



Transformers

Emily Dalrymple

A transforming vision

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Film title: Transformers

Director: Michael Bay

Screenplay: Roberto Orci, Alex Kurtzman, and John Rogers

Starring: Shia LaBeouf, Megan Fox, Josh Duhamel, Tyrese Gibson, John Voight, Peter Cullen

Distributor: Paramount Pictures

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DVD Distributor: Dreamworks Home Entertainment

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Certificate: PG-13 (USA); 12A (UK) Contains moderate action violence

[Image]

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Based on the iconic 1980s cartoon series and film of the same name, *Transformers* is the story of Sam Witwicky (Shia LaBeouf), an ordinary teenage boy who struggles with schoolwork, lusts after classmate Mikaela (Megan Fox), and is desperate for a car. But he gets more than he bargained for when the battered yellow Camaro his father buys for him turns out to be an Autobot, an alien sentient robot from the planet Cybertron, called Bumblebee (Mark Ryan). Bumblebee and the rest of the Autobots, led by Optimus Prime (Peter Cullen), are searching for

the All-Spark, a Cube of immense power that the Autobots wish to use to rebuild their destroyed planet. They are racing to find it before the evil Decepticons, who plan to use the Cube to conquer the universe, reach it first. Sam holds the key to the All-Spark's location in one of his ancestor's possessions, and he races to help the Autobots in their quest.

However, the Decepticons start waging war on Earth in order to find their leader, Megatron (Hugo Weaving), and the Cube, both of which are being held by a secret Government agency. Sam, Mikaela and a company of soldiers, led by Captain Lennox (Josh Duhamel) – the first to suffer a Decepticon attack – must work together with the Autobots to keep the All-Spark out of the Decepticons' hands and prevent an alien war from destroying Earth.

One of the main themes of *Transformers* is people being more than they initially appear to be, and then realising their potential. On the surface, Sam is very much a typical teenager. But in helping the Autobots, he shows increasing bravery and determination. Most courageous of all, he refuses to give up the All-Spark when confronted by Megatron, knowing that he will be killed for doing so. He has been shaken out of his small, internal concerns enough that he is willing to give up his life for something he believes in, finally living out his family's motto of '*no sacrifice, no victory.*' The other characters show similar depths. Mikaela proves to be more than a juvenile delinquent, going back into the thick of the action to help after she has been ordered away, and the soldiers show that they are more than musclemen just following orders by organising and facilitating the Cube's protection. The characters' journeys act as a challenge for the audience. There is more that you can be, the film tells us, and there is so much more unrealised potential inside each of us, reinforcing the familiar warning that we should never judge by appearances.

The fact that the characters discover these new depths during a huge crisis reflects the biblical idea that we are refined and made stronger through times of suffering. However, the key to this in the Bible is that the best way to deal with the tough times is by depending on God and his strength, and that anything can be overcome by living this way (Philippians 4:13). These

characters depend only on themselves and each other. The film is right to be positive about this, emphasising the importance of depending on each other and showing how much can be achieved by doing this. But it is not enough because it ignores the most important aspect of human existence: we need God, not just in dire situations like this, but in our everyday lives.

Amid the battles there is also a message about the importance of free will and freedom. *'Freedom is the right of all sentient beings,'* Optimus Prime tells his troops when they question why they are helping humanity when it is such a comparatively primitive race. But the Decepticons desire only the destruction of the weak; they want all power for themselves. This conflict of values is most clearly expressed when Megatron declares that, *'humans don't deserve to live'*, and Optimus replies that, *'they deserve to choose for themselves!'* Freedom is highly important, something worth fighting for and even dying for, as Optimus is willing to do. Optimus could be seen as something of a Christ-figure, seeing the value in human beings and being willing to die for them so that they can be free.

Perhaps the clearest theme to come through the film is the idea of broadening our point of view to beyond our daily lives. It explores, to some extent, the fundamental question of whether what we experience everyday is all there is to life. For Sam and the others, the possibility of alien races and life among the stars is opened up to them. We see the characters develop as a result of this, realising that there are much more important concerns in life than the petty things we worry so much about. It enables them to help defeat the Decepticons and, in doing so, learn that they themselves are capable of more than they originally realised.

Transformers challenges viewers to have bigger perspectives, to believe that we are capable of doing so much more than we think is possible, and to see that there is more to live for than we realise. We need to be challenged about these kinds of things; it is all too easy for us, like Sam, to be wrapped up with the small day-to-day concerns of our immediate worlds. But we need to look further than Sam and the others do, to discover that our real purpose comes, not in aiding alien robots to avert a cataclysm, but

in discovering the most crucial aspect of human existence: a relationship with the God who made us, which brings about our transformation.

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