

**Gran Torino (2008)**  
R | 1h 56min | Drama | 2009

Even though rated R – this movie might provide thoughtful conversation in regards to who we see as minorities. Clint Eastwood doesn't hold back about his prejudices especially in regard to his changed neighborhood. What might we learn as we watch this movie about those who are different than us? In this movie, disgruntled Korean War veteran Walt Kowalski sets out to reform his neighbor, Thao Lor, a Hmong teenager who tried to steal Kowalski's prized possession: a 1972 Gran Torino.

If you have time look up the history of the Hmong people and what it took for them to come to America.

**Read and reflect on John 15:9-17**

<sup>9</sup>As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. <sup>10</sup>If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. <sup>11</sup>I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.

<sup>12</sup>This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. <sup>13</sup>No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. <sup>14</sup>You are my friends if you do what I command you. <sup>15</sup>I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father. <sup>16</sup>You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name. <sup>17</sup>I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.

**What might it mean for us to love one another especially in this fractured society we live in?**

**How have you seen people of different races – show this love?**

**How did Jesus demonstrate love for all people?**

**Reflect upon how hate and violence just breed hate and violence – how might we begin to change our world – even if in small ways?**

*Don't read below until after you have watched the movie*

## **Trivia**

Walt's dog, Daisy, is Clint Eastwood's beloved family retriever in real life.

Walt fires a weapon only once in this movie, accidentally.

In terms of box office, this movie is the most successful Clint Eastwood movie ever, both in the U.S. and the U.K, but not with inflation. Taking inflation into account, his most successful movies are *Every Which Way but Loose* (1978) and *Any Which Way You Can* (1980).

Clint Eastwood's character's name, Walt Kowalski, is the real name of legendary wrestler Walter "Killer" Kowalski.

Clint Eastwood's character is a Korean War veteran, which he has played in other movies such as *Heartbreak Ridge* (1986) and *Absolute Power* (1997). In real life, the actor's penchant for dropping ambiguous Korean War references is considered audacious by those who know him, because for his entire stint in the Army, he was a lifeguard at the Post Swimming Pool at Fort Ord, California. He never set foot in South Korea.

In this movie, Walt only drives his old F100, not his Gran Torino. The only person in the movie who drives the Gran Torino is Thao.

The movie opens with Walt's wife, Dorothy's, funeral, and ends with Walt's.

## **Additional thoughts by - Dan R. Dick who writes:**

What can we possibly learn about love from a curmudgeonly old racist? Racism and love don't have much in common, and it is always difficult to prove a positive with a negative. However, Clint Eastwood's film, *Gran Torino*, is a treasure trove of life lessons and moral enlightenment.

Eastwood directed and stars in *Gran Torino* as Korean War veteran, Walt Kowalski, a deeply unhappy and tormented man incapable of dealing with the decline and decay of his world.

Walt cannot cope with change, and his only reaction is anger and bilious racism. Walt's physical and emotional decline parallels the decline he sees in society, and in particular his own neighborhood. When a Hmong family moves in next door, Walt feels nothing but contempt and hatred for those he deems something less than human.

The teenage son next door becomes the target of street gangs, and to prove his worth he attempts to steal Walt's one truly prized possession—his 1972 Gran Torino. Defending his property, Walt

collaterally helps his neighbors, who treat him with the utmost gratitude and thanksgiving. Initially contemptuous of their praise, Walt slowly accepts their appreciation, then, slowly, begins to care about what happens to them.

Without meaning to, Walt becomes a protector and hero to the family and the salvation of the teenage boy becomes Walt's mission in life. People who mean nothing to Walt—in fact, people he despised and reviled—become his purpose. The loving attention and care Walt once lavished on his beloved car shifts to defending the defenseless and taking a stand against the injustices and violence that threaten to destroy our society.

Granted, violence in the face of evil is a tired and not-so-turn-the-other-cheek response, but this is essentially a tale of conversion and redemption. "No one has greater love than this," writes the author of John, "to lay down one's life for one's friends." (15:13) How much greater is this love when a man rises above his bigotry and narrow-mindedness to put his life on the line for those he so recently loathed? Out of the vile miasma of his own hatred and rage, Walt realizes that doing what is right and good is more important than holding on to past hurts and fears.

Walt is a type—a caricature on the most basic level. He is a mean and nasty Archie Bunker, with no obvious redeeming qualities except scant warmth he extends to his dog. This is an unhappy, broken, sick, rigid, angry, hate-filled human being in need of salvation. Perhaps one of the most important messages of this film is that salvation is not bestowed upon him, but that it comes through the selfless sacrifice of carrying for others. How often do we find ourselves immersed in our own problems, unaware of anything but our own unhappiness and despair? So often, the solution to such a state is not to further fixate on self, but to look to the needs of others. In caring for neighbor, we save self.

The commandments of God find summation in Jesus' instruction to his closest followers and friends: love. As God loves, Jesus loves. To know such love, we must love others. To prove such love, we must be willing to sacrifice. God's commandments are given that we might prepare ourselves for such sacrifice—that we might truly love one another.

It is a mistake to reduce such love to the desire to give one's life for one's friends. Certainly, this is proof of great love, but rarely come occasions where we put our life on the line. Much more frequent are the simple daily expressions of love—kind words, considerate actions, reassuring smiles, and basic respect. God's love is not a feeling, but grace in action. In Jesus' words, love is a fruit that we bear—fruit of divine succulence and sweetness that nourishes and pleases and makes life richer and satisfying. Love is the fruit that is only truly good when shared with others.

Walt's view of the world as a hostile and dangerous place, full of disappointments and constant change, is not inaccurate, but it is incomplete. A world without love is a world of anger, bigotry, and hatred. There are indeed many people who spread such negative energy, reinforcing such a dismal worldview. But that is not the world we need to settle for—for God is love, and by God's grace and guidance, we can bear the fruit of love to feed a love-starved world.