

BIBLE STUDY: Forgiveness Fights Your Dark Side

by Mark Thompson

Study for use with the film *Spiderman 3* (2007) PG-13, 2 hr. 19 minutes

Movie Info for Spiderman 3

(source: RottenTomatoes.com) Action & Adventure, Mystery & Suspense, Science

Your friendly neighborhood web-slinger is back, only this time his sunny outlook has become partially overcast in the third chapter of director Sam Raimi's Spider-Man saga.... Peter Parker has finally leaned to walk the middle ground between being the superhero that his city needs and the man that Mary Jane loves. All is well in New York City until one night, as Peter and M.J. sit gazing at the stars, a falling comet streams across the sky and crashes into the ground close by. But this isn't any ordinary shooting star, and upon impact the mysterious space rock is split open to reveal a shape-shifting symbiote with the power to overtake anything that it comes into contact with. Later, as Harry Osborn acquires his late father's flying board, engineers a powerful new Goblin outfit, and takes to the sky to avenge dad's death, the mysterious space sludge infects both Peter's Spider-Man suit and ambitious street photographer Eddie Brock. Peter's strange new suit gives him a newfound sense of power as it gradually overpowers his personality, and he discovers that escaped convict Flint Marko was in fact the man responsible for the death of Uncle Ben. Unfortunately for Peter, Marko has recently acquired the power to morph at will and quickly completes his transformation into the dreaded Sandman. As the Sandman gives in to his darkest criminal instincts and the slithering space symbiote transforms Eddie Brock into the nightmarish fanged villain known as Venom, the citizens of New York City must once again call on Spider-Man to fend off destructive forces that are far too powerful for the likes of mortal man.

(Jason Buchanan, Rovi http://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/spiderman_3/)

Objective:

- For participants to see sin as an organism that works within us, against us, and out of us – hurting our loved ones and alienating us from people who are best for us;
- to point students to the Hero who defeated sin; and
- to help them spread the new life of forgiveness as sidekick heroes with Christ.

Summary:

Sin sticks and takes on a life of its own. The evil we fight is often staring back at us in the mirror. Sin can often be blamed on aliens from another planet, but our dark side can only be faced with a resounding bell of truth.

Forgiveness, like sin, is catchy. When we embrace God's forgiveness and healing, we can forgive others and bring healing to relationships.

"...I write to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one." (1 John 2:14b)

"...the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world." (1 John 2:16b)

"If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother." (Matthew 18:15)

"And out of pity for him, the master of that servant released him and forgave him the debt." (Matthew 18:27)

Suggestions for use of the film: Leaders should view the entire movie in advance so as to understand the whole context. You can choose to use this study viewing all two hours and nineteen minutes as a part of a lock-in or in segments over several meeting times. Many students have seen the film, so you can choose to show clips as long as you and those who have seen it can fill out the story as needed. There is certainly violence in *Spiderman 3*, so you will need to advertise your plans well in advance so you can hear concerns beforehand. People have their own sensitivities to media so it is better not to assume and allow them to opt out.

Movie connection quotes: You can play the scene (number in right hand corner indicates the time the scene appears in the film), use the written quotes or both. Similar to the purpose of a parable, this story can help your students really consider and apply the lesson in their lives. And let's be honest, movies help get and hold their attention. Perhaps that is another reason Jesus taught in parables.

Copyright note: It is recommended that your church secures license to show the film. This can be provided in an annual subscription by <http://www.cvli.com/>

Themes in the film: Courage, Leadership, Determination, Sacrifice, Forgiveness, Friendship, Teamwork, Repentance

Scripture:

1. 1 John 2:14-21
2. Mark 5:1-17
3. Matthew 18:15-35

Opening Activity:

Get some goo—corn syrup, melted chocolate, creamy peanut butter, etc. Have a volunteer immerse their hands in it. Get them talking about how it feels (cool, slippery, fun, etc.). Now have them grab some cereal (rice crisp, crunchy nuts, or whatever you have that is small and messy). Ask them how that feels. Then tell your volunteer thanks—have them sit down, or announce an opening prayer where group will hold hands, or ask them to pass out the Bibles. What reaction do they give? What reaction do others give? They are a mess. This mess is going to get on other people. How can they get out of it? Will the mess just go away, or do they need some help getting clean? In closing your object lesson, you provide a tub of dish soapy water and a rag. Clean them up. Jesus removes our messy, sticky sin.

Bible Study:

Movie connection scene – quote:	1:06:14
Dr. Curt Connors: ...Don't let any of that get on you.	
Peter Parker: Why?	
Dr. Curt Connors: It has the characteristics of a symbiote, which needs to bond to a host in order to survive. And once it binds... it can be hard to UNbind.	

Spiderman 3 is the third installment of the popular comic book hero that has come to life on screen. As usual, Peter Parker gets into trouble trying to balance his relationships and his crime fighting responsibilities. Evil attacks in the form of a friend-gone-wronged, an alien from outer space and a hard-luck criminal trying to save his daughter.

- So why do we relate to this super hero when our lives are generally pretty ordinary?
Peter Parker is someone I can relate to. He can be kind of a dork. He stumbles into this hero thing. While it seems all cool at first, it has some drawbacks. Relationships become difficult. Choices are impossible. Someone is always getting hurt.
- How is your sin-fighting going?
You, the strong and Word-abiding heroes, combat sin every day. You say no to drugs. You help temper your friends' passions before they lead to sin. You turn conversations from filth. Admit it, you come to the rescue of some people in peril.

The thing with Peter Parker in this third Spidey film is that the enemy does not attack from the outside, but from within. While he still saves the day as the black-suited Spiderman, he was possessed by a force that bonded to his most selfish and aggressive passions. The fight was within him.

Movie connection scene – quote:	1:06:00
Dr. Curt Connors: It enhances aggression...	
[the symbiote slithers towards Peter, but it's quickly trapped under a glass]	
Dr. Curt Connors: It seems to like you.	

In First John, we are warned against selfish desires that coincide with a fallen world. Read 1 John 2:14-21.

The epistle writer goes right from complimenting the readers for their faithful strength, to warning them they will be turned from the truth.

- What specifically is he warning them of?
- Why would this be something for such heroic people to worry about?
- What does it mean to be the “anti” of something?
- How is this evil the “anti” of Christ?
- What from the *Spiderman 3* film turned the actions of a hero into those of a villain? What did it use to make this turn?

Movie connection scene – quote: Peter Parker: This suit, where’d this come from? The power, feels good... But you lose yourself to it...	1:
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In the Gospel of Mark, Jesus faces this sticky situation with a man bound by evil. Read Mark 5:1-17.

There was nothing this nameless man, or anyone else, could do about this demon-possession. Certainly the man possessed great power to the extent that he could probably battle toe-to-toe with a radioactive-spider-bitten hero mutation. However, this power came at great cost.

- What was lost with this demon possessed man?
- What did Peter Parker lose when he became the cool-dancing, arrogant, self-loving dark-shadow of himself?

Movie connection scene – quote: Peter Parker: [to Eddie Brock] You want forgiveness? Get Religion.	1:31:40
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With a force like the church bell out of the movie (1:42:24), Jesus un-stuck this Legion of demons from this man and even the pigs couldn’t live with that.

- How did the crowds (and J. Jonah Jameson) treat this good superhero at times?
- How was Jesus treated for His rescue effort?

Today also, Jesus is disrespected. Forgiveness and religion are for the weak, or so we are made to think.

Movie connection scene – quote: Peter Parker: Eddie, the suit you’ve got to take it off. Eddie Brock: Oh, you’d like that, wouldn’t you? Peter Parker: I know what it feels like. It feels good. The power. Everything. But you’ll lose yourself. It’ll destroy you. Let it go. Venom: I like being bad. It makes me happy.	2:03:00
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Of course sin lives even in our closest relationships. Read Matthew 18:15-20.

- Can you think of a time where one of your friends or family members pulled away from you?
- What came between you?
- What is so hard about forgiving? Is it like giving up a power you have over someone?

Sometimes it is literally like that. We don’t want to quit reminding someone of what they did to hurt us. It’s like a poker chip we play when we need to win. It is like a power. And like Venom, we want others to join us in our grievance. We seek out other hurting people (like the Flint Marko character) to join “our side.” Whoa, the battle is on. Where is the real power? Is it holding onto sins – or is it in forgiving them?

Movie connection scene – quote: Peter Parker: Flint Marko. The man who killed Uncle Ben, he was killed last night. Aunt May: Oh, my. What happened? Peter Parker: Spider-Man killed him. Aunt May: Spider-Man? I don’t understand, Spider-Man doesn’t kill people. What happened? Peter Parker: I, uh... He... he was... I thought that - That you’d feel... He deserved it, didn’t he? Aunt May: I don’t think it’s for us to say whether a person deserves to live or die. Peter Parker: But, Aunt May, he killed Uncle Ben. Aunt May: Uncle Ben meant the world to us. But he wouldn’t want us living one second with revenge in our hearts. It’s like a poison. It can - It can take you over. Before you know it, turn us into something ugly.	1:12:21
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Read The Parable of the Unforgiving Servant (Matthew 18:21-35).

The funny thing about being a superhero is the more you save people, the more people need saving. Jesus told a parable to help His disciples understand their role in this forgiveness thing. We keep it up. We don't reach a quota and quit.

What a powerful example this servant could have set if he had done like his master the king. Forgiven debt could have been spread throughout the kingdom. All that is needed is a quick 3 step reflection:

1. Oops, nuts, d'oh, I am a sinner. I have been forgiven.
2. I cannot possibly hold this debt against my neighbor – for I have been released from my prison.
3. God calls and empowers me to forgive.

That quick, the whole thing could be over.

Movie connection scene – quote:

2:07:30

Flint Marko: I did a terrible thing to you, I spent a lot of nights wishing I could take it back.

[Flint's partner drives off with the car, but Flint stays by Uncle Ben's side]

Flint Marko: [to Peter] I'm not asking you to forgive me. I just want you to understand.

Peter Parker: I've done terrible things too.

Flint Marko: I didn't choose to be this. The only thing left of me now... is my daughter.

Peter Parker: [after a pause] I forgive you.

Healing

Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. (Psalm 51:10)

The forgiveness won for us by our Savior Jesus Christ, and available to us through the Means of Grace, are a very real healing. We are healed. Others are healed. Relationships are healed.

Next time you are the Communion rail, think about the miraculous power that flows in this Sacrament. Then look around at your brothers and sisters in Christ. Let go of any hurts. Let them explode in the power of the Cross. Then, simply say what needs to be said and enjoy the love.

Movie connection scene – quote:

2:09:30

Peter Parker: [coming down to Harry's side along with Mary Jane] Hey, pal. How you doing?

Harry Osborn: [sarcastically] Been better.

Peter Parker: We'll get you through this.

Harry Osborn: [shakes his head slowly] No.

Peter Parker: I never should have hurt you... said those things.

Harry Osborn: None of that matters, Peter. You're my friend.

Peter Parker: Best friend.

Meaningful movie connection quotes source: (IMDB.com)