



Psalms 139:7-11 teaches us that God is literally everywhere in our lives. From existing in our hearts to being found in the complexity of Creation to existing in the most simple of life's pleasures, God is truly everywhere at all times. He can even be found at the movies.

While most of Hollywood may not intend to create movies with a spiritual message, there are numerous films where God's presence can be seen and a spiritual truth can be learned. Whether it is an action movie like Iron Man or a drama like August Rush, God's truth is prevalent.

In the pages of this guide you will find studies to some of today's most popular films that you, your family or a group of friends can use to supplement this year's "At The Movies" series.

You can view these movies and talk over God's truths as portrayed in these films. Simply pick a time, watch the movie together, pop a few bags of popcorn, drink some soda and enjoy experiencing Biblical community in a different way. Once the movie is over, use the questions to discuss the movie and learn what truth God has in store for you or for those you have watched the movie with. By the time you are done, the movie will take on a whole new meaning for you and will serve as a specific reminder that God's unique presence can be found everywhere in our lives, even at the movies.

Invictus

Invictus tells the true story of how South African President Nelson Mandela brought his nation together after years of apartheid and unified the country with the goal of winning the 1995 Rugby World Cup. The movie can also be seen as an illustration of what the process of forgiveness should look like in our lives; not only in the way God forgives us, but also in the way we forgive others. Early in the movie, Mandela describes forgiveness in a powerful way by saying, "Forgiveness liberates the soul. It removes fear. That is why it is such a powerful weapon."

1. We must forgive others just as God has forgiven us.

Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. Colossians 3:13

QUESTION: When you think about the people you need to forgive, who comes to mind? What is keeping you from forgiving this person?

After South Africa is set on a path of forgiveness, it enters a period of tension as the people undertake the difficult task of reconciling their drastic differences. Mandela recognized reconciliation would be difficult but necessary for his nation. In the movie, Mandela said, "The Rainbow Nation starts here. Reconciliation starts here. Forgiveness starts here too."

2. Reconciliation is a tough, but necessary part of forgiving others.

All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God was making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. 2 Corinthians 5:18-21 (NIV)

QUESTION: Why is it so difficult to forgive and reconcile with those who have severely hurt us?

3. Forgiveness leads to freedom.

And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your ~~Mask~~ Mask 11:25 (NIV)

QUESTION: How have you been set free by the power of God's forgiveness?

QUESTION: What can the forgiveness we have received from God teach us about forgiving those who hurt us?

Get Low

In the movie *Get Low*, we meet Felix Bush, an old hermit who has stayed out of the public eye for several decades. One day Felix decides it is time for him to “get low” (die). He decides to stage his own funeral while he is still alive. As the movie progresses, we learn that the reason Felix chooses to live alone is from guilt for a past sin he committed; however, he ultimately repents of his past and finds reconciliation.

Felix’s story is like many of ours in that we let the pain of our past hold us in bondage, but freedom can come from God. Felix describes his bondage to his past sin by saying, “There’s alive and there’s dead and there’s a worse place in between, and I hope you never know about that..”

1. When we don’t confess our sins to God, we become bound to them.

Jesus replied, “Very truly I tell you, everyone who sins is a slave to sin.”
~John 8:34 (NIV)

QUESTION: What sin are you in bondage to? How has that bondage impacted your life?

At the end of the movie, Felix publically confesses his sin and asks for forgiveness by saying, “If I left her in there, everything I know about myself is a lie. I didn’t get her out of (the fire) and I’m sorry. And that’s my story. I would like forgiveness now, if possible. And then I don’t mind dying for real next time, but please forgive me.”

2. Freedom from your sin can only be found through Christ’s forgiveness.

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.
~1 John 1:9 (NIV)

QUESTION: What is keeping you from seeking freedom from your sin? What can you do to remove these barriers?

3. The freedom from sin we find in Christ is not temporary, but lasts forever.

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!
~2 Corinthians 5:17 (NIV)

QUESTION: How is the freedom you have found in Christ impacted and changed your life?

QUESTION: What are some actions you can take today that will help you overcome any baggage left over from past sins?

True Grit (2010)

In the remake of True Grit we follow the story of teenager Mattie Ross who is bent on bringing the outlaw Tom Chaney, her father's killer, to justice. She hires U.S. Marshall Rooster Cogburn to assist her in tracking down Chaney. True Grit is full of powerful Biblical messages, such as, understanding the meaning of justice, understanding God's grace and the importance of leaning on God's everlasting arms.

While Mattie, as an adult, is reflecting back on her experience of hunting down Tom Chaney, she says, "You must pay for everything in this world, one way or another. There is nothing free except the grace of God."

1. God's grace is free and is available to everyone.

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God. ~Ephesians 2:8 (NIV)

QUESTION: What does God's free gift of grace mean to you? How has it changed your life?

2. We are called by God to maintain justice.

Blessed are they who maintain justice, who constantly do what is right. ~Psalm 106:3 (NLT)

QUESTION: What is the difference between justice and revenge? Why is it important that we understand the difference between the two?

QUESTION: How have you seen God's justice in your life? What did you learn from your experiences?

One of the themes of the movie is leaning on God's strength and comfort in all situations. Throughout the movie, the old hymn, "Leaning on the Everlasting Arms", plays in the background as Mattie makes her journey. The scene in which Rooster, to save her life, carries her across miles of terrain after she is snake bitten portrays the way God carries us in times of trouble. The song says, "Leaning, leaning, safe and secure from all alarms; leaning, leaning, leaning on the everlasting arms."

3. We can find comfort and strength in God's everlasting arms.

The eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms. ~Deuteronomy 33:27a (NIV)

QUESTION: How is the strength and comfort you receive from God like none other?

Toy Story 3

In Toy Story 3, we are once again reunited with Woody, Buzz and the rest of Andy's toys that play and live in his bedroom. Things have changed since we last saw the toys. Andy has grown up and is ready to move past his childhood toys as he prepares to go off to college. The movie is full of great Biblical themes such as the importance of friendship, the changing seasons of life and the difference between being childish and childlike.

When the toys are accidentally thrown out, Woody sets out on another mission to rescue his best friends. Andy perfectly describes Woody's heroism by saying, "Now Woody, he's been my pal for as long as I can remember. He's brave, like a cowboy should be. And kind, and smart. But the thing that makes Woody special, is he'll never give up on you...ever. He'll be there for you, no matter what."

1. True friendship that lasts a lifetime requires love and sacrifice.

One who has unreliable friends soon comes to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother. ~Proverbs 18:24 (NIV)

QUESTION: What is one of the biggest sacrifices a friend has ever made for you? How did that sacrifice impact your friendship?

2. God desires us to be childlike and not childish.

But Jesus called the children to him and said, "Let the children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it. ~Luke 18:16-17 (NIV)

QUESTION: In what ways do you see yourself as being childlike? How do you think being childlike has helped build your relationship with Christ?

At the end of the movie, Andy parts ways with Woody, Buzz and the rest of the toys to begin a new season living as a college student. As Andy leaves, Woody is happy in a new home but offers one last "So long...Partner," as Andy leaves.

3. God has designed our lives to consist of different seasons.

There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens. ~Ecclesiastes 3:1 (NIV)

QUESTION: What season of life are you currently in? What are some of the things you feel God is trying teach you during this season?

QUESTION: How have you seen the various seasons of your life shape

you into the person you are today?

Breakfast at Tiffany's

In *Breakfast at Tiffany's*, Holly Golightly is a smart and likable young woman living a selfish life with little-to-no responsibility. She tries to cover up her inner loneliness and fear with material and earthly pleasures. As a result, she will not allow herself to get close to anyone. In life and in our faith in Christ, community and relationships are incredibly important. Our most important relationship of all is with our Savior Jesus Christ. Sadly, it is the one that many ignore despite His constant pursuit.

1. While Holly presents herself as being sweet and caring, she lives a life of reckless actions with little-to-no thought of the consequences to herself and others.

Whoever sows to please their flesh, from the flesh will reap destruction; whoever sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life.
~Galatians 6:8 (NIV)

QUESTION: From what part(s) of your life are you reaping destruction? In what ways are you thinking only of your own temporary pleasure?

2. Holly is constantly looking for someone to save her and is constantly disappointed, but she ignores the one who is there for her all along and loves her no matter what.

...Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine.
~Isaiah 43:1b (NIV)

QUESTION: What are you chasing instead of God? In what ways have you seen God actively pursuing you?

Holly famously says, "We belong to nobody, and nobody belongs to us. We don't even belong to each other."

Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace... Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit... ~Colossians 3:15-16 (NIV)

QUESTION: Have you ever felt like you don't belong? Have you ever wanted to just be alone? What is the importance of having close relationships with other Christians?

3. Holly wants everyone to think she is a happy and carefree woman, enjoying a life of parties and different men every night. But we see

glimpses of her feeling miserable, lonely and heartbroken.

Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's might hand, that he may lift you up in due time. Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.

~1 Peter 5:6-7 (NIV)

QUESTION: How are you presenting yourself to the world? How do you really feel? Have you asked God to be your refuge and strength?

Tangled

The movie Tangled is the story of Rapunzel, a princess whose hair has a magical ability to restore youth and health to others. An evil old woman who wants this power for herself steals the infant Rapunzel away. Mother Gothel then raises Rapunzel as her own and locks her away in a tower, teaching her to fear the world and to doubt her own ability to survive in it.

Each year on her birthday, Rapunzel sees floating lights from her window, and dreams of seeing them in person and discovering their true nature. She then meets Flynn Rider and sets out on a quest that will lead her to the truth about the floating lights and about herself.

1. Rapunzel was held captive by the lies she believed about herself and her world.

"The world is dark and selfish and cruel. If it finds even the slightest ray of sunshine, it destroys it."
– Mother Gothel

The godless spread lies about me, but I focus my attention on what you are saying.
~Psalm 119:69 (MSG)

QUESTION: What are some of the lies you continue to believe about yourself or your current situation?

2. Rapunzel was always a princess even though her circumstances and beliefs about herself did not seem to line up with reality. Discovering the truth led to her ultimate freedom and to the fulfillment of her destiny.

Then you will experience for yourselves the truth, and the truth will free you.

~John 8:32 (MSG)

QUESTION: What is something about you that's true, but does not always SEEM true?

3. Like Rapunzel, God helps us get over our fear and doubt even in the midst of the journey.

He asked the boy's father, "How long has this been going on?" "Many times it pitches him into fire or the river to do away with him. If you can do anything, do it. Have a heart and help us!" Jesus said, "If? There are no 'ifs' among believers. Anything can happen." No sooner were the words out of his mouth than the father cried, "Then I believe. Help me with my doubts!"

~Mark 9:21-24 (MSG)

QUESTION: How do you gain strength to renew your resolve and to press on when you find your faith growing shaky?

4. When Rapunzel finally understood who she really was, she found the strength to confront her captor with the truth.

“NO! You were wrong about the world, and you were wrong about ME! And I will NEVER let you use my hair again!”– Rapunzel to Mother Gothel.

QUESTION: What has God been using to call to you and remind you of whom He made you to be? What changes do you think you will see as you truly believe what He says about you?

Star Trek (2009)

Star Trek tells the story of a young, impulsive and misguided James T. Kirk who discovers in the movie that his life is destined for something greater. By enduring various challenges throughout the movie, he finds his purpose and direction in life, which ultimately leads him to impacting millions of lives as one of Starfleet's greatest starship captains.

Early in the movie, Capitan Pike intervenes in Kirk's life. He challenges Kirk not to settle for an ordinary life, but rather strive to be the best he can be by asking, “You've always had a hard time finding your place in this world, haven't you? Never knowing your true worth. You can settle for an ordinary life, or do you feel like you were meant for something better? Something special?”

Much like Kirk...

1. God has a specific destiny for each of our lives.

For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified; he also glorified. ~Romans 8:29-30 (NIV)

QUESTION: How have you seen God shape your life in equipping you to carry out His specific purpose? Give examples.

Much like Kirk...

2. God counsels us, advises us and challenges us through our relationships with elders and mentors.

And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach each other.

~2 Timothy 2:2 (NIV)

QUESTION: Who are some of the mentors God has placed in your life that have helped shape you into who you are today? How have they guided and shaped you?

Captain Pike became a mentor for Kirk and challenged him in many ways such as when he told Kirk, “Your father was captain of a starship for 12 minutes. He saved 800 lives, including yours. I dare you to do better.”

Much like Kirk...

3. The Enemy will place obstacles in our path to derail us from

accomplishing God's purpose for our lives.

The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full. ~John 10:10 (NIV)

QUESTION: What are some of the challenges you are currently enduring that are hindering you from accomplishing God's purpose for your life? How can your group help you in overcoming these challenges?

QUESTION: What do you feel is the great purpose or destiny that God has called you to accomplish in your life? If you are unsure, what are some things you can do that will help you uncover God's purpose for your life?

Evan Almighty

Evan Almighty is a modern day retelling of the classic Biblical story of Noah and the Ark. In the movie, God asks Evan Baxter to do something completely out of his comfort zone, to build an ark that will allow his family and all of the Earth's animals to survive a coming flood.

God tells Evan, "I want you, Evan Baxter, to build an ark." Evan responds to God by saying, "Building an ark is really not a part of my plans here."

1. God asked Evan to do something radical.

Trust in the Lord with all your heart; do not depend on your own understanding. Seek His will in all you do, and He will direct your paths. ~Proverbs 3:4-5 (NLT)

QUESTION: Has God ever asked you to do anything radical or outside of your comfort zone? If so, what was it and did you do it? If not, how do you think you would honestly respond to God's request?

2. Evan was initially condemned by his friends and family for obeying God's command.

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you. Matthew 5:10-12 (NIV)

QUESTION: God's chosen path for our lives is not an easy one at times. Was there a time in your life where you were persecuted for following Christ? How did you handle it?

3. By obeying God, Evan changed his world by showing kindness to his family and those around him.

But when the Holy Spirit controls our lives, He will produce this kind of fruit in us: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Here there is no conflict. Galatians 5:22-23 (NLT)

QUESTION: Where has God called you to change your world? Is it your relationship with your family, as the case was with Evan, or is it something bigger like going on a mission trip, starting a ministry or becoming a mentor for someone.

The underlying theme of the movie is summed up at the end when God tells Evan, "What the ark really means is... 'Acts of Random Kindness.'"

QUESTION: In the movie we learned that one way to change the world is through acts of random kindness. When was the last time you offered an act of random kindness to someone? How did it make you feel? What keeps us from showing kindness to others more than what we actually do?

August Rush

August Rush tells the story of Evan Taylor, a boy who sees the world through the genius of his music. Orphaned as a baby, Evan has faith that his music will one day reunite his mother and father and bring them back into his life.

One of the central themes of the movie is that we all connect to God in different ways. The character of Wizard explains the way he connects through music by saying, "You know what music is? God's little reminder that there's something else besides us in this universe; harmonic connection between all living beings everywhere, even the stars."

1. We all connect to God differently through His creation.

For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse. Romans 1:20 (NIV)

QUESTION: In what ways do you creatively connect with God? Is it through music, being outdoors, painting, writing or something else?

2. God has blessed us all with some unique talent to use for His glory.

There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men. 1 Corinthians 12:4-6 (NIV)

QUESTION: What is your unique talent? How do you use it to glorify God?

3. Like Evan, we must have faith that God can accomplish great things.

Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, if you have faith and do not doubt, not only can you do what was done to the fig tree, but also you can say to the mountain, 'Go, throw yourself into the sea,' and it will be done. If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer." Matthew 21:21-22 (NIV)

QUESTION: Describe a time when you had to take a major leap of faith that God would accomplish something incredible. What happened and how did it change your outlook towards God?

Evan describes the way he connects to music by saying "Can you hear it? The music? I can hear it everywhere... in the wind... in the air... in the light. It's all around us. All you have to do is open yourself up. All you have to do is listen."

QUESTION: In our busy and hectic lives we many times miss what God is saying to us because we do not stop to listen. Describe a time when you took Evan's advice and stopped to open yourself up and listen to

God. What happened? What are some ways this week that you can stop the chaos around you and listen to what God is saying?

Iron Man

In the movie Iron Man, we meet Tony Stark who is a billionaire weapons dealer whose life is motivated by wealth, power, women and his inflated ego. His life changes when he is mortally wounded during a terrorist attack. As a result of that event, Stark's life is dramatically transformed; much the way God transforms our lives. Stark decides from that moment on to dedicate his life to righting the wrongs of his past and helping others as the superhero Iron Man.

Before his transformation, Tony shares his selfish philosophy for life during a weapons demonstration, saying, "Is it better to be feared or respected? I say, is it too much to ask for both?"

Much like Tony Stark...

1. We tend to rely on ourselves rather than God.

Though the Lord is on high, he looks upon the lowly, but the proud he knows from afar. ~Psalms 138:6 (NIV)

QUESTION: Why do we tend to rely more on our own abilities rather than God's? Describe a time when you relied more on yourself than God.

Much like Tony Stark...

2. God often uses dramatic events like pain and suffering in our lives to capture our attention.

To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness. ~2 Corinthians 12:7-9a (NIV)

QUESTION: Describe a time when God used something dramatic in your life to gain your attention. Did it work, and if so, how did you respond?

Much like Tony Stark...

3. God gives us a purpose for our lives.

In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will.

~Ephesians 1:11 (NIV)

QUESTION: What has God revealed to you as the purpose or vision for

your life? How are you working to accomplish that purpose?

Following his mortal injury, Tony Stark describes his dramatic transformation during a press conference, saying, "My eyes were opened. I came to realize that I had more to offer this world than just making things blow up."

QUESTION: In what ways did Christ open your eyes when you came to know Him as your Savior? How was your life changed after you accepted Christ as your Savior?