

# MOVIES@HOME

Discussing Faith Themes in Popular Films



## MOVIE NIGHT CHATS

### *Think about it...*

- For better or worse, popular films shape our opinions and beliefs in powerful ways.
- Most teens list watching movies as one of their favorite activities.
- The Apostle Paul quoted popular stories from the ancient world to point his generation to God. (See Acts 17)
- Movies are the informal “mythology” of this generation, often creating experiences more impactful than a child’s religious routines.
- Every story reflects some system of belief and can spark dialogue on themes important and thoughtful to Christians.

*So how can we turn watching movies together into an opportunity for faith-formation? By following three simple steps:*



### **Select Wisely**

Not every film is worth watching or touches important themes. Select a film that can trigger meaningful dialogue. Ask those you trust what films they have seen with worthwhile themes, then preview before watching with the family so you can skip offensive scenes and prepare for the chat.



### **Watch Intentionally**

It is easy to turn the passive activity of watching movies into an intentional opportunity for discussion. Before starting the film, make it clear to everyone that you want to talk about the film from a Christian perspective afterwards. Ask each person to make a mental note of specific scenes that reinforce or undermine their beliefs while they watch.



### **Discuss Openly**

Take a few moments after watching the film to enjoy open dialogue about what you’ve seen. Feel free to use the movie night chat guide to drive the conversation. Invite one person to guide everyone through the process and insist that no one person dominate the conversation - including dad or mom! Remember, the goal is not to teach or even agree on everything. The goal is to foster healthy conversation and sharpen everyone’s critical thinking skills.



## MOVIE CHAT GUIDE

**Film Title:** \_\_\_\_\_

### The Story:

1. Who is the central character? (The "hero")
2. Who or what does the main character want? (Consciously and subconsciously)
3. Who or what are the obstacles that must be overcome?
4. What was the "ultimate conflict" of the drama?



### The World View:

*How might the main character answer these questions?*

1. Why am I (are we) here?
2. What is wrong in my/our world?
3. How has/will it be made right again?
4. What central lesson or agenda do you think the writer conveys, intentionally or not?
5. On the whole, does the film reinforce or undermine a Christian world view?



### Other Questions:

1. What wrong choices were made?
2. What right choices were made?
3. Can we learn anything from the story?



### Specific Scenes:

Describe one or two scenes you think were most impactful from a faith perspective.



## SAMPLE ANSWERS

**Film Title:** *A Christmas Carol*

### The Story:

1. Ebenezer Scrooge
2. He thinks he wants to be rich and left alone, but really wants to be loved
3. His selfish choices and stubborn will
4. Facing the inevitability of dying



### The World View:

1. We are here to do good to our fellow man
2. People suffer because we neglect charity
3. By repenting of greed to care for others
4. That poverty is a direct consequence of greed and that we make ourselves miserable through isolation
5. It affirms rewards and punishment after death and a Christian view of charity



### Other Questions:

1. Scrooge worshipped money
2. Scrooge admitted he was wrong
3. Love people more than money/things



### Specific Scenes:

At the grave = Scrooge "repents" of his "sins" and determines to change



## MOVIE CHAT TIPS

### ✓ Fun vs. Forced

Avoid turning movie night into an agenda-driven duty. Enjoy the time together as a family and keep it fun! A few tips...

- Let one of the kids facilitate the discussion rather than a parent.
- Take turns selecting the film to hit everyone's interest.

### ✓ Discussion vs. Diversion

Many of us watch films as "mindless entertainment." That is fine on occasion. But movies can help sharpen one's discernment skills since every story reflects beliefs that either reinforce or undermine Christian truth. A few tips...

- Don't undermine the film's entertainment value. Wait until the end for discussion.
- Don't limit your chats to films that affirm your faith. Movies that oppose Christian beliefs can trigger great discussion, especially with mature teens.

### ✓ Screen vs. Shock

Unfortunately, most popular films contain offensive content such as language, sexuality or gratuitous violence. Parents must pre-screen films to avoid surprises. Even if someone you trust recommends the film, it is wise to check for yourself since it is easy to forget or underestimate the power of certain scenes. A few tips...

- Read detailed descriptions of troubling content by title at [pluggedinonline.com](http://pluggedinonline.com)
- Consider investing in a tool that pre-edits offensive content such as [clearplay.com](http://clearplay.com)

## RECOMMENDED MOVIE CHATS

### Movie Chats With Teens

#### *Dead Poets Society*

- Theme: The Meaning of Life
- Summary: This 1989 film features the story of Mr. Keating (played by Robin Williams) as a wonderful teacher who uses unconventional methods to awaken his students' minds to poetry, beauty and a passion for life. He also gives them a world view that drives one student to make a tragic decision. Specific discussion questions at [movienightchat.com](http://movienightchat.com)

#### *Contact*

- Theme: Science vs. Religion
- Summary: In this 1997 film, the main character (played by Jodi Foster) is a scientist on a quest to find intelligent life beyond earth. A strict atheist, her perspective is challenged by the man she loves, a popular minister (played by Matthew McConaughey). Specific discussion questions at [movienightchat.com](http://movienightchat.com)

### Movie Chats with the Whole Family

#### *Ratatouille*

- Theme: Relating to Food
- Summary: This 2007 Disney/Pixar film features a rat who is a gifted chef as he relates to a variety of characters with different food obsessions, from gluttonous overindulgence to snobbish pickiness. Each character embodies one or more unhealthy approach to God's gift called food. Specific discussion questions at [movienightchat.com](http://movienightchat.com)

#### *Amazing Grace*

- Theme: Human Dignity and Compassion
- Summary: This 2006 film tells the epic true story of William Wilberforce – an 18th century British politician who led a very unpopular movement to end the slave trade. Wilberforce was motivated by a deep Christian faith and spiritually mentored by John Newton – a former slave ship captain turned minister and author of the famous hymn Amazing Grace. Specific discussion questions at [movienightchat.com](http://movienightchat.com)

[MovieNightChat.com](http://MovieNightChat.com)

Hear a FREE podcast explaining Movie Nights and view discussion guides on specific films.

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