

Star Wars: The Last Jedi Discussion Guide

By Sam Sessa

Leader Guide

Movie Themes:

Good vs. Evil; Identity; Removing Ties to the Past; Self-Sacrifice; Universalism; Wealth

Introduction:

The Last Jedi is the 8th installment in the main Star Wars series. It was released on December 9, 2017, to critical acclaim and a fair-share of backlash to how this entry expanded the Star Wars mythos. 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 *The Last Jedi*.

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 Star Wars universe. Star Wars is premised on eastern religions like Buddhism and Hinduism. The Force is an impersonal, universal, mystical and supernatural phenomenon. In *The Last Jedi*, like much of Star Wars, good and evil are in an eternal struggle where neither will triumph over the other, they can only hope to be equal. This message is antithetical to the Christian religion. We firmly believe that Christ has conquered sin, death and the devil. At the end of time, evil will not be in balance with good, but will be resigned to the lake of fire. Our hope is in good triumphing over evil for all time. With this in mind, help guide your group to ground their hope in Christ. *The Last Jedi* is a popular movie and can be, with discernment, an edifying experience for you and your group.

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 2.5 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)

(0:1:45—0:12:10)

During the evacuation battle, Paige, the sister to Rose, dies sacrificing herself to blow up the Dreadnaught. Poe Dameron initiated a fight that ended up costing many people their lives.

- What does Poe's actions tell us about leadership?
 - Your actions have consequences. Poe was so focused on destroying his target, that he sacrificed others to accomplish his goal. In many ways, their deaths were for nothing.
- What does Paige's sacrifice tell us about doing your job? (Vocation)
 - Regardless of why she was in this situation, Paige's duty was to release the bombs. She did the best she could in the situation and didn't waste time complaining or trying to find fault in someone else.
 - In the same way, we should approach our duty as sons and daughters, students, and workers with the same mindset. Whatever our hand finds to do, we should do unto God.
 - "Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters, knowing that from the Lord you will

receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ." (Col. 3:23-24 NIV)

(0:22:30—0:26:02)

Rey is trying to find her identity throughout both *The Last Jedi* and *The Force Awakens*. While Rey is trying to find her identity as a pupil to Luke Skywalker, she starts to follow him up a steep hill. As she follows him, she hears whispers and begins to walk in a new direction. In part, this shows that Rey is striking out on her own path and doesn't need Luke.

When she finds the ancient Jedi texts, Luke is astonished and asks Rey's most important and intimate question, "Who are you?" Rey dodges the question by saying that the Resistance sent her. But Luke is driving to the heart of the matter. He presses on and asks, "Why are you here?" Rey dodges the question again and says, "The Resistance sent me." Luke pushes aside her façade and asks again, "Why are you here?"

Rey finally reveals what's going on inside, she is afraid and her fear stems from ignorance. She doesn't know who her parents are nor the power that is inside of her.

- How do you relate to Rey's fear?
- Through Jesus Christ, we are adopted as children of God. How does knowing who we are help with fear?
 - Rey's fear stems from her ignorance and lack of purpose. Because she doesn't know who her parents are, she doesn't know where she comes from; therefore, she is uncertain about where she should be going.
 - No matter where we come from, when we are baptized, we are adopted into God's family. We know where we come from (history of God's people) and we know where we are going (the Resurrection). So when fear bites at our heels, we can take comfort in know what God has done for us, His people, in the past, and what He promises to do for us in the future.

(0:13:43—0:14:48); (0:16:30—0:19:50)

- What are some of the ways that characters say goodbye to the past?
 - When Rey meets Luke, she hands him a lightsaber and he tosses it away.
 - Supreme Leader Snoke calls Kylo Ren's mask "ridiculous" and then Kylo smashes his mask into nothing.

(0:38:10—0:41:50)

Finn is caught trying to escape using an escape pod. Before he is caught, he hypocritically tries to play the hero.

- What would you do if you were in Finn's position? Why?

(0:47:10—0:0:51:40)

Luke takes Rey to the top of the mountain to teach her about the Force. He shows her that the Force is what binds and connects all things. Then he teaches her the lesson. Luke says, "And this is the lesson: That Force does not belong to the Jedi. To say that if the Jedi die, the light dies, is vanity. Can you feel that?"

- How does the world see Christianity's claim that we have exclusive access to God and eternal life through Jesus Christ as vanity?
 - The world is repulsed by Christianity's exclusive claim to have the keys to eternal life.
- How does this lesson from Luke reveal a belief that there are many paths to God?
 - The world believes that God is bigger than any single religion. They often see the goal of religion as enlightenment, and to think that enlightenment is only found in a single religion, like the Jedi Order, is the highest form of hubris.
- Read in a different light, how does this statement reveal that God is going to be working through His Word even if the church closes her doors?
 - What Luke said is in reference to many religions having access to divine truth, but we can take it another way. We should not become so focused on the vitality of a single congregation or denomination that we lose sight of the fact that God's Church has been in play since Adam and Eve. The Church is bigger than a building; it is the place where the saints gather around God's Word and receive His means of grace. And that can never go out of business.

(0:54:04—0:57:37)

When Finn and Rose are at the Cantina casino they see extravagant wealth. But the beauty is paid for by the blood and sweat of slaves.

- How do we subsidize our wealthy way of life by exploiting people here and around the world?
 - Point to examples of how we purchase products that were made by people in other countries where the working conditions are barely above slave labor.

(1:11:12—1:13:22)

In one of their Force conversations, Kylo reveals to Rey what Luke tried to do. Afterward he says, "Let the past die. Kill it, if you have to. That is the only way to become who you were meant to be."

- How can the past become an unhealthy fixation for us in the present?
 - We can get so caught up in nostalgia and love for the past that we forget to live in the present.
 - This can be especially dangerous when we become fixated on something evil that we have done, or has been done to us. Our fixation can turn into an obsession that binds us. We need to live in the present reality that if we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us of our sins and cleanse

us of all unrighteousness. And since we have been forgiven such a huge debt, we need to forgive those who have sinned against us.

- How can killing the past be dangerous for us today?
 - Killing the past is a very dangerous thing to do. The past tells us where we have been, and by knowing that, we can plot a course for where we are going. If the past, present and future acted as dimensions, by killing the past we would become like two-dimensional creatures, rather than the fully three-dimensional creatures that God created us to be. It is far better to be a cube than a square.

(1:20:45—1:24:15)

After Rey confronts Luke about what he did to Kylo, she leaves to try and convert Kylo to the light side. Fed up with his failure, Luke goes to destroy the ancient Jedi texts when he meets Yoda. Luke loses his nerve but Yoda summons a lightning to burn the tree and the books. Yoda and Luke have the following conversation:

Luke: So, it is time for the Jedi Order to end.

Yoda: Time it is. Hmm. For you to look past a pile of old books, hmm?

Luke: The Sacred Jedi texts!

Yoda: Oh, read them, have you?

Luke: Well, I...

Yoda: Page-turners they were not. Yes, yes, yes. Wisdom they held but that library contained nothing that the girl Rey does not already possess. Skywalker, still looking to the horizon. Never here! *[pokes Luke with his walking stick]* Now, hmm? The need in front of your nose, hmm?

Luke: I was weak. Unwise.

Yoda: Lost Ben Solo, you did. Lose Rey, we must not.

Luke: I can't be what she needs me to be.

Yoda: Heeded my words not, did you. Pass on what you have learned. Strength, mastery. But weakness, folly, and failure. Yes, failure most of all. The greatest teacher, failure is.

Luke, we are what they grow beyond. That is the true burden of all masters.

- How does the world see Christianity as a bunch of people who can't "look past a pile of old books"?
 - The world sees a group of people trying to live out a Pharisaical morality based on the teachings of a guy who died 2,000 years ago. They don't believe that anything that happened that long ago could contain truth or wisdom for today.
- One of the central themes of Star Wars is that the answers are already inside of you. What would Jesus say about this?
 - Jesus would say that He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. He is the answer. We find the answers we need in Him.

(1:24:16—1:26:20)

The hacker, DJ, shows that the wealthy profit off the death of the Resistance and the First Order. DJ says to Finn, "Finn, let me learn you something big: It's all a machine, partner. Live free. Don't join."

- DJ shows Finn that the Resistance and the First Order are "two sides of the same coin" and that to "live free" is to not join either. In our society, are there other "two sides of the same coin" that we can join?
 - Republicans and Democrats offer two different visions for our society. Both lionize their group and demonize the other. Yet there is no Republican or Democrat who has the power to forgive sins. There is no governor, senator, or president who can legislate salvation. Christ offers something radically different. Not a better version of this world that can be attained with a larger voting bloc, but a new heaven and a new earth that will be experienced with new resurrected bodies.
- How is the freedom that Christ offers us a radical departure from what our society offers us?
 - DJ suggested that freedom is found by eschewing the system and looking out for yourself. Jesus offers us true freedom, freedom that is found not by trying to earn it or keep it, but by receiving it freely. Jesus has taken care of everything for us, so we are now free to love and serve our neighbor.

(1:47:37—1:49:32)

Kylo Ren appeals to Rey to "Let old things die." This scene combines the themes of identity, enemies, and letting go of the past. Kylo throws Ren's abusive parents in her face.

Ren: It's time to let old things die. Snoke, Skywalker, the Sith, the Jedi, the Rebels; let it all die. Rey...I want you to join me. We can rule together and bring a new order to the galaxy!

Rey: *[starting to tear up]* Don't do this, Ben. Please, don't go this way.

Ren: No, no, you're still...holding on! Let go! Do you want to know the truth about your parents, or have you always known? You've just hidden it away. You know the truth. Say it. *[Rey continues to tear up]* Say it.

Rey: *[tearfully]* They were nobody.

Ren: They were filthy junk traders; sold you off for drinking money. They're dead in a pauper's grave in the Jakku desert. You have no place in this story; you come from nothing. You're nothing...but not to me. Join me. *[he extends his hand towards Rey]* Please.

- What do you think about Rey's parentage? How do you feel about Kylo talking about them as "filthy junk traders; sold you off for drinking money. They're dead in a pauper's grave"?

Kylo says to Rey, "You have no place in this story; you come from nothing. You're nothing." Star Wars is a saga about the Skywalker family. First it was Anakin who became Darth Vader. Then it was about his children, Luke and Leia. Now it is about the third generation of Skywalker's, Ben Solo AKA Kylo Ren. Rey is not a Skywalker, and as such she doesn't have an honored place in this saga. In much the same way, the Bible is about the nation of Israel, the family of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. As Gentiles, we do not have an honored place in this story.

- How might Rey see herself, now that she has acknowledged her parents' abuse and are dead?
- How does adoption in God's family, through Baptism, change the way you see yourself?

(1:51:00—1:52:17)

Holdo sacrificed herself to save the Resistance.

- How does her sacrifice remind you of Christ?
 - By her death she tried to save the lives of those she cared about.
 - Christ's death was altogether different. Holdo died for the Resistance. Christ died for the Resistance *and the First Order*. And while Holdo merely set the enemy back, Christ defeated sin, death and the devil and reigns supreme over all of creation.

(2:03:09—2:06:25)

Finn was going to sacrifice himself to save the Resistance, but Rose stopped him.

- How has Finn changed from the guy who tried to escape earlier in the film to the guy who was willing to sacrifice himself?
- If the Battering Ram Cannon was the judgment of the Law, how is what Rose did for Finn like what Christ did for us?
 - When we try to earn God's love through good actions we are like Finn riding our way into a giant laser beam. The only thing that we will earn is the right to become vaporized space dust.
 - But Christ came and pushed us out of the way of the laser beam. Rose cleared the death ray when she saved Finn, but Christ got caught in the center of it. He took the full blast so that you don't have to. He died, so that you could receive all of God's love.

QUESTIONS PRESENTED THEMATICALLY

Self-Sacrifice

(0:1:45—0:12:10)

During the evacuation battle, Paige, the sister to Rose, dies sacrificing herself to blow up the Dreadnaught. Poe Dameron initiated a fight that ended up costing many people their lives.

- What does Poe's actions tell us about leadership?

- Your actions have consequences. Poe was so focused on destroying his target, that he sacrificed others to accomplish his goal. In many ways, their deaths were for nothing.
- What does Paige's sacrifice tell us about doing your job? (Vocation)
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