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## To the Bone

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## To the Bone

### Abstract

This is a film review of *To the Bone* (2017), directed by Marti Noxon.

### Keywords

Anorexia, Addictions

### Author Notes

William Blizek is the Founding Editor of the Journal of Religion and Film, and is Professor of Philosophy and Religion at the University of Nebraska at Omaha. He is also the editor of the Continuum Companion to Religion and Film (2009).



**To the Bone (2017), dir. Marti Noxon**

*To the Bone* is the story of Ellen's battle with anorexia. She comes from a family where her father is absent and her step-mother can only be described as a bitch. Her sister adores her and serves as a buffer between her and the parents she lives with. Her biological mother has moved to Arizona with her lesbian lover, abandoning her yet again. Ellen agrees to try one more inpatient facility and meets a doctor that treats anorexia as an addiction. In the end, Ellen decides that she wants to live and returns to the facility with a measure of hope.

What struck me about this story is that Ellen's journey seems similar to the journey of many people who find religion. Religions offer their adherents hope for a better life whether in this world or the next. And many people find themselves addicted to things that are harmful to them, not only drugs, alcohol, gambling or sex, but material goods, fame or popularity, work, saving

others, being morally pure and so on. The addiction leaves them with lives that are empty and painful, but they remain addicted anyhow. When religion enters the picture, it tries to wean people away from those addictions and it offers them hope for a better future.

The interesting feature of this story is that Ellen achieves a modicum of hope, not because there is a god, but because Ellen herself has decided that life is worth living. It is Ellen's choice that makes the difference, rather than turning herself over to some higher power. The doctor serves as a guide, but does not play the role of savior.

One of the most important things in making movies is getting the right cast and *To the Bone* has an outstanding cast from top to bottom. Keanu Reeves, who we all remember from *Bill and Ted's Excellent Adventure*, *Little Buddha*, *The Devil's Advocate*, the recent film *John Wick*, and, oh yes, *The Matrix*, turns in an impeccable performance as the doctor. Keanu's understated performance is key to the success of the film.

This is not an easy movie to watch, but it is well worth seeing, not only for the way it deals with anorexia, but for the way that it deals with all of those addiction that bring us pain and loneliness and the way it shows us the possibility of real hope, rather than dependence on others.