

Trinity Family Film Guide

For use by families.

It's a Wonderful Life:

Choosing the Wonderful Life

With the help of It's a Wonderful Life, we will explore the two main life paths that continuously lay before all of us. The first is historically defined by the masculine and is marked by conquest, acquisition, and objectively measurable value. The second is historically defined by the feminine and is marked by collaboration, assistance, and subjective relational value.

As we journey through the fictitious life of George Bailey, we will all have the opportunity to face our choices, and take responsibility for them. We will be reminded why God at Christmas chooses to reveal himself as a baby, born to woman, born into family, and come to reveal the Father who always chooses the path marked people.

Duration: 3-4+ hours

Materials Needed: Treats for Intermission One, bread/cracker (or the like) for Intermission Three, a meal for after movie.

Recommended Movie Snack or Meal: This is a movie to watch with family favorites. Make the dishes which most represent your common life. Make lots of them and feast, but not on the fancy, on the mundane.

View it with a Twist (optional): Either dress up or dress down: jammies or formal attire.

Note to Parents/Adults about Film Guides:

Movies are a great way to relax and spend time together as a family/group. With a little intentionality, we can make them a special place of connection and growth, as well as a joyful viewing experience. Every Family Film Guide focuses on one theme and seeks to walk adults through engaging their family/group in a growth experience around that theme. For some families/groups, these conversations might seem scary and even awkward, but take courage knowing you are setting the norm of connection and a learning heart in each of your children. If your kids seem too young or too "cool" to participate in some of these things, then at least let them see you participating. They will catch on or warm up. Also, make sure not to underestimate them. Give them plenty of opportunity to participate.

Parental Warning for *It's A Wonderful Life*: (Conversation necessary, but suitable for all.)

This film is wonderfully paced for young children, slow and clear. With weighty subjects such as suicide playing a central part, conversation is essential, but such is the point of a film guide!

Before Starting:

Make sure you have read through the entire guide before starting the movie. Gather your supplies and your courage before starting. If you feel rushed going into it, slow down and just pick one or two activities to do. Then just enjoy the movie. It is better to do something well than to stress or rush through the whole thing. Plan further ahead for the next one if necessary, but **don't forget to enjoy this special time with your kids!**

Pre-Movie Exercise:

Introduction: As adults, introduce the movie with the theme of “Choosing the Wonderful Life.”

Share: Reflect on the previous year and recall the most wonderful moments you have shared. Delight and give thanks in memories made together.

Imagine and celebrate: Now that you’ve recalled those memories, go around the family/group and imagine what life this year would have been like without each member. The movie we are about to watch is in part an imagining of what life would have been like without one man, George Bailey. Use this opportunity not to morbidly imagine each other deceased, but to celebrate the unique and precious gift each individual is, and the moments made possible and richer this year because of their existence. Take at least a few minutes for each individual and then speak in unison a prayer of thanksgiving like, “God, we are so thankful to have had our _____ with us this year.”

First Intermission:

(35 minutes, 16 seconds—beginning chapter 10 on scene selection)

The Power to Choose

Instructions: George Bailey makes a very important decision in this moment. He has before him his ticket to travel the world, receive his education, and make it “big,” but instead he chooses to stay and serve the Building and Loan. Jesus made a similar decision when he was only twelve-years-old. Did you know that no one took any notice of Jesus until he was thirty? His wasn’t the typical path to being a Rabbi.

The path he chose is described in Luke 2:41-52. Read this passage.

Then consider how the leaders were “astonished at his understanding and answers.” That was the typical path to being a Rabbi. Get noticed by the big-wigs. Get groomed by them. And then make it “big.” Remember that Jesus had been told by angels at his birth that he was to be King. Wouldn’t it make sense for him to take his chance when it came? Not Jesus. Just like George Bailey, Jesus instead chose to stay home, invest there, and in the process to “increase in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.”

This is the path to the wonderful life, the path of relational responsibility, and continuous stable growth. We are going to play a game to explore these ideas.

The Race to the Top

Step 1: Pick a special treat and place it on a stool on the other side of a hallway or large room.

Step 2: Make the opposite end of the hallway or room the starting line and have everyone gather there.

Step 3: Explain that the first person to reach the snack hopping on one foot gets to eat it and that as soon as one person gets it, everyone else must stop where they are, stand still, and watch the winner enjoy the treat, which cannot be shared.

Step 4: Do the race. Adults play hard and try to win. Men play hard and try to win. Do not stop the contest under any circumstances. The first one to the treat wins and gets it. Even if that person cheats.

Step 5: Process the experience asking these questions:

How does each person feel from their position at the end of this experience?

The winner has the riches, do they feel rich? Why and why not?

Was anyone tempted to, or did anyone try to cheat? Why did you feel a desire to cheat?

The Relational Race

Step 1: Pick another special treat (or the same one) in sufficient quantity to be shared and place it on its perch.

Step 2: Regather at the starting line.

Step 3: Place two of the following slips of paper in a cup or hat: *4 limbs, 3 limbs, 2 limbs, 1 limb, dead weight.* Then have each person draw out a piece of paper. This slip tells them how many limbs they can use to get to the other side. No switching slips. No switching limbs part-way through. If you start on one leg you can't switch to the other. If you start helping someone with one arm, you can't switch to the other. Anyone who is dead weight may not move at all, or hold on, or use their body in any way.

Step 4: Figure out how to get everyone to the snack with their various limitations. Once successful, enjoy the snack together with all limbs and all gusto!

Step 5: Process the experience asking these questions:

How does each person feel from their position at the end of this experience?

How was the dining experience different this time for the person who won before?

Was anyone tempted to, or did anyone try to cheat? Why did you feel a desire to cheat?

Second Intermission:

(1 hour, 3 minutes, 49 seconds beginning of chapter 12 on scene selection)

Feminine, Familial Dreams

Instructions: Mary Bailey had a dream of being a wife to George and raising a family in an old, dilapidated house. Our modern world looks down on women with such dreams as an oppressed people group. Alas, as this film illustrates so well, it is just those dreams that bring the most wonderful life. The masculine path of conquest is not the path of happiness. The pursuit of happiness down that masculine path is not glorious, but destructive. It is always unfulfilled. The good news for our modern world is that home, even with a leaky roof, still waits for all of us, male and female alike, if we will choose to prioritize it as the path to the wonderful life.

After Jesus' birth and after his decision to return home with her from the temple, the Bible tells us that Mary (Jesus' mom), "kept all these things in her heart." It is the feminine heart that keeps us tethered to home. We are now going to take a memory tour through our home.

Step 1: Start in the room you now stand. Let mom (if applicable, or Dad if not) tell one story she has kept in her heart from his room. Follow that up with one more story from one other person.

Step 2: Continue to the next room on and on until your house has been toured, with Mom (if applicable) always telling one of the two stories.

Step 3: Return to the main room and now have Dad (if applicable, or the oldest child if not) bless Mom. Pray your own prayer, use this one, or do both:

Father, thank you for mothers. Thank you for our mother. And thank you for feminine dreams. I, as a man and a father, know it is in those relational dreams where the wonderful life comes home. I ask you to forgive me and to forgive us all for undervaluing people in the name of progress. Help us to keep in our hearts those dreams which will bring heaven to earth and bring the whole world home. Amen.

Third Intermission:

(1, hour, 32 minutes, 19 seconds—beginning of chapter 20 on scene selection)

Pray for the Daddies

“Is Daddy in trouble?” Yes. “Should I pray?” Yes.

This is not a bash on men, but the honest declaration that the masculine pursuit of the wonderful life has all too often been a disastrous, deadly dead-end. When we prioritize productivity and promotions and power over people, we partner with the wrong kingdom. It is satan’s kingdom that has worked through the authority of men to destroy a world meant to be home. After returning with his parents at twelve, Jesus spent eighteen years in obscurity until he was driven by the Holy Spirit to the desert. There he met satan who tempted him to turn rocks into bread (productivity), offered him authority over all the world (promotion), and invited him to leap off the temple to showcase God’s protection over him (power). Jesus refused all three and instead emerged from the desert to call a dozen lowly disciples and begin his ministry. We are going to pray for our Daddy and all Daddy’s to have the wisdom to resist the temptations Jesus resisted.

Step 1: Take a piece of bread or cracker (or really anything). Let the father (if applicable) distribute it amongst the family. As you eat together, have Mom pray for him (again, if applicable) and all men using her own words or these or both:

Father, thank you for our father and for all fathers. We bless him with the peace of knowing what we need most from him is not his productivity. Help him and all men say yes to breaking bread over and above the need to win it. Amen.

Step 2: Now take the whole family to the highest window in your home. Look out and have a child pray for their father using their own words or these or both:

Father, thank you for our father and for all fathers. We bless him with the peace of knowing you will promote him as needed and already has top spot in our hearts. Help him and all men say yes to promoting others over and above being promoted themselves. Amen.

Step 3: Return to the main room and now have Dad stand, while everyone else sits (yes awkwardly) at his feet. Have everyone pray in unison for him using their own words or these or both:

Father, thank you for our father and for all fathers. We bless him with the peace of knowing that the richest man is the one who is well loved. Help him and all men recognize their power to serve and love women and children so we might all find ourselves home. Amen.

Post-Movie Exercise:

Activate: The Richest Man in Town, No Man is a Failure who has Friends

Ideally, the following activation will be discussed and decided from around a family table. Make dishes which best represent your family's normal life and feast on the mundaneness of them. As you eat, activate this family project in your life:

Step 1: Brainstorm ideas for how this family could serve one or all (or somewhere in between) of our friends. These should be ideas that will draw on all of our resources and that will require us to invest in people, not just a quick, productive project.

Step 2: As people start receiving seconds, take it as the cue to end brainstorming and pick the idea that the family wants to pursue.

Step 3: Spend dessert fleshing out a plan for this project, assigning everyone their special roles and ideating more for how to take our service to the highest levels possible.

Family/Group Statement:

Step 1: Say the following out loud as an entire group before leaving the table:

Together, we will take the path less chosen, the path of the Wonderful Life.

Step 2: Thank yourself (from us) for making your family/group movie time "A Trinity Family" movie time!

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