

Discussion guide for

No Greater Love

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Directors Notes

No Greater Love, at its core, is a love story. It is the story about the reconciliation of a husband and wife in an estranged marriage. But this story is a bit different in that it is set against the backdrop of history.

In 1956, the Hungarian people rose up against Soviet occupation in their home. Protests and marches, largely started by students, exploded into an all out revolution. Budapest, the capitol of Hungary, became a war zone. Students, factory workers, women, even children took to the streets with anything from machine guns, Molotov cocktails, to buckets of soapy water to slow the tanks on the cobblestone streets. It almost seemed as if victory was at hand until November 4th, when Soviets rolled in the tanks and regained control of the city and the country. Any revolutionaries caught on the streets were either executed or sent to Siberia. Thus anyone that had fought had to flee. Other Hungarians who didn't fight but couldn't stand another day of Communism also fled to the West, mostly to Austria—across the countryside, around tanks, towers, and dogs, beyond the iron curtain...to freedom.

And that is where the story of *No Greater Love* picks up.

Devotional Thoughts

There's a statistic that is listed at the end of the film—200,000 people *successfully* crossed the border. However, unofficially, one Hungarian refugee now living in Seattle stated, “if 200,000 people made it, then probably more than one million people *tried*.” But those 800,000 plus stories are unrecorded as they were never heard.

All kinds of survival stories of crossing the countryside are out there. There's the story of one person, a double amputee, who hitched a ride as close to the border as allowed. He then had to literally drag himself the last mile or so through the fields. One writer comments that any one person crossing comprised a novel—any ten, an epic.

This film stands as a timely piece in light of the challenges facing our country. The removal of “God” from public language, schools, and edicts was a significant matter of agenda for the Communists. Secularism and atheism were the enforced religions of the Soviet regime. The film stands to subtly remind us of this and the fact that the lifeblood of a nation, all that kept a country alive—its educated, proud people—ran from it and died to escape it.

But the film is also a timely piece in light of the challenges facing families. It stands to remind us of what true love is all about.

Author and pastor John MacArthur states, “Authentic love involves a deliberate, voluntary commitment to sacrifice whatever we can for the good of the person we love.” (MacArthur, 58)

The title “No Greater Love” is, of course, language borrowed from John 15:13, where Jesus states, “Greater love has no man than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends.”

As we see this Hungarian father laying down his family, we are automatically reminded of what Christ did for the church. We are reminded that Christ died for his bride. The father symbolizes Christ’s love for his family, Jesus’ sacrifice for the family of God.

This brings us back to Ephesians 5:25-27. Paul writes:

“Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she would be holy and without blemish.” Ephesians 5:25-27 NKJV

Christ had to die for the church. Why? That was how He redeemed us from sin. He lived the perfect, sinless, spotless, immaculate, life—and, no doubt, that wasn’t easy. Then on the cross, He had to assume the weight of the world on His shoulders and bear the sin of all those He died to save.

Thus, the husband is called to this same role and duty—to die. To be willing not only to die for his bride but also, and perhaps moreover, to die to self. This has a range of applications, but at the core, the husband must be willing to lay his life down, literally and figuratively for the good of his wife.

And you know what’s harder than literally dying for one’s wife? Living each day, putting her needs above our own. Our challenge is to die to ourselves every day.

Is Jack a changed man at the end of the film? Has he saved his marriage? The film remains somewhat vague on the issue, because Jack’s challenge is to die every day to himself for the sake of his wife and family *for the rest of his life*.

Every day he has to cross the chasm from his old life to his new life, from his defiled heart to a renewed mind, from his selfishness to sacrificial love and longsuffering. He has to flee from the bondage of sin and death, he has to sneak by the dogs and the guard towers to a new hope of a life free in Christ.

MacArthur again states, “By loving his wife as Christ loves the church, the husband honors Christ in the most direct and graphic way. He becomes the embodiment of Christ’s love to his own wife, a living example to the rest of his family, a channel of blessing to his entire household, and a powerful testimony to a watching world.” (MacArthur, 78)

And those watching most are our children.

There is a contemporary musical entitled “Into the Woods” in which a song is featured near the end of the production with the following lyrics:

“Careful the things you say, children will listen.
Careful the things you do, children will see.
Children may not obey, but children will listen.
Children will look to you, for which way to turn, to learn what to be.”*

These words pretty much say it all.

The film challenges us as parents, or even future parents. It challenges us by placing us in one of two camps. Either one who is willing to lay down his life, or one who is not? One who is willing to lay down his life for his family and friends?

And the film dares you to ask yourself: Which one are you? Or moreover, which one will you resolve to be?

Upon reflection of God’s saving grace in your own life, which one will you resolve to be?

Questions for additional discussion

1. Compare and contrast the roles of both fathers; the father who is sacrificing his life to save the life of his family and the photographer who is away from his family when they need him, but who is at the same time providing for his family financially.
2. Is the photographer father selfish to go after the story, or is he doing what he is gifted to do to provide financially for his family?
3. How is the photographer’s role different from that of a soldier who must also be away from his family?
4. Define the role(s) God has assigned to fathers.
5. Is there conflict within these roles as provider and protector? Explain.
6. For fathers: Do you struggle with the lack of time spent with your family when your job takes you away from them? What are your regrets, if any?
7. For wives: Do you struggle with supporting your husband in his career if it takes him away from home? If yes, how? If no, also explain for the benefit of the group.
8. For older fathers: Do you now feel you spent more time with your career than with your family? Do you have regrets?
9. The photographer became involved in the story when he saved the life of the frostbitten father. How do you think your father/husband has made a difference in the lives of others?