



THEIR FAITH CHALLENGED  
AN EMPIRE.

JIM  
CAVIEZEL  
OLIVIER  
MARTINEZ  
AND  
JAMES  
FAULKNER

PAUL  
APOSTLE OF CHRIST  
WHERE SIN ABOUNDS... GRACE ABOUNDS MORE.

IN THEATERS MARCH 23

MOVIE DISCUSSION GUIDE



# PAUL

## APOSTLE OF CHRIST

### MOVIE DISCUSSION GUIDE

The film **PAUL, APOSTLE OF CHRIST** offers a moving personal depiction of some of the lives behind the birth of the early Christian church. Paul and Luke are familiar apostles from the Bible. The film brings to life the real human struggles, fears, and challenges those individuals faced. But the movie also powerfully depicts the historical context of the early church and portrays what life may have been like for those followers of Jesus, trying to live out their new faith in the face of life-threatening persecution and danger. Just like us, they wrestle with daily uncertainties, seeking to live what they believe as they experience God's ongoing transformation within.

This movie discussion guide is meant for small groups, youth groups, and families to use in conjunction with watching **PAUL, APOSTLE OF CHRIST**. As you use this guide to foster discussion about the themes and ideas presented in the movie, we encourage you to keep an open mind and heart.

In this guide, you'll find three sections which include a clip, devotional and Scriptures to explore, followed by engaging questions which will guide a conversation about the overall themes of the film. At the end of this guide you'll find activities for putting the themes into action and serving together for follow-up.

Use any or all of the elements to facilitate meaningful conversations and further steps of faith!

**PAUL, APOSTLE OF CHRIST** portrays an epic and Biblical look at the lives of Paul, Luke, and the early Christians trying to live out their faith under the harsh persecution of Rome's Emperor Nero. It deals with themes including love, grace, guilt, forgiveness, God's will, discernment and more. Because any open discussion can go in many directions, encourage your group to listen and speak respectfully and compassionately to all.





## PERSECUTOR TO PERSECUTED

Paul in his earlier years as Saul, persecuted and killed Christians in an attempt to crush the quickly growing and spreading faith.

In the clip “[Saul Leads the Persecution](#)” — Paul reflects back on when he was the young Saul of Tarsus (Yorgos Karamihos), leading the charge in wiping out members of “The Way,” including Stephen, the first martyr.

<https://youtu.be/iGJProHZ2zY>

Acts 9:1-19 describes Saul’s dramatic encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus. He then spent three days in Damascus, blind, not eating or drinking, waiting, and praying. Galatians 1:17 mentions that Paul then spent three years in Arabia following his life-change in Damascus. In the movie, Paul says it was because Peter and the others spent three years with Christ. “I had to do the same. I had to learn how to pray, how to speak, how to love,” he explains to Luke.

Roman rulers had overseen the crucifixion of Jesus and considered Christians a rebellious cult that threatened their authority. King Herod killed Christians, and by 64 A.D., Nero’s persecution reached an unprecedented level. His murderous atrocities are historically famous, including his preference for using Christians as human torches to light his parties.

It’s easy for us, especially those who have been in church for a long time, to gloss over 1 Corinthians 13. We know that the Bible is filled with images and stories and descriptions of God’s grace and love. And none of those are more beautiful than Paul’s descriptions in 1 Corinthians 13, the chapter famously known as “the love chapter.” We’ve heard it many times. We know how we’ve failed in just about every area it describes.



“Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres” (1 Corinthians 13:4-7, NIV).

You can hear this passage narrated by James Faulkner in the *Letters From Paul* reading series. <https://www.youtube.com/embed/kK8YZit-Oyk?rel=0&autoplay=1>



In the clip “*Write It Down*” — Amid the horrors of Nero’s Rome, Luke (Jim Caviezel) begins to question why love is the only way. But Paul (James Faulkner) reminds him to embody Christlike love, and urges him to write down what he has learned.

<https://youtu.be/ROnwz7A1zoo>

It’s the epitome of love—love that we long for. Love that we want. Love that we try to offer. Love that gives a picture of the essence of God. But we need to keep in mind that Paul was not writing this from a luxurious villa. The man personally knew hardship. He was repeatedly accused, beaten, whipped, imprisoned, stoned. He suffered in conditions we would find deplorable.

These were the realities for Paul, yet he continued to speak of the highest ideals of love. These were the conditions of the man who wrote and encouraged his fellow believers, “Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good” (Romans 12:21, NIV).

### QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Why was Paul the ideal messenger for God’s message of grace? Read 1 Timothy 1:12-16.
2. Do you believe the words of Paul and the teachings of Jesus still apply today?
3. Was there a time when you chose to extend grace to someone? How did it change the situation? How did it change that relationship?
4. What situations are you experiencing currently that could use some grace? What step can you take to offer grace?





## LOVE IS THE ONLY WAY

In the movie, Luke and other Christians like Cassius struggle to comprehend and live such a love in the face of brutal hatred and evil. Can you blame them? Love is so much easier to say than to do.

In the clip “*Love is the Only Way*” — Cassius (Alessandro Sperduti) calls for the Christians to retaliate against Rome, Luke (Jim Caviezel) reminds them that love is the only way to respond to Nero’s persecution.

[https://youtu.be/\\_5zXMTYU1K8](https://youtu.be/_5zXMTYU1K8)

How would you respond in their shoes? In many ways, our world isn’t so different from that of the early church. We watch horrendous events unfold around the world, down the street, or in the news. When you imagine the worst being done to you and those you care most about, what would your reaction be?

This is not love as a feel-good emotion, but a choice toward action. It goes beyond justice. In some cases, it goes above and beyond what should naturally be expected of anyone. This kind of love requires seeing the world and our own experience from a different perspective.

We aren’t talking about glossing over wrongs or even about letting things go that need to be dealt with. We are not talking about accepting abuse or turning a blind eye to it—in those cases, please seek help or speak out. God’s love is not one that ignores evil, but that meets evil with overpowering good.

Jesus flipped the ultimate scene around, and He calls us into the process of continually doing the same. When we choose love, we show that we belong to the God of love. Jesus said, “By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another,” (John 13:35, NIV). This is what Jesus envisioned for His followers, His church. This is to be what marks and identifies us in this world: love.



In a world that challenges our resolve and is overcome with evil, will you choose love? It's hard! But the truth is simple: Love is the only way.

### QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Tragedy and heartache force the question in our face. But in subtler (though no less important) ways, we face the same question every day—and the challenge that comes with it to choose love. What would you do in these situations?
  - a. When a loved one's life is ended senselessly?
  - b. In the aftermath of mass violence or terrorism?
  - c. When you are treated unfairly at work?
  - d. When another child is cruel to your own son or daughter?
  - e. When a parent or sibling or spouse or friend speaks hurtful words in anger?
2. How can you choose daily to meet evil, hardship, and hurt with love and grace?
3. When you look at your life, do often you feel self-righteous and without blame, and quick to judge? Are you constantly dividing up people into “us vs. them” or “right vs. wrong”?
4. Is there a situation you're facing now that has you wanting to repay hurt with hurt? What step can you take toward forgiveness and love?
5. Who do you find difficult to love? Have you faced—or are you facing—a situation where love is the farthest emotion from your mind? What is one step you can take toward love?
6. Is forgiveness a one-time act or an ongoing process? Why? Is there anyone you are holding hurt or a grudge against? What step can you take toward forgiveness today?
7. Prayerfully consider who needs a touch of kindness and love. How can you choose to show them love today? What steps will you take today to extend love?







## LOVE ONE ANOTHER. AS I HAVE LOVED YOU.

In wrestling with their decision, Priscilla and Aquila pray diligently. They seek guidance and wisdom from Paul, who tells them that each of the Christians must make their own decision. In other words, there was no universally correct answer or specific direction from God.

In the clip “[Priscilla and Aquila Discuss Fleeing Rome](https://youtu.be/niL27_E7ImY)” — As oppression against the church increases, Priscilla (Joanne Whalley) and Aquila (John Lynch) discuss abandoning Rome to darkness, or remaining in the face of persecution.

[https://youtu.be/niL27\\_E7ImY](https://youtu.be/niL27_E7ImY)

For Paul and Luke, Priscilla and Aquila, and all the other early Christians, that was the call and the challenge, especially in a dark and hateful world. As Priscilla said, “We are the only light left in the city.” For us, as individuals and as the church, the call—and challenge—are the same: to love one another and to be defined by God’s love. As the body of Christ in the world today, we can do better than being known for what we are against. We can be known for what we are for: God’s unconditional love.

The believers in **PAUL, APOSTLE OF CHRIST** were trying their best to live out the teachings of Jesus and their new relationship with God—and to do so in extremely difficult times. While they risked their lives to follow Jesus, they also sought to live out His love for each other and for their communities and cities. Only a few decades earlier, during His final meal with His disciples, Jesus had described God’s new work, even as He explained His approaching death.

Jesus said, “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another” (John 13:34-35, NIV).

What would define and demonstrate God’s work in the world through His followers? Love.



## QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What process do you usually follow when facing big decisions? Where do you turn for guidance? (Psalm 119:105, Philippians 4:6-7, James 1:5, and Proverbs 12:15.)
2. How does experience and ongoing relationship with God help us to understand and discern His will and guidance? (Romans 12:1-2)
3. What would you have done in Aquila and Priscilla's shoes, if you were a Christian living in Nero's Rome? Would you have stayed in Rome or fled? Why?
4. What choices are you facing today? What decisions are causing you to stop, think, and maybe even agonize over what is right? What step can you take today toward making a wise decision?

## ACTIVITY: GRACE IN ACTION

Often, love and grace can be expressed through meeting needs and serving others over our own needs.

### WHO CAN WE SERVE?

Individually or as a group, brainstorm a list of potential ways to serve your community. Who is in need? Who is overlooked? Who is unlovable? What problems face your city or neighborhood? Are there any "enemies" of your church?

Write down your initial ideas, but take some time to look around and notice the needs that aren't being met. Walk around your neighborhood(s) and pay attention to the people you see. Search online for community needs and organizations that are trying to meet them.

### HOW CAN WE SERVE?

Consider your gifts and passions, and agree together on what issue you or your group would like to address—and whom you would like to serve. If your church has a group or ministry already involved in that area, that can be a perfect place to plug in. Another option might be a local or even national organization that you can partner with.

Here's a starter list of needs and people you may be able to serve with love.

- Hunger—food pantry
- Homelessness—rescue mission or shelter
- Domestic violence—women's or family shelter
- Foster care
- Elder care
- Widows
- At-risk youth—counseling center or outreach ministry
- Refugees
- Cleaning up public spaces

### HOW WILL YOU OR YOUR GROUP BE KNOWN BY LOVE?