

Row M Seat 30



The "AMAZING GRACE" website is almost the only reference required!! www.amazinggracemovie.com/
Film/small group and worship resources
Pictures
Trailers

MOVIE SYNOPSIS [based on the website introduction]

Amazing Grace, based on the life of anti-slavery pioneer William Wilberforce [Joan Gruffudd] . Gruffudd plays Wilberforce, who, as a Member of Parliament, navigated the world of 18th Century backroom politics to end the slave trade in the British Empire. Albert Finney plays John Newton, a confidante of Wilberforce who inspires him to pursue a life of service to humanity. Benedict Cumberbatch is William Pitt the Younger, England's youngest ever Prime Minister at the age of 24, who encourages his friend Wilberforce to take up the fight to outlaw slavery and supports him in his struggles in Parliament.

Elected to the House of Commons at the age of 21, and on his way to a successful political career, Wilberforce, over the course of two decades, took on the English establishment and persuaded those in power to end the inhumane trade of slavery.

Romola Garai plays Barbara Spooner, a beautiful and headstrong young woman who shares Wilberforce's passion for reform, and who becomes his wife after a whirlwind courtship. Youssou N'Dour is Olaudah Equiano. Born in Africa and sent as a slave to the Colonies, Equiano bought his freedom and made his home in London, where he wrote a best-selling account of his life and became a leading figure in the fight to end the slavery of his fellow countrymen.

The film comes at the 200 year anniversary of this action and celebrates Newton's HYMN "Amazing Grace" along the way!!

"do you intend to use your beautiful voice to praise the Lord or change the world?"

UNPACKING THE STORY

Two things struck me about this film.

The first has little to do with fruitful discussion but was the commonality of historical references with the TV comedy "Blackadder the Third". Richard Curtis worked hard to include: the mad King; Pitt the younger; the French revolution ;and when Dr Johnson's dictionary got a mention I suspected the film's writer was a Blackadder fan or at least had used it for checking his context.

The second was the theme of Wilberforce's story where after a period of struggle and apparent failure to get the issue of slavery solved he underwent an epiphany and felt more at home sitting in the farm paddocks and gardens relating to God than on the floor of Parliament speaking for the cause!! To me this was central to the films portrayal of Wilberforce. How is God's call heard, experienced and lived out.

In today's terms its about taking seriously the idea of the ministry of all believers and the way in which 'call' might be not to be 'set aside' for leadership but to be Jesus person where you live and work and advocate for those on the edge and in need.

Wilberforce ponders the timeless dilemma of what's perceived as experiencing faith in God vs. taking action in the world and how they are not an either or choice... Newton is the one who warns "as long as he is in the world But NOT of the world..."

The film makers cleverly use the household staff and interactions with Wilberforce to place the story in its historical context. A highlight for me was Fox's speech at the end about MEN OF PEACE... After all the illness, energy, false starts and hopes... its noted that Wilberforce will return and lay his head on his pillow and remember that the slave trade is no more...

"why do you only feel the thorns when you stop running"

Rob Hanks
UCA NSW Synod Youth Unit 2007



DISCUSSION

Check the website guides for in-depth discussion BUT its relevance in youth ministry may lead in other directions:

In this day and age we seem obsessed [at least by mainstream media indications] with those world famous for little else than being famous. Daily we read and watch the latest trauma for Paris Hilton, Lindsay Lohan or Brittany Spears.

1. What are some of the genuinely heroic qualities you see in Wilberforce and his team? Compare & contrast this with the well known names today...
2. Choose a character from the film and see if you can write or describe the story that unfolds 'in their own words'. What did they witness? What challenges confronted them? How did they navigate their way through?
3. What do you learn for today from the story of Wilberforce all those years ago?



Wilberforce was considered something of an eccentric who lived on a the farm with a literal menagerie of animals. He also instructed the kitchen staff to cook meals for any homeless or poor person who made their way to the farm. He was later instrumental in the beginnings of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals.

4. READ James 2: 14-18 and share about the dilemma between faith and action in today's world?

"Wilberforce proved that [a man] can change [his] times, but that [he] cannot do it alone."

It was fitting that despite the muted impact of a massive petition, the surprise trips to the dockside slave ships and lots of other lobbying, in the end the Bill at the beginning of the end was one about whether or not boats would be allowed to display the US flag or not at significant times. This put financial pressure on pirate vulnerable ships and changed the economic equation!!

"No one of our age has ever taken power... Which is why we're too young to realize certain things are impossible. Which is why we will do them anyway."