

youthESource Bible Study

Spider-Man: Homecoming Discussion Guide

By Sam Sessa

Leader Guide

Movie Themes:

The Big Guy and the Little Guy | Christ Motifs | Relationships | Coming of Age

Introduction:

From RottenTomatoes.com:

A young Peter Parker/Spider-Man (Tom Holland), who made his sensational debut in *Captain America: Civil War*, begins to navigate his newfound identity as the web-slinging super hero in *Spider-Man: Homecoming*. Thrilled by his experience with the Avengers, Peter returns home, where he lives with his Aunt May (Marisa Tomei), under the watchful eye of his new mentor Tony Stark (Robert Downey, Jr.). Peter tries to fall back into his normal daily routine—distracted by thoughts of proving himself to be more than just your friendly neighborhood Spider-Man—but when the Vulture (Michael Keaton) emerges as a new villain, everything that Peter holds most important will be threatened.

Spider-Man: Homecoming is a fantastic coming-of-age tale that blends what is best about a John Hughes-style film with the Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU). For church leaders seeking to use this film in a youth setting there are a few things to note.

The first is the underlying principal that undergirds this study guide. Namely, that the gospel-event, Christ's life, death and resurrection, was such a momentous event in history that it has spilled over into every aspect of existence. We can find shards of the gospel in literature, movies, pagan belief systems, science; nearly anything that you can imagine has been affected in some way by Christ.

The gospel that is found in non-Christian sources is only a shard of the gospel, an echo if you will. If existence was a calm pool, then Christ's entrance was a large stone striking the center, causing waves and ripples. This guide is aimed at looking at some of the ripples that can be seen in *Spider-Man*.

It is my hope that you can use this movie to showcase Christ both in the ways that this movie affirms the Christian story and the ways that this movie contradicts it. Ultimately, we are called to be in this world but not of it. If our youth are to live in this world, then they need to be able to discern many messages that are being thrown at them, and to be able to separate what is negative from what is positive.

A few things to note about the MCU and Spider-Man. The first is that this is the second reboot of the Spider-Man franchise but this film doesn't waste time with an origin story. Instead, the heart of this film is a group of high schoolers as they try to navigate social groups and relationships. As with nearly any piece of entertainment, there is some objectionable content. Thankfully, *Spider-Man: Homecoming* has far less objectionable content than most PG-13 films. There is some violence and a few off-color jokes, but for the most part, this is a wholesome entertaining romp in a superhero world.

This film is firmly set in the MCU and doesn't connect to any of the previous Spider-Man movies. Spider-Man features a prominent role in *Captain America: Civil War* and *Avengers: Infinity War*. It is very likely that he will continue to be a large figure in the years to come.

Watching the Movie:

This guide can be used in multiple ways. The first is to watch the movie in its entirety and then host a discussion afterward. The benefit of this approach is that it will be the most entertaining and the simplest to execute. The down side is that the movie itself takes a little over 2 hours and any discussion on top of that will make for a very long event.

The second suggested way is to have everyone watch the film beforehand and then go through the discussion questions. This guide will provide both a chronological and thematic approach to the questions and you can choose the method that most appeals to your context.

Before you sit down to watch the movie, take out something to take notes with and write these two questions on it:

- What do I like most about this film?
- What do I like least about this film?

By taking notes throughout the film, even sparse notes, it will enrich and enliven the group discussion afterward. If you'd like, you can even go over the Group Discussion questions in brief beforehand so as to know what to look for while watching the film.

Group Discussion:

QUESTIONS PRESENTED CHRONOLOGICALLY

(hr:min:sec)

(0:00:35—0:04:03)

Toomes put all of his money and resources into getting the city contract to pick up the debris from the alien invasion that happened in the first *Avengers* movie. When the government came in, they stripped Toomes of his contract and he faced losing everything. Instead of turning in a truckload of alien hardware, he chose to keep it and start a black-market tech and arms company.

- If you were in Toomes' position, how would you respond as you faced financial ruin?

- Try to get your participants to have empathy for those in tough financial predicaments.
- How could the government have handled things differently? How much pain and suffering would have been avoided if the Big Guy cared for the little guy?
 - One of the major themes in this film is the elites vs. the common man. Consistently, the common man, or the little guy, feels ignored and stepped on by the elites or the Big Guy. This dynamic can be explored from a political, cultural or religious perspective. In a church context, how is it when the leadership doesn't show empathy for the everyday laity? When *Homecoming* is viewed from one of these lens, it takes on a much deeper perspective.
- How can this situation form the way that we treat other people?
 - This is an excellent opportunity to engender empathy in your participants as they consider their own relationships.

(0:8:42—0:21:34)

Tony Stark used Peter Parker to help him fight Captain America, but once Peter wasn't useful, he didn't get any love or attention. In their relationship, Tony is the Big Guy and Peter is the little guy. But because Peter is trying to get into Tony's good graces, he ends up stepping all over his friends and classmates who look up to him.

- What are some personal examples of where you stepped over your old friends to try to impress someone new?

Peter tried to tell Happy about the ATM robbery with the alien weapons but Happy brushed him aside.

- How is what Happy did to Peter similar to what the government did to Toomes?
 - In *Homecoming*, Peter and Toomes share a similar set of circumstances. Both the hero and the villain represent the everyman. Both are stepped on by the Big Guy. What is different is how they respond. Toomes chooses to take things into his own hands and go outside of the law to take care of his family. Peter chooses to be persistent in fighting to protect his neighborhood from danger and criminals.
- How much pain and suffering would have been avoided if the Big Guy had empathy for the little guy?
 - The goal with this question is to get the participants to consider how their own actions have consequences. By having empathy, which leads to actions for others, they can help to prevent poor or evil decisions from people who feel that they are alone in dealing with life's problems.

(0:31:53—0:38:27)

Peter wants to be one of the Big Guys so he tried to take on the weapons dealers and ran into Toomes in his Vulture suit. Toomes nearly killed Peter, and Tony reprimanded Peter for trying to take on villains too big for him. Tony wants Peter to focus on the little people, like helping old woman cross the street.

- How does Peter not realize that Tony has Peter's best interests at heart?
 - Tony cares about Peter but chooses not to show it. If Tony showed Spider-Man that he cared, then Peter would be more willing to follow Tony's directions.

- What could Tony say or do that would communicate to Peter how much he cares?
 - Try to bring out several examples of how we communicate love and respect to people around us.

(1:12:03—1:19:40)

- In the ferry scene, do you notice any Christological imagery? (Christological imagery would be any image or action that reminds you of Christ.)
 - The primary example is when the ferry is splitting in two and Peter tries to use his webs to hold it all together. As the webs begin to split, Peter jumps out and grabs one and shoots another so that as he is in cruciform he is sacrificing his body to save the people in the ship.
 - This act is likely a call-back to *Spider-Man 2* where Spider-Man stops a train from crashing by shooting webs out and sacrificing his body in the front in cruciform to prevent it from crashing. He then "dies" and his body is passed through the train from person to person.
 - The secondary example is where Iron Man comes in to save the day. When viewing this scene from this perspective, Spider-Man represents the everyday Christian who comes in and tries to do right but fails. But in his weakness, Christ's strength is made perfect (2 Cor. 12:9). In a similar way, Spider-Man is saved by Iron Man.
 - The important thing about any Christological connections is to remember that the creators may or may not have intended these connections. And while they can be useful in reminding us of the Christian story, they are not perfect parallels but a merely an extended ripple that we are chasing.

(1:20:15—1:23:15)

- In what ways does Peter's and Tony's relationship mirror a father/son relationship?
 - Peter's father and mother died when he was a young child. He has since lived with his Aunt May and is starved for a father-figure in his life. When Tony enters, Peter looks up to and treats him like a father. Peter is starved for approval and acceptance from Tony, whereas Tony sees Peter as a kid he is

responsible for. It is not until later in the film that Tony begins to accept the father-figure role that is played up further in *Avengers: Infinity War*.

(1:29:43—1:34:30)

- What situation from Christ's life does the car ride remind you of?
 - The car ride, possibly the best scene in the entire film, is reminiscent of Christ's temptation. In this scene, the hero is tempted by the villain to set aside his mission. Where Satan used the promise of power and stature as his bait, Toomes uses fear and intimidation. In both cases, the hero rejects the temptation and sacrifices himself to stop the villain.

(1:39:19—1:53:50)

- When Peter confronts Toomes in his hideout, he is trapped under the rubble. What aspects of his escape remind you of Christ's story?
 - When the building collapses on Peter it is almost like a death and burial. Toomes fully believes that he has finally killed his nemesis and he leaves to score the big heist. Meanwhile, Peter must extricate himself from the "tomb" to stop the villain.
 - While there are some similarities to Peter and Christ, it would be useful to highlight both the similarities and differences.

After the plane crashes, Peter and Toomes have it out on the beach. Peter tries to save Toomes from flying as his suit is about to explode. Then Peter jumps through the flames and carries Toomes out on his shoulders. This can remind us of how Christ descended into hell to lead the captives free.

- How does this scene give image to Romans 5:8, "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."?
 - There are strong ripples of how Christ loves us even while we are far from him. The imagery in the movie evokes a hellish scene filled with flames. The Christ-figure jumps into the flames to rescue the sinner from death and Hades. Again, while not a perfect parallel to the Christian story, the participants can be sharpened by drawing the similarities and dissimilarities to what Christ has done for us.

(1:58:03—2:02:18)

- By the end of the film, how does Peter transcend the need to have external affirmation that he is a Big Guy?
 - The whole of the film up until Peter is buried in the rubble, he is looking for affirmation and identity from Tony. Peter sees himself as an Avenger and as such he lets his friends, interests and studies slide. At one point he is planning on dropping out of high school. But after he rises from the rubble under his own power without any help from Tony, he realizes that he doesn't need to

belong to any elite group in order to be affirmed in who he is and what he has to do.

- This could be a good point to affirm the doctrine of vocation and that everything we do can be glorifying to God whether it is on the big stage or in the back hallway.

(2:05:04—2:05:50)

- In the first extra credits scene, Toomes is asked if he knows Spider-Man's identity. Why do you think he doesn't tell who Spider-Man is? Do you think that Toomes is repentant (even a little bit)?
 - The first stinger (extra credit scene) has an interesting dynamic. It is possible that Toomes is willing to forgive Peter for interfering with his criminal enterprise because Peter saved his life. This would be similar to how he was willing to let Peter go because Peter saved his daughter.
 - Toomes could also be keeping Peter's identity quiet because he plans on extracting vengeance himself. This would fall in line with many comic book tropes.
 - Finally, this could be an example of someone who is willing to change. Toomes wasn't always a criminal, and now that his wife and daughter know what he has done, there is a chance that he is willing to turn over a new leaf.

QUESTIONS PRESENTED THEMATICALLY

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The Big Guy and the Little Guy

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