

**Movie discussion resource**                      **Land (2021)**  
*Engage with culture without disengaging your faith.*

**Genre:** Drama

**Rating:** M (thematic content, brief strong language, and partial nudity)

**Length:** 89 minutes

**Starring** Robin Wright, Demián Bichir, Sarah Dawn Pledge, Kim Dickens

**Director:** Robin Wright (directorial debut)



**Brief synopsis**

The poignant story of one woman's search for meaning in the vast and harsh American wilderness. The nature of her grief is revealed only in flashbacks and visions about her husband and son. Edee (Wright) finds herself unable to stay connected to the world she once knew in a big city. She retreats to the magnificent, but unforgiving, wilds of the Rockies. A local hunter Miguel (Demián Bichir) finds her starving and dehydrated and brings her back from the brink of death. Then, Edee must find a way to live again. (One critic wrote: "Wright's directorial debut might capture the beauty of Wyoming but the story will put you to sleep". Hmmm, maybe don't watch it when you're tired then?)

**Questions for discussion**

*The film may be a catalyst for conversation leading into deep sharing and mutual support. Some general questions might provide enough framework for you to discuss the movie, such as:*

- ❖ 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?
- ❖ Are there biblical or theological themes or characters that come to mind?

**Grief - ongoing**

*Counsellor: Edee, how are you feeling, right now. What are you feeling?*

*Edee: That it's really difficult to be around people, because they just want me to be better.*

*Counsellor: So you're not able to share what you're feeling with other people?*

Perhaps her own character traits of arrogance and egotism make her grieving more difficult. Nevertheless, Edee's inner pain is evident and hope seems elusive. She feels alone, conflicted, defeated, unable to share her deepest feelings.

The pain and grief of someone living with loss continues, long after the outward markers of sorrow seem to diminish. People breathe a collective sigh of relief when someone seems to be 'better', almost as if it relieves them of any caring responsibilities.

=> Discuss your own experience - a time that has been difficult and challenging, or when you have been supporting someone else.

**Losing oneself in the landscape**

The beauty and grandeur of the winter landscape of the Rocky Mountains is also harsh and unforgiving. The landscape seem to externalise Edee's inner world. She tries to lose herself physically in the vastness of the landscape. There is a deliberate recklessness in her lack of preparation to live in the wild, as if she anticipates her life will end with her death at the hands of Mother Nature. A slow suicide. She ignores the kindly advice of the man who suggests that it's safer to have a vehicle in the isolated spot she has chosen to live. She throws away her phone. She doesn't have enough provisions nor does she know the basics of survival. She doesn't care about safety or her own well-being. She anticipates death will eventually come and swallow her up. Edee says to Miguel, "I'm here in this place because I don't want to be around people," and he responds, in a gentle voice, "Only a person who has never been hungry thinks starving is a good way to die."

Psalm 8.4 wonders about the relationship between God and humanity, about God's love and concern for mortal beings. In the scheme of things, in the vastness of the universe, what is a single life? And yet, rather than diminish the worth of each human life, the

Psalmist reminds us that each one has value and dignity and significance.  
=> Discuss how Psalm 8.4 (and similar) may give a sense of 'being held' in times of grief when life seems to have no purpose and no worth.

### **Alone, together**

The film suggests that rather than finding resolution through isolation in the face of pain, grief and loss, connection is what matters. Miguel becomes a gentle ally, companion and teacher for Edee. She asks him, "Why are you helping me?" He says, "You were in my path". He teaches her basic tools for survival. As their friendship grows, each of them has an opportunity to find healing. Their relationship shows that there is a deep yearning for human connection and companionship through the human journey, even in the midst of challenges. Sometimes that connectivity may best be honoured with silence and a commitment to journey with a person rather than fill the void with words.

=> Reflect on ways you have received/given helpful support in times of need.

### **Tears for Fears: Everybody wants to rule the world**

Miguel sings the song a few times. It includes the lines "Turn your back on mother nature" and "It's my own design/It's my own remorse," both of which resonate with Edee's story. There's a line in the chorus that is also important to remember when it comes to depression and grief, emotions that can sometimes feel like they'll never end: "Nothing ever lasts forever." *(Brian Tallerico, adapted)*

=> What songs would you choose to be on a soundtrack for this film?

### **'Retreats'**

Many people find 'retreats' to be helpful, including 'silent retreats', with space to learn, connect personal beliefs, values and goals, and find a deeper meaning in life.

"I calm and quiet my soul. I dwell deeply and richly in this present moment. I surrender what has been. I let go of what might be. I am here. God is living this moment with me. I look at the sky. Contemplate eternity. Remember the billions of years that lie before and ahead of this universe. I relax. There is plenty of time". *(from Living from the Stillpoint: Prayers and meditations for ordinary days by the Stillpoint Spirituality Network, SA Synod)*

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=> Compare and contrast spiritual 'retreats' with Edee's 'retreat' from the world.

### **First Nation peoples and healing**

When Miguel finds Edee dying in her cabin, he brings a local nurse, Alawa (Sarah Dawn Pledge), to help revive her. Alawa is a First Nations woman. There are other First Nations people who appear in one of the final scenes at Miguel's home, performing a ritual. This part of the storyline is undeveloped, but there is a richness there to explore further.

"Indigenous health systems view the earth as a source of life rather than a resource (Looking Horse)".

"Traditional psychology treats patients in the context of their immediate social context and tends to focus solely on human relationships. Eco-psychology places the psyche in the context of the more than human world meaning the complex, interconnected web of humans, animals, plants, microbes, rocks, oceans and stars" (Larry Robinson).

=> Reflect on western health, 'eco-psychology', and insight about the healing rituals of Indigenous peoples.

### **The ending**

"The ending comes out of nowhere, rushed as the end credits abruptly appear on the screen. After visiting Miguel at his home, Edee is ready for the first time in two years to reach out to her sister. This undermines the character's complete grieving process, showing something much too tidy to be the end result of the same situation that was introduced in the opening moments". *(Shea Vassar)*

=> Discuss whether you found the ending satisfactory, or whether it served as a neat and tidy way to finish the film. How else might it have been finished/reach a conclusion?