

REMEMBER THE TITANS

Rated: PG • **Running Time:** 1 hour, 54 minutes

Starring: Denzel Washington as Herman Boone; Will Patton as Bill Yoast; Ryan Hurst as Bertier; Wood Harris as Julius; Donald Faison as Petey; with Kip Pardue, Kate Bosworth, Ryan Gosling and Hayden Panettiere
Director: Boaz Yakin

Themes: Racism, teamwork, pride, unity, putting aside ambition and

jealousy for the greater good, loyalty, responding to discrimination, coping with a disability

Cautions: A half-dozen mild profanities. Bigots refer to Boone as Coach Coon (the film's most egregious racial slur). During some locker-room shenanigans, a plucky new player plants a kiss on a repulsed Bertier, which leads to speculation about the boy's sexual preference.

Story Summary

Peter Schneider, former chair of Walt Disney Studios, described his introduction to *Remember the Titans* as follows: "[Producer] Jerry Bruckheimer brought it to me and I said, 'Take out all the swear words.' In the script, every third word was the n-word, every fourth word was the f-word, and every sixth word was the s-word." Not anymore. What remains is an inspirational film suitable for family viewing. It's the true story of a city ravaged by racism in 1971, the newly integrated football team at the epicenter of the tension, and how those athletes eventually overcame prejudice to unite the community.

Redistricting turns lily-white TC Williams high school of Alexandria, Virginia, into a melting pot of flesh tones. Aggravating things further, Herman Boone, a black journeyman football coach from North Carolina, is handed the head coaching position, displacing beloved white coach Bill Yoast in a case of affirmative action. Most whites in Alexandria find it unfair, while the black residents cheer Boone's presence. Yoast, tempted to leave the school, humbly accepts a demotion in hopes of protecting "his boys." After receiving a chilly reception from coach Yoast and white students protecting their turf, Boone promises that "the best player will play; color won't matter." However, that assurance isn't enough to earn the confidence of white players or ease the anger and distrust the black athletes feel towards their white teammates.

Boone's coaching ability is tested immediately when the Titans head out of town for preseason training camp. Infighting inhibits the team's progress. Then a turning point occurs when Boone escorts his team to a grave site from the Battle of Gettysburg, where he delivers a persuasive speech on unity. The team realizes that winning is contingent upon how well they cooperate.

As the camp reaches its end, players bond over Motown tunes. Friendships begin to form, especially between leaders on the defensive side of the ball, Bertier and Julius. The Titans return

to Alexandria ready to fight for the state championship.

Another fundamental clash involves the coaching styles of Boone and Yoast. Boone is an ambitious drill sergeant less concerned about his players' enjoyment of the game than their mastery of his pared-down playbook. His word is law. He refuses to tolerate failure, and isn't above humiliating undisciplined athletes. Yoast, on the other hand, has a soft spot for trick plays, and is quick to protect his players' self-esteem.

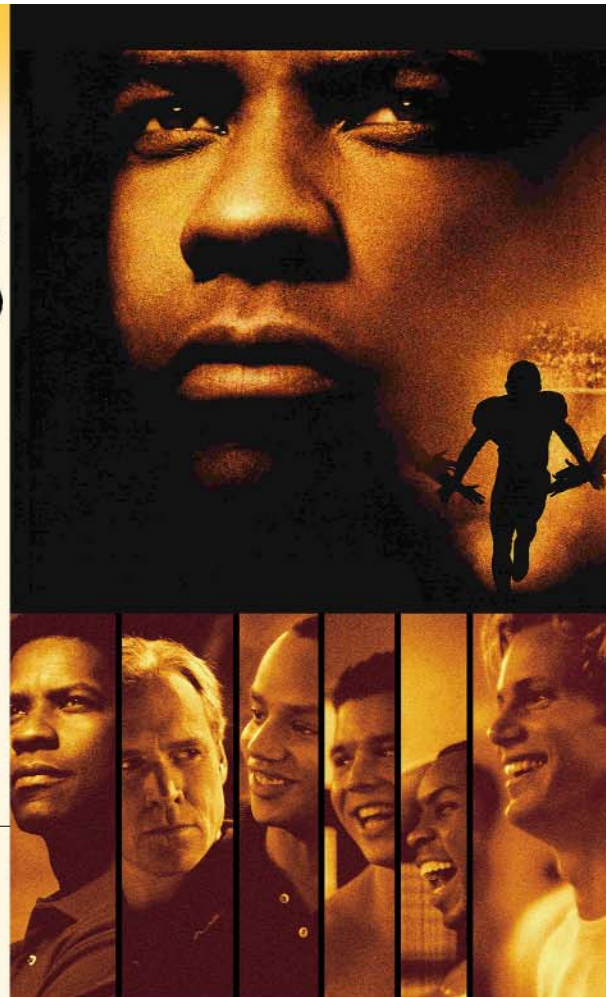
Boone: You think you're doing these boys a favor taking 'em aside every time I come down on 'em—protectin' 'em from big bad Boone. You're cuttin' my legs from under me.

Yoast: Some of the boys just don't respond well to public criticism. I tell them what they need to know, but I don't humiliate them in front of the team.

Boone: ... I may be a mean cuss, but I'm the same mean cuss with everybody out there on that football field. ... You ain't doing these kids a favor by patronizing 'em. You're cripplin' 'em. You're cripplin' 'em for life.

Despite winning their first game against the Hayfield Hawks, the Titans still must battle racist attitudes in the community (someone throws a rock through Boone's living room window) and occasional division amongst themselves (a bigoted blocker intentionally lets a defender flatten his black quarterback). Meanwhile, Boone learns that losing a single game will cost him his job. In fact, a pivotal matchup finds the referees instructed to cheat so that the Titans will fall, only to have Yoast stand up against the fix, jeopardizing his pending hall-of-fame induction in an attempt to do the right thing.

Tragedy strikes the club just before the state championship. Bertier is paralyzed from the waist down in a car



accident. It's a bittersweet turn of events. While Bertier—who refuses to wallow in self-pity—finds himself permanently sidelined, the crisis shows us just how close Bertier and Julius have grown, and how Bertier's mother and girlfriend have learned to let go of racial prejudice. After the Titans overcome a halftime deficit to win the championship, Yoast and Boone hoist the game ball together as Boone tells his partner, "You're a hall-of-famer in my book!"

Before You Watch

Christian music as far back as "Jesus Loves the Little Children" has taught us that God views everyone equally, regardless of skin color. A wonderful modern example is "Colored People," a song by dc Talk that appears on the trio's *Jesus Freak* and *Intermission: The Greatest Hits* CDs ("This thing of beauty is the passion of an artist's heart/ By God's design, we are a skin kaleidoscope"). Listen to "Colored People" and read through its smart lyrics together as a primer for the racial issues you'll face in the film.

Bible Bookmarks

Lev. 18:22; Acts 3-4; Rom. 1:26-27, 8:28; 1 Cor. 1:10; Gal. 3:26-29; Eph. 4:1-16

Talking Points

1 In Acts 3 and 4 we see the quiet, contemplative John paired with the bold, tactless Peter. Obviously, God sees value in teaming unlike personalities. How does this compare with the tense partnership between Boone and Yoast? In life, how can God help opposites overcome differences and complement each other?

2 Have you ever been teamed with someone who was so unlike you that you wondered if you would be able to work together? What if that person hated you? How would you handle it? Would you retreat or work it out? How have you handled situations like this in the past?

3 Coach Boone tells his players, "We will be perfect in every aspect of the game." Why is being well-rounded in skill and discipline important? How does that relate to our spiritual lives?

4 Imagine a world without racial diversity. Would there still be conflict? Why or why not? Introduce Galatians 3:26-29 and Ephesians 4:1-16 as calls to Christian unity.

5 Sunshine seems to be joking around when he plants a kiss on Bertier. But what if he's not? How does God feel about homosexuality (Lev. 18:22, Rom. 1:26-27)? Would it be fair to compare gender preferences to race in a film about diversity and prejudice?

6 Contrast the coaching styles and motivational tactics of Boone and Yoast. Which do you respect more and why? Have you known or played for a coach like either of these men?

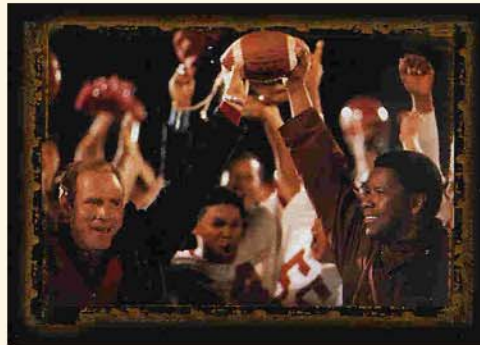
7 Coach Yoast, through no fault of his own, sees his position handed to someone else purely on the basis of race. Such reverse discrimination is an example of the

injustices sometimes committed in an attempt to compensate for society's past mistakes. Do you feel that's ever appropriate if it serves to advance a noble social cause? Discuss Yoast's decision to put aside bitterness, jealousy and selfish ambition for the good of the team.

8 Following his accident, Bertier tells Yoast, "Y'know, I've been reading up on the activities they've got for people in wheelchairs and such. They got Olympics." Read between the lines. What was he *really* saying? Take a look at Romans 8:28, and discuss how Christians are uniquely equipped to resist self-pity and gain perspective on tragedy.

9 References to Christianity appear throughout the story. Does the film score or fumble in its varied portrayals of people of faith? (Examples range from self-righteous bigotry by religious people to players singing gospel songs and respecting "Rev".)

10 Talk about Boone's statement in the graveyard, "Hatred destroyed my family. You listen and take a lesson from the dead. If we don't come together right now on this hallowed ground, we too will be destroyed just like they were. I don't care if you like each other or not, but you will respect each other." What did he mean?



Follow-Up Activity

Introduce your teen to modern-day heroes of the faith who've suffered physical tragedies, as Bertier did, and emerged victorious. Shining examples include quadriplegic author, speaker and artist Joni Eareckson Tada (visit joniandfriends.org), former major league baseball player Dave Dravecky, whose career was cut short by cancer and the eventual amputation of his pitching arm

(endurance.org), and competitive surfer Bethany Hamilton, who staged a comeback after losing her arm in a shark attack as a teenager (bethanyhamilton.com). All have turned their trials into opportunities to be used by God.

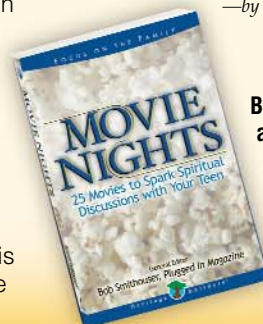
For a closer look at the real-life coaches behind this story, don't miss the DVD bonus feature "Remember the Titans: An Inspirational Journey Behind the Scenes," hosted by NFL hall-of-famer Lynn Swann.

Just for Fun

Observant football fans may notice a goof at the end of the Titans' first victory. The game-winning touchdown comes when a Hayfield receiver is tackled, coughs up the ball and a Titan runs it in for the score. One problem: The player doesn't reverse field. He races into the wrong end zone. Oops!

—by Bob Smithouser

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BY THE BOOK: "We have a brief window, usually when our children are between the ages of 13 and 18, to watch and discuss mature-minded movies together, before they're out on their own. The key is to use movies with which you feel comfortable in a controlled setting."

—*Movie Nights*