



A KNIGHT'S TALE

Rated: PG-13 • **Running Time:** 2 hours, 12 minutes

Starring: Heath Ledger as William Thatcher; Rufus Sewell as Count Adhemar; Shannyn Sossamon as Jocelyn; Paul Bettany as Geoffrey Chaucer; Mark Addy as Roland; Alan Tudyk as Wat; Laura Fraser as Kate

Director: Brian Helgeland

Themes: Nobility of birth vs. noble character, redemption, mercy, friendship, honesty, sportsmanship, bravery, the father-son bond, competing with integrity

Cautions: About a dozen profanities. Twice, Chaucer is

shown naked (rear and side) after having lost his clothes gambling, though the nudity is not sexualized. One of Jocelyn's dresses reveals cleavage. Alcohol is consumed at a pub. There's an implied sexual encounter between the romantic leads—a real disappointment but one that parents should be able to turn to their advantage during discussion time. Most of the modern music infused into the film is fine, but hit the stop button just as the final scene fades into the end credits and the bawdy lyrics to AC/DC's "You Shook Me All Night Long." This film is best viewed by older teens and adults.



Story Summary

Arena rock meets 14th-century Europe in this breezy, offbeat blend of *Rocky*, *Grease* and *Robin Hood*. As the film opens, a trio of squires tries in vain to rouse their liege, an aging knight who has passed away mid-tournament. With victory so close—and their stomachs so empty—they suit up one of their own, who poses as their master and proceeds to win first prize. Trouble is, William Thatcher is a peasant. Only men of noble birth can compete. But once William has tasted competition, he wants more. So he convinces his partners, Roland and Wat, to join him in a grand deception. Together they will tour the jousting circuit and make their fortune as William fulfills his boyhood dream of knighthood by masquerading as a nobleman.

Roland: You're not of noble birth!

William: So we lie. How did the nobles become noble in the first place, huh? They took it at the tip of a sword. I'll do it with a lance.

Wat: A blunted lance.

William: No matter, Wat, a man can change his stars. And I won't spend the rest of my life as nothing.

Some training follows, then it's off to their first true test. On the road, William (aka Sir Ulrich von Lichtenstein of Gelderland) and his squires encounter Geoff Chaucer. Yes, *that* Chaucer. He's filthy and naked, the result of a gambling problem that has cost him the clothes off his back. He offers to forge the medieval equivalent of a birth certificate for William (proof of nobility needed at check-in), and becomes the team's herald. Chaucer is an endearing comic sidekick, an anachronistic cross between William Shakespeare and the pro-wrestling announcer who bellows, "Let's get ready to rummmble!" They also meet Kate, a

feisty female blacksmith who rounds out William's lance-handling, armor-repairing pit crew.

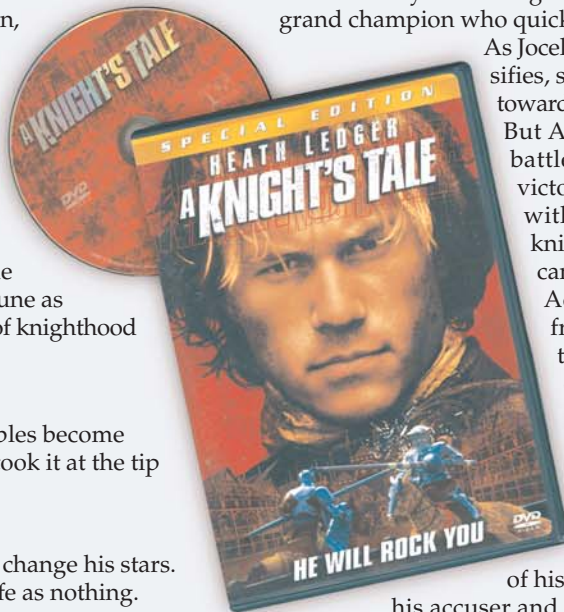
A fair maiden named Jocelyn catches William's eye. Unfortunately, she also turns the head of Count Adhemar, the dastardly black knight, military leader and jousting grand champion who quickly becomes William's nemesis.

As Jocelyn's affection for William intensifies, so does Adhemar's animosity toward him. A showdown is inevitable. But Adhemar gets called away to battle, leaving William to rack up victories, woo Jocelyn and reunite with his blind father in the evil knight's absence. Before the rivals can go mano a mano, the seething Adhemar learns of William's fraud and exposes him, leading to an excellent (if unintentional) cinematic parallel of Christ's redemption of mankind.

The jig is up. Authorities are closing in. William's friends urge him to flee, but the young man nobly refuses to run from the consequences

of his sin. He is arrested, mocked by his accuser and put in a pillory to face public ridicule. Guilty as charged. No chance of escape. Then the one man with the authority to pardon him steps out of the crowd. It's the heir to the throne of England. Based on an earlier encounter with William, the prince sees fit to wipe the slate clean, and goes a step further by bestowing on him a title of nobility contestable by no man. This allows William to battle—and defeat—Adhemar legitimately.

What a terrific illustration of Jesus' intervention on our behalf. Unable to escape sin, we all face judgment and humiliation at the hand of our accuser, Satan. There's no escape apart from a royal pardon by the only One with the





authority to release us and dub us holy, Jesus Christ. It is because of our previous relationship with the King of kings that, at the time of judgment, He will step forth and intercede. And Christ's uncontestable decree allows us to legitimately defeat death.

Before You Watch

- Attend a Renaissance festival, or do a little research on that period. The more teens know about the actual music and dress of 14th-century England, the better they'll appreciate how the filmmakers infused modern elements to create a quirky clash of cultures.
- Since the Chaucer character is loosely based on the famous author of *The Canterbury Tales* (a book read in many high school literature classes), familiarize yourself with the real poet and his well-known work.

Bible Bookmarks Prov. 3:5-6, 17:17; Isa. 5:20, 55:6-7; Matt. 5:7, 9:9-13, 28:18; John 15:13; Rom. 5:6-11, 6:23; 1 Cor. 6:18-20, 10:23-11:1; 2 Cor. 5:16-19; 1 Thes. 4:3-5; Heb. 13:4; 1 Pet. 2:9-10; Rev. 12:10

Talking Points

1 A basic theme of the film is that noble birth is less important than noble behavior, and that William's knightly character is what makes him heroic. List the things he does that are truly virtuous. Point out that lying about his heritage and sleeping with Jocelyn were *not* noble, yet the latter is almost treated as a grand accomplishment rather than a moral failure. Discuss these things in light of 1 Corinthians 6:18-20, Hebrews 13:4, 1 Thessalonians 4:3-5 and Isaiah 5:20.

2 Upon being exposed as a fraud, William chooses to stick around and face the music. Ask teens how they feel about his decision. Was it the right thing to do? Would you have done the same or heeded Will's friends' advice? For that matter, would you have been tempted to commit the deception in the first place? Why or why not?

3 Explore the spiritual parallels between the prince's pardon of William and Jesus Christ's rescue of sinners saved by grace. Use verses such as Isaiah 55:6-7, 2 Corinthians 5:16-19, Romans 5:6-11 and 6:23, 1 Peter 2:9-10, Revelation 12:10 and Matthew 28:18.

4 Examine how the friends all pitch in to help William write a love letter, fix his armor and prepare him for the dance. How does such loyalty and selflessness—especially following William's arrest—reflect Proverbs 17:17 and John 15:13?

5 Adhemar equates William's display of mercy with weakness. Conversely, Jocelyn finds William all the more attractive for it. Read Matthew 5:7 and 9:9-13 for a better understanding of God's view of mercy.

6 Talk about the film's references to God, Jesus, the church and the Bible. Would you agree that the reverence they show is above-average for movies today? Why or why not?

7 Teenagers will no doubt identify with the giddy awkwardness William feels upon meeting Jocelyn. Tell your teen about a time when you might have felt that way about someone. Invite them to do the same. Take a moment to make a distinction between love-at-first-sight infatuation and the kind of character-based love and commitment that endures.

8 When William talks of "changing his stars," what does he mean? Is each life fatalistically mapped out in the cosmos as some astrologers might suggest, or do we have the freedom to chart our own destiny? Read Proverbs 3:5-6 and 1 Corinthians 10:23-11:1 to see how God wants to help His children plot their course.

9 Ask teens if they think William's dad did the right thing by sending him off to serve as a squire. On one hand, it was Will's ticket out and a chance to get closer to his dream. On the other hand, father and son missed important years in their relationship.

Follow-Up Activity

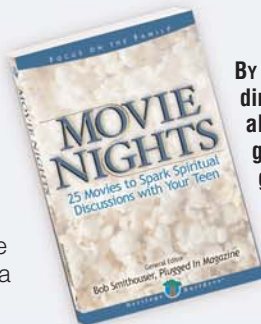
Christian teens can use their newfound perspective on the film's closing scenes to share the Gospel with unsaved friends familiar with the movie (which has seen a revival with Ledger's passing). It can be a non-confrontational witnessing tool. Ask teens if there's someone they have been praying for who would benefit from such a discussion. For adolescents who see the value in it but lack the confidence to proceed, invite them to practice on you.

Just for Fun

Making movies can be dangerous business. The *A Knight's Tale* DVD commentary by writer/director Brian Helgeland shows the filmmaker minus a front tooth, which was accidentally knocked out by star Heath Ledger when the pair were demonstrating a joust with broom handles.

—by Bob Smithouser

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—**Movie Nights**

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