

NO GREATER LOVE

first love.
second chance.



BIBLE STUDY GUIDE



ABOUT THE FILM

Jeff and Heather Baker were the “lucky ones.” Best friends from childhood, high school sweethearts, and married by twenty-two, they were inseparable soul mates. Over time, however, Jeff (*Anthony Tyler Quinn*) became a workaholic and Heather (*Danielle Bisutti*) felt the neglected. After the birth of their son, Ethan (*Aaron Sanders*), and with Jeff never around, Heather fell into a deep and prolonged depression. In a moment of uncontrollable despair, Heather did the unthinkable – she abandoned her husband and infant son – and vanished. Jeff was forced to raise their son as a single father.

Ten years after Heather’s disappearance, Jeff is finally ready to move on with his life and is on the verge of proposing to Katie Saunders (*Alexis Boozer*), his girlfriend of eight months. Heather has become a distant memory for Jeff and no memory at all for the well-adjusted (now eleven-year-old) Ethan.

Jeff is befriended by Dave Torre (*Jay Underwood*), a fellow regular at a local coffee house. After striking up a friendship, they learn that their sons are little league baseball teammates. With summer break approaching, Dave encourages Jeff to allow Ethan to come to “Kids Fest,” a fun week-long summer camp at Dave’s church. Having few feelings about God or church, but thinking that Kids Fest would be – if nothing else – safe babysitting for his son, Jeff accepts.

Ethan has a blast, and on the final day of camp, Jeff and Katie are persuaded to attend a brief show performed by the kids for the parents. It is on this day that Jeff receives the monumental shock of his life: Heather is serving at the church as one of the Kids Fest helpers!

The heart-wrenching drama begins as all involved are forced into an emotional journey with painful choices of forgiveness, reconciliation, and second chances.

Lionsgate, Thomas Nelson Publishing, Carmel Entertainment and Coram Deo Studios are pleased to present **No Greater Love**.



LIONSGATE



CORAMDEO STUDIOS



ABOUT THE BIBLE STUDY GUIDE

At one level, **No Greater Love** is an emotional romantic drama about the reuniting of two separated “soul mates” and, specifically, the obstacles they must overcome in order to be together again. At a deeper level, however, **NGL** is a story of redemption. It chronicles the lives of Jeff and Heather and the individual trials they must go through in order to be humbled enough to submit their lives to the One true and living **God**.

As with our lives, their journey is complicated. They encounter extremely difficult situations, are forced to make painful decisions, and in the end they must wrestle with the central theme of the movie: which road will they take...theirs or **God's**?

We may never experience some of the specific trials of Jeff or Heather, but the basic themes of the film including marriage, divorce, forgiveness, despair, encouraging fellow Christians, personal sanctification and evangelism are universal issues we will continually encounter in some fashion or another during the course of our lives.

Because **No Greater Love** presents such relatable characters in real-life situations, the film is sure to spark much discussion. The fact that the characters portrayed in the film must repeatedly think through difficult Biblical passages and choose whether to walk by faith or by sight makes **NGL** an excellent launching pad for a lively and profitable group study. This study guide was created for the very purpose of providing a framework for prompting excellent group discussion and has been divided into seven lessons.

Each of the seven lessons contains:

- A selected scene from the film which deals with the respective topic (these scenes can be downloaded online).
- A series of questions related to the respective topic to prompt discussion.
- A brief Biblical commentary on a selected Scriptural passage addressing the topic.
- Additional Scripture passages for optional further study.
- A quote from a Hero of the Faith to conclude the topic.

It is recommended that all participants first watch **No Greater Love** in its entirety. As an alternative, watching the film trailer will be helpful. For the study itself it is recommended that the respective downloadable film clip is watched by the group at the beginning of each section. Next, the group leader can ask the topical questions. After discussing the questions the leader can read aloud the brief Biblical commentary as well as the additional Scriptural passages if desired. Each section can be concluded with the leader reading the quote from a Hero of the Faith.

This study can be completed in one full sitting or one lesson at a time. It can be used in a large group setting or by an individual. It really isn't important exactly how the study is used, only that the rich Biblical truths contained within are clearly and accurately presented for what they truly are: The living Word of our loving **God**.

Enjoy, and to **Jesus Christ** be all Glory!

LESSON 1: DEALING WITH DESPAIR

At the beginning of the film, Heather Baker feels such hopelessness that she does the unthinkable: she abandons her husband and infant son.

Questions:

How do you react when your expectations are not met? What situations bring you to a point of depression and despair? How should we deal with despair when all seems lost?



A simple definition of despair is to lose all hope or confidence. Often our hope and confidence can be misplaced in our relationships, career, or our bank accounts but all these can be fleeting. As we take an assessment of our life, is our hope built upon a foundation that is man made or God made? At the beginning of **No Greater Love**, Heather had clearly put her hope in her relationship with her husband and when he did not meet her expectations she felt despair. When we have our hope misplaced we can easily find ourselves traveling towards depression. But if our hope is anchored in Jesus Christ then despair is kept at bay.

Read and Consider Psalm 42

This chapter gives us a firsthand picture of one in despair. The Psalmist is physically separated from fellowship with other believers and is experiencing an extremely dark time in his spiritual life. In verse one he describes his soul as dry and parched. Like a deer panting for lack of water, the Psalmist is facing a deep spiritual drought. By verse three his degree of anguish is apparent as he describes his own tears as being his food! In verse five and again in verse eleven, he asks himself, "Why is my soul cast down?" Simply put – why is my soul in despair? He then remembers his past experiences of communion with God and he longs to experience this again. Finally, after heart-wrenching self-examination, the Psalmist comes to terms with his only true source of hope as he cries out, "Hope in God."

In times of turmoil and despair we must understand and act upon the fact that true hope does not come from temporal fixes. True hope is found only in Jesus Christ and Him alone. Take careful stock of where your hope lies. Is your hope in Jesus Christ?

For Further Study:

Read Psalm 71:14,
Lamentations 3:24,
Eph. 1:18, Titus
1:1-3

Hero of the Faith

"The knowledge of God, His favor, His image, His soul-cheering presence and the hopeful prospect of dwelling forever with Him are objects of sufficient worth and excellence to draw out the heart of the best and greatest of men." – William Plumer

LESSON 2: PURPOSEFUL RELATIONSHIPS – EVANGELISM

Throughout the film, Dave seeks to continually build a trusting friendship with Jeff for the purpose of evangelism.

Questions:

As a Christian, do you intentionally seek relationships for the purpose of evangelism? Do your current relationships with non-Christians have a purpose? Do you seek to tell others of the hope you have in Christ?



We all have many relationships - with a spouse, kids, neighbors, a friend from work, maybe a food server we see regularly at our favorite restaurant. The list can seem endless. Should each of our relationships have a purpose? In **NGL**, Dave befriends Jeff for the purpose of telling him about Jesus Christ. The two men really have very little in common, yet, Dave patiently and intentionally seeks opportunities to evangelize Jeff. As God allows people to come into our lives we, too, have a great opportunity to be used as an instrument of God to present the Gospel to non-Christians. We should look at the non-Christians around us as God's divine grace upon us for us to be used in their lives. What should motivate us to have this kind of perspective in a relationship? Our first motivation should be our love for our Lord Jesus Christ. If we value our relationship with Him the way we should, we will have a great desire for others to know Him as we do. Our second motivation is our love for others. If you love someone you will be truthful with them about their eternity. We were all made for eternity and we will all one day stand in front of God and give an account for our life. This should motivate us to share the Good News of our Lord Jesus Christ with those who cross our paths.

Read and Consider 2 Corinthians 5:18-20

We are each ambassadors of Christ and we have been commanded by God to be instruments of reconciliation to an unreconciled world. An ambassador is one who represents someone or something and in this case we represent Jesus Christ. We are all called to be preachers of the Good News. In this passage we are reminded that Christ has forgiven our sins and out of this truth we should desire others to experience true forgiveness of their sins as well. God uses our relationships with non-Christians to accomplish His salvation in their lives. If we are not faithfully engaged in purposeful relationships, God's design will still be accomplished but we miss out on the blessings of being used by God.

For Further Study:

Read Matthew
24:14, Acts 10:42,
Romans 10:14,
Colossians 4:5

Hero of the Faith

"Gladly would I meet a martyr's death, if you would be persuaded thereby to come to Christ for life." – Charles Spurgeon

LESSON 3: FORGIVENESS

At a pivotal moment in the film, Heather asks Jeff to forgive her for her past.

Questions:

Why should we forgive? How do we forgive if someone has wronged us so greatly? Do we only need to forgive if someone asks us? What if we don't forgive someone?



Forgiveness is much talked about but little understood. John MacArthur defines genuine forgiveness as, “Not feigned or grudging, but is given as freely as we ourselves desire to be forgiven. It involves a deliberate refusal to hold the guilt over the head of the offender. It means ending the bitterness, laying aside anger, and refusing to dwell on the offense that has been forgiven. It is a complete letting go of any thought of retaliation or reprisal. It is, as nearly as possible, the human equivalent of what God promises – to remember the sin no more.” We cannot truly forgive others until we have been forgiven by God for our sins. Heather understands that she has been forgiven much and in humility she begs Jeff to truly forgive her. Jeff, for his part, only forgives her when it is advantageous to him. This is not true forgiveness. True forgiveness involves mercy (not getting what we DO deserve – eternal damnation) and grace (getting what we DON'T deserve – eternal salvation). If we have experienced the true forgiveness of our sins in Christ then we will have a desire to forgive others. We, as Christians, have been forgiven a weight of sin that would damn us to Hell a thousand times over. So, who are we to not forgive others? Our mere willingness to forgive should be so evident to the offender that it woos him or her to seek our forgiveness.

Consider Matthew 6:14-15

Here we get to the heart of forgiveness. When we forgive others it is a demonstration of God forgiving us. The supreme example of forgiveness is Jesus Christ, who was beaten, accused unjustly, spit upon, and finally hung on a cross – yet He still forgave. He even asked God the Father to forgive these very ones that had done these horrific things to Him. We have not been treated in this manner, yet at times we simply choose to disobey and not forgive. In this passage Jesus calls us to obedience – to be one that forgives. Simply put, forgiveness is a command and not an option.

For Further Study:

Read Psalm 32:5, Proverbs 28:13, Luke 11:4; 23:34, Ephesians 4:32, Colossians 3:13, 1 John 1:9

Hero of the Faith

“He that demands mercy, and shows none, ruins the bridge over which he himself is to pass.” – *Thomas Adam*

LESSON 4: PURPOSEFUL RELATIONSHIPS – SANCTIFICATION

At a time of great need, Sherry comes alongside Heather to Biblically encourage her.

Questions:

What is sanctification? How are we to be used in other Christians lives for sanctification? Is this optional or commanded in Scripture?



Sanctification means to be set apart to be made holy – and this involves two aspects.

The first is called positional sanctification. The moment Christ saves us we are declared holy in the eyes of God – not because of any good we have done, but based solely on what Christ has done on our behalf. Our position before God is that of perfect holiness. Practically, however, we still sin which brings us to the second aspect called progressive sanctification. As we seek to be more like Jesus, the Holy Spirit empowers us to become progressively more and more holy with each passing day. As Christians we must be purposeful in helping each other to grow in Christ. No Christian is meant to live out his or her life alone, and in His grace, God has designed the body of Christ to need each other. Heather realizes that she needs to have other Christians in her life to help her grow in grace, therefore Sherry and Heather have a purposeful relationship for sanctification. Over thirty passages in Scripture call us to practice the “one anothers” (love, comfort, exhort, admonish, pray, forgive, and so on) all with the purpose of helping one another to be more like our Savior. Not only do we need to have these relationships, but we are commanded to actively seek out these types of sanctifying relationships.

Consider Ephesians 4:4-13

What a beautiful picture of how the body of Christ works. Though we are all individuals, we are all of one body. God has gifted every Christian with spiritual gifts that must be exercised in the body. The goal of these gifts is to bring the entire body of Christ to spiritual maturity, but this can only be done as we have purposeful relationships with other Christians. Plus, as we interact with each other with purpose, we will find greater unity with each other. Bear in mind, however, that apart from a personal, active pursuit of Christ we will never grow as an individual and thus will not be able to be used of God to grow others as we should.

For Further Study:

Read Proverbs
27:17, 1 Samuel
23:16, Hebrews
10:24

Hero of the Faith

“There is but one God, and they that serve Him should be one. There is nothing that would render the true religion more lovely, or make more proselytes to it, than to see the professors of it tied together with the heart-string of love.” – *Thomas Watson*

LESSON 5: WILLINGNESS TO OBEY REGARDLESS OF CIRCUMSTANCES

Heather must choose whether or not to obey the Bible and be reconciled to Jeff – knowing this may make her life very difficult.

Questions:

*Must we obey the Bible at all times?
What if obeying will potentially lead to more pain? How can we trust God through this type of trial?*



Obedience is the mark of a true Christian. In our culture we are encouraged to do what we want – when we want, but when Christ redeems us from our sins we are no longer slaves to sin but are now willing servants of Christ. Our obedience is not born out of fear of a mean Deity but rather out of a heart of thankfulness for what God has done for us. Out of our love for Christ we will have the desire to please Him. It is easy to obey when there is little cost, but when the cost is great, or even potentially great, it becomes harder. Heather's life was finally coming together. She was growing comfortable in her relationship with God, her church, her friends, and had a wonderful ministry opportunity. She knew that if she remained married to Jeff she ran the risk of a painful life as well as the temptation of falling back into her old, sinfully destructive patterns. Yet, remaining married to Jeff is precisely what the Bible has commanded her to do. This was her big test of faith – would she trust in God's plan or would she make things temporarily "easier" by rebelling against His Word? The Scriptures are clear that we are to obey all of His commands all of the time – not just when we want to or when it is convenient. It is easy for us to try to justify disobedience, but there is no room for this in Scripture. Christ is our perfect example of obedience to God the Father's commands. He knew what lay ahead of him at Calvary but there was no wavering in His obedience.

Consider 2 John 1:6

Love is the motivation for our obedience to Christ. Our motivation is not one of obligation but rather of gratitude for what Christ has done for us. Do we truly love our Lord enough to obey Him? It is refreshing to remember that since God is our loving Father who only wants our best, then His commands are for our best!

For Further Study:
Read Psalm 103:21,
John 3:36, Hebrews
5:9, 1 John 5:3

Hero of the Faith

"Holy joy will be oil to the wheels of our obedience." – *Matthew Henry*

LESSON 6: THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS CHANCE

In the end, Dave confronts Jeff with the truth that God is sovereign and has been in control of everything that has transpired in the lives of Jeff and Heather.

Questions:

Do you trust that God is in complete control of everything? Do you believe that God works all things together – even our pain and sin – to accomplish His ultimate good?



God's sovereignty means that He is in complete control of everything, everywhere, all the time. Nothing happens outside of His control and there is nothing that can stop His decreed will. The more we understand this doctrine, the more we are comforted by the truth that God is God and therefore He is sovereign. Dave understands this truth as he confronts Jeff with the fact that God had orchestrated all aspects of Jeff and Heather's relationship and circumstances. We may not always understand why God allows certain things to happen, but we can be assured that He is always in control. For the Christian, we are not only sure that He is sovereign, but we know that He is always working everything out for our good! We know that He always has our best in mind.

Consider Genesis 50:14-20

Here we have the familiar story of Joseph and his brothers. Joseph was his father's favorite and was favored by God. Because of this, his brothers burned with resentment, jealousy, and bitterness. The brothers plot to kill Joseph but at the last minute they chose to sell him to a caravan of travelers who eventually sell Joseph into Egyptian slavery. While in Egypt, Joseph is falsely accused of sin and thrown into prison. After years of prison, he is summoned by Pharaoh and is accurately able to interpret Pharaoh's dreams. As a result, Pharaoh puts Joseph in charge of the entire kingdom. In this position, Joseph is able to save the people, and ultimately his own family, from the famine that God decreed! In the end, Joseph's is an amazing story of triumph, but along the way we see immense pain and discouragement. God, however, was in complete control. He orchestrated all these circumstances for the preservation of Joseph and his family (which was, in fact, the earthly line of Jesus Himself!) God even allowed Joseph's brothers to sin against him to accomplish His will. We don't always know or understand His decreed will or how it will be for our ultimate good. We do know that He is the Master Planner with a divine agenda for our good so we can take great comfort in His will.

For Further Study:

Read Psalm 113:11;
135:6, Isaiah 46:10,
Daniel 4:35,
Romans 8:28

Hero of the Faith

"No doctrine in the whole Word of God has more excited the hatred of mankind than the truth of the absolute sovereignty of God. The fact that 'the Lord reigneth' is indisputable, and it is this fact that arouses the utmost in the unrenewed human heart." – Charles Spurgeon

LESSON 7: "I WANT WHAT YOU HAVE"

By the end of the film, Jeff has seen Christ in Heather, Dave and Chris and is ultimately drawn to God.

Questions:

Do you live your life in such a way that when others observe you they see Christ?



We come now to the real crux of it all.

There are only two types of people in the world – forgiven or unforgiven, saved or unsaved. Jeff had seen a consistent walk with the Lord in the lives of Heather, Dave, and Pastor Chris. Their lives had been marked with the outward evidence of the inward transformation that had taken place – which the Bible calls the “Fruit of the Spirit.” As we evaluate our lives, would a non-Christian see Christ in us? If our lives are not reflecting Christ, and if we are not growing in our faith, then there is reason to question whether we truly have been forgiven and saved from our sins. This is why the Scriptures call us to examine ourselves to see if we are truly in the faith.

Consider Matthew 5:14-16

The power and validity of our faith is seen in all aspects of our daily lives. If we are obediently living out our faith in the Lord then we will shine brighter and brighter as this world continues to fall deeper and deeper into darkness. Because we are called to be lights in a dark world, our lives should give testimony to our non-believing friends that we are different. As you examine your life do you see areas to which you should repent – and seek to be more like Christ? Christians, let’s let our lights shine extremely bright so that we may be fully used of God in drawing non-Christians to our precious Lord Jesus Christ.

For Further Study:

Read Romans 12:1, Galatians 5:19-25, Philippians 2:15, Colossians 1:10; 4:5

Hero of the Faith

“The upright soul is constant in his profession, and changes not his behavior according to his companions. Oh, that I might never through shame or fear, disown Him who has already acknowledged me!” – *George Swinnock*