

# AMAZING GRACE

WHAT WOULD IT TAKE TO CHANGE THE WORLD?  
*AMAZING GRACE* FAITH DISCUSSION GUIDE



# INTRODUCTION

The following Faith Discussion Guide has been designed for personal reflection and/or group discussion. It examines five scenes from the film, *Amazing Grace*, exploring important themes raised by each. Each theme is also discussed in light of a passage from Scripture. The Guide is designed for adults, including high school and college students. It is suitable for small group discussions, youth groups, and church Sunday school programs.

## GUIDE OVERVIEW



**BIG IDEA:** Description of the main theme.



**STEP ONE:** Read the *Scene Description* that describes the scene and identifies the main characters involved in the action.



**STEP TWO:** Play the short movie clip (on average no longer than two minutes).



**STEP THREE:** Read the *Scene Context* that provides helpful historical background.



**STEP FOUR:** Discuss the questions provided for each scene.



**STEP FIVE:** Discuss the implications of a Scriptural reference to the theme of the scene.



**STEP SIX:** Play the video clip a second time.

The aim of this Faith Discussion Guide is to use William Wilberforce's life and work—as depicted through these five scenes from the film *Amazing Grace*—as a mirror for examining our own lives and times.



# THE PARTNERSHIP

## SCENE ONE: PITT AND WILBERFORCE

### **BIG IDEA: COURAGE**

#### **STEP ONE: Scene Description**

Pitt and Wilberforce, both 23-years-old at the time, discuss their political futures over coffee at the Brookes Club. Pitt reveals his aspiration to become Prime Minister and his desire for Wilberforce's support and partnership.

Key Quote: "Which is why we are too young to realize that certain things are impossible. So we will do them anyway." — William Pitt

#### **STEP TWO: Movie Clip**

#### **STEP THREE: Scene Context**

Pitt and Wilberforce became close friends while attending Cambridge University. A year after this conversation, at the age of 24, Pitt became England's youngest Prime Minister. A biographer writes, "Wilberforce proved that a man can change his times, but that he cannot do it alone."

#### **STEP FOUR: Discussion Questions**

1. Why do you think Wilberforce and Pitt were such good friends?
2. In what ways did they need each other to accomplish their goals?
3. How do you think the age of the two men influenced their desire for social change?
4. How does this conversation differ from a youthful display of ambition?
5. What are some of the influences that can make young people idealistic about making a difference?  
Cynical?
6. How can friendship inspire courage in those attempting to work for change?
7. How would one cultivate such friendships?

#### **STEP FIVE: Discuss Hebrews 3:6**

"But Christ is faithful as a son over God's house. And we are his house, if we hold on to our courage and the hope of which we boast."

#### **STEP SIX: Movie Clip**



# THE QUESTION

## SCENE TWO: CLAPHAM DINNER

### **BIG IDEA: CONFIDENCE**

#### **STEP ONE: Scene Description**

Wilberforce and Pitt are entertaining a group of Anglican and Quaker abolitionists in Wilberforce's Wimbledon home. Among the guests are Thomas Clarkson, a leading abolitionist who helped establish The Society for the Abolition of the African Slave Trade; Hannah More, author, philanthropist, and leading female abolitionist; and Olaudah Equiano, a former slave and eyewitness to injustice.

Key Quote: "We humbly suggest...that you can do both." — Hannah More

#### **STEP TWO: Movie Clip**

#### **STEP THREE: Scene Context**

Pitt has arranged for Wilberforce to meet some of the leading British abolitionists of the time including Olaudah Equiano, an articulate former slave. Equiano says the branding of slaves is to let them know that slaves no longer belong to God, but man. This theme would be later depicted on Josiah Wedgwood's abolitionist medallions, on which was inscribed, "Am I Not a Man and a Brother?"

#### **STEP FOUR: Discussion Questions**

1. Why was it important for Wilberforce to meet Equiano?
2. How did Equiano's witness help Wilberforce understand the human toll of slavery?
3. Why do you think Pitt counted on the meeting being uncomfortable for Wilberforce?
4. Why do you think Wilberforce initially saw political work and the work of God as separate from one another?
5. How does Wilberforce's discomfort with what he learns from his guests heighten his personal dilemma?
6. What makes people confident in their work on behalf of social justice, over time?
7. How can we make social injustice "real" as Equiano did for Wilberforce?

#### **STEP FIVE: Discuss James 2:14-18**

"What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food, if one of you says to him, 'Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed,' but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead. But someone will say, 'You have faith; I have deeds.' Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do."

#### **STEP SIX: Movie Clip**



# THE CHALLENGE

## SCENE THREE: "YOU WOULD DO IT"

### **BIG IDEA: COMMITMENT**

#### **STEP ONE: Scene Description**

Later the same evening following dinner with the leading abolitionists, Wilberforce and Pitt stand in the moonlight beneath an oak tree. Pitt presses Wilberforce to make a personal commitment to the abolitionist movement.

Key Quote: "But you could do it.... You *would* do it." — William Pitt

#### **STEP TWO: Movie Clip**

#### **STEP THREE: Scene Context**

We know from Wilberforce's journal that this conversation was the decision point in his commitment to taking up the cause of slavery. Several months later he wrote, "God Almighty, has set before me two great objects: the suppression of the slave trade and the reformation of manners [morals]." From this moment until the end of his life, these two objects occupied his attention and energy.

#### **STEP FOUR: Discussion Questions**

1. What is the difference between observing a problem and doing something about it?
2. Why was it necessary for Pitt to push Wilberforce to make a decision?
3. How does Pitt set before Wilberforce the magnitude of the challenge?
4. Did Pitt think this would make Wilberforce more likely to take up the cause?
5. How does God use close friends to help us make important decisions?
6. What "great object" has God placed before you?
7. What will it take for you to make a commitment to doing something about it?

#### **STEP FIVE: Discuss Matthew 6:31-33**

"So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well."

#### **STEP SIX: Movie Clip**



# THE CAMPAIGN

## SCENE FOUR: THE SMELL OF SLAVERY

### BIG IDEA: CLEVERNESS

#### STEP ONE: *Scene Description*

Members of Parliament and their wives are enjoying a private cruise of the harbor, accompanied by a string quartet with catered food and beverages. Unexpectedly, they come upon the slave ship, Madagascar, in whose rigging stands William Wilberforce.

Key Quote: “There now. Remember that smell. Remember the Madagascar. Remember God made men equal.” — William Wilberforce

#### STEP TWO: *Movie Clip*

#### STEP THREE: *Scene Context*

The challenge facing the English abolitionists was that for most Englishmen and women, slavery was largely invisible—involving unseen ships and distant colonies. The existence of slaves inside of England officially became illegal in 1772, but England continued to dominate the transportation of slaves overseas. For this reason, every effort was made to help people see the problem. Equiano’s memoir, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano or, Gustavus Vassa, The African*, first published in 1789, was one of the few firsthand accounts of slavery and became a publishing sensation.

#### STEP FOUR: *Discussion Questions*

1. How does one take an abstract issue and make it real for people?
2. How does Wilberforce make slavery real for members of Parliament?
3. What makes the contrast between the two ships so stark?
4. What is significant about seeing a slave ship in particular?
5. How does the “smell of death” underscore Wilberforce’s message?
6. What are contemporary issues that remain largely invisible and unreal to us?
7. What are ways we could make them visible and real?

#### STEP FIVE: *Discuss Matthew 10:16*

“I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves.”

#### STEP SIX: *Movie Clip*



# THE CONFESSION

## SCENE FIVE: ONCE WAS BLIND

### **BIG IDEA: GRACE**

#### **STEP ONE: Scene Description**

Wilberforce visits an aging and now blind John Newton. Newton is dictating his account of his years as a slave trader, an account, which he describes as his “confession.” Newton urges Wilberforce to use the account to further his abolitionist campaign.

Key Quote: “We were apes and they were human.” — John Newton

#### **STEP TWO: Movie Clip**

#### **STEP THREE: Scene Context**

For John Newton, slavery was never abstract but concrete, never impersonal but personal. Yet, it was only after many years as a preacher that he joined the abolitionist movement. He wrote, “Disagreeable I had long found it, but I think I should have quitted it sooner, had I considered it, as I now do, to be unlawful and wrong. But I never had a scruple upon this head at the time, nor was such a thought once suggested to me by any friend. What I did, I did ignorantly, considering it as the line of life which Divine Providence had allotted to me, and having no concern, in point of conscience, but to treat the slaves, while under my care, with as much humanity as a regard to my own safety would admit.” He later acknowledged, “I hope it will always be a subject of humiliating reflection to me, that I was once an active instrument in a business at which my heart now shudders.”

#### **STEP FOUR: Discussion Questions**

1. What is the significance of Newton writing his confession? To Newton? To Wilberforce?
2. Why does he wish to remember the slave’s names?
3. In what ways do we see Newton accepting responsibility for his past actions?
4. How does he acknowledge God’s forgiveness while seeking to make restitution?
5. How does slavery victimize both the slave and the slaver?
6. How does Newton apply the verse from his hymn “Amazing Grace” to himself?
7. Why is it necessary to accept one’s own culpability in social injustice? How does it change the conversation? How does it change one’s involvement in its remedy?

#### **STEP FIVE: Discuss 1 Corinthians 1:27**

“But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong.”

#### **STEP SIX: Movie Clip**



## OTHER

1. Why was Wilberforce drawn to Barbara Spooner?
2. What were the sacrifices that Wilberforce faced in taking on abolition?
3. Why is it necessary to include a heart and mind campaign in order to change laws?
4. What gives one the persistence necessary to engage in a twenty-year campaign?

## FURTHER STUDY

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