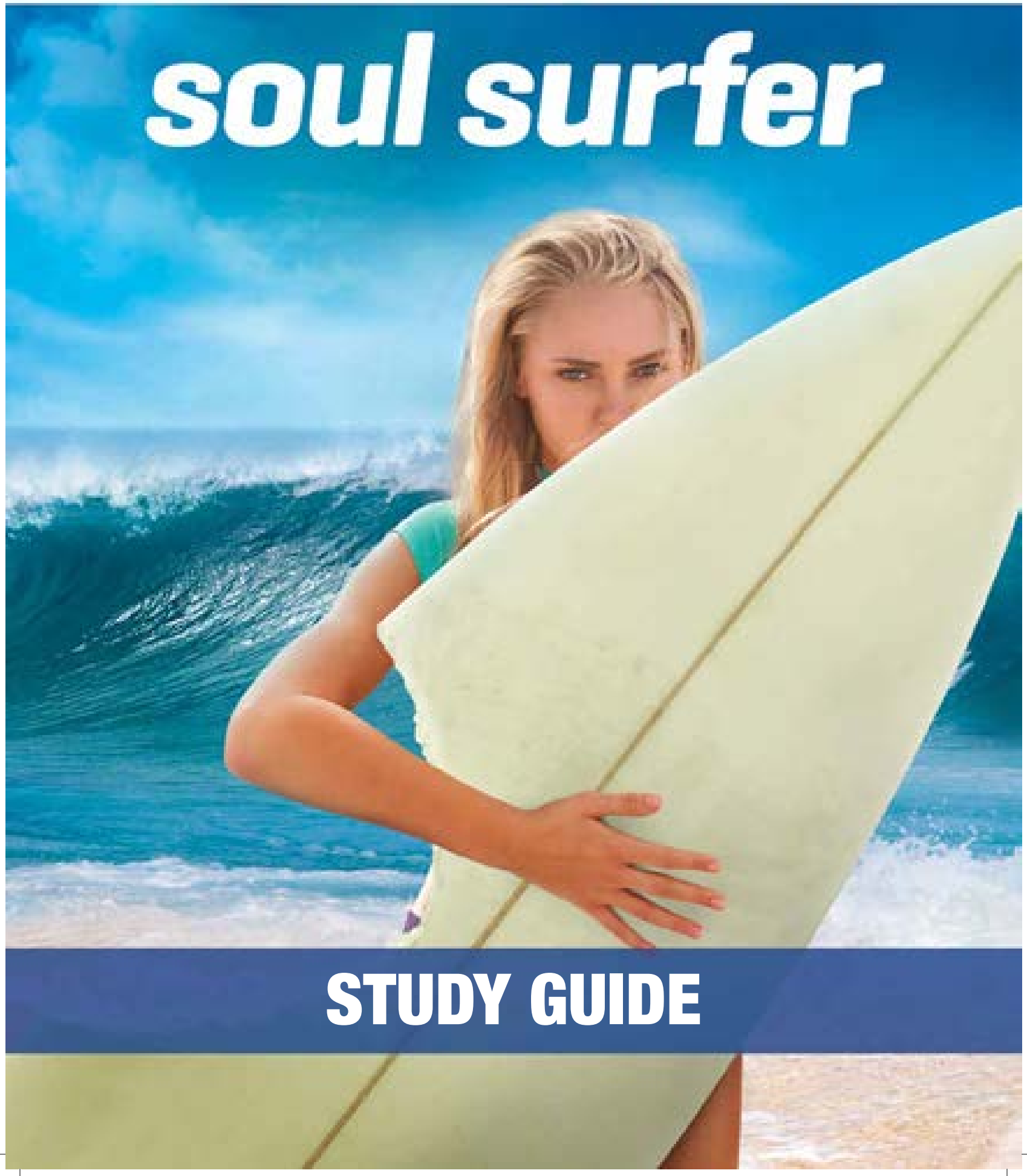
SPECIAL EDITION

soul surfer



STUDY GUIDE

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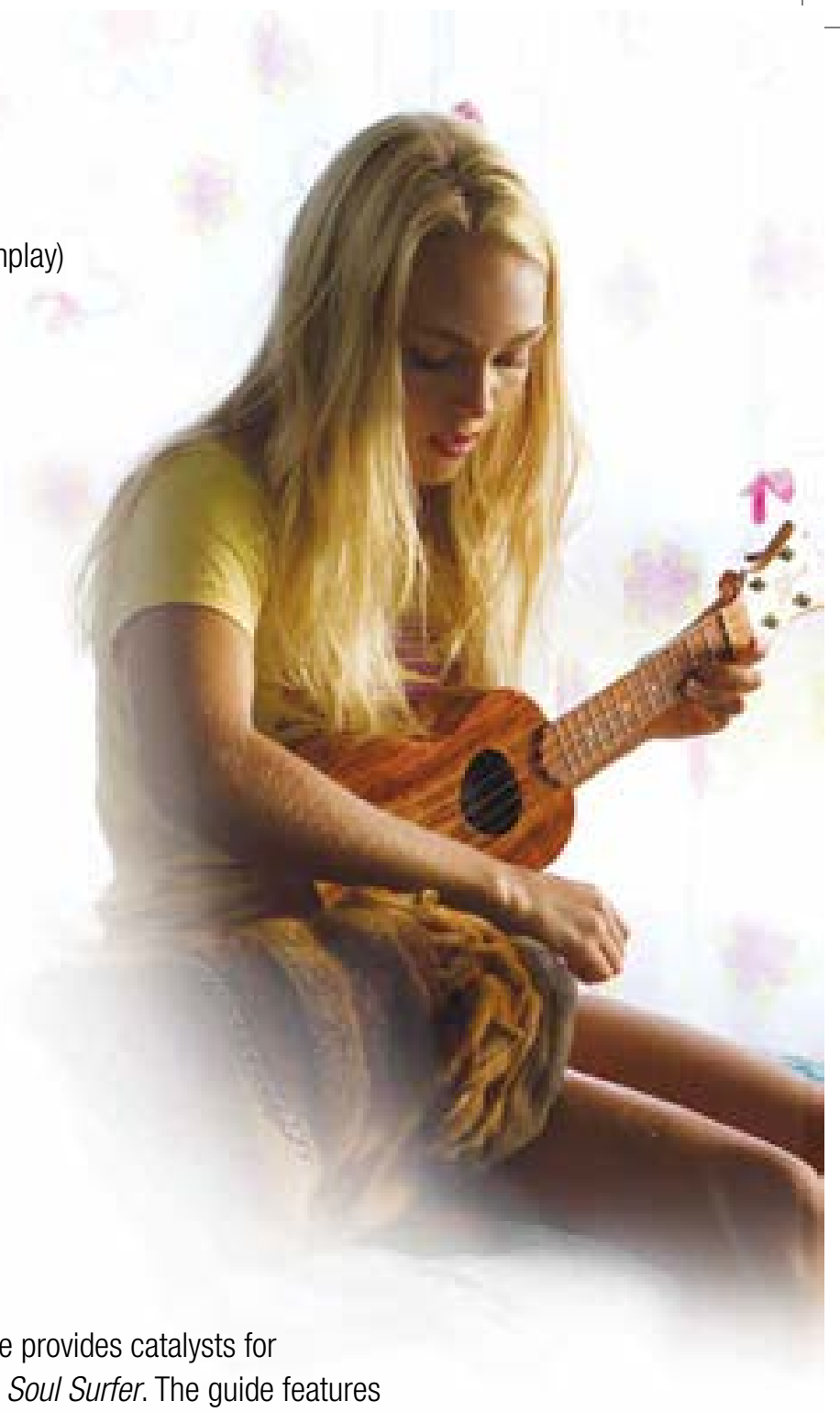
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Crew Overview

Sean McNamara (Director; Writer: screen story, screenplay)
Deborah Schwartz (Writer: screen story, screenplay)
Douglas Schwartz (Writer: screen story, screenplay)
Michael Berk (Writer: screen story, screenplay)
Matt R. Allen (Writer: screen story)
Caleb Wilson (Writer: screen story)
Brad Gann (Writer: screen story)
Bethany Hamilton (Writer: book)
Sheryl Berk (Writer: book)
Rick Bundschuh (Writer: book)

Cast Overview

AnnaSophia Robb (Bethany Hamilton)
Dennis Quaid (Tom Hamilton)
Helen Hunt (Cheri Hamilton)
Carrie Underwood (Sarah Hill)
Kevin Sorbo (Holt Blanchard)
Lorraine Nicholson (Alana Blanchard)
Ross Thomas (Noah Hamilton)
Chris Brochu (Timmy Hamilton)
Craig T. Nelson (Dr. David Rovinsky)
Sonya Balmores (Malina Birch)
Jeremy Sumpter (Byron Blanchard)



Using This Discussion Guide

Intended for use after viewing the film, this study guide provides catalysts for biblically based discussion of various themes found in *Soul Surfer*. The guide features three themes from the movie and is structured in such a way that groups can choose to discuss the entire guide at once or can focus on one or two themes at a time.

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Film Overview/Note to Group

Based on actual events, interviews and an autobiography of the same name, *Soul Surfer* recounts the inspiring true story of teen surfer and shark attack survivor Bethany Hamilton. Following the harrowing encounter that

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claims her left arm, Bethany (played by AnnaSophia Robb) struggles to find purpose amidst such a devastating and debilitating loss. With her surfing aspirations in jeopardy, Bethany relies on her faith, family and friends to muster new determination and a fresh perspective as she overcomes her adversity with grace and courage.

The film opens with childhood home videos, and Bethany's narration explains that her love for surfing began at an early age thanks to her parents, Tom (Dennis Quaid) and Cheri (Helen Hunt). Now, years later, the practice, hard work and sacrifice are helping a teenage Bethany pursue her dream of becoming a professional surfer. She's winning heats. She's taking championships. She's landing sponsorships. And she's doing it all with the full support of her family and with her best friend and fellow competitive surfer Alana Blanchard (Lorraine Nicholson) at her side.

But Bethany's life is about to change.

On Halloween morning, while her father heads to the hospital for knee surgery, Bethany goes surfing with Alana and her family, including Alana's father, Holt (Kevin Sorbo), and brother, Byron (Jeremy Sumpter). It's a beautiful Hawaiian day, and the two girls are chatting and floating when – in an instant – a shark emerges to Bethany's left, biting through both her arm and surfboard. Despite the shock, Bethany utters prayers while Holt maneuvers her to shore and tends to the injury as best he can. Wasting no time, the group then heads toward the hospital, meeting the paramedics on the way.

In the recovery room, Bethany asks her father, "When can I surf again?" This determination would be a vital companion to the young surfer during her struggle to understand the emotional, physical and spiritual implications of her loss. Following the attack, Bethany presents a brave face as she adjusts to the reality of her new situation, but frustration hounds her, especially when her long-awaited and hard-earned return to competitive surfing ends in disaster. Convinced that a surfing career is now unattainable, Bethany finds herself awash in disappointment.

As Bethany wrestles with understanding her purpose apart from surfing, she joins a mission trip led by her youth pastor, Sarah Hill (Carrie Underwood), to tsunami-ravaged Thailand. While there, Bethany is overcome with compassion for the people who truly have lost everything, and the experience gives her a new perspective on her own situation. When she returns home to stacks of fan mail, she realizes she's become a role model for countless kids facing their own obstacles. After a grueling training regimen, she returns to competitive surfing, her loss having become a unique opportunity to embrace more people than she ever could have with two arms.



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Theme One: Perseverance: Overcoming Adversity with Faith

Guiding Scripture: Philippians 4:13 (NIV): "I can do everything through him who gives me strength."

Scriptures Referenced

- Deuteronomy 31:8 (NIV): "The Lord himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged."
- Job 13:15 (NIV): "Though he slay me, yet I will hope in him; I will surely defend my ways to his face."
- Matthew 16:24 (NIV): "Then Jesus said to his disciples, 'If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.'"
- Romans 5:3–5 (NLT): "We can rejoice, too, when we run into problems and trials, for we know that they help us develop endurance. And endurance develops strength of character, and character strengthens our confident hope of salvation. And this hope will not lead to disappointment. For we know how dearly God loves us, because he has given us the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts with his love."
- 2 Corinthians 4:8–9 (NLT): "We are pressed on every side by troubles, but we are not crushed. We are perplexed, but not driven to despair. We are hunted down, but never abandoned by God. We get knocked down, but we are not destroyed."
- 2 Corinthians 12:10 (NLT): "That's why I take pleasure in my weaknesses, and in the insults, hardships, persecutions, and troubles that I suffer for Christ. For when I am weak, then I am strong."
- Philippians 4:13 (NIV): "I can do everything through him who gives me strength."
- Hebrews 12:1 (NIV): "Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us."
- James 1:12 (NIV): "Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him."

Scenes to Review

- The Attack (00:22:00–00:28:53, Chapter 5)
- Recovery (00:28:54–00:32:56, Chapter 6)
- Back in the Water (00:49:05–00:52:19, Chapter 10)
- "I just need possible." (01:57:27–01:59:02, Chapter 12)
- "It totally counted." (01:25:48–01:37:20, Chapter 18)



Discussion Questions

Bethany Hamilton's story is an amazing testimony to the power of perseverance. Through her faith in Jesus Christ, sheer determination and incredible courage, she overcomes staggering adversity to return to the water. But the journey isn't easy. From the first terrifying moments of the actual shark attack to the long process of healing and rehabilitation, Bethany is confronted with endless opportunities to persevere or to quit. Thankfully, she chooses the former.

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Scenes to Review
The Attack (00:22:00–00:28:53, Chapter 5)*

***Viewer caution: This scene contains the shark attack and subsequent trauma.**

- How does Bethany respond to the attack? What does her reaction reveal about her strength of character? How does her reaction foreshadow her ability to persevere?
- On the way to the beach, Bethany prays to Jesus for help. In what ways does her faith give her the fortitude to handle the crisis that surrounds her?
- At the very end of this scene, Bethany is tube-riding in slow motion when she suddenly veers to her right. What is your interpretation of this sequence?
- Can you testify to the power of perseverance? Have you ever experienced adversity that you eventually overcame with determination? With faith? If so, what happened?

Read 2 Corinthians 4:8–9 and James 1:12 (see Scriptures Referenced).

- 2 Corinthians 4:8–9 is an empowering anthem for perseverance. How does this passage offer incredible encouragement to persist when we're confronted with adversity?
- What does James 1:12 say about persevering under trial? Why does God affirm and reward His children who successfully overcome hardships?

After the attack and emergency surgery, Bethany wakes in a recovery room filled with concerned – and simultaneously relieved – faces. The worst of the medical trauma is behind her, and she must now focus on healing. But Bethany's priorities are slightly different than her doctor's, as evidenced by one of the first things she asks her dad: "When can I surf again?" This stubborn determination, coupled with a passion for the water, would aid Bethany in her perseverance.



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Scene to Review
Recovery (00:28:54–00:32:56, Chapter 6)

- What does Holt tell Bethany when he visits? How does his description of the events immediately following the shark attack paint a portrait of Bethany's perseverance?
- Dr. Rovinsky (Craig T. Nelson) says, "There's going to be a lot of pain because of the trauma that you've endured." Does the statement apply to more than physical trauma?
- What is the significance of Bethany's question ("When can I surf again?")? Why might Tom Hamilton view the question as a good sign where Bethany's recovery is concerned?
- Tom and Bethany quote Philippians 4:13 (see Scriptures Referenced). How is this verse a source of strength for people facing hardships? For people who must persevere?

Read Deuteronomy 31:8 and Job 13:15 (see Scriptures Referenced).

- In Deuteronomy 31:8, Moses encourages Joshua to cross the Jordan and take possession of the land promised to the forefathers. How is Bethany's challenge similar to Joshua's?
- How does Job 13:15 represent perseverance? How do Job's words reflect the magnitude of his faithfulness to his God, despite the unspeakable adversity in his life?

Just before Thanksgiving, Bethany announces that she is ready to get back in the water; in fact, she's more afraid of never surfing again than of any threat below the ocean's surface. And so, surfboards in hand, the Hamiltons and Alana head to the beach. Despite the temptation to settle for much less, Bethany battles for that first wave, her perseverance resulting in an amazing feat.



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Scene to Review
Back in the Water (00:49:05–00:52:19, Chapter 10)

- How does Bethany's passion for surfing motivate her? Why is motivation an important aspect of perseverance for anyone striving to overcome adversity?
- When Bethany tells Alana that she's more afraid of not surfing, can you appreciate her logic? What does this rationalization say about Bethany's incredible courage?
- What are your thoughts as you watch Bethany's clumsy attempts to get on her surfboard? How do you feel when she finally achieves her goal and rides her first wave back?
- Even though Tom and Cheri are just protecting their daughter, how does their concern actually become yet another obstacle for Bethany to overcome?

Read Romans 5:3–5 and 2 Corinthians 12:10 (see Scriptures Referenced).

- How does the Romans passage relate to Bethany's situation? Can you point to specific examples where she grows in endurance, strength of character and hope of salvation?
- When Paul says, "For when I am weak, then I am strong," in 2 Corinthians 12:10, what does he mean? How can weakness be considered a strength?

To see more of Bethany's inspiring perseverance in action during the film, make sure to watch the following Optional Scenes to Review. The first is a training montage for the regionals contest, and the second is the last scene in the film – the Rip Curl Nationals contest, which represents Bethany's triumphant return to surfing – even if the judges didn't count that last wave.

Optional Scenes to Review
"I just need possible." (01:57:2–01:59:02, Chapter 12)
"It totally counted." (01:25:48–01:37:20, Chapter 18)

In concluding this theme discussion, make sure to read Matthew 16:24 and Hebrews 12:1 (see Scriptures Referenced). Spend some time with these verses, thinking about and discussing what each means. And, consider what perseverance looks like in your life. Using Bethany's story as inspiration, think of some ways that you can seek excellence with determination and bravery.



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Theme Two: Perspective: Human vs. Eternal

Guiding Scripture: Jeremiah 29:11 (NLT): "'For I know the plans I have for you,' says the Lord. 'They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope.'"

Scriptures Referenced

- 1 Chronicles 16:11 (NIV): "Look to the Lord and his strength; seek his face always."
- Psalm 16:8 (NIV): "I have set the Lord always before me. Because he is at my right hand, I will not be shaken."
- Psalm 138:8 (NIV): "The Lord will fulfill his purpose for me; your love, O Lord, endures forever – do not abandon the works of your hands."
- Proverbs 3:5–6 (NLT): "Trust in the Lord with all your heart; do not depend on your own understanding. Seek his will in all you do, and he will show you which path to take."
- Isaiah 26:3 (NIV): "You will keep in perfect peace him whose mind is steadfast, because he trusts in you."
- Isaiah 55:8 (NIV): "'For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,' declares the Lord."
- Jeremiah 1:5 (NIV): "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations."
- Jeremiah 29:11 (NLT): "'For I know the plans I have for you,' says the Lord. 'They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope.'"
- Romans 8:28 (NIV): "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose."
- Romans 12:2 (NLT): "Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect."

Scenes to Review

- Rad Night: New Perspective (00:12:47–00:14:06, Chapter 3)
- A Difficult Question (00:43:41–00:45:47, Chapter 9)
- The Next Step (01:08:13–01:10:19, Chapter 14)
- Thailand (01:10:20–01:18:27, Chapter 15)

Discussion Questions

As life unfolds, it's important to approach both peaks and valleys with an eternal perspective – with an understanding that God is sovereign and "works for the good of those who love him" (Romans 8:28; see Scriptures Referenced). But at times, the valleys are simply overwhelming, and the desire to trust in God's greater plan gives way to human limitations and uncertainty.

In Bethany's case, the perspective question is brought into acute focus following the shark attack. Suddenly, the young surfer is consumed – and understandably so – with questions and doubts about her purpose and future. With a heavy heart, Bethany seeks the counsel and comfort of her youth leader, who encourages her spiritual protégé to keep her eyes on the grander plan.

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Scene to Review
Rad Night: New Perspective (00:12:47–00:14:06, Chapter 3)
A Difficult Question (00:43:41–00:45:47, Chapter 9)

- In the first scene, what do you think of Sarah's perspective game? How do the pictures demonstrate her point about changing perspectives in order to make sense of things?
- Sarah recites Jeremiah 29:11 (see Scriptures Referenced). How does this verse address the concept of perspective? What does it say about purpose? About God's plan?
- In the second scene, Bethany visits Sarah with a heavy heart. How has the shark attack complicated Bethany's perspective and challenged her ability to see the greater plan?
- Can you relate to Bethany's struggle? Has a life experience ever made you doubt God's plan? If so, were you eventually able to gain a new perspective? What was the outcome?

Read Isaiah 55:8 and Romans 8:28 (see Scriptures Referenced).

- How does Isaiah 55:8 establish that God is altogether different? What does this passage suggest about human vs. eternal perspective? How can we take comfort in this verse?
- In what way is Romans 8:28 an encouragement to maintain an eternal perspective amidst life's difficulties? How does the phrase "in all things" emphasize God's power?

From an early age, Bethany is passionate about surfing. She spends years in the water, training to become a professional surfer, her one career ambition. But the attack alters those dreams, and after a heartbreaking return to competitive surfing, Bethany quits. Feeling as though she has lost everything, she talks with her father, who gently admonishes her to see a different perspective.

Scene to Review
The Next Step (01:08:13–01:10:19, Chapter 14)

- In the first part of the scene, how do Bethany's questions reflect the ways that fear, hopelessness and uncertainty have limited her perspective?
- When Bethany asks why she had to lose everything, what does her father say? How does his answer encourage Bethany toward an attitude of thanksgiving rather than despair?
- Tom tells his daughter to pray and to listen for what comes next. Why is it often difficult to exercise patience during life's hardships? How does patience improve perspective?
- Knowing Bethany's beautiful and inspiring story in full, how does God ultimately transform her devastation and broaden her surfing passion beyond expectation?

Take a moment to read Psalm 138:8 and Proverbs 3:5–6 (see Scriptures Referenced).

- In Psalm 138:8, David pleads with the Lord, "…do not abandon the works of your hands." How does this request show David's understanding of eternal perspective?
- According to Proverbs 3:5–6, what is the reward for trusting in the Lord and seeking His will? Why should we forsake our human understanding and perspective for His?

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While Bethany recovers from her performance at regionals – an attempt that resulted in a broken board and bruised spirit – she joins the mission trip to Phuket, Thailand, assisting with relief efforts in the aftermath of the tsunami. At first, Bethany is overwhelmed with the stories of loss and destruction, but she soon embraces a new perspective, one based on compassion and love.

Scene to Review
Thailand (01:10:20–01:18:27, Chapter 15)

- Sarah tells Bethany that compassion can move people to do great things and can also provide a new perspective. Why does compassion change the way we view things?
- When Bethany takes a break from the medical table to assess her emotions, what do you think is going through her mind? How does the Thai woman's story impact Bethany?
- In the second half of the Thailand scene, what is the significance of Bethany's success in convincing the young child to reenter the ocean and ride the surfboard?

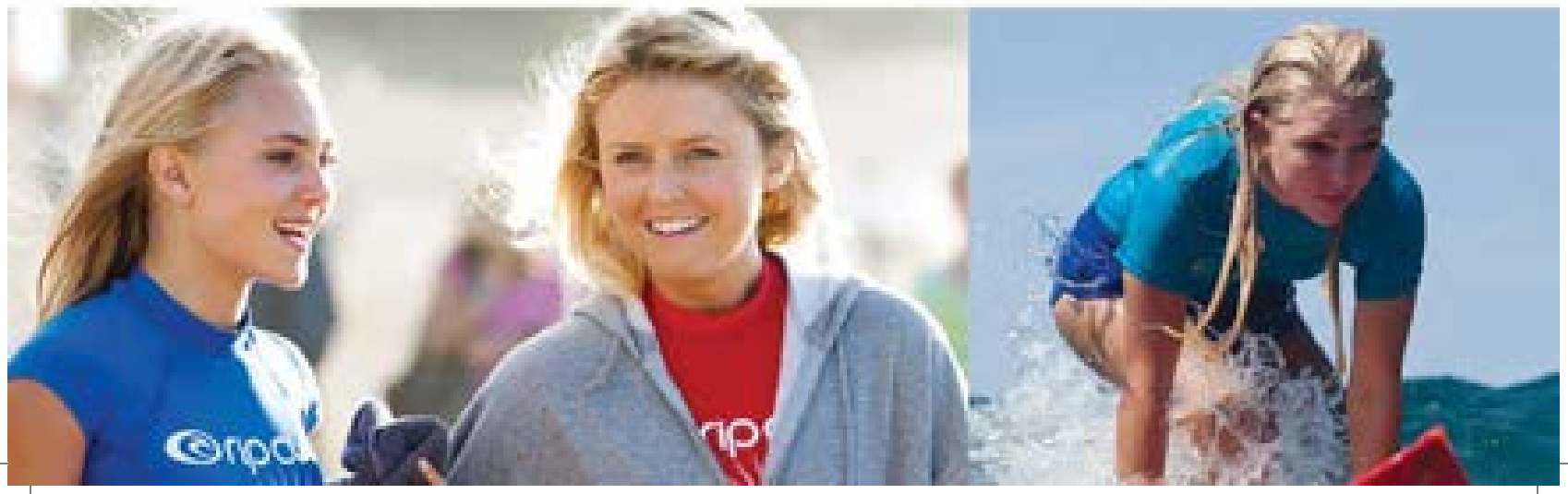
Toward the end of the scene, Bethany narrates: "They say the Lord works in mysterious ways. I say that's an understatement. Who would have thought that teaching a kid to surf would teach me that surfing isn't the most important thing in the world and that something else is – love? Bigger than any tidal wave, more powerful than any fear."

- What does Bethany's epiphany reveal about the way her perspective has changed since the beginning of the mission trip? How has the overall experience impacted her?

Read Isaiah 26:3; Jeremiah 1:5; and Romans 12:2 (see Scriptures Referenced).

- What do the Isaiah and Romans verses say about the mind? How do these passages encourage us to keep our minds focused on an eternal perspective?
- In what way does Jeremiah 1:5 serve as a reminder of God's love for His children? What does the verse reveal about God's character? About His purpose? His perspective?

As you conclude this theme discussion, read 1 Chronicles 16:11 and Psalm 16:8 (see Scriptures Referenced). These verses give specific instruction regarding human vs. eternal perspective. Consider the ways in which you might be trying to understand things in your own power and, subsequently, within a limited scope. Rather, be encouraged to seek a more eternal mindset, and trust God "to give you a future and a hope" (Jeremiah 29:11; see Scriptures Referenced).



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Theme Three: Community: The Body of Christ

Guiding Scripture: Romans 12:10 (NLT): "Love each other with genuine affection, and take delight in honoring each other."

Scriptures Referenced

- Proverbs 12:25 (NLT): "Worry weighs a person down; an encouraging word cheers a person up."
- Proverbs 17:17 (NLT): "A friend is always loyal, and a brother is born to help in time of need."
- Ecclesiastes 4:9–10 (NIV): "Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work: If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up!"
- John 13:34–35 (NLT): "So now I am giving you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other."
- John 15:13 (NLT): "There is no greater love than to lay down one's life for one's friends."
- Acts 2:42 (NLT): "All the believers devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, and to fellowship, and to sharing in meals (including the Lord's Supper), and to prayer."
- Romans 12:10 (NLT): "Love each other with genuine affection, and take delight in honoring each other."
- Romans 14:19 (NIV): "Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification."
- 1 Corinthians 12:20, 27 (NLT): "Yes, there are many parts, but only one body…All of you together are Christ's body, and each of you is a part of it."
- 1 Thessalonians 5:11 (NIV): "Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing."

Scenes to Review

- A Family Competition (00:05:13–00:07:21, Chapter 2)
- The Ride Home (00:35:43–00:38:15, Chapter 8)
- *Venus de Milo* (00:54:00–00:57:26, Chapter 11)
- Fan Mail (01:18:29–01:19:29, Chapter 16)

Discussion Questions

One of the biggest blessings in Bethany's life is the community of believers by which she's consistently surrounded. Whether she's spending time with her immediate family, Alana and her family, church friends or fellow surfers, Bethany has a wonderful support system. And as she handles the ramifications of the shark attack, she does so with the gift of community.

The Hamiltons are a tight-knit group. They're dedicated to each other, with bonds established in faith, love and commitment. When one of them is hurting, the rest act as a single unit, surrounding, protecting and nurturing the wounded family member while she recovers. So, while they certainly have their share of fun (see the first Scene to Review), the Hamiltons also take their jobs as members of a greater community very seriously (see the second Scene to Review).

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Scene to Review
A Family Competition (00:05:13–00:07:21, Chapter 2)
The Ride Home (00:35:43–00:38:15, Chapter 8)

- How does the first scene demonstrate the closeness of the Hamilton family? What does their familial community suggest about their ability to support each other?
- What role does faith play in the Hamilton household? What are some tangible ways that the Hamiltons' faith strengthens their relationships and creates community?
- On the drive home, Bethany sees the surfboards: "Welcome home, Bethany. We love you!" In addition to the printed message, what does this gesture really mean?
- How do Noah (Ross Thomas) and Timmy (Chris Brochu) react to the reporters swarming the van? What do their actions convey about their concern for Bethany?

Read Proverbs 17:17; Ecclesiastes 4:9–10; and John 15:13 (see Scriptures Referenced).

- What do these verses say about the importance of community? According to the Ecclesiastes passage, what are two reasons that friendship is important?
- Notice that these Bible verses also address the concept of sacrifice. How does sacrifice – whether to a small or great degree – relate to friendship and community?

After Thanksgiving, the prosthetic arm arrives, and Bethany is disappointed to learn that the prosthesis isn't weight-bearing and won't help her surf. Afterwards, Bethany expresses frustration over her appearance in terms of what guys like in "normal" girls, and what follows is a touching conversation between Bethany and Cheri about beauty's evolving standards.

Scene to Review
Venus de Milo (00:54:00–00:57:26, Chapter 11)

- Why is the prosthetic arm such a disappointment? Is Bethany's annoyance based solely on the fact that the arm is useless for surfing? Or is there something else on her mind?
- When the prosthesis doesn't work as planned, how does Bethany's community of supporters step in to help her through the stressful situation?
- How does Cheri's support for her daughter sustain Bethany through her bout with body image issues? What are your thoughts on Cheri's *Venus de Milo* reference?
- How is Cheri's conversation with Bethany an example of the importance of community? Why is it important to have a network (however large or small) of supportive people?

Read Proverbs 12:25 and 1 Thessalonians 5:11 (see Scriptures Referenced).

- What do these verses have to say about encouragement? How does encouragement relate to the overarching theme of community? To the body of Christ as a whole?
- How about you? Have you ever been an encouragement to someone who needed a word of support? Or have you been the recipient of such support? If so, what happened?

When Bethany returns home from Thailand, she is shocked to find stacks of fan mail waiting for her. Apparently, even though she thought she "blew it" at regionals, people around the world were encouraged that she even tried, giving her instant role model status among countless kids.

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Scene to Review
Fan Mail (01:18:29–01:19:29, Chapter 16)

- Since relationships (friends, family, etc.) are extremely important to Bethany, how is the fan mail an extension of the community that's so vital to the young surfer?

With this scene in mind, think about the body of Christ on a global scale. Read 1 Corinthians 12:20, 27 (see Scriptures Referenced) and consider how the actions of one part of the body (Bethany performing at regionals in Hawaii) influence other parts thousands of miles away.

- How does Bethany's performance at regionals impact people around the world?
- Even though the shark attack was horrendous, how does God use that incident in Bethany's life to expand, build and unify both her community and the body of Christ?
- Bethany is largely unaware of her global influence. Is it possible that you are making choices that either positively or negatively impact the people around you?

Take a moment to read Romans 12:10 and 14:19 (see Scriptures Referenced).

- What do these verses have to say about living in community? What do they say about edifying the body of Christ and seeking to live in peace with each other?
- What are some practical ways that you can incorporate the message and spirit of these verses into your everyday life? How would that impact your community?

In concluding this theme discussion, read John 13:34–35; Acts 2:42; and revisit the Guiding Scripture, Romans 12:10 (see Scriptures Referenced). Look at the biblical example of Christian community and fellowship found in Acts, and then take some time to discuss the mandates for living in community found in the other two verses. Think about your own community – whether nonexistent, small or large – and see where and how you could implement some biblical change.



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Final Thoughts

Feel free to watch the designated Scenes to Review and discuss the questions that follow.

Scenes to Review
Blessed Be Your Name (00:03:05–00:05:10, Chapter 1)

- How does this scene introduce Bethany? What can you tell about her personality and priorities based on this opening? How is the song relevant to the film as a whole?
- Speaking of music, what did you think about the film's soundtrack? Can you recall various scenes where music was used? Did the music enhance the film?

Scenes to Review
An Encounter with Malina (00:11:47–00:12:46, Chapter 3)

- Though Malina Birch (Sonya Balmores) is slightly villainous for most of the film, how does she push Bethany to excel both before and after the accident?

Scenes to Review
The Mexico Trip (00:14:37–00:15:51, Chapter 3)

- What does this scene reveal about Bethany's priorities? How do her priorities shift once she's sponsored? Do you agree or disagree with her decision to stay and train? Why?

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SOME MATERIAL MAY NOT BE SUITABLE FOR CHILDREN
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