

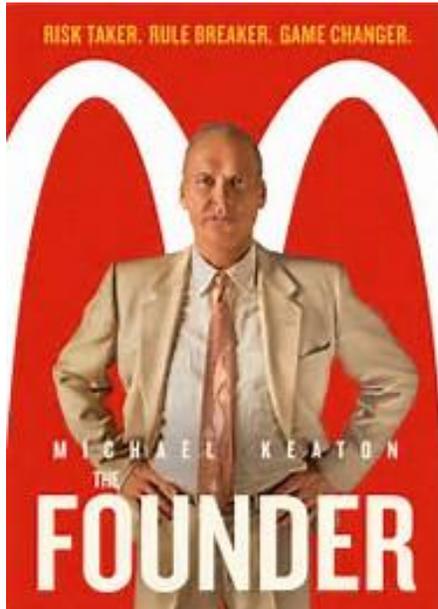
The Founder

(2016, 1 hour and 55 minutes)

Directed by: John Lee Hancock

Starring: Michael Keaton, Nick Offerman, John Carroll Lynch

Rated: PG-13



What constitutes an American success story?

The content of this movie is an answer to that question.

I must confess, at the outset, that I have worked at McDonalds several times during my life (my first job at 16) and a couple of times while in college and seminary (to put food on the table). I enjoyed my time at McDonalds...I liked the fast pace, the affirmation and responsibility on the job, the interaction with customers and employees. I imagine if I had not gone into ministry that I could have easily made a career at McD's.

I had heard of Ray Kroc, the iconic "founder" of McDonalds, who this bio-epic is about. The common story is told of a middle-aged, spindle shake machine salesman who aspired to something more and something greater.

The movie is an incredibly honest look at a man who moved from anonymity to great heights, motivated by an unbridled ambition. It looks at Ray Kroc, successes and failures, strengths and weaknesses, virtues and foibles.

Ray begins by discovering the McDonald brothers, Dick and Mac, who operated a hamburger stand in San Bernardino, California. He saw their "Speedee" system in making, packaging and selling hamburgers and he was enamored. He took it all in and he entered into an agreement with the McDonald brothers to begin to franchise the McDonald's restaurant.

In the process of moving the franchise operation from a small family operation to an international corporation a transformation occurs. Over the course of the next several years, you see is Ray Kroc doing whatever he can to expand the operation and increase his own affluence and influence. During the movie, Ray tells one of the brothers he is in business with, "If I saw a competitor drowning, the last thing I would do is go over and rescue him." This demonstrates his cutthroat approach to advancing his business enterprise.

By the end of the movie, Kroc has taken advantage of the McDonald brothers and broken his financial and verbal agreements with them. He has divorced his wife to marry the wife of one of his franchise operator's wives. He secretly mortgaged his home without telling his wife about the debt he was taking on. He became obsessed with growing the corporation, the franchises and expanding his empire.

And what he did simply worked.

If you watch the movie, I will tell you that you probably will not like Ray the man or, perhaps, even Kroc the businessman. Keaton plays the part with near acting perfection. You really get a sense (in comparison to the interviews with Ray Kroc at the end of the movie) how much Keaton captures his persona and his approach.

This is an American success story but...

It is not a Christian success story. You have the image of a man who was willing to do anything in this dog-eat-dog world and he succeeded in terms of money, position, prestige and political/social influence. Yet, as a believer in Jesus Christ, I am struck that he became so hungry for power and wealth that he sacrificed his character and his relationships to get ahead.

This is a great American story...but a sad personal story when it comes to living out the gospel ethic. I was entertained by the movie, the storyline and the acting. It was a great story that brought me into it and I identified with the McDonald brothers and to a degree, even Ray.

But I also watch the movie as a cautionary tale. I could choose to do things Kroc's way or Christ's way – but don't think that they are the same.