

MOVIE: “Amazing Grace”**Sub Topic Theme:**

It's All About God

Lesson Objective:

To provide teens with an inspiring true story of one man who gave himself fully toward fulfilling God's purposes for his life. William Wilberforce was motivated to endure to the end because he understood his life was consumed with fulfilling God's purposes. For him, all of life was about God.



The link below is a two and a half minute trailer for the movie “Amazing Grace” and could be used as a short plug or promo piece at Club for an upcoming movie night.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q6Cv5P9H9qU>

Intro to the Movie:

This movie chronicles the life of one of England's proudest saints, William Wilberforce. Wilberforce was born on August 24, 1759 and died one month short of his 74th birthday on July 29, 1833. In his early years, he was the beneficiary of the family fortune, making him independently wealthy at the age of 18. Wilberforce had a charming personality and wonderful sense of humor. His oratory skills were also top-notch. Though he struggled in school, few would deny that he had his own sense of brilliance. Together, these qualities propelled him to become an elected Member of Parliament at the age of 21.

But despite such early success, Wilberforce could not ignore the gnawing sense that his life had no purpose. And so it was that in the coming months, he entered into a period of deep sorrow and soul searching. Finally, during Easter of 1786, at the age of 27, this young man converted to an evangelical expression of the Christian faith. At one point in the movie, Wilberforce implies that from that moment onward, God had “set before him two great objects: the oppression of the slave trade and the reformation of society.” It was to those two causes that he dedicated the rest of his life.

Leaders, as you prepare yourself and your teens to watch this movie, keep in the mind the larger historical context. The movie takes place in the latter half of the 18th century. At this time, England was the one of the world's most formidable powers, but the twilight of her heyday loomed. Revolutions in the North American British Colonies (1776), France (1789-1799) and Haiti (1791-1804) threatened to spill over the English Channel, thus raising fears of sedition, particularly from among political and social activists. It is also post-Enlightenment Europe, which is not an insignificant detail. Enlightenment

philosophers trumpeted the emancipation from all authorities, political or otherwise, and promoted more democratic forms of government. John Locke, the leading thinker of the movement, was strongly in favor of individual rights. His view of government was that it should protect individual life and property. Unlike previous centuries, Locke believed it was improper for the state to impose its will on the people. Rather than the people serving the government, it was now the government serving the will of the people. The directors and producers of “Amazing Grace” do an excellent job of subtly conveying all these historical themes throughout the movie. The combination of all these influences – the Enlightenment and ensuing political and social revolutions – makes Wilberforce’s cause seem all the more inevitable.

But none of this should take away from the fact that God used Wilberforce at a most crucial time in British history. William will always be honored for his remarkable commitment to serving God and his purposes during his 73 years on earth. And it is that fact that we wish to highlight in our discussion following the viewing of the movie.

There is one other facet that you will want to bring to your teens’ attention – that is the economic pull to keep the status quo. Bear in mind that economics drive everything, even when principle is right. Invite your teens to pay particular attention to the arguments used against Wilberforce. Also challenge them to find the pivotal point in Wilberforce’s life and the implications of his Christian faith.

All together, the historical context, the economic pull and the internal transformation of William Wilberforce will serve as your 3D lens for this movie. Now, with that as a backdrop, sit back, pass out the popcorn, and enjoy the movie!

Discussion Group Questions:

1. The movie does not give a chronological review of Wilberforce’s life. Instead it is broken up with flashbacks throughout. How would you describe William’s life in his younger years? How did he spend his time and money? Did these activities bring him lasting satisfaction? Why or why not?
2. How would you describe William’s life in his later years? What changed for him? What issues tugged on his heart?
3. At one point in the movie, William is lying in a grassy, moist meadow contemplating this inner change that has taken place within him when his butler enters the scene. William makes this statement: “God meeting us is inconvenient, idiotic.” What do you think of his comment? Agree or disagree? Why? In what ways can this statement be true? Untrue?
4. The movie does not make this abundantly clear, but William labored more than 18 years to abolish the slave trade. During that time, he faced an enormous uphill

battle. What were some of the forces pushing against him? How did he overcome them?

5. Consider the standing ovation William received near the end of the movie. Do you think he would have said that all his labor and toil was worth the effort at that moment? Do you think he toiled merely for praise of humankind? Or for God?
6. Did you sense that William cared whether he was well liked by his peers? Why or why not? Whose commendation mattered most to him? What motivated him to endure to the end?

Group input:

Solicit responses from the large group on reactions to some of the questions.

Gathering of ideas and themes recognized in the discussion groups and focus on guiding the audience toward the main objective: *William Wilberforce was motivated to endure to the end because he understood his life was consumed with fulfilling God's purposes. For him, all of life was about God.*

Bullet Objective:

Feel free to put this summary section in your own words, but here is an idea you can use:

There are so many elements of this movie that are worthy of further discussion, but what stands out above all others is Wilberforce's sense of purpose. The whole focus of Wilberforce's life took on a whole new meaning when he gave his life to God. Prior to that time, he enjoyed all the pleasures that his fortune and fame afforded. He had all that the world said mattered, yet deep within him was a gnawing, consuming-like yearning to do something meaningful, something purposeful with his life. When he discovered his purpose, he was set afire.

Friends, every single one of us has that same desire. Sure, William is remembered because he took on Goliath and won, but his longing for purpose is not unique. All of us have that spark of the Creator in us. We were not created for this world alone. Do you realize that? We were created for eternity! We were created to live in harmony with our Creator. The world we now live in is not the one that God created in Genesis 1 and 2. These two chapters of the Bible inform us of the ways things ought to be; the way God intended from the beginning. But something has gone dastardly wrong. For you see when Adam and Eve disobeyed God and tried to live life by the light of their own reason, they set human history on a downward trajectory to try to find meaning, or purpose, apart from God. They choose not to look to God but to themselves.

Adam and Eve are our ancestors, and, sadly, we follow in their footsteps. We will look to practically anything and everything to find our sense of purpose. We'll look to athletics, academics, degrees, careers, money and all that it can purchase for our sense of purpose in this world. But we are suggesting, and William Wilberforce's life stands as a great example, that unless those activities are driven by something outside of ourselves, unless they are driven by God, then they will eventually fail. This, friends, is not a matter of opinion, but fact. They will fail because they were never designed to be an end in themselves. God is the end of all things. He is our all-powerful, all-knowing, ever-present, all-good, eternal Creator. He is the beginning *and* the end. From him *everything* comes into existence. Apart from him, we would have no breath in our lungs, no beat in our hearts, no waves in our brains. He sustains all of life. Therefore, all of life ought to be all about God. As humans, we are too insignificant to live for just worldly gain; God wants us to live for him and for his purposes. Wilberforce understood that; he got it.

Do not miss this fact: Wilberforce accomplished the unthinkable precisely because he was driven by a purpose larger than himself; he was driven by God. Western civilization is now changed because of his life and his accomplishments.

Challenge:

1. Some of you may have tried Adam and Eve's strategy. Maybe you're trying to find your sense of purpose apart from God. If that is you, may we challenge you to humbly repent of your sin? Tell God you're sorry for thinking that life can be found in anything other than him. Then, invite him to move into your life. Allow him to take up center stage. Then begin that journey of seeking how God would have you spend your life.
2. Others of you may have already begun that journey with God but just need to be reminded of this simple truth. If that is you, then we challenge you to take a personal inventory to realign areas of your life. Sometimes we all need to assess whether our principles match our practices. If you don't know what that looks like, find a leader and ask him or her to buy you a soda at the food court so you can sit down and chat.

Lord, thank you for men and women like William Wilberforce who devote themselves wholeheartedly to your purposes. Forgive us for those times when we mistakenly believe life is about anything other than you. And, by your grace and mercy, reorient all that we do in this life to reflect your glory. Help us to represent you well. Amen.