

STUDY GUIDE For Groups

Written by Craig Detweiler, co-director of Reel Spirituality
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FULLER

THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

Dear Friends in Faith:

Sometimes in life, you run across something wonderful and new and think to yourself, “why didn’t they think of that sooner?” We here at Fuller Theological Seminary recently had one of those Eureka! moments, when we discovered that a major Hollywood studio had taken a newfound interest in reaching Americans who go to church. Last year, Warner Bros. Pictures released a film entitled, *A Walk To Remember*, and as part of their campaign, the studio produced a Bible study guide that was sent to over 11,000 youth ministries nationwide. This year, we’re both pleased and proud that Warner Bros. Pictures has asked Fuller to produce a Bible study guide for their upcoming Civil War epic, *Gods and Generals*, opening nationwide February 21.

Gods and Generals is a dramatic look back at the Civil War .America’s bloodiest conflict, in which more than 620,000 lives were lost. A prequel to the acclaimed screen drama *Gettysburg*, *Gods and Generals* follows the lives of the unquestionably brave and devoutly religious men on both sides of the war. It is a compelling look at the soldiers’ lives which were motivated by faith, but bound by mortality.

The enclosed Bible study guide was written by Craig Detweiler, co-director of Reel Spirituality. This guide is intended as an opportunity for your congregation to explore their faith through the lens of film. As you well know, movies play a critical role the unfolding evolution of our society. As Christians, it is absolutely vital that we utilize the good that mainstream culture offers us in the form of Common Grace to help draw people closer to Christ. And by actively supporting films that reflect our values and vision .we give Hollywood a financial incentive to do the right thing.

Take the time to plan a congregation-wide screening of *Gods and Generals* as a special event in the life of your church. Photocopy this guide, distribute it to your fellow ministers and lay leaders, and have them lead discussion groups on the themes in the film. This *Gods and Generals* study guide is the perfect marriage of popular culture and the church .a shining example of manifest ministries. It is faith in action.

The epitaph on Alex Haley’s tombstone reads, “Find the good and praise it.” When Hollywood does it right, it is imperative that we as Christians support their efforts. *Gods and Generals* is a film worthy of your attention. I wholeheartedly encourage you and your congregation to take advantage of this remarkable study guide and the opportunity it presents to use mainstream entertainment as outreach.

In Christ,
Richard J. Mouw
President, Fuller Theological Seminar

STUDY GUIDE

God's plan is a great mystery; it will be revealed to us.
—General Thomas “Stonewall” Jackson

INTRODUCTION

Gods and Generals, the screen adaptation of Jeff Shaara’s heralded best-selling novel and prequel to the acclaimed drama *Gettysburg*, is an epic and sweeping portrayal of a nation divided at the start of the Civil War. Beginning in early 1861 and continuing through 1863, just prior to the Battle of Gettysburg, *Gods and Generals* illuminates heroes on both sides of the conflict and chronicles the tremendous suffering and bravery on the battlefields as well as the home front. The film vividly brings to life not only the Civil War’s legendary leaders, but also the legions of anonymous soldiers and citizens who fought passionately and courageously for their vision of unity and freedom.

Gods and Generals deals with timeless questions about the will of God. Does God take sides in a war? Does might make right? What does divine justice look like?



MOVIES AND MINISTRY

In Isaiah 10, God uses the Assyrians to speak to his chosen people, Judah. In *Gods and Generals*, God speaks through the Civil War to communicate his hope for a free America. With this movie, people of faith have an opportunity to speak to their culture, their friends, and their congregation about the will of God for us today.

This study guide will equip your community of faith to engage with one of God's largest megaphones, the movies. Movies can teach. Movies can motivate. Movies can spark discussions and change hearts and minds. If you're familiar with acclaimed films like *Chariots of Fire*, *Dead Man Walking* or *The Apostle*, then you know how powerful and enduring on-screen portrayals of faith can be. *Gods and Generals* will spark similar post-screening discussions about the nature of God and the possibilities of faith under trial.

Gods and Generals lives up to its title, dealing with competing generals and their dueling hopes of securing the blessing of God for military conquest. It contains numerous scenes of prayer and often refers to the Bible. This study guide will allow you to highlight these passages and draw out biblical understanding that viewers may otherwise miss.

This guide will enable you to see the film with your congregation and lead an insightful conversation afterwards. It can be duplicated for Bible studies, Sunday school classes, or small groups. *Gods and Generals* is broad enough to be occasion for outreach yet deep enough to encourage discipleship.



BEFORE SEEING THE FILM

With America on the brink of war, *Gods and Generals* offers people of faith an important, historical perspective. The film raises relevant and timeless questions about the cost of war, the importance of prayer, and the will of God. You may wish to prepare your congregational moviegoers with the following information beforehand:

3 KEY CHARACTERS, 3 KEY BATTLES, 3 KEY QUESTIONS

Those steeped in Civil War history will be thrilled by the filmmakers' attention to detail. For those less familiar with the Civil War, *Gods and Generals* can be viewed as the story of three key soldiers and three key battles.

The story is told primarily through the faith and actions of Confederate Generals Robert E. Lee and Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson, and Colonel Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain of the Union Army. Each leaves beloved family and reluctantly takes up arms. Each prays for divine blessing on behalf of their soldiers marching into battle. Each hopes to remain firmly within the will of God.

This epic film covers three major battles that served as turning points in the Civil War. *Gods and Generals* begins with the surprising victory of the Confederate Army led by General Jackson at the Battle of Bull Run. Next, General Robert E. Lee and the Confederate Army resist the Union forces in Fredericksburg. Finally, the Confederate victory at Chancellorsville results in the devastating loss of Jackson.

Before your congregation views the film, help them to consider the following questions:

What is the proper Christian response to the threat of war?
Does God choose sides in battle?
How do we discern the will of God?

AFTER SEEING THE FILM

The biblical themes explored in *Gods and Generals* will be freshest in viewers' minds directly after seeing the movie.

The size of the group will likely determine the best place to direct a post-screening discussion—perhaps a church fellowship hall, a restaurant, or a family's home. In each instance, acoustics that allow everyone to hear and be heard will prove essential.

The breadth of the movie can make leading a discussion daunting. We suggest breaking the discussion into three distinct parts, connected to the three main battles. Then, you can focus upon the practical applications that arise from each—preparing for battle, testing our faith, and discerning the will of God.

GROUP STUDY 1

BULL RUN—PREPARING FOR BATTLE

DISCUSSION STARTER: In your own lives, what battles have you faced? (E.g. marriage, childbirth, a medical scare, etc.) How have you prepared?



1. PREPARATION FOR BATTLE

THE SCENE: Before Thomas Jackson goes off to war, he and his beloved wife, Anna, gather near the fireplace, looking for strength and comfort. They turn to the Bible and read 2 Corinthians 5:1— “If our earthly house were dissolved, we have a building made by God, eternally in the heavens, not built by human hands.”

Jackson prays: “Almighty God, grant that if it be thou will, avert the threatening danger and bring us peace, keep my love in thy care. Bring us all at last to the joy of thy eternal kingdom.”

QUESTION: Why, when faced with a moment of crisis, is it important as Christians to keep an “eternal - perspective on life?”

2. PRAYER

THE SCENE: On the peaceful morning of July 21st, 1861, before the Battle of Bull Run, General Jackson surveys the green fields of Virginia and offers this prayer:



“Dear Lord, this is your day, you have admonished us to keep it holy. If it is your will that we fight this day, then your will be done. I ask your protection over Anna, your faithful servant, my loving wife. I ask you to shine your face upon her on her 30th birthday. Dear Lord, you have called me to this place and this hour far from my home and my loved ones. I am ready Lord, your will be done. It is your sword I will wield into battle, it is your banner I will raise against those who will desecrate our land. If it is my time to come, then I will come with all the joy in my heart. Amen.”

QUESTION: For all Christians, “Thy will be done” is a hard prayer to pray, and harder to literally mean. With all of the ups and downs of life, how is it really possible to say “Thy will be done” in both the peaks and valleys?

3. AFTER THE BATTLE

Jackson earned his nickname by standing “like a stone wall” while under heavy enemy fire. Shot in the hand by the Union army, he persevered, demonstrating uncommon bravery.

THE SCENE: After the Confederate victory, General Jackson surveyed the field. Finding hundreds of Confederate soldiers dead, a soldier asks: “General, how is it you can keep so serene and stay so utterly insensible with a storm of shells and bullets raining about your head?” Jackson replies: “Captain Smith, my religious belief teaches me to feel as safe in battle as in bed. God has fixed the time for my death, I don’t concern myself with that. But to be always ready, whenever it should overtake me. That is how all men should live. Then all men would be equally brave.”

QUESTION: Do you lead your life that way? If not, why not? What are some ways that you could learn to live life in this manner? Would that mean you can be reckless in the way you choose to live?

CONCLUSION: Preparation for battle in life begins with preparation for death – in the promises of scripture, in the comfort of prayer, in the assurance of eternal life.



GROUP STUDY 2

FREDERICKSBURG—TESTING OUR FAITH

DISCUSSION STARTER: Is it possible to determine the will of God?

1. PREPARATION FOR BATTLE

THE SCENE: General Robert E. Lee is briefed on the Union army's position and the Confederate soldiers' preparations. After studying the plans, he declares: "These deployments are sound. The rest is in God's hands."



QUESTION: Lee did everything possible to fully prepare for what God's will would be the following day. In your own life, what actions do you take to prepare yourself for what tomorrow brings?

2. WAR IS OUR JUDGE

THE SCENE: As the Union army crosses the river into Fredericksburg, Colonel Lawrence Chamberlain refers to Julius Caesar's prayer before he marched on his own beloved Roman people.

"O Thunderer, O Jupiter, O Rome equal to the highest deity, favor my plans, not with impious weapons do I pursue you, here am I Caesar, conqueror of land and sea, your own soldier everywhere, now too if I am permitted. The man who makes me thy enemy, it is he who will be the guilty one. Here I abandon peace, farewell to treaties, from now on, war is our judge. Hail Caesar .we who are about to die, salute you."

QUESTION: The quote asserts that "war is our judge" —that God's will is ultimately revealed by the particular outcome of a moment in time. Is it possible that when bad things happen to good people, that it may, in fact, be God's will? Are both the good and bad that befall us God's will, or are they instead just random life events?

3. A SLAVE'S PRAYER FOR FREEDOM

THE SCENE: A slave woman, left behind by the Southern family that she serves, offers a prayer on behalf of the Union soldiers who've overtaken the house. She quotes from Esther 4:13-14,

*“Think not to thyself, that thou shall escape.
Then shall deliverance arise
Who knows whether thou hast come to the kingdom.
For such a time as this.”*



She expresses His deepest hope:

“Esther had to save her people too. I love the people you chased from this house. The Bells is good people. I was born a slave and I want to die free. Heaven help me. May Cod bless you all.”

QUESTION: The slave woman is clearly conflicted .one the one hand, she loves her slave owner “family,” but thanks to her Union Army liberators, freedom is finally in her grasp. How are we as Christians to determine if opportunities placed in front of us are Cod’s will? When confronted with a hard life decision, how are we to know which choice is the one Cod wants for us?

CONCLUSION: For slaves hoping and praying for deliverance, God took a long time to answer their prayers. But if war was the judge, then Cod ultimately answered the prayers of the slaves through the actions of the Union Army. It is through ceaseless prayer that life’s problems are addressed.

GROUP STUDY 3

CHANCELLORSVILLE DISCERNING THE WILL OF GOD

DISCUSSION STARTER: What do the words, “Thy will be done,” mean to you?

1. *ENDING THE SCOURGE OF SLAVERY*

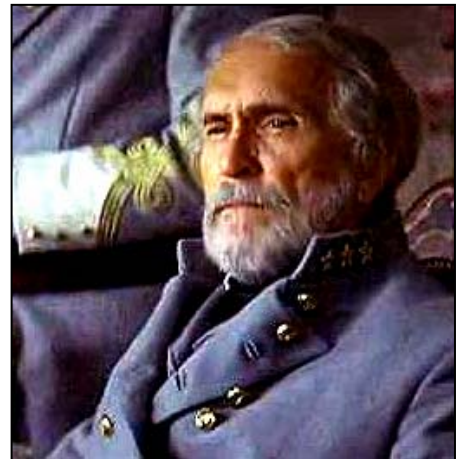
THE SCENE: Colonel Lawrence Chamberlain explains to his brother why they must fight. He says, “An army is power. Its entire purpose is to coerce others. We have seen more suffering than any man should ever see. The end must justify the cost. War is a scourge, but so is slavery. It is the systematic coercion of one man over another. That is no excuse to tolerate it here. If your life or mine is part of the price to end this curse and free the Negro, then let God’s will be done.”

QUESTION: The men who died in the Civil War (as in all wars) never got to see the final results of that which cost their life. Does God have plans for your life that are bigger than you?

2. *UNANSWERED PRAYERS*

THE SCENE: While the Confederate army won a victory at Chancellorsville, their inspirational general, Thomas Jackson, was accidentally shot by his own soldiers. Robert E. Lee grasped the enormity of the potential loss of the general and what it might mean to the outcome of the war. He declared, “He has lost his left arm, but I have lost my right.”

In his tent, reflecting upon their ‘victory,’ Lee says: “Surely, General Jackson will recover. God will not take him now, not when we need him so much. Tell him that I prayed for him last night as I never prayed, I believe, for myself.”



QUESTION: Did God answer Lee’s prayer, or did it go unanswered?

3. *THY WILL BE DONE*

THE SCENE: Despite Robert E. Lee’s prayers, Jackson develops pneumonia, which fatally complicates his recovery from his gunshot wounds. As Jackson lies dying, he requests his loving wife Anna to “Pray for me. But in your prayers, never forget to use the petition, ‘Thy will be done’”

QUESTION: With Jackson’s death, was God’s will accomplished? Though both North and South faithfully prayed, did God take sides in the war? What does the Bible communicate about the overall will of God and whom He consistently champions and defends?

CONCLUSION: Ultimately, God’s will emerged in the accidental death of “Stonewall” Jackson, in Robert E. Lee’s battle at Gettysburg, in the victory of the Union Army. While we may wonder about God’s will in our individual lives, God demonstrates throughout scripture that his will includes loving our neighbors, caring for widows and orphans, and defending the weak from injustice and oppression even if that sometimes means taking up arms to accomplish it.

Arrange a Group Sale Showing of *Gods and Generals*

If there is a participating theatre convenient to your school, you may be able to set up a private screening of *Gods and Generals*. To qualify for a Private Group Sale, you must purchase a minimum of 100 seats or an entire auditorium. For smaller groups, blocks of tickets for regularly scheduled show times may also be purchased.

To arrange a class or school showing of *Gods and Generals*, contact a Group Sale Coordinator, listed below from a circuit in your area.

For information on theatres opening *Gods and Generals*, contact Warner Bros. Pictures Group Sale Hotline at (818) 954-7222.

AMC

Marie Cook
(888) 262-1180
groupsales@amctheatres.com

CARMIKE

Fred Van Noy
(706) 576-3449
fred@carmike.com

CENTURY

Jacque Clark
(415) 448-8422
jacque_clark@centurytheatres.com

CINEMARK

Kelly Lee
(972) 665-1142
klee@cinemark.com

FAMOUS PLAYERS

Nancy Spotton
(416) 969-7051
nspotton@famousplayers.ca

GOODRICH

Mutt Johnson
(616) 698-7733 x320
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(460) 627-7777

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