

main course for lent

using film – the terminal

AIM

To explore the Easter themes found in the film “The Terminal”.

EXPLANATORY NOTE ABOUT FILMS

Many films have Christian themes in them, even though they don't set out to be religious. Christopher Booker in his book “The Seven Basic Plots” sets out his theory that all stories whether in film, print or from oral tradition follow one or more of just seven plots. We can therefore assume that this would even fit stories in the Bible. It would also seem logical that we can watch a non-Christian film and find Biblical themes included in it.

WATCHING THE FILM

In the first week, we hope that the whole group will sit together and watch the complete film. The film is 2 hours long, so you may want to contact the members of your group and arrange to meet for a longer period of time, or make sure that they all have a chance to see the film before meeting for the first time.

THEMES FROM THE FILM

The themes we pick up from the film will look at different parts of Jesus' life and ministry, focussing on the events we now know as the Passion and Easter. We will do this each week by looking at a small clip of the film and talking about it, both in the context of the whole film and in the context of the Biblical theme it touches upon. Each discussion will also have a Bible passage that relates to the theme of the clip.

Following on from this will be a quieter, more reflective time, using prayers, Biblical quotes and other resources such as poetry and meditations to help the group focus on the week's theme. It doesn't have to be complete silence; use suitable music or split the readings so that people have a chance to reflect on paragraphs rather than whole passages at a time. Choose prayers and reflections from sources with which you are familiar for this purpose, or have a time of open prayer. You may want to include a creative activity, like making a box for your reflections. Such a box could be decorated or filled with small notes each week and serve as a personal reminder of what has been explored during the whole course. A template for such a box can be found at http://www.activityvillage.co.uk/images/box_template_1.gif

TIMING

It is very difficult to say how much time will be spent on each of these elements of the course as it very much depends on the make-up of your particular group. Some will enjoy the discussion more than the quiet and vice-versa. In some groups the discussion will be easier on some weeks because people enjoy the theme better or memories are sparked by things that are said. Overall, apart from the first week, there should be enough material to last about 1½ hours. Feel free just to “go with the flow” of your group and don't feel that you have to halt discussion in order to fit the next bit in, or that you have to deliberately extend something just to fill in time.

How you structure your evening in terms of breaks and refreshments – whether on arrival or at the end or both- is entirely up to you. Please remember that none of us are experts, we are just exploring things together. We may see the film clip and interpret it in an entirely different way to someone else, or someone may interpret the Bible passage differently. That's ok. That's what makes it a good course for us all. We are all exploring together. That's why the course asks lots of questions and doesn't give any answers! Even though we

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give you lots of questions to use with your group feel free to ignore them and use questions of your own or find other ways of exploring the topics together.

EVALUATION

Please try to answer these questions for yourself and for others who will use this material:

- What was the most helpful thing?
- What was the least helpful thing?
- What would you like to try now?

THE NEXT STEP

If you want more material for Lent we plan to have other material on the website.

This Bible study has been contributed by Colin Udall, CYDO for East Midlands Synod.

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FILM SYNOPSIS

This film synopsis is taken from www.amazon.co.uk

Viktor Navorski (Tom Hanks) falls into a bureaucratic crack in the system when his plane lands at New York's JFK airport from the fictitious country of Krakozhia. Unbeknownst to Navorski, his country fell prey to a military coup while he was in flight, causing it to be wiped from the map. This effectively renders his passport null and void, meaning he cannot legally enter America, nor return to his now nonexistent home. Barely able to speak English, the hapless Navorski is offered a sanctuary of sorts by kindly staff members, who allow him to freely inhabit the airport. With little money to his name, Navorski has to quickly shed his feelings of displacement, confusion, and alienation to survive. Fortunately he has a resourceful nature, and makes a meagre amount of money for food by returning baggage carts. As time passes he becomes more comfortable with his surroundings, even finding time to pursue a passing stewardess, Amelia (Catherine Zeta-Jones), who has captured his heart. But airport denizens such as customs chief Frank Dixon (Stanley Tucci), who is a constant thorn in Navorski's side, remind him of his outsider status throughout the ordeal. Director Steven Spielberg uses the airport setting of *The Terminal* to represent a microcosmic view of the immigrant experience in American society. Drawing on a fine performance from Hanks, and a supporting cast who provide plenty of laughs, Spielberg handles some delicate subject matter with an acute sensitivity, providing a heartfelt tale in the process.

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OUTLINE SESSION TIMETABLE

This timetable is just a guide please feel free to structure your groups entirely differently.

7.30pm	Arrivals, welcome and film clip
7.45	Discussion questions around the film clip
8.05	Bible reading and discussion questions
8.25	Quiet time, meditation, music, etc
8.45	Prayers, reflections, work on the box (if used), etc

THEMES FOR THE COURSE

Week 1 About the film

There will be a general discussion about the whole film and what themes can be immediately recognised – Christian and non-Christian - by members of the group. It will be a bit like a book club, for those of you with experience of this. But even if not, there will be prompt questions to help you along.

Week 2 Identity

We will look at identity:

- Who are we?
- Who gives us our identity?
- Who is Jesus?
- How restricted are we by our identity?

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Week 3 Loneliness

We will look at loneliness and particularly the loneliness that Jesus felt in the Garden of Gesthemane.

Week 4 Promises

We will think about keeping promises:

- How do we keep our promises?
- How does Jesus keep his?

Week 5 Punishment and forgiveness

We will think about

- What are the consequences of punishment?
- How did Jesus take punishment on our behalf?
- What does that mean to us as Christians now?

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WEEK 1 “THE TERMINAL” – THE FILM

If you are able to all be together and watch the film together, that’s great. Please warn your group members that the film is 2 hours long (if they haven’t seen it before) and that because of this, the meeting will be longer – approximately 3 hours. Watch the film together.

Discussion Questions

At the end of the film ask members of the group what they felt about the film.

- If they’d seen it before was there anything different they noticed this time round?
- Anything to say about the actors?
- Was there anything that made them laugh, cry, feel angry, happy, disappointed?
- Did the film have a satisfactory conclusion? Why? Were there any parts of the film that were left unanswered at the end for characters other than Viktor?
- Were there any particular themes that people felt the film explored – for example relationships, marriage, work, ambition, immigration and power?
- Did anyone pick up any Biblical themes during the film? If so, what? (Don’t discuss them in great detail if they are to come up later in the course.)

Read Hebrews 13:1-3

- What does this passage say about how we should treat others, particularly those we don’t know?
- Is this how Viktor was treated in the film?
- Who treated him well and who treated him badly?
- What other “strangers” were there in the film?
- What does Jesus say about treating other people?

Spend some time in quiet thinking about situations in the world where there are refugees and asylum seekers or about people who are trapped in places where they may not want to be. How do they find themselves being treated?

Pray for those who work with refugees and asylum seekers, particularly if your church has links with projects that help refugees and asylum seekers or if any individuals are known to the church. Young people from the URC have visited and worked with a refugee centre in Hungary. You may like to pray for:

The refugee centre in Debrecen, Hungary where Maria Terdik and her team of staff deal with around 350 refugees and asylum seekers at any one time.

Pray for all those dealing very formally with people’s lives and trying to make things as easy as possible in what can be very traumatic and unsettling situations.

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WEEK 2 “WHO AM I?” - IDENTITY

Watch the opening sequence of the film as Viktor arrives at JFK airport and is told of his situation by the Customs Officer, Frank Dixon. The clip is approximately 8½ minutes long and finishes with Frank Dixon saying “Welcome to the United States”.

Discussion Questions

- How did you feel about Viktor?
- What did you feel about Frank Dixon? Is he just doing his job or do you think he could have been more helpful to Viktor?
- Much of the theme of this opening sequence is about identity. Who gives us our identity? Is it God? Are we born with our identity?
- Is our identity in the way we are brought up, nurtured, our family and friends, education, etc?
- How much of us is in the identity we carry in our passports, driving licences, bank statements and the jobs we hold/held or aspire(d) to?

Read Matthew 16:13-20

- What is said in this passage about the identity of Jesus?
- Peter identifies Jesus as the Christ. Do you think the other disciples felt the same? Why?
- What does this passage also say about Peter and the way Jesus identifies him?
- In which ways do you feel Jesus and Peter were affected by this conversation in their later ministries?

Spend some time in quiet reflecting on your identity, who you are and what you are – your relationships with others.

Thank God for giving you the gifts and skills that make you who you are.

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WEEK 3 “WHY HAVE YOU FORSAKEN ME?” - LONELINESS

Watch the next sequence of the film, which begins immediately after we left it last week. This shows Viktor being escorted into the departure lounge and then seeing on the TV screens the situation in his home country of Krakozhia. The clip is approximately 5 minutes long and finishes with the camera panning out showing Viktor standing alone whilst the busyness of the departure lounge goes on around him.

Discussion Questions

- Why did Viktor feel lonely?
- Have you ever felt completely alone when surrounded by people as Viktor was?
- What are some ways people respond to loneliness? How do you respond to feelings of loneliness?
- Which of these responses helps cure loneliness (if any)?
- Do you feel that the responses shown in the film, where people moved Viktor on or ignored him) were true to life? How do you honestly feel you would have responded to Viktor? Why?

Read Matthew 26:36-46

- It tells us (in verse 37) that Jesus felt sorrowful and troubled. Do you think he felt any other emotions?
- When nailed to the cross, Jesus feels that God has abandoned (forsaken) Him. Do you think Jesus feels abandoned here, too? Why?
- Does feeling lonely make it easier or harder for you to connect with God? Why?
- Why do you think Jesus went through this call to/from God despite feeling abandoned?

Read Psalm 142

This psalm is interpreted by some as David feeling desperately lonely and that many people are getting at him. Read this psalm together and then **spend some time in quiet thinking** about how lonely Jesus felt in the Garden of Gethsemane and the call He makes to God to take “the cup” away from Him.

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WEEK 4 "A PROMISE IS A PROMISE" - PROMISES

Watch Chapter/Scene 23 of the film. It begins approximately 1 hour 31 minutes from the start and lasts for about 6 minutes. You can finish it when Viktor says "Maybe I think he do it for me", but the scene finishes about a minute later with a fade as he and Amelia kiss.

This scene tells us why Viktor has stayed in the airport; what he came to do in the first place.

Discussion questions

- Why is Amelia so suspicious and wary of Viktor?
- How does this change when she hears about the autograph collection and Viktor's promise to his father?
- Viktor may have been deported when he first arrived, or he may have been let straight through. Would either of these have made a difference to the promise?
- How has Viktor's life been changed by this promise?
- How has his life been changed by his experiences in the airport as a result of keeping his promise?

Read Matthew 5:33-37 and Acts 13:35-37

- What do these passages say about Jesus and God's promise to us?
- What do you feel we are promising God when we believe in Him?

Spend some time in quiet reflecting on your relationship with God.

- How do you keep your promises to Him?
- Is there now anything you want to do in response to these promises to us?

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WEEK 5 “TAKING OUR PUNISHMENT” – PUNISHMENT AND FORGIVENESS

The film clip this week is in Chapter 20 of the film and begins approximately 1:17:30 after the film has started and lasts for only about 2 minutes. It begins with Viktor asking Gupta “Gupta, You been ever married?” and ends when Gupta says “No reason to notice a man like me”.

In this clip, Gupta tells the story of how he ended up being in the Airport, working as a cleaner, having run away from India after having stabbed a policeman. He has not seen his family for 23 years, yet had he stayed in India, he would have only received a 7 year prison sentence.

Discussion questions

- Was Gupta foolish to try to escape his punishment?
- Why do people naturally try to avoid punishment? What are the positive aspects of punishment? The negative aspects?
- Can you remember a time, perhaps as a child, when you were punished for something? What lessons did you learn from that experience? How did you feel about the person meting out the punishment?

Read Luke 23:39-49

Jesus is taking punishment although he is innocent of any crime.

- What does this mean to you?
- What does this mean to us as Christians?
- If God’s love is unconditional – He loves us whatever we do – why send His Son to die for us?
- Even when taking the punishment, Jesus forgives those who are killing Him. What does this say about the New Covenant that is set by God as a result of Jesus’ crucifixion?

Read Matthew 25:31-end

- How do these verses make you feel?
- What does God’s judgement or punishment mean to you?
- What do these verses say to us as Christians about how we should live our lives?
- If God’s love is unconditional, why does Jesus say we should be doing these things or else face punishment?

Spend some time in quiet reflecting on what you feel Jesus has done for you.

Think about his accepting the punishment for our sins on the cross.