientially, religiously and spiritually it was much more.

I believe that a genuine faith can be fostered and nurtured, even when the "minister" is not on the up and up. By the way, Paul believed that too.

Paul says, in Philippians 1:15-18, ***"Some indeed preach Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from good will. The latter do it out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. The former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely but thinking to***

***afflict me in my imprisonment. What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice.”***

Yes, there are some who preach out of a selfish motive and out of greed and envy. It is true in our day, and it was true in Paul's day. Paul rejoiced, not in the motives of the preachers, but in the fact that Jesus' name was being proclaimed.

Does it frustrate me that there are preachers and teachers out there who are manipulative, mean-spirited, self-interested, materialistically consumed and driven to take advantage of others? Yes, yes it does.

But it does not negate the one person who hears of Jesus and responds to the inner impulse of the Holy Spirit and responds in genuine faith. The genuineness of an individual's faith is not dependent on the “righteousness” of the preacher.

Thank God!

Watch the movie...and celebrate genuine faith!