

Feel pain. Love deeply.

by [Carol Howard Merritt](#)

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John Green was enrolled at University of Chicago Divinity School, preparing to become an Episcopal priest. He was doing his CPE (Clinical Pastoral Education), working as a chaplain when he conceived of *The Fault in Our Stars*. The book hit the top of the NYT bestseller list and Green didn't go to Div School. Though the book might be assigned reading in seminary now. At least [Katherine Willis Pershey](#) thinks it should be.

The John Green oeuvre is something that I share with my teen daughter. She tells me which ones to read. (Evidently, *Looking for Alaska* is too depressing. Even more depressing than reading about cancer kids.) I listened to *An Abundance of Katherines* while gardening and contemplating my own circuitous move from Chicago to Tennessee. My daughter read *Will Grayson, Will Grayson* to me on a road trip--expertly leaving out the more embarrassing parts. So, we had to see the *Fault in Our Stars* the day it was released.

The actors were beautiful and ordinary. They took on the emotional richness of the characters with ease, and the central themes rang with clarity.

Pain must be felt. Even as Hazel took her handful of pills three times a day, in order to dull the physical and emotional torment, she highlighted the words: Pain demands to be felt. And we feel it through the scenes. As a mother cares for her dying daughter and teens fall in love in a cancer support group, we know that the miracles will eventually end and there will be pain.

The other theme, which resonates in our world of social media surface friends and casual followers, is that life's meaning does not come from being loved widely by many, but from being loved deeply by one or two. Even though Hazel's observations seem so dark at first, we come to understand their wisdom.

I can abide an abbreviated rendering of a book. I understand that there are just two hours that a moviegoer is willing to contribute to the cause of art. But there were some disappointments. Much of what made the characters so human—like the endless videogame playing and the crude humor—was cut out. Which, I guess I can understand that a movie about teens playing video games is not all that interesting. But the humor? Isaac's robot eyes were supposed to have X-ray vision. How could you edit that out?

And, a bit more to our purposes here, they made Support Group Patrick (the guy who ran the meetings in the church fellowship hall) into a Jesus-loving loser who lived in his parents' basement. In a typical move which resulted in much eye-rolling from my seat, the movie makers amped the mockery. In the book Patrick is a Jesus-loving loser, who dedicates his life to *kids dying with cancer*. And that's a big difference, especially since the story was probably conceived from a point of view that looked a lot like Patrick's.