

Manchester by the Sea

(2016, 2 hours and 17 minutes)

Directed by: Kenneth Lonergan

Starring: Casey Affleck, Michelle Williams, Kyle Chandler and Lucas Hedges

“Just get over it.”

“Don’t let it bother you.”

“Let it go.”

These phrases have often been said to me (and to others I have known) who have had some difficult experiences and traumatic encounters in life. The basic approach of those that would utter such advice is the belief that, no matter what happens, a person should just let things roll off their back.

For those who find it hard to let things go, this movie was made for you. This movie was nominated for the 2016 Best Picture Academy Award, and Casey Affleck won for Best Actor. He portrays a man who has a hard time getting over it and letting it go.

Trauma of any kind and at any age can haunt a person for life. Sometimes the trauma is self-inflicted; sometimes it is imposed upon a person by outside, uncontrollable forces. Sometimes emotional trauma takes place when relationships become unsafe, and people become abusive and hostile toward an individual.

Lee Chandler (Casey Affleck) is called upon to assume a parental role for his nephew when his brother suddenly passes away. He possesses a very modest apartment in Boston, lives a sheltered and withdrawn life and has a menial, low-paying maintenance job for an apartment building. When the crisis strikes and his nephew (and others) look to him to return to Manchester by the Sea, there is confusion and perhaps even some anger directed toward him when he hesitates.

He is hesitant to return home and fulfill this responsibility because of something that happened. This event, which I won’t spoil the movie by revealing here, is so traumatic that Lee is unable to overcome his emotions and “let it go.” In the end, he leaves Manchester by the Sea and leaves his nephew in the care of others and returns to Boston because the trauma is so strong, so real, so fresh.

I say that this is a movie for those who have had traumatic events in their lives because Lee is a relatable character. And rather than just being told to get over it or let it go, sometimes trauma just has to work itself out on its own timetable. You can’t rush it, and you can’t force it. Sometimes it just hangs there.



Some would say that Christians should just let it go and get over it – and leave the trauma behind. However, I don't think that is always the best. I think the godliest thing we can do is learn to live with the trauma and integrate the pain into our lives and learn to live in the face of that suffering.

The movie is intense and certainly has adult themes and language. As we were going into the movie, my daughter said that it is an Affleck movie, so it is going to have lots of cursing – and it certainly did. But it did not distract from the deep emotion that was present. In fact, the trauma may have even lent itself to some very profane thoughts and words.

One can only imagine what Lee's life would be like after the movie ends. All we know is that he is doing the best that he can in coping with the trauma of his life. May it be so with us that we learn to live, the best that we can with the pain that we endure.

And the next time who see someone who isn't doing what you think they should do, remember that they may be dealing with a trauma about which you know nothing. Extend to these persons your understanding and some grace.