

SHADOWLANDS

Rated: PG • **Running Time:** 2 hours, 13 minutes
Starring: Anthony Hopkins as C.S. Lewis; Debra Winger as Joy Gresham; Edward Hardwicke as Warnie; Joseph Mazzello as Douglas Gresham
Director: Richard Attenborough

Themes: God's role in suffering, risking pain for intimacy,

intellectual integrity, romantic love in marriage

Cautions: The Lewis brothers smoke pipes. Despite alluding to the consequences of alcoholism, the film features social drinking in many scenes (the local pub is a favorite hangout for the Oxford elite). Viewers may object to Jack's use of the term "bloody awful."

Story Summary

Shadowlands chronicles the budding friendship and romance shared by English author and Christian apologist C.S. "Jack" Lewis and Joy Gresham, the transplanted New York poet who captured his heart in the early 1950s before she succumbed to cancer.

We meet Jack as an aging bachelor enjoying a proper, undisturbed life as a professor at Oxford University. He lives with his brother, Warnie. A well-known writer, Jack speaks publicly and spars intellectually with peers at a local pub. Jack has much to say about grief and suffering, and is accused by one colleague of supplying "easy answers to difficult questions." During one lecture, he quotes a letter he received in which the writer, referring to a tragic accident that took 24 innocent lives, asks Lewis, "Where was God? Why didn't He stop it? Isn't God supposed to be good? Isn't He supposed to love us? Does God want us to suffer?" He replies, "I suggest to you that it is *because* God loves us that He makes us the gift of suffering. Pain is God's megaphone to rouse a deaf world."

Jack's calm, emotionally aloof world is altered when he agrees to have tea with visiting American Joy Gresham, a fan who has been corresponding with him. He anticipates an "hour or so of polite conversation, then we go home and everything goes on just the way it always has." But that initial meeting turns into a tour of Oxford, more teas, a Christmas dinner and the acquaintance of Joy's young son, Douglas. Through it all, Joy's enchantingly brazen ability to challenge Jack in matters of philosophy becomes a central source of attraction:

Jack: Personal experience isn't everything.

Joy: I disagree. I think personal experience is everything.

Jack: So, reading is a waste of time?

Joy: No, it's not a waste of time. But reading is "safe," isn't it? Books aren't about to hurt you.

Jack: Why should one want to be hurt?

Joy: That's when we learn.



It seems Joy's journey to England was partly to escape the abuse of her alcoholic, "compulsively unfaithful" husband. Joy asks only for Jack's friendship, which he gladly offers.

When Joy returns to America, Jack attempts to ignore the void in his life. He thinks of her often and misses their spirited dialogues. After her divorce, Joy moves to London. Jack is delighted to have his friend back and, at her request, marries her

so that she can become a citizen. It's a "technical" union before the state, not before God. No passion. No intimacy. It's a platonic arrangement between friends, allowing Jack to keep his comfortably cloistered heart "safe."

Soon after, Joy is stricken with cancer. Faced with losing her, Jack realizes how deeply he loves her and asks to marry her again, this time in the eyes of God. Their remaining months together are filled with a true, strong, emotionally intimate romance. When Joy dies, Jack and Douglas both have their worlds torn asunder—forever altered by love. Not only has Jack's perfect world been shattered, but so has his view of pain and suffering. The man who once had all the answers has nothing left but questions. "Why love if losing hurts so much?" he asks. Yet the viewer senses that, despite his frustration, Jack is not only glad for the choice he made to love Joy, but that he is a much deeper, richer, wiser man and teacher because of it.

If there's a weakness in this Oscar-nominated film, it's that *Shadowlands* ends with the audience wondering just how severely C.S. Lewis' loss impacted his faith. A more appropriate epilogue would've shown Jack returning from his valley of despair to a renewed and energized relationship with God. That's how his biography really ended. Instead, this articulate saint's conversion and conviction play only a supporting role in what is an otherwise terrific movie. Shortly after its release, the real Douglas Gresham—a committed Christian and producer of Walden Media's *Chronicles of Narnia* films—said of his step-father, "Her death taught him something. He had yet to learn that in the very deepest despair there is hope, and when by grief the entire universe is suddenly emptied, there is God."

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Before You Watch

C.S. Lewis' personality heavily favored intellect over emotion, which explains why he dealt with circumstances the way he did. Can you identify with that way of seeing the world? Do you know how you and your teen are "wired"? If you've never taken a personality inventory, consider doing so.

Bible Bookmarks

Psalm 126:6;
Prov. 14:13;
Isa. 41:10,
43:1-2, 53:3-7;
Matt. 6:5-13;
Rom. 8:18;
2 Cor. 1:3-5; James 1:2-4; 1 Thes. 5:17; 1 Pet. 1:6-7; Rev. 21:4

Talking Points

1 Lewis preaches, "If you love someone, you don't want them to suffer. You can't bear it. You want to take their suffering on yourself. Even I feel like that. Why doesn't God?" The great romance of the gospel proves that God did feel like that and sent his Son to bear our suffering, as prophesied in Isaiah 53:3-7 and fulfilled in Jesus Christ. Discuss this passage and God's wonderful love.

2 Do you think Jack did the right thing when he married Joy to give her British citizenship? Why or why not? At what point did you sense that Jack was falling in love with her? When did you realize that Joy loved him? How was their marriage healthier after their second set of vows?

3 What were your early impressions of Jack? Did they change as the story progressed? How? Would you consider Joy a good mother? What does she do that shows how much she loves Douglas?

4 When Joy is ill, Jack explains to his friends, "I pray because the need flows out of me all the time, waking and sleeping. It doesn't change God; it changes me." Read 1 Thessalonians 5:17 and Jesus' view of prayer in Matthew 6:5-13. Talk about these perspectives. Why do you pray?

5 Jack asks, "Why love if losing hurts so much?" What would you tell him? What would Jack have missed had he not opened his heart to Joy? Why do you think he chose to do it? Refer back to the dialogue reprinted in the story summary. Are you more inclined to play it safe or to boldly step out in this area with friends and loved ones? Why?

6 This isn't your typical cinematic love story. Contrast Hollywood's obsession with perfect storybook romances and "happily ever after" endings to Jack's painful, sacrificial, yet deeply satisfying love for Joy.



7 Jack concludes, "The pain now is part of the happiness then. That's the deal." Talk about that statement in light of Proverbs 14:13.

8 What is the point of suffering, and where is

God when we endure trials? Clear answers await in 2 Corinthians 1:3-5, 1 Peter 1:6-7, James 1:2-4, Isaiah 41:10 and 43:1-2.

9 Some hard times last longer than others. Still others seem as if they'll last forever. What does God's Word say about the duration of suffering? What is a healthy eternal perspective on it? Read Psalm 126:6, Romans 8:18 and Revelation 21:4.

10 What did Jack mean when he told his students, "The most intense joy lies not in the having, but in the desiring." Do you agree? Why or why not?

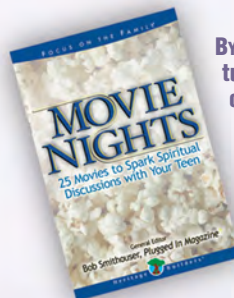
Follow-Up Activity

- One of C.S. Lewis' most popular books, *The Screwtape Letters*, analyzes spiritual warfare via correspondences between an apprentice demon and his skilled uncle. Each entry describes ways the forces of evil seek to undermine the spiritual well-being of the humans they're charged with crippling. Read a letter each day during your private devotions. Later, chat about that day's reading together. Or you can listen to Focus on the Family's Radio Theater production of *The Screwtape Letters* on CD, starring the voice talents of Andy Serkis (*The Lord of the Rings*).
- Disney's 2005 feature *The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* could be the perfect follow-up Movie Night. You'll find it in the Movie Nights for Teens section at pluggedin.com.

Just for Fun

Richard Attenborough, the film's director, may be best known to young people for his role as John Hammond, the grandfatherly theme-park owner responsible for the genetically engineered dinosaurs in *Jurassic Park*. Joseph Mazzello, cast here as Douglas Gresham, played the grandson of Attenborough's character in *Jurassic Park*. —by Bob Smithouser

A **plugged**ⁿ Resource
online



BY THE BOOK: "Perhaps symptomatic of a culture continuing its shift away from words on a page in favor of images on a screen, even college literature majors now learn how to 'read film,' usually apart from a biblical worldview."

—Movie Nights

You can request this resource today by contacting Focus on the Family at 800-232-6459 (in Canada, 800-661-9800).