

MOVIE: “Soul Surfer”**Sub Topic Theme:**

What To Do When Life
Makes No Sense?

Lesson Objective:

To stimulate discussion with teens on how we should respond when life throws us a major curve ball. A movie that provides a great springboard for such a discussion is the 2011 movie of Bethany Hamilton’s story entitled “Soul Surfer.”



<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=isjY34VD5jE>

Intro to the Movie:

Bethany Hamilton was a rising star on the surfing circuit. But at the precious age of 13, a shark attacked Bethany and literally torn off her left arm. Undaunted, she regained her courage to get back in the open water after months of rehab. But surfing with one arm proved to be a bigger challenge than she realized, and she decided to bow out of competitive surfing.

It was on a mission trip with her youth group to Phuket, Thailand in the aftermath of the 2004 tsunami that helped Bethany put her own trials in perspective. After helping a young boy overcome his fear of the water, Bethany discovered she had a gift for inspiring other people through her surfing talent. So she resolved to do whatever it would take to surf competitively again. Her hard work and determination eventually propelled her to professional status.

The movie gives an accurate portrayal of Bethany before, during, and after the attack. In doing so, it does not shy away from her Christian faith. The nature of the film lends itself to lots of young girls in two-piece bathing suits. But there is no suggestive behavior throughout the movie. It is tastefully cast and produced and should not be a major concern for parents or leaders. Encourage participants to pay close attention to how Bethany overcomes the “curve ball” thrown her way. This is your 3D lens for the movie. Enjoy!

Discussion Group Questions:

Leaders, there are more questions here than you probably need. These are here only as a guide to help facilitate small group discussions. Feel free to delete some or add your own that you think are better suited for your students. The main idea here is that students interact with the movie and extend that discussion to the hurt and pain we all experience in this world.

1. What were some of the “curve balls” thrown at Bethany throughout this movie?
Hint: Think bigger and broader than just the shark attack.
2. How does watching this film help put some of your trials into better perspective?
3. What caused Bethany to give up her dreams of competitive surfing? What was the turning point in Bethany’s life? How do you know?
4. When Bethany resumed surfing, did she do it more for selfish reasons or selfless reasons? How can you tell?
5. How would you describe Bethany’s spiritual life before the accident? How did it change after the accident? What role did her faith play in her recovery? Why is it that some people run away from God when tragedy strikes and others run to him?
6. Looking at Bethany’s experience from beginning to end, how was she able to overcome this tragedy in her life? What did she do that enabled her to succeed not just in surfing but also in life? How did her personal life and character affect her success?

What attributes that Bethany possesses would you like to cultivate for yourself? Would you like to be like Bethany? Why or why not? If so, in what ways?

Group input:

Leader-solicited responses from the large group on reactions to some of the questions.

Gathering of ideas and themes recognized in the discussion groups with a focus on guiding your teens toward a proper response when life presents unexpected and unpleasant “curve balls.”

Bullet Objective:

Put this summary section in your own words, but here is an idea you can use:

Is Bethany's story not inspiring? This is a pretty special young woman. Obviously she has done a lot of things right in her life that propelled her to such success. But let's focus our attention on how this shark attack affected her walk with God.

Prior to the attack, her faith commitment was lukewarm at best. But that began to change after the attack. Somehow this tragic event in her life caused her to pursue God with greater vitality and eagerness. No longer was God just a good "extra," like a good luck charm when you needed him. Suddenly God became a life-line for Bethany.

One of the things I like about movies like this is that they are true to life. If it hasn't happened yet, then it is only a matter of time before life throws you a curve ball. So the question we all have to ask is, "What do we do when life doesn't make any sense?"

Let's look at another woman in the Bible who also had to overcome some setbacks. The woman's name is Ruth. She lived with her husband and his family in a place called Moab, which is located southeast of the Dead Sea. In a relatively short period of time, she lost her father-in-law, brother-in-law, and even her own husband! Three deaths within the family! Can you imagine how hard that must have been for her? To make things worse, women in this society did not have the means to provide for themselves; they needed a husband for economic and social security. So not only was there the emotional pain of death, but there was the very real economic struggle for survival. Now, her mother-in-law, Naomi, was an Israelite. And she decided to return to her homeland because that was the only thing she knew to do. Naomi pleads with Ruth to stay in Moab and to find another husband among her own people. But Ruth wouldn't have it. Listen to her response in Ruth 1:16-18:

¹⁶Don't ask me to leave you! Let me go with you. Wherever you go, I will go; wherever you live, I will live. Your people will be my people, and your God will be my God.¹⁷ Wherever you die, I will die, and that is where I will be buried. May the LORD's worst punishment come upon me if I let anything but death separate me from you!

Ruth clings to Naomi and to Naomi's God, which is the same God Christians worship today. She ran toward God; she clung to him as though he were her only hope. Now to make a long story short, God ended up honoring this woman because she ends up becoming one of the ancestor's of Jesus. That's pretty cool!

What did Ruth do when tragedy struck? The same thing Bethany did. They both ran to God and found comfort from him.

Challenge:

My challenge for you here tonight is to see God for who he really is. God is a refuge in times of trouble. He is a comforter to those who are hurting. He is able to bring about good ends to terrible beginnings. And he's able to fix even the most tragic events in our lives.

Ruth did, and look what God did through her. Bethany did, and look how God used her to accomplish his purposes through her tragedy. What might your life look like if you gave it completely over to God?

Closing Prayer:

Lord, we do pray for your protection in our lives. But we realize that none of us are immune from tragedy. So we pray for your Spirit to work in our hearts and minds in order that we may see you for who you really are. Create within us a desire for you and a desire to please you in all that we say and do. Amen!