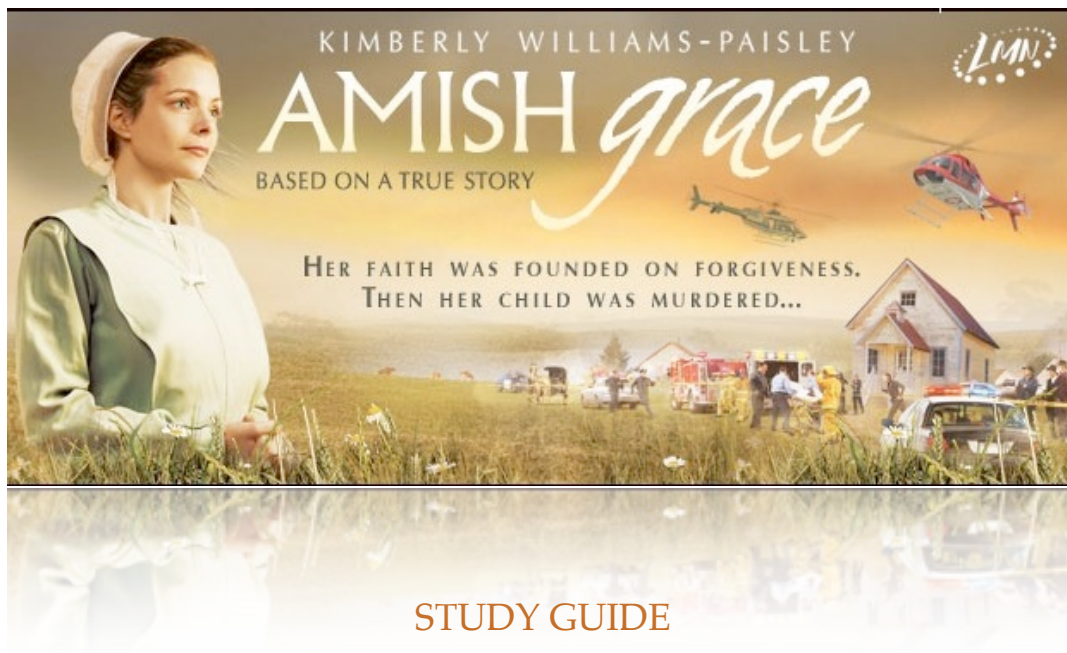


GodChicks

T H O U G H T S

O N A M I S H G R A C E

by Holly Wagner



Thoughts for GodChicks From the Movie Amish Grace

I love movies that make me think and movies that make me feel. This movie did both. I have wiped the tears off my face, and am now ready to share a few thoughts with my fellow GodChicks around the country.

GodChicks are real women, with real faith, living in a real world. GodChicks are women who are determined to rise with strength in the midst of challenge and make our world a better place.

There are some simple truths that I saw presented in the movie:

- 1. GodChicks are found everywhere, in all places, in all manner of dress and in all arenas of life.*
- 2. Grace is found in all sorts of places...some of these unexpected.*
- 3. Faith can remain even after devastation.*
- 4. Choosing to do life God's way is not always the easiest, but it is the most rewarding and brings the most freedom.*

There were so many questions and thoughts I had as I watched this movie. I wondered if I would have handled circumstances in the same way. So, to help us get the most out of this movie, I have put together some observations and some questions. I hope they are a help to you and or the small group you have gathered with.

#1

In one of the early scenes, we watch the chaos around the school building and see the excruciating pain the families endure as they wait for news of their children.

Personally, I remember the days of waiting after a biopsy to determine whether or not I had cancer. Turns out that I was diagnosed with cancer, and so had a whole battle ahead of me...but I remember the waiting. I remember crying, being frustrated and scared as I waited to return to the doctor's office. But ultimately I made the decision to just trust God. To the best of my very human ability, I released my worries trusting that whatever the outcome, He would see me through.

- Have you ever had to wait for an unforeseen outcome on some news about a child, a job or a test result?
- How did you endure the pain of not knowing?

#2

After the murders have taken place, we enter the home of Charlie and Amy Roberts. We find out that they seem to have been a family of faith.

Charlie never dealt with his pain (the pain of losing his daughter). He had other children. Life went on, and yet he didn't.

If we don't deal with hurts and issues that are in our soul, then I believe we all have the ability to make decisions that bring pain.

We have all heard it said, "Hurt people hurt people." And if we don't want to be one of those who hurt people, then we must deal with the hurts in our own heart.

- Can people with faith and values still feel such pain that they make bad decisions?
- Are there hurts in your life you haven't let go of?
- Have you experienced a loss that has still left a void in your life?

#3

We hear Mary Beth's little sister reading Psalm 23, specifically, "Yea though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for thou art with me."

In Genesis we learn the story of Joseph and it is an inspiring one. In the middle of being abducted, sold into slavery and living as a slave, we are told that Joseph knew God was with him. As he is thrown into prison and spends years as a prisoner, we learn that even there he knew that God was with him.

- How can we become aware of God's presence in the midst of confusion or pain?

#4

Three of the Amish men, including Pastor Levi and Gideon go to Amy's house. Amy asks if any of the men present lost a child. When Gideon tells her that he lost Mary Beth, the following dialogue takes place:

Amy

I am sorry – you must be suffering deeply.

Gideon

It is a deep wound, but she is in heaven with her Father now and she is at peace.

Amy

I'm sorry, so sorry.

Gideon

We're sorry for your loss too.

Amy

My loss?

Levi

You lost a husband; your children have lost their father. We grieve for you as well. We will harbor no anger at Charlie. He was known to most of us. We've come here to tell you that we forgive him.

Amy

You forgive him?

Gideon

"For as you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will forgive you also."

Amy

Matthew 6:14

Gideon (nodding)

We will not allow hatred into our hearts. We know that you will be facing harsh judgments and we would like to offer our help. We're your neighbors and if you or your children should need anything, we hope that you will let us know.

Not sure about you, but for me this conversation is stunning! Not only are they able to empathize with the Robert's family's pain but also they are able to forgive...and they don't even stop there – they even offer to help the family navigate the pain of their loss. (Pretty much takes away all of our excuses to harbor unforgiveness!)

- What is the most shocking or surprising to you about their actions?
- Compare their forgiveness to the unconditional forgiveness God offers us through Christ.
- I think this kind of forgiveness is not possible without Christ. How can we connect with God in a way that empowers us to forgive like this?

#5

Ida cries into her husband's arms, "I don't know how to be without Mary Beth." A totally understandable feeling. Evidently, this was how Charlie had felt...and this is what led him to murder. Now Ida was at a crossroads. She could move forward, or stay in the hurt of her loss.

When we experience loss of any kind- a child, a family member, or even our past that we lost to an addiction, we often don't know how to be without what we have lost. I lost my 'before cancer' life, and so like many people, I have had to live life after a loss.

- What are some next steps toward accepting loss and moving forward?

#6

Consider this dialogue:

Ida

Why would God want a beautiful innocent girl to be slaughtered?

Gideon

I don't know! All I know is that if we forgive, God promises that peace will follow.

Ida

God has shattered my heart. And I will not betray my daughter by forgiving the man who killed her. I will not do it Gideon. I cannot.

It's refreshing that Gideon does not try to answer his wife's question with a theological perspective; he simply says, "I don't know. All I know is..."

Sometimes we have to build our lives on the little we DO know, rather than the things we don't know.

Asking 'why?' after any crisis is the first logical question, but often there is no answer. Maybe the better question would be, "How can I get through this?" or "What can I do?"

- Maybe studying this verse might help.

Habakkuk 3:19 (Amplified Bible)

¹⁹The Lord God is my Strength, my personal bravery, and my invincible army; He makes my feet like hinds' feet and will make me to walk [not to stand still in terror, but to walk] and make [spiritual] progress upon my high places [of trouble, suffering, or responsibility]!

- Is there an area in your life where you have unanswered questions for God?
- What attribute of God do you personally have confidence in that helps you stand strong regardless of the circumstances?

#7

Initially Ida wanted to be alone. She wanted to bake alone, and sew her daughter's burial dress alone.

Often people do seem to withdraw when they are going through a crisis or challenge. You and I were not designed to do life in isolation. God created us for family, community, and team. We were created to do life and navigate challenges with people.

In Exodus 17 we learn that Joshua and the army defeated an enemy because Moses held his hands up. When Moses got tired of keeping his hands raised, Aaron and Hur came along to help. God could have set it up so that none of them were needed...that Joshua would get victory alone. But that is not what he did. We need each other.

- How about you? When you are feeling pain, have you ever shut people out who were trying to help?

- How have you included someone in your journey that helped bring healing and strength to you?

#8

Ida and Gideon's youngest daughter, after overhearing her mother say that she would not forgive the man who murdered Mary Beth, told Gideon as she was crying that she hated him too. And that she would not forgive him either. Gideon asked her how the hate that was inside of her felt? Did it feel good? She responded, "Not very good." There have been times when I have carried negative feelings toward a situation or toward people. They have never felt good. And never did they produce anything good.

Gideon describes hate to his daughter:

"No, hate is a very big, very hungry thing with lots of sharp teeth and it will eat up your whole heart and leave no room left for love. We are lucky that God understands this. He is the one that will hand out the punishments, so that we don't have to carry all this terrible hate around inside us, if we don't want. If we're willing to forgive."

His daughter responds with:

"Maybe I could forgive him and still hate him just a little bit."
It would be childish of you and me to think that hatred and forgiveness can share the same heart.

Sometimes (ok, ok, most times) forgiveness – relinquishing our rights as judge and punisher – is a choice that must be made over and over again, until all the hatred is gone and we are free again.

- What do you think about Gideon's powerful statement about hate?
- Sometimes I have to forgive hourly. When in your life have you had to forgive someone over and over again?
- Perhaps the first moments of our choice to forgive don't seem genuine, but in reality our feelings follow our actions. Do you think that we should make choices based on our faith and values even though our feelings may still be fragile? (If we only make decisions based on feelings, I am not sure we'd get to the gym, stay on a budget, or love our husbands when they are completely unlovable!)

#9

The grief counselor basically told the families that their life would never be what it used to be, and that they needed to “create a new normal.”

I have had to learn that I can never go back to my ‘pre-cancer life’. I can only go from here, working to create a new normal. I have a friend whose teenage son was recently killed. As she navigated the overwhelming grief, she asked the question, “How do we go from a family of five around the dinner table to a family of four? It doesn’t feel normal.” Like the Amish families, she has had to create a new normal.

- We can never go back to what our life was like before the pain, but we need to create a new life perspective from here. How do we do that?
- Another thing the counselor said was that when they got stuck in their pain, to remember good things, to find something positive about their life. Let’s do this important exercise: list some positive things about your life.

#10

While with the counselor, Ida sarcastically said, “Oh, we can forgive the man who murdered our children, but we cannot forgive a lonely widow for falling in love.” (Referring to her sister whom the Amish community had shunned for leaving)

- Are there things in your life or in your heart that are a contradiction of values? In other words, are there certain sins that you can forgive and not others?
- Do you think there are some violations that are “unforgivable” as the reporter said?

#11

Many people choose to deal with pain by shutting down or getting hardened. Instead of allowing themselves to express the feeling of pain, they close up. Even if someone manages to stay stiff and closed off for a year, at some point they will have to go back and feel the pain. Feeling the pain is the first step toward healing. It is not the last step, but is the first.

- Have you ever allowed your heart to get hardened and angry rather than “feel the pain?”

#12

Gideon makes this statement:

“It is not easy to forgive... The Lord does not set us on an easy path, but this I know: Faith when everything is as you want it to be, is not real faith. It is only when our lives are falling apart that we have the chance to make our faith real.”

I wish this wasn't true...but I believe it is. I found out the depth of my faith when I was diagnosed with cancer. I found out who my God is. I also found out the depth of my faith when I had to navigate a very challenging time in my marriage. My faith is stronger now than it was before either of those. I suppose I could have withdrawn and gotten angry with God, but instead I chose to develop my faith.

In his letter to the Corinthians, the apostle Paul challenges us to 'Stay at our post...' Stay at our post of faith in the midst of calamity, adversity, hunger, heartbreak...and the list goes on.

- How have you handled heartbreak or disappointment? Pain or loss?
- Is your faith stronger now that you have navigated a challenging time?

#13

Amy Roberts takes part in the last grief counseling session in the movie. She doesn't understand about the Amish ability to forgive her husband. She has been harboring her own pain and anger toward him.

Perhaps not many of us have husbands who have murdered, but many women have experienced an unfaithful husband or abandonment or abuse.

I would just like to say...we all need to forgive anyone who has hurt us. However, if you have been abused, do not put yourself in harms way again. You can forgive him while you are in a place of safety.

- What would you say to a woman whose husband had been unfaithful, or what would you say to someone who had been violated?

#14

In response to Amy not understanding about the Amish ability to forgive Charlie, Gideon says:

“Our forgiveness isn’t about Charlie. Forgiving doesn’t mean forgetting. It doesn’t even mean a pardon. We know that Charlie will stand before a just God, but we also know that if we hold on to our anger and resentment, then it is only ourselves who are being punished.”

When you and I hold onto unforgiveness, we keep ourselves in torment, so that’s why forgiveness is given. And it is given whether the other person ever shows remorse, or asks for it, or says, “I’m sorry.” Forgiveness is not even really between us and the offender; it is between us and God.

- Is there someone in your life who wronged you and you are waiting until they acknowledge it before you forgive them?
- Will you take a moment now, and forgive them? Say their name and what you are forgiving them for. For example, “I forgive Jim for leaving me.” If you are in a group, it is important not to expose too much information. This is about healing your heart, not bringing pain to anyone else. Don’t give unforgiveness any more room in your heart.

#15

At this counseling session, one of the Amish mothers says:

“Every morning when I wake, I expect to hear Anna and Lydia singing together as they do their chores. But the silence reminds me that they’re gone. And my heart becomes so full of anger that I can barely breathe. But then I offer that anger up to God and I forgive. And sometimes I have to do it again in an hour and again an hour after that. If I did not do that, I do not know how I would breathe again.”

Perhaps like many people, there have been a few times that I have experienced the betrayal of friends causing me to feel anger and hurt...sorrow and loss. I had to forgive daily for a while...until the feelings lessened.

- Acknowledging the pain and anger and surrendering it to God is really the only way to be free. Has there been a time in your life, maybe now, when your heart was so full of anger that it hurt?
- Even now, as I am writing this, I am examining my own heart. After seeing this movie...how could I not forgive someone for lying about me? Did you feel like that when you were watching the movie? Like you needed to evaluate your own heart?

I think forgiveness is probably when we are the most like God. When we demonstrate grace, just like God did when He sent Jesus, we are the most like Him.

#16

One of the most powerful moments in the movie occurred at this counseling session. After hearing from the Amish parents whose children her husband had killed, Amy looked at these people offering forgiveness and cried. She said, "I don't know how to forgive."

Two of the Amish women quickly came to her saying, "We will help you. We will show you, you are not alone."

Not only were they offering forgiveness to her husband, but also they were willing to show her how.

This scene took my breath away.

Because isn't that what being a follower of Christ is all about? Loving in such a way that others want to be a part of it. Our faith should be more than our words; it should be what we do. They demonstrated their faith by bringing toys to her children, by forgiving and by caring for her and by showing up en masse to her husband's funeral. As James wrote in the New Testament, "Faith by itself, if it does not have works is dead."

- How can you demonstrate your faith today?
- What practical action can you take? Is it forgiving? Is it taking a gift to someone? Is it making dinner for someone?