

Movie discussion resource

Gravity

Engage with culture without disengaging your faith.



Genre: Drama

Rating: M

Length: 90 minutes

Starring: Sandra Bullock, George Clooney

Director: Alfonso Cuarón

Screenplay: Alfonso Cuarón & Jonás Cuarón

Brief synopsis

Far out in space, three American astronauts have left their shuttle to work on a Hubble telescope; we barely get to meet one of them but the other two are veteran astronaut Matt Kowalski, played by George Clooney, and first-timer Dr. Ryan Stone, played by Sandra Bullock. The atmosphere is relaxed, Kowalski cracks jokes to help his colleague overcome her nervousness. And then disaster strikes: a Russian satellite self-destructs and a mass of debris heads directly towards the three Americans...there

are none of the trappings of conventional science fiction, no monsters, no bad guys at all. Just human beings in the vastness and eeriness of space, trying to survive after an unexpected disaster. *David Stratton- At the Movies, ABC.*

Questions for discussion

Some general questions might provide enough framework to get started:

- ❖ What stood out as the main points/highlights in the movie?
- ❖ What themes are explored?
- ❖ What assumptions were embedded in the story?
- ❖ What challenged you? What questions did it raise for you?
- ❖ Are there aspects of the story that resonated with your own experience or with the experience of others in a similar situation?
- ❖ Are there biblical or theological themes or characters that come to mind?

The technology

We see the earth from space below and are mesmerised by the shapes of the clouds and the sea and earth. Then silently there appears, first as a dot in the far right top corner, then closer in the space shuttle, and closer still we see tiny figures in space suits bouncing around and the ever increasing sound of radio communications. The technology that makes all this real is amazing. The question is, "Why do we do it and should we be expending the vast amounts of money to do this while there are so many problems to be resolved on earth?" **Discuss.**

Knowing when you will die

After the storm of debris hits the shuttle, Stone is detached from the shuttle and flung into space with no self-propulsion unit; she is adrift attached only to Kowalski by radio. Kowalski comes after her and tows her back to the damaged shuttle. They find none of the other crew have survived. They then make for the International Space Station using only Kowalski's propulsion pack. However, with the fuel in the pack exhausted they approach too fast and end up only attached by being tangled in loose cable. Kowalski knows his mass is pulling both of them away and Stone's only chance is if he detaches himself from her. Stone manages to board the station and escape via a damaged Soyuz re-entry vehicle, hoping to reach the Chinese station which has an undamaged re-entry vehicle. But she

uses up all the fuel in the process. She then faces death for the second time. What difference would it make if you knew when you were to die? What would keep you going?

Prayer

As Stone sits in the Soyuz she resigns herself to death; she expresses fear and wishes she had been taught to pray. Even atheists facing death have been known to pray. What is so special about prayer? Do you think it makes a difference? Stone turns off her oxygen supply and, as she breathes in carbon dioxide, she hallucinates, a common symptom. Her 'non-prayer' appears to be answered. What do you think? In both the Russian and Chinese spacecraft, religious symbols are in view. What does this suggest?

Survival – a purpose for living

Life in space is impossible. This statement is one of the first things to appear on the screen as the movie commences. All through the movie there is the struggle to survive in an impossible environment. The impossible is made possible only through the training and skill of the astronauts and their determination to survive. The fragility of the technology becomes only too apparent. What sort of person would it take to be an astronaut? Would you do it if you had the chance? Space is a dangerous place. Could you leave family and friends behind with this risk?

Isolation

Isolation has always been a part of religious experience. Whether it is in monasteries or religious retreats, or like the desert fathers and mothers as hermits in isolated places, it is often believed that it brings one closer to God. Do you think the isolation of space might have a similar effect? In April of 1961, Russian cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin became the first human to travel into space aboard Vostok 1. Gagarin was reported to have said, "I don't see any God up here", although he actually never said it. In 1969 Buzz Aldrin, just before re-entry by the first successful Lunar Landing mission in Apollo 11, recited from Psalm 8, "*When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou has ordained; What is man that thou art mindful of him? And the Son of Man, that thou visitest Him?*" Does the view from space make it more or less difficult to believe? Explain your answer.

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