What If

PG
Rating: ****

Ben Walker (Kevin Sorbo) isn’t looking for a second chance. He thinks he did alright the first time around. He’s wealthy, the boy wonder of a powerful corporation, and has a gorgeous fiance’ who adores him (or at least his bank account). So when a scruffy old guy called Mike who claims to be an angel (John Ratzenberger) comes along and offers Ben a second chance, Ben turns him down cold. Turns out that Ben doesn’t really have a choice...

…and when he comes to, Ben finds himself back in the small town he worked so hard to escape, married to his old girlfriend Wendy (Kristy Swanson) and apparently the father of two daughters. To his chagrin, Ben discovers this version of himself is anything but wealthy, and to top it off, he finds out that he’s now a minister...just as he’s introduced to his new church. Could things possibly get any worse? Or will Ben discover his real life isn’t all he thought it was?

What If is great little film about the choices we make and the fact that there is indeed a plan for everyone’s life. Ben Walker resists this idea, and angrily tells Mike that life has no point: you live, you die, that’s it. But Ben didn’t always think like that. Fifteen years ago he was on the brink of joining the seminary, and he and Wendy were preparing for a life of ministry together. But Ben left Wendy at the bus station one day and never went back. That day he didn’t only break a promise to Wendy, but to God as well.

Kevin Sorbo is absolutely terrific as Ben, and wonderfully conveys the hapless protagonist’s gradual transformation from oily and arrogant businessman to frustrated refugee in an alternate timeline to loving father, husband, and pastor. Sorbo has always been a charismatic actor, and his role in What If may be the highlight of his career. Kristy Swanson is likewise great as Ben’s loving but confused wife Wendy, and John Ratzenberger imbues his angelic character with personality and down-to-earth sincerity. The script doesn’t shy away from religious themes and tackles some weighty ones, but never becomes preachy or cliché.

There are a lot of spiritual films out there during the Christmas season, but few of them will hold a candle to What If.