Overcomer Movie

Guests: Alex Kendrick and Cameron Arnett
From the series: Overcomer Movie (Day 1 of 1)
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Bob: Actor, director, and screenwriter Alex Kendrick says that Hollywood studios have a pretty good idea, when they release a movie, how much money they think that film is going to make.

Alex: They have a formula for every type of movie, and they even shared a lot of it. They said, “You tell us who is in the movie, who is directing it, and what the budget is; and we have a formula for how well it should do.” So, for ours, they said, “We have no formula.” [Laughter] So—and I love that because God doesn’t need our formula. [Applause]

Audience: Amen.

Alex: Yes; not to be disrespectful. We are very grateful that the Lord has given us favor to use this 76-country pipeline of distribution, but we are going to do what the Lord tells us to do.

Bob: This is FamilyLife Today for Friday, August 23rd. Our hosts are Dave and Ann Wilson; I’m Bob Lepine. We’re going to talk about the new movie, Overcomer, that comes out in theaters today—a movie for which there is no formula. We’re going to talk with Alex Kendrick and one of the stars of the movie, Cameron Arnett, today. Stay with us.

And welcome to FamilyLife Today. Thanks for joining us on the Friday edition. Big day—it’s opening day for our friends, Alex and Stephen and Shannon Kendrick, the Kendrick brothers. They have a movie coming out today called Overcomer, which I’ve seen; but you haven’t.

Ann: I can’t wait to see it.

Bob: Yes.

Dave: You know what, Bob? We are movie people.

Bob: You like going to the movies?
Ann: Yes.

Dave: So, we'll be sitting in the front row tonight with our big, jumbo popcorn—[Laughter]

Ann: Yes; I can't wait.

Dave: —with butter.

Bob: Well, you may need to get there early—

Dave: Yes.

Bob: —because there is a lot of buzz about this film. As I said, I've seen it; it really is a great film. We had a chance to screen this for an audience on board the Love Like You Mean It marriage cruise, back in February.

What we're going to do today—we're going to hear from Alex Kendrick, who is the star of the film; he is also the screenwriter and the director—and one of the actors in the film. We talked with them after the screening. Let's just dive in and listen to the conversation we had after the audience had seen the film, Overcomer, which, again, is in theaters today.

[Previous Interview]

Bob: So, I am here with an audience that has just seen a screening of the movie that's coming out this weekend, Overcomer. What did you guys think of the movie?

Audience: Woo! [Applause]

Bob: And I have with me the screenwriter, the director, and the star of the movie, Alex Kendrick. [Applause] So, congratulations; great film.

Alex: Oh, man! What a crowd! I wish all of them could be like you! [Laughter]

Bob: I first heard you talking about this film and the idea for this film years ago.

Alex: Right.

Bob: How does a movie go from an idea—how does the idea you get in your head and how do you decide, “That's the one that needs to be a movie”?

Alex: We have many ideas, just among the brothers, and then we get thousands of ideas from other people. What we tend to do is—we go through a season of prayer,
saying, “God, what direction do we go in?” After a season, He usually says, “This is the direction,” and He gives us a theme and a message; so we begin pursuing that.

This one originated in 2011, even before War Room. It was in the incubator all this time; so the Lord would say, “Okay; now is the time.” It’s interesting to be how the Lord will prepare us to address a theme. Right now I would not have known in 2019 how our culture’s dealing with identity but the Lord knew. So we made this film about identity and God’s timing is perfect.

**Bob:** Did you just wake up one morning from a dream about a cross-country runner? How did—I mean, where does that come from?

**Alex:** Well, the first time I had the imagery for a cross-country runner was in 2011. I didn’t know what to do with it. Sometimes the Lord will give me something and I’ll be like well, that’s interesting. But after we did War Room and started praying, all these pieces started coming back. I was like, “Oh!” It’s like the Lord gives you 350 pieces of a puzzle but you don’t really see it come together until the season He wants you to do it.

**Bob:** You had an idea for a movie about cross-country; then, this overlap of identity.

**Alex:** Yes.

**Bob:** How did that get layered in?—where did that come from?

**Alex:** The identity portion came about a year-and-a-half ago, where I felt the Lord tugging on our hearts—and Stephen and Shannon—tugging on our hearts to talk about the fact that the Creator should be the One that gets to define His creation. When the rest of the world is saying, “Oh, it’s whatever I feel like”; or what culture says; or these back-and-forth waves of emotion that are going through our culture, ultimately, you have to have an anchor for your identity.

The Lord says, “When you find your identity in Me—because I created you—you are the fullest version of yourself.” We want people to find themselves in Christ, who died for them/who loves them. When we find ourselves in Christ and live that way, that is the best version of ourselves—really, the only real version of ourselves, I would say.

**Bob:** People are always curious about the casting of these films. Your process is a little different than the normal Hollywood casting process.

**Alex:** We ask everyone who wants to be in our film, “Is there anything in your life that would prevent God from blessing your work on this movie?” Because you cannot duplicate the favor of God. He either gives it or He doesn’t. So we seek after that. We want the people that He wants in the movie. Part of that is having people who truly believe in the message that we are presenting. It’s not a gig for them. So when you see Thomas in the movie talking about identity and talking about his relationship with God it
doesn’t come from just an acting role. It comes from his heart. Now, he is a good actor on top of that but we love the fact that the people—Priscilla Shirer, Cameron Arnett, and the young lady who plays Hannah all of them are believers and we love that that comes across on the screen.

**Bob:** Hannah is the heart of the movie. Tell us about where you found her and how you found her.

**Alex:** That is Aryn Wright-Thompson. She’s a 15-year-old girl from North Carolina. She came and auditioned. Her mother had just gone through heart surgery and she was at a very tender place trying to trust God with what’s going to happen to my mom when she came to auditions.

When she did the scene in the film where she does the speech and drama class, “The Who Am I” speech. Which is one of my favorite scenes in the movie. When she did that we about fell out of our chair because it was 100 percent authentic. When we asked about it she shared her testimony on how she learning to walk with God and she wanted to give God any desire to act and any skill she has. That won us over. Of course, we prayed about it as well. The Lord confirmed pretty quickly this is my one.

The man who plays Thomas Hill—I met at NRB a little over a year ago.

**Bob:**—National Religious Broadcasters.

**Alex:** Yes.

**Bob:** Yes.

**Alex:** He is an ordained minister. He has been an actor for some time and is just—he is just ready for his breakout role. He loves the Lord, and I hope it is this one.

**Bob:** Well, would you like to meet Cameron Arnett? [Applause] Cameron, come on up here.

**Cameron:** They put me in the hot seat. [Laughter]

**Bob:** You saw the movie for the first time.

**Cameron:** First time, yesterday.

**Bob:** What was it like for you to watch this film for the first time?

**Cameron:** Well, you saw the result—I came up on stage and could not speak; I’m rarely speechless. It just wowed me to see it for the first time—to realize what God did. As
Alex was saying—the coordination/how God puts things together—you cannot deny. To see the final result on the screen, I’m as blown away as anybody else is.

**Bob:** When you bumped into Alex Kendrick at the National Religious Broadcasters convention—[Laughter]—you’re an actor; you’re familiar with the Kendrick brothers/their movies. There had to be a little voice inside of you going, “Oh, don’t blow this, man”; right? [Laughter]

**Cameron:** I’m part of a group called ICVM, so we had to be at NRB. I’m at the hotel, and God/the Holy Spirit is prompting me—I mean, all day long: “Go. Go to the other hotel; go to the other hotel.” I don’t, and I’m tired. Finally, I said, “Okay,”—I decided.

I get out of my hotel, get in the car, drive over. As I am getting on the escalator—I put my foot on the platform—and I hear, “Cameron Arnett!” I shook; I’m looking at Alex. I’m thinking, “Did Alex Kendrick just yell my name?”

**Bob:** —“just call my name?!”

**Cameron:** Right? He said: “Oh, I’m—what are you doing in the next ten minutes? What are you doing in the next ten?” I’m thinking to myself—you know how you watch the video—and I’m saying: “Dude, my feet are going to be planted right here; okay? I don’t care what you’re doing. I’ll be here when you come out.” He came out, and we went to eat something. Basically, he told me the whole story. I’m crying while he’s telling me this story; at the same time, thinking, “God, what are You doing?”

**Bob:** Yes; your acting goes back a couple of decades.

**Cameron:** Correct.

**Bob:** So, *Star Trek: The Next Generation*—

**Cameron:** —*The Next Generation*.

**Bob:** Right? So, yes; yes; somebody going, “I remember him in that”; yes. [Applause] *Doogie Howser*.

**Cameron:** *Doogie Howser, China Beach, Miami Vice*—all the above.

**Bob:** How did you get into the business, and were you a Christian back then?

**Cameron:** I—you know how we are—I knew about God, but I didn’t know God like I know Him now.

**Bob:** Right.
**Cameron:** So, back in college, I was a pre-med/pre-law student in college. I answered an ad during the summer for the first time: “Models and actors wanted”—that kind of thing. I wanted to do something just for fun that was different, so I entered that competition; and I ended up winning. I ended up entering another ten competitions and won eight out of ten. It kind of started to take off; so I moved out of the whole realm of the doctor and all that stuff I had in my mind, which I really didn’t want to do anyway. [Laughter]

I ended up in New York; I ended up in California, doing all these episodic roles. I went to/I was at—in Toronto, Canada. I was doing a movie of the week. From that, I came back to California. They called me in for my first television series, which would have been my starring role. I got the role; everything was fine. I’m auditioning against all these other people that you know.

Right before I signed on the dotted line, they said, “Oh, by the way, we want you to do partial-body nudity.” This was when, you know, cable and regular TV were really at odds with each other; TV is trying to keep up with cable. When they told me that, you know, I felt that little tap on the shoulder by God, saying, “It’s time to get out of the system.”

**Bob:** Wow!

**Cameron:** When I told them that I couldn’t do it, they said, “Well, you know, we’ll give you a body double.” When they gave me the body double, the Lord said to me, “Well, you have to even shun the appearance of evil or people will think it is you.”

**Bob:** Wow.

**Cameron:** So, I left everything; I chose Christ. [Applause] You know, I ended up sleeping in the back room of a woman, who was on welfare. I lost a big house, Mercedes—everything. I went to teach at a small church; God said, “If you really believe Me, go do that.” I started teaching at a small church, and people started to live; the church started to thrive. God called me to that, and I went to full-time ministry for like 16/17 years.

I left California, came to Atlanta, met this beautiful woman over here—where did she go? Oh, there she is! That’s my beautiful, lovely—[Applause]—God’s gift to me. We got married; started two different churches, left the—never thought I’d be doing this again—around 2013, God sent us back into the Christian side of things. I’ve been doing Christian films ever since. This is probably about my 15th Christian film.

When Alex said, “Cameron Arnett,” I knew my life had changed. That’s—you know, I’m still kind of reeling, because it’s still surreal to me.

**Bob:** You [Alex] come up to a weekend like this weekend, and you can’t do anything at this point to affect what happens this weekend.
Alex: Pray. [Laughter] We can pray.

Bob: Do you find—do you find your identity connected to what's going to happen this weekend?

Alex: Perfect question because I even asked myself when the Lord said, “This is the path you are going to take on identity.” I had to ask myself, “If I am never allowed to do another movie, or act, or direct, or even another book again, do I still know who I am?” because most of us put our identity in what we do, or in our position, or some measure of success; but the Lord says, “You put your identity in Me first.”

When my identity is in Christ, and that is my foundation, everything else on top of that may shift or change; but I should still know who I am because I find myself in Christ; and Jesus doesn’t change; right? So, He is my rock. Even for me, making this movie, I went back and I had to ask myself: “Is my identity in the correct order?—the Lord is first; He is my foundation—then I’m a husband and a father—and then I’m a filmmaker, and author, and all these other things.”

When it’s in the right order, and life does allow things to change—we all go through ups and downs—but when my identity is in Christ, that shouldn’t change.

Cameron: Amen; amen.

Bob: And you can say that, here, on this side of this weekend; but if I call you Monday—[Laughter]

Alex: Yes.

Bob: —and—

Alex: —it didn’t do well.

Bob: —it does not do as well as you’d hoped—

Alex: —then I should have the same answer: “Praise God!” either way: “I’m still saved. He is still my Savior. I still know where my eternal home is and where my value lies.” [Applause]

Bob: There was a scene in the film that, as I watched it, I thought, “In terms of plot and development, you probably could have taken that scene out, but you left it in.” The scene I’m thinking of is the scene where you and your wife have conflict in the film.

Alex: That’s right.
Bob: Why did you decide, “I want that scene to stay in this film”?  

Alex: Yes; that’s a great question. I’m going to admit to you—I have multiple motives. The first one is to tackle identity—for John’s side, his identity—and the Lord is allowing this—his identity is crumbling. All the things I was grabbing hold of to be a successful basketball coach are being ripped away until his team is ripped away, and he has no season; there is no team anymore.

So, now, he has to do something he doesn’t want to do; he has no confidence in and doesn’t see any way to win. For a guy to be told, “This is what you have to do, but there is no way to win,”—wow; that’s frustrating—[Laughter]—really frustrating. So, he’s discouraged.

Now, in the scene with his wife—and his wife comes out to talk to him—he, essentially, is a jerk to his wife because he’s so down. His wife comes back out to talk to him. She could have played the card of: “You owe me an apology”; because he did owe her an apology—right?—but she doesn’t do that. She plays the love card instead.

The scene is cute, because she comes out there. First, she sits across from him—about eight feet across. Then she scoots up until she’s about four feet across. He’s thinking, “Okay; don’t get in my space.” [Laughter] Then she comes right in his space, as a woman would do,—[Laughter]

Bob: Yes.

Alex: —right up next to him. Once she invades his space, and he’s ready for another argument, she doesn’t go there.

Bob: Yes.

Alex: She doesn’t pull out the ammunition. She plays the love card, and it makes him melt. That is a reminder to me, even when I was working on it, of sometimes how marriage should be. Even when you have ammunition against your spouse, sometimes, you drop it; you play the love card.

Bob: That’s why I loved that scene/loved the fact that it was still in the film. What I really loved was how you ended that scene, with two boys watching mom and dad. [Applause]

Alex: You know, that’s a great point. We wanted to show that in the movie, where there are two sons in the movie—see them fight and, then, see them make up. Wow; more than your words—when we display to our children how to love, that makes a bigger impact.

Bob: I also thought—and again, because I’m looking at marriage and parenting every time I watch movies like this—here are two kids facing disappointment. Instead of
having these kids spin out into the wrong behavior, as kids will often do when they experience disappointment, you had these two young men step up and be godly young men in the midst of this. It was refreshing to watch them do that.

**Alex:** Yes; so, you know, the older son, who was wanting a basketball scholarship—and he’s a senior when his team is lost—at first, he is selfish and discouraged; but then—and he even tries to run cross country—he realizes: “Wow! This is not for me. This is way harder than I thought”; but he can do something.

**Bob:** Yes.

**Alex:** He realizes: “My parents still love me. My performance on the court or off the court is not going to change my parents’ love. What can I do?” He begins to come out and support and love Hannah who, initially, has no support. He gets some other citizens to do the same thing, which is a very unselfish act.

**Bob:** We have to, again, in the midst of this, just remind viewers this is an important weekend. A lot of folks will see something like this come out; and they’ll say: “We’ll catch this in a couple of weeks,” or “We’ll catch this when it comes out on DVD or on TV.” That’s all fine; but if you want to see movies like this in theaters, this is where we need to come out and support a film like this.

**Alex:** This is one of the reasons why—if you are hoping it impacts as many people as possible, there is what they call “Chase money at the ready.” When the movie comes out in a certain number of theaters, if it hits a certain mark of performance that weekend, the chase money is activated; the theaters expand, and they include more cities and even more territories overseas.

So, if you’re hoping this impacts even more areas—that it starts more conversations on identity; more people hear Priscilla Shirer walk somebody through the plan of salvation—then support it, opening weekend; because it helps to launch it higher and further and more territories are reached.

**Bob:** Okay; so the fact that all of you have seen it does not let you off the hook; right? [Laughter] You’ve got to come back out to the theater. You’ve got to bring your friends, and come out and see this. [Applause]

[Studio]

**Bob:** Well, again, we’ve been listening to a conversation with Alex Kendrick and Cameron Arnett from the movie, *Overcomer*, that is opening in theaters tonight. It was—here’s what was interesting to me. After seeing the movie, it was like everywhere I went, we were having conversations about identity—not with people who had seen the film—but it was like God was raising identity issues all over the place.
Do you remember our conversation with Jackie Hill Perry, which was all about identity; right?

**Dave:** Right; right.

**Ann:** I feel like, in our country, identity is a topic that is a buzz right now—

**Bob:** Yes.

**Ann:** —in the secular world and the Christian world.

**Bob:** When you understand who you are at the core and live out of that, it does change everything. When we understand that who we are at the core is adopted sons and daughters of the King, who have been brought into His family that transforms the way we live our lives.

**Dave:** It’s great to think that you’re going to walk out of a theater and start talking about identity.

**Bob:** Right.

**Dave:** You know, of all places to start that conversation, you don’t often think of a movie. So, again, I can’t wait to see that; because, I mean, identity is the foundation of living life and living, definitely, the Christian life.

**Bob:** Will you get the big bucket of popcorn? [Laughter]

**Ann:** Yes, Bob!

**Bob:** —that you can go back and get refills on?

**Ann:** Yes.

**Dave:** Here is the funny thing—every time we go, we’re like: “Don’t get the big one. Don’t get the big one.”

**Ann:** And we do every time.

**Dave:** And we walk out—and I’m not telling listeners to do that—but we get the big one, and we put all the butter on it. Then we get—

**Bob:** —the refill?

**Dave:** —to balance it out, we get the Diet Coke®—[Laughter]—because that makes it work. You can get all the butter and popcorn as long as you get the Diet.
Bob: We can go to movies together—you and me—because I’m right there with you, buddy, on that. [Laughter]

Ann: Yes; me too.

Bob: Alright. Well, again, it’s in theaters today. You can see a trailer for the film if you’d like. Our website is FamilyLifeToday.com, and make plans to go to the movies this weekend. Take a group with you; you will really enjoy this film. Again, see the trailer at FamilyLifeToday.com.

Now, before we are all done here today, I want to quickly remind our listeners about the unique opportunity that is facing us, here, at FamilyLife®. We’ve got about a week left to take full advantage of the matching gift that has been offered. Every donation we receive, during the month of August, is being matched, dollar for dollar, up to a total of $500,000. We are hoping to move forward with projects like taking the Art of Parenting® video series and the Like Arrows movie and translating those into Mandarin and into Arabic.

We’ve seen how God is using this tool in Central and South America after we’ve translated it into Spanish. We want to see the impact continue to expand. There are other initiatives, here, at FamilyLife that we are hoping to move forward on; but what happens this month will determine whether we can say, “Yes,” to those things or not.

So, if you believe in what we are doing—if you believe in the mission and ministry of FamilyLife to effectively develop godly marriages and families who change the world one home at a time—go to our website, FamilyLifeToday.com, and make a donation; or call 1-800-FL-TODAY to donate. When you do, we’d love to send you a copy of Dennis and Barbara Rainey’s book, The Art of Parenting, that you can keep for yourself or pass on to someone you know, who is in the middle of the parenting season of life. Again, the website is FamilyLifeToday.com to donate; or call 1-800-FL-TODAY.

With that, we’ve got to wrap things up for this week. Thanks for being with us. I hope you have a great weekend. I hope you and your family can worship together in your local church this weekend. Join us back on Monday when we’re going to talk to Jonathan Holmes. He’s on the staff at Parkside Church in Cleveland, Ohio, where Alistair Begg is the pastor. He counsels couples, and he works with others who counsel. We’re going to talk about the most common issues that couples are facing and the kind of biblical counsel that we can offer them. I hope you can tune in for that.

I want to thank our engineer today, Keith Lynch, along with our entire broadcast production team. On behalf of our hosts, Dave and Ann Wilson, I’m Bob Lepine. We will see you back next time for another edition of FamilyLife Today.