

A man and a young boy are shown from the waist up, holding hands. The man is on the right, wearing a light-colored, vertically striped shirt and dark trousers. The boy is on the left, wearing a plaid shirt and a dark vest. They are standing in a field of tall grass under a bright blue sky with scattered white clouds. The sun is low on the horizon, creating a warm, golden glow. The man is looking down at the boy, and the boy is looking up at the man.

HEAVEN
is for **Real**

BASED ON
THE INCREDIBLE TRUE STORY

FROM THE *NEW YORK TIMES* #1 BESTSELLER
DISCUSSION GUIDE

HEAVEN IS FOR REAL 2014

CREW OVERVIEW

Randall Wallace (Director; Writer)

Christopher Parker (Writer: screenplay)

Todd Burpo (Writing Credit: book)

CAST OVERVIEW

Greg Kinnear (Todd Burpo)

Kelly Reilly (Sonja Burpo)

Connor Corum (Colton Burpo)

Lane Styles (Cassie Burpo)

Margo Martindale (Nancy Rawling)

Thomas Haden Church (Jay Wilkins)

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USING THIS DISCUSSION GUIDE

Intended for use after viewing the film, this study guide provides catalysts for biblically based discussion of various themes found in *Heaven Is for Real*. The guide features three themes from the movie and is structured in such a way that individuals or groups may choose to address the entire guide at once or focus on one or two themes at a time.

FILM OVERVIEW/NOTE TO GROUP

Based on the #1 *New York Times* best-selling book of the same name, *Heaven Is for Real* tells the powerful true story of four-year-old Colton Burpo (played by newcomer Connor Corum), who experiences Heaven during emergency surgery. When Colton begins sharing stunning details about his amazing journey, his parents, Todd and Sonja (Greg Kinnear and Kelly Reilly, respectively), wrestle with the account in light of their faith, family and community. As the pastor of the local church, Todd comes under particular and increasing scrutiny, and must find the courage and conviction to share Colton's remarkable story of hope and love.

As the film opens, a young girl in Lithuania is composing the first strokes of a painting.* Meanwhile, in small-town Imperial, Nebraska, Todd Burpo is covering a lot of ground. He's a pastor, a husband, a father, a friend, a garage door repairman, a volunteer firefighter and a wrestling coach. One thing is clear: Todd is committed to his family, his church and his community. So committed, in fact, that his responsibilities soon push him to breaking points both physically (spiral fracture, kidney stones and exhaustion) and spiritually (frustration and doubt).



In an effort to cheer her husband, Sonja organizes a family road trip to Denver. While the trip begins with rest and rejuvenation, it ends in a profoundly life-changing way for the family. Both Burpo children fall ill; Cassie (Lane Styles) eventually recovers, but Colton continues to decline. An urgent visit to the medical center confirms Sonja's initial fear: ruptured appendix. Colton is rushed to the operating room for emergency surgery, and his parents retreat to different parts of the hospital – Todd to the chapel for an impassioned, honest conversation with God, and Sonja to the waiting room to phone for prayer regarding a dire, seemingly hopeless situation.

Miraculously, Colton survives and recovers. Gradually, though, he begins recounting unexplainable experiences related to his time in surgery: Colton recalls lifting out of his body and seeing his father and mother in different parts of the hospital; he speaks of angels singing over him; of visiting Heaven and meeting Jesus and His horse; of seeing Jesus' "bluish greenish" eyes and "markers" (crucifixion wounds). While Sonja dismisses Colton's descriptions as the product of a brilliant and overactive imagination, Todd struggles to understand God's purpose in the situation, eventually confronted by a crisis of faith and faltering in his leadership as pastor.

As word spreads of Colton’s experience, the Burpos receive a wide range of responses, from curiosity and intrigue to skepticism and derision. Jay Wilkins (Thomas Haden Church) and Nancy Rawling (Margo Martindale), church board members and Burpo family friends, deliver an ultimatum: more preaching and less Heaven or the church will find a new pastor. Soon, even a frustrated Sonja implores Todd to focus on this life rather than the next one, especially considering the family’s severe financial struggles. Yet, Todd believes his son experienced Heaven, and is further convinced when Colton reveals that he met a healthy, younger version of “Pop” – Todd’s grandfather who passed away before Colton was born.

Colton convinces Sonja as well. He innocently mentions meeting his other older sister – the one who died in Sonja’s “tummy” – during his visit to Heaven. With renewed faith and a desire to explore and accept God’s purpose for Colton’s experience, Todd invites the community to the next church service and delivers a much-anticipated message. Todd tells the congregation that, yes, God allowed Colton to experience a version of Heaven; that faith opens our eyes to eternal matters; that we are to love one another the way God loves us; that Heaven is definitely for real.

**At the end of the film, Todd sees a news report about Akiane Kramarik, the Lithuanian girl who painted a breathtaking portrait of Jesus after experiencing Heaven herself. When Colton views the portrait, he is astonished; it is the only picture he’s seen that truly captures His appearance.*

THEME ONE: HEAVEN

Guiding Scripture: Colossians 3:1–4 (NIV): Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.



SCRIPTURES REFERENCED

- Isaiah 25:8 (NIV): He will swallow up death forever. The Sovereign LORD will wipe away the tears from all faces; he will remove his people’s disgrace from all the earth. The LORD has spoken.
- Matthew 19:14 (NIV): Jesus said, “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of Heaven belongs to such as these.”
- Luke 18:17 (NLT): “I tell you the truth, anyone who doesn’t receive the Kingdom of God like a child will never enter it.”
- Luke 23:43 (NLT): And Jesus replied, “I assure you, today you will be with me in paradise.”
- John 14:2 (NIV): “My Father’s house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you?”
- 1 Corinthians 2:9 (NLT): That is what the Scriptures mean when they say, “No eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no mind has imagined what God has prepared for those who love him.”
- 2 Corinthians 5:1 (NIV): For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in Heaven, not built by human hands.
- Philippians 3:20–21 (NLT): But we are citizens of Heaven, where the LORD Jesus Christ lives. And we are eagerly waiting for him to return as our Savior. He will take our weak mortal bodies and change them into glorious bodies like his own, using the same power with which he will bring everything under his control.
- Colossians 3:1–4 (NIV): Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.
- 2 Peter 3:13 (NIV): But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new Heaven and a new Earth, where righteousness dwells.

DVD SCENES TO REVIEW

- “We don’t ever have to be scared.” (00:31:24–00:33:06)
- First Mention of Heaven (00:34:41–00:36:34)
- Colton Describes His Visit (00:36:35–00:40:26)
- Jesus’ “Markers” (00:50:50–00:52:54)
- Pop (01:09:53–01:13:05)
- Colton’s Other Sister (01:20:50–01:23:49)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

At the beginning of the film, Todd Burpo narrates, “Is Heaven a hope, or as real as the earth and sky?” It’s a question he had asked his grandfather – “Pop” – and it’s a question that resurfaces when Todd’s four-year-old son, Colton, undergoes

emergency surgery and visits Heaven, later relaying astounding experiences and knowledge that stun his parents and greater community.

Colton's narrative stirs intense debate and raises thought-provoking (and potentially life-changing) questions – primarily: If Heaven is for real, what are the temporal and eternal implications? How does the certainty of Heaven affect life in the here and now? As the Burpos struggle to process Colton's extraordinary journey, they must also seek God's purpose for their son's experience as well as examine the remarkable event in light of biblical truth.

SCENES TO REVIEW

“We don't ever have to be scared.” (00:31:24–00:33:06)

First Mention of Heaven (00:34:41–00:36:34)

- How does Colton's age (four) influence the way he shares details about Heaven? Do you find that his age makes his experience more or less compelling? Why?
- Colton says, “We don't ever have to be scared” and that “It's important” not to be scared. What do these statements reveal about Colton's experience with Heaven?
- Describe Todd's physical and emotional reactions to hearing Colton's account of lifting out of his body and seeing his parents in different parts of the hospital.
- What would you think and feel if your child told you he'd been to Heaven? Would you chalk it up to a “beautiful imagination” as Sonja does, or would you respond differently?

Read Matthew 19:14; Luke 18:17; and 1 Corinthians 2:9 (see Scriptures Referenced).

- What do Matthew 19:14 and Luke 18:17 tell us about the relationship between children (or childlikeness) and the Kingdom of Heaven?
- How does 1 Corinthians 2:9 resonate with the way Colton tries to describe the things he witnessed in Heaven (e.g., the colors of the rainbow being “more”)?

Todd's curiosity regarding Colton's claims prompts him to ask his son about the time “when the angels sang to [him].” Colton willingly shares some of his experience (seeing angels and meeting Jesus) and later mentions Jesus' crucifixion wounds (“markers”) during a newspaper interview. These innocent details take on profound implications considering even the cleverest of children would have difficulty creating and communicating such intimate, fresh observations with ease.

SCENES TO REVIEW

Colton Describes His Visit (00:36:35–00:40:26)

Jesus' “Markers” (00:50:50–00:52:54)

- What are your impressions of Colton's visit to Heaven as portrayed in the first scene? Does any of his narration stand out? What do you make of his interaction with Jesus?
- Why are near-death experiences intriguing? What does it say

about our spiritual nature that we long to know what comes after our earthly existence?

In the second scene, Colton realizes – pensively rather than defensively – that people might not believe his story, to which Todd replies that people may be afraid to believe: “Maybe they're afraid that there is no Heaven. Or maybe they're afraid that there is.”

- If Heaven is for real, how does that affect the way we live? How does it affect our perspectives and decisions – both currently and eternally?
- What is the difference between Heaven as a *concept* and a *reality*? How does Colton's experience, at the very least, force people to consider Heaven in one of these terms?

Read Isaiah 25:8; Luke 23:43; and Colossians 3:1–4 (see Scriptures Referenced).

- How does Isaiah 25:8 provide hope for those who trust in the LORD? What does this verse say about God's love for His people that He would do these things for us?
- List the promises mentioned in Luke 23:43 and Colossians 3:1–4. How do these verses describe Heaven, especially in reference to Jesus Christ?

In Heaven, Colton meets two family members who died before he was born. One of them is Pop, Todd's grandfather, and the other is Colton's unnamed sister, who died in the womb. When relayed to his parents, these are the encounters that powerfully and finally convince them that their son did indeed experience Heaven. They also further Todd's resolve to share Colton's story; he fully accepts the call to champion God's love in an effort to share hope and comfort.



SCENES TO REVIEW

Pop (01:09:53–01:13:05)

Colton's Other Sister (01:20:50–01:23:49)

- The first scene raises some essential questions regarding Heaven: How has God made a way for us to spend eternity with him? Why does it matter what we (or Pop) believe?
- Read Philippians 3:20–21 (see Scriptures Referenced). How does this verse relate to Colton telling Todd that nobody wears glasses in Heaven and that everybody is young?
- What are your thoughts on the scene in which Colton tells his mother about the sister he met in Heaven? How does this interaction convince Sonja of Colton's experience?
- How do these scenes remind us to be sensitive to those who have lost loved ones? What are some appropriate ways to support friends and family who are dealing with grief?

Read John 14:2; 2 Corinthians 5:1; and 2 Peter 3:13 (see Scriptures Referenced).

- What hope (certainty, even, for the Christian) is expressed in John 14:2 and 2 Corinthians 5:1? How do these verses offer encouragement to run the race and look to eternity?
- 2 Peter 3:13 tells us that righteousness dwells in the new Heaven and new Earth. In this difficult and broken world, why is the promise of righteousness a profound comfort?

As you conclude this theme discussion, spend some time discussing your reaction to the film. Feel free to use the following questions as starting points: Do you believe that Colton went to Heaven? *(If you're in a group setting, it's entirely possible – even likely – that you will have differing opinions on the matter. That's perfectly acceptable; use the opportunity to further the discussion in a productive way.)* Is Heaven for real? Why or why not? In addition to the Scriptures Referenced, what does the Bible say about Heaven? Finish by reading the Guiding Scripture (Colossians 3:1–4); consider Paul's encouragement and instruction regarding Heaven.

THEME TWO: FAITH

Guiding Scripture: Hebrews 11:1 (NLT):
Faith is the confidence that what we hope for will actually happen; it gives us assurance about things we cannot see.

SCRIPTURES REFERENCED

- Psalm 50:15 (NLT): “Then call on me when you are in trouble, and I will rescue you, and you will give me glory.”
- Psalm 121:1–2 (NIV): I lift up my eyes to the hills – where does my help come from? My help comes from the LORD, the Maker of Heaven and Earth.
- Psalm 145:18 (NLT): The LORD is close to all who call on him, yes, to all who call on him in truth.
- Jeremiah 29:11–13 (NLT): “For I know the plans I have for you,” says the LORD. “They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope. In those days when you pray, I will listen. If you look for me wholeheartedly, you will find me.”
- Matthew 19:26 (NIV): Jesus looked at them and said, “With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.”
- Mark 9:23 (NLT): “What do you mean, ‘If I can?’” Jesus asked. “Anything is possible if a person believes.”
- Mark 11:23 (NIV): “Truly I tell you, if anyone says to this mountain, ‘Go, throw yourself into the sea,’ and does not doubt in their heart but believes that what they say will happen, it will be done for them.”
- John 3:16 (NIV): For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.





- John 16:33 (NLT): “I have told you all this so that you may have peace in me. Here on Earth you will have many trials and sorrows. But take heart, because I have overcome the world.”
- Romans 8:38–39 (NIV): For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our LORD.
- Philippians 4:6–7 (NIV): Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.
- Hebrews 11:1 (NLT): Faith is the confidence that what we hope for will actually happen; it gives us assurance about things we cannot see.
- Hebrews 11:6 (NIV): And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.

DVD SCENES TO REVIEW

- Emergency Surgery (00:25:55–00:30:49)
- Faltering in the Pulpit (00:47:11–00:49:45)
- Dr. Slater (00:40:27–00:44:35)
- Visit With Jay (00:44:36–00:47:10)
- Myth or Truth? (01:13:06–01:15:14)
- Final Sermon (01:23:50–01:29:38)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

While Colton’s experience impacts the greater community (and eventually beyond), perhaps no one is more affected by the events surrounding Colton’s surgery, recovery and heavenly account than Todd. In a very personal and vulnerable way,

the film explores the journey of Todd’s faith – how it is tested, shaped and refined as he both processes his son’s near-fatal illness and miraculous healing and tries to understand God’s purpose in these life-changing circumstances.

At the beginning of the film, things are going well for Todd other than some financial concerns. He’s serving his community, leading his church and spending time with his family. However, he then is confronted with a series of health-related challenges – a spiral fracture in his leg and several kidney stones – that open the door for spiritual discouragement to take hold. With these frustrations fresh in his mind, it’s no wonder that Todd’s faith is further rattled by the devastating realization that he may lose his son. In these dark moments, we see a defenseless, shaken man.

SCENES TO REVIEW

Emergency Surgery (00:25:55–00:30:49)

Faltering in the Pulpit (00:47:11–00:49:45)

Todd prays, “You’ve made me suffer, and I took that. You’ve made my family suffer, and I took that. You’re going to take my boy? Don’t you take my son. Don’t you take my son!”

- At the medical center, Todd isolates himself in the chapel and yells at God over the potential death of his son. What was your reaction to this scene and to Todd’s prayer?
- Can you recall the various tones and moods with which you’ve prayed? How do these different types of prayers demonstrate the complexities of your relationship with God?
- How is prayer an extension or representation of faith? What is the relationship between the two? How does prayer keep us connected to the Father in both triumphs and trials?
- What do you think of the film’s honest and vulnerable portrayal of Todd’s struggles (as opposed to a trite, sugarcoated or superficial depiction of a pastor wrestling with doubt)?
- As he falters in the pulpit, how does Todd’s unease – and the awkwardness between Todd and his congregation – publicly reflect the very personal nature of Todd’s conflict?

Read Psalm 50:15; John 16:33; and Philippians 4:6–7 (see Scriptures Referenced).

- According to John 16:33, is the Christian guaranteed a pain-free life without trials and sorrows? What instruction and comfort does Jesus give in the second half of the verse?
- What do Psalm 50:15 and Philippians 4:6–7 say about prayer? How do these passages speak to the Burpos' medical emergency as well as Todd's frustration and doubt?

When Colton recovers from his ruptured appendix, Todd and Sonja are thrilled and thankful to have their child restored to good health. What Todd doesn't anticipate, though, is how Colton's subsequent comments about Heaven will foster a crisis of faith for the small-town pastor. For the first time in his life and calling, Todd realizes that there is a difference between knowing the Bible and truly taking God at His Word – *believing*, in faith, that His promises are true.

SCENES TO REVIEW

Dr. Slater (00:40:27–00:44:35)

Visit With Jay (00:44:36–00:47:10)

- Even though Todd is having difficulty reconciling his beliefs with Colton's experience, how does he (even inadvertently) defend the concept of faith while talking to Dr. Slater?
- What do you think of Dr. Slater's fact-based explanations? Are logic (reason, science, etc.) and faith mutually exclusive? Why or why not?
- Can you relate to Todd and his crisis of faith? How has doubt or skepticism threatened to undermine what you believe? Would you be willing to share an example?
- In the second scene, Todd says, "We ask these kids to believe this stuff and I don't even know if I believe it myself, Jay." What is the "stuff" to which Todd is referring?
- On the fire truck, Todd further adds: "The Bible tells us to believe His children. What my child's telling me would get me laughed out of this town." Articulate Todd's dilemma.
- What is the difference between *head* knowledge and *heart* knowledge? How would you explain these terms in reference to believing God and taking Him at His Word?

Read Psalm 121:1–2; Psalm 145:18; and Jeremiah 29:11–13 (see Scriptures Referenced).

- The passages from the Psalms give clear instruction as to where to find help when facing times of trouble. What encouragement do these verses provide in keeping doubt at bay?
- Jeremiah 29:11–13, a passage full of beauty and hope, concludes with, "If you look for me wholeheartedly, you will find me." How does God's promise bolster our faith?

Todd's faith is further stretched when Colton reveals that he met Pop in Heaven. Because of Colton's innocence and sincerity, Todd knows he cannot simply categorize his son's claims as myth, but must choose to exercise rather than scrutinize his faith, accepting Colton's story as true – along with whatever corresponding calling God has for the Burpo family.

Todd also acknowledges that this time of testing has produced in him a newfound humility and the realization that we are meant to show and share God's love, modeling His love for us.

SCENES TO REVIEW

Myth or Truth? (01:13:06–01:15:14)

Final Sermon (01:23:50–01:29:38)

- In the first scene, Sonja asks, "Why can't [Colton's experience] just be a mystery and we leave it at that?" Does she raise a valid point regarding faith? Why or why not?
- Todd says that Colton is innocent, yet the things he's talking about are impossible. What relationship does faith have with the impossible? What are some biblical examples?
- In his sermon, Todd says that only faith opens our eyes. Do you agree or disagree and why? How do you interpret the phrase, "On Earth as it is in Heaven"?
- How does Todd's sermon stress the connection between a thriving faith and sharing God's love? How is Heaven a demonstration of God's love and the hope that He offers?*
- Describe Todd's faith journey in the film and include the various ways his journey impacts his family, friends, church and community.

Take a look at Mark 11:23 and Hebrews 11:6 (see Scriptures Referenced).

- What does Mark 11:23 tell us about doubt? How can doubt undermine the beauty and hope of faith in Jesus Christ? What are some ways to strive for and preserve faith?
- List everything Hebrews 11:6 says (directly or indirectly) about faith. How might you use the message of this verse to commit to growing in faith and fellowship with God?

Before concluding this theme discussion, read Matthew 19:26; Mark 9:23; and Hebrews 11:1 (see Scriptures Referenced), and take a moment to reflect on the power of Almighty God and the hope we have in Him through faith in Jesus Christ. How do these passages nurture and promote faith? On a personal level, how would you describe your own faith journey? Are you



wrestling with doubt? Consider seeking the LORD – with Whom and by Whom all things are possible – to ask for grace to grow in faith, overcoming doubt with the trustworthy promises of His Word.

THEME THREE: COURAGE

Guiding Scripture: 2 Timothy 1:7 (NLT): For God has not given us a spirit of fear and timidity, but of power, love, and self-discipline.

SCRIPTURES REFERENCED

- Deuteronomy 31:6 (NIV): “Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the LORD your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you.”
- Psalm 27:1 (NIV): The LORD is my light and my salvation – whom shall I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life – of whom shall I be afraid?
- Psalm 43:5 (NIV): Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God.
- Isaiah 41:10 (NLT): “Don’t be afraid, for I am with you. Don’t be discouraged, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you. I will hold you up with my victorious right hand.”
- Matthew 6:25–26 (NIV): “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?”
- 1 Corinthians 1:18 (NIV): For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.
- 1 Corinthians 2:14 (NIV): The person without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God but considers them foolishness, and cannot understand them because they are discerned only through the Spirit.
- 2 Corinthians 4:8–11 (NIV): We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus’ sake, so that his life may also be revealed in our mortal body.
- Philippians 4:13 (NLT): For I can do everything through Christ, who gives me strength.
- 2 Timothy 1:7 (NLT): For God has not given us a spirit of fear and timidity, but of power, love, and self-discipline.
- 1 Peter 3:13–14 (NLT): Now, who will want to harm you if

you are eager to do good? But even if you suffer for doing what is right, God will reward you for it. So don’t worry or be afraid of their threats.

- 1 John 4:18 (NLT): Such love has no fear, because perfect love expels all fear. If we are afraid, it is for fear of punishment, and this shows that we have not fully experienced his perfect love.

DVD SCENES TO REVIEW

- “I’ll never give up that Lion.” (00:11:08–00:14:18)
- Public Backlash (00:53:27–00:56:33)
- Church Board Meeting (01:01:45–01:05:23)
- Courage in Action (01:15:15–01:20:50)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

As you begin this theme discussion, take some time to read 1 Corinthians 1:18 and 2:14 (see Scriptures Referenced). These verses are a small representation of a very clear message in the Bible: standing firm in faith takes courage. During those difficult times when our convictions are questioned, mocked or persecuted, we can cling to an eternal promise in God the Father and call out as King David does in Psalm 27:1: “The LORD is my light and my salvation – whom shall I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life – of whom shall I be afraid?” (NIV).

Toward the beginning of the film, Todd delivers a compelling sermon in which he vows that he will never give up his belief in and commitment to Jesus Christ. That scene lays the foundation for an important storyline in the film and foreshadows the difficulties that Todd and his family will soon face. Todd’s sermon also serves as a reminder that the peaks of faith are essential preparation for the valleys; it is in the valleys, the trying times, that courage shines the brightest.

SCENE TO REVIEW

“I’ll never give up that Lion.” (00:11:08–00:14:18)

Public Backlash (00:53:27–00:56:33)

In the first scene, as part of the sermon, Todd says, “The bear, the lion and the unicorn – they weren’t looking for an easy road. I don’t think Jesus was either when he accepted the cross.”

- How does Christ model courage for us, especially in reference to the events leading up to and surrounding His crucifixion and resurrection? Give specific examples if possible.
- Todd gives this sermon prior to the series of significant challenges his family faces. Why is it important to practice courage even when things are going well (during the “peaks”)?
- After watching the second scene, compare and contrast it with the first one. How have things changed for the Burpos? What is it costing them to stand for their convictions?
- Have you ever been mocked for your beliefs or for supporting

someone you love? If so, what did the experience teach you about courage in the face of adversity?

Read Deuteronomy 31:6; Isaiah 41:10 and 1 Peter 3:13–14 (see Scriptures Referenced).

- In Deuteronomy 31:6 and Isaiah 41:10, God commands (rather than suggests) that His people be courageous. What promises does He make to help us in this regard?
- What does 1 Peter 3:13–14 tell us about being courageous in relation to an eternal mindset? How does the verse’s message give us strength to face temporal troubles?

Amid the negative responses from the community, Todd continues to support Colton as best he can (albeit, somewhat reluctantly for much of the film as he tries to reconcile his son’s heavenly claims with his own faith; this is explored more deeply in Theme Two: Faith). When Todd’s preaching declines further, the church board calls a meeting, confronting Todd about his preoccupation with Colton’s experience and giving him one more week in the pulpit. In the meeting, though Todd is not aggressive, he begins to exercise gentle assertiveness and engages Nancy, whose annoyance – anger even – attempts to mask a very deep and abiding grief.

SCENE TO REVIEW

Church Board Meeting (01:01:45–01:05:23)

- Describe Nancy’s tone and demeanor when she decides to be honest with Todd about why Colton’s talk of Heaven bothers her. What do you think of her reasoning?
- Todd demonstrates a quiet steadfastness in this scene. How does his courage enable him to hear Nancy’s heart as well as accept the uncertainty of his future with the church?
- In this scene specifically, what does Todd do or say that reveals his support for his son? How do his explanations remind the board to think of things from Colton’s perspective?
- Why does the idea (and implementation) of standing up for our convictions have the potential to be intimidating or scary? What do we fear? Have you had this experience?

Read Matthew 6:25–26 and Philippians 4:13 (see Scriptures Referenced).

- In Matthew 6:25–26, what does Jesus tell us about worry? How does the act of worrying stifle our courage and our ability to trust in God’s perfect plan and provision?
- Philippians 4:13 is a beloved verse with countless applications for helping us walk with the LORD. What does the verse suggest about the theme of courage?

Through the course of the film, Todd experiences a tremendous humbling, one that deepens his faith and courage, and one that brings him to a new realization of the love he is obligated to share (but also *desires* to share) in his role as pastor. Specifically, Todd reaches out to Nancy, who has continued grieving the loss of her son privately while participating in church and maintaining a façade publicly. With renewed conviction and courage, Todd addresses the hurt that Nancy so stoically bears, and the two are able to find reconciliation through forgiveness and honesty.

SCENE TO REVIEW

Courage in Action (01:15:15–01:20:50)

- The beginning of the scene shows a brief montage of Todd pensively waiting to hear from God. In what ways does this kind of patient obedience require courage?
- What responsibilities does Todd have as a pastor of a small-town church? How do these commitments give him the unique opportunity to establish and invest in relationships?
- How has Nancy’s despair over the tragic loss of her son impacted her relationship with God and with the people in her life? Why does Colton’s experience frustrate her?
- What does this scene reveal about Todd and Nancy? And how does almost losing his own son give him new perspective (as well as the courage) to reach out to a grieving friend?
- Describe the way that the Burpos grow and mature in their courage through the course of the movie. Include scenes that demonstrate their struggles as well as their victories.

Read Psalm 43:5 and 1 John 4:18 (see Scriptures Referenced).

- We can all relate to Psalm 43:5 at one time or another in our lives. What does the second half of the verse tell us to do when our souls are downcast, troubled or disturbed?
- 1 John 4:18 says that “perfect love expels all fear.” How does this verse relate to courage? How can we fully experience God’s perfect love through Jesus Christ?

2 Corinthians 4:8–11 and 2 Timothy 1:7 are wonderful reminders for believers to stand strong and be courageous when faced with opposition. Consider memorizing these passages for those times when you feel that your beliefs are being questioned or mocked; scripture memorization can be a tremendous comfort and encouragement. And while you may not be struggling with fear or intimidation at this moment, perhaps you know someone who is. Prayerfully reflect on how you might encourage that person, pointing them to the One who gives strength and courage.

FINAL THOUGHTS

- Thinking back through the film, what does Colton share about Heaven? Can you recall specific experiences or descriptions? Which of these did you most resonate with? Why?
- Sonja is an unsung hero in the film. How does she quietly demonstrate commitment to her family, friends and church? Can you point to specific scenes or examples?
- What scenes in the film examine how we relate to God and how He relates to us? Essentially, how does the film explore the relational side of God?
- How would you describe Todd and Colton’s relationship? What does their bond suggest about the way Todd and Sonja value their children?
- What are your impressions of the characters of Nancy Rawling and Jay Wilkins? How do their roles enhance the overall story of the film?

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