

DISCUSSION GUIDE

Spider-Man 1 and 2

"With great power comes great responsibility."

Spider-Man currently holds the [Guinness Book of World Records](#) award for the largest single-day box-office earnings (\$43.6 million for its first Saturday opening) and is currently the [fifth highest-grossing film](#) in U.S. history (\$403.7 million), which paved the way for an even more critically acclaimed sequel, *Spider-Man 2*.

This study will look at both *Spider-Man* movies, explore what it means to be a hero, note how choices shape our character, and examine the responsibilities that come with the gift of power.

Based on:

Spider-Man (Sony Pictures, 2002), screenplay by David Koepp. Spider-Man 2 (Sony Pictures, 2004), screen story by Alfred Gough, Miles Millar, and Michael Chabon; screenplay by Alvin Sargent.

Both films were directed by Sam Raimi and are based on the Marvel comic book character, Spider-Man, created by Stan Lee and Steve Ditko. Both films are MPAA-rated PG-13 for stylized violence and action. (Note, both films use profane language, and though the violence may be "stylized," some characters die mercilessly.)

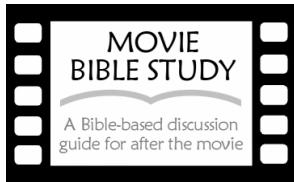


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Movie Summaries

Spider-Man: Peter Parker (Tobey McGuire) is an awkward high-school nerd, suffering the insults of bullies and mean bus drivers. He secretly loves the girl next door, Mary Jane Watson, whom he refers to as MJ (Kirsten Dunst). Bitten by a genetically engineered spider, Parker's life spins into chaos when he is gifted with superhuman, spider-like abilities.

Parker initially uses his powers selfishly, but he unwittingly causes the murder of his Uncle Ben (Cliff Robertson). Then, wreaking vengeance, Parker causes the thief who killed his uncle to fall to an accidental death. Driven by guilt, Parker begins doing great deeds and attempts to honor his uncle's final lesson: "With great power comes great responsibility."

When a wealthy scientist, Norman Osborn (Willem Dafoe), rushes a scientific experiment that goes wrong, he too gains superhuman strength, reflexes, and mental acuity—but he goes insane and, as his alter ego, the Green Goblin, begins murdering his enemies. When Spider-Man thwarts the Green Goblin, he swears to destroy Spider-Man and eventually learns Spider-Man's true identity. After nearly killing MJ and Peter's Aunt May (Rosemary Harris), the Green Goblin causes his own death in a dramatic battle with Spider-Man.

Parker's best friend is Norman Osborn's son, Harry Osborn (James Franco). Harry Osborn is unaware of his father's alter ego and believes Spider-Man killed his father, so he vows revenge. Ultimately, Parker abandons his dreams of love—choosing responsibility instead—and walks away from MJ even as she confesses her love for him.

Spider-Man 2: Two years after Peter Parker becomes Spider-Man, the strain of living two lives unravels Parker's relationships and personal commitments. His life-long secret love for MJ is making him sick, and his powers randomly fail him. Harry Osborn's bitterness has evolved into an obsession with Spider-Man, and when a nuclear fusion experiment Osborn sponsors fails, his hatred finds renewed focus.

Parker finds a new father figure, Dr. Otto Octavius (Alfred Molina), but Octavius is injured in Osborn's fusion experiment, which has grafted eight mechanical arms onto his body. Octavius ("Doc Ock") is driven mad by this transformation and begins to do harm with his new abilities.

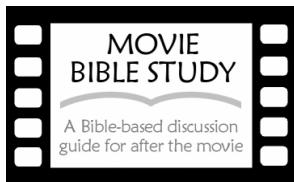
Spider-Man initially works to foil Doc Ock's misdeeds, but, faced with growing superhero impotence and a yearning for his personal needs, Parker abandons his responsibilities and throws away his Spider-Man suit. But when Doc Ock abducts MJ, Parker is forced to don the Spider-Man suit again. After battling Doc Ock to save MJ and New York, Parker unmasks himself, appealing to Octavius to help avert destruction.

MJ finally discovers Spider-Man's true identity, and Parker reveals his love for her.

—For more coverage of the Spider-Man movies, visit:
<http://christianitytoday.com/movies/reviews/spiderman.html>
<http://christianitytoday.com/movies/reviews/spiderman2.html>

Rated PG-13

Both films have profane language and some violence.



Discussing the Scenes

Select one or more of these themes to discuss:

1. What Makes a Hero
2. The Ability to Choose Whom We Become
3. Power and Responsibility

1. What Makes a Hero: "There's a hero in all of us." **(John 16:33; Hebrews 11:1–40)**

While adapting the Spider-Man story for our times, Raimi faced a lot of pressure to portray a hero worth emulating. In scifi.com, Raimi explains:

I had a responsibility to the kids of America ... who are going to look up to the character ... and say, "That's my hero." ... I wanted to make sure he was worthy of their admiration ... that they're presented someone who learns a lesson of morality, that maybe you don't have to be so selfish, that you could look outside yourself. I think it's actually the growth of him as a human being ... that makes him into a hero, not because he beats up the bad guys.

- [Q]** Did Sam Raimi do a good job in portraying Spider-Man as a worthy hero?
- [Q]** What about Peter Parker or Spider-Man is worth emulating? What is negative about these characters?
- [Q]** If there were no mythical superhero characters on screen or in comic books, where would kids turn to find their role models?
- [Q]** Do you think there's a vacuum of leadership for children, or are there too many role models? Explain.

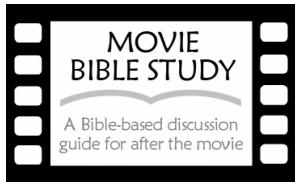
Scene to Watch:

Aunt May talks about heroes

(Spider-Man 2: elapsed time: 1:22:48–1:25:08)

In *Spider-Man 2* Aunt May tells Parker, "I believe there's a hero in all of us, that keeps us honest, gives us strength, makes us noble, and finally allows us to die with pride." She says that kids need heroes like Spider-Man: "courageous, self-sacrificing people setting examples."

- [Q]** What do you think of Aunt May's assessment? According to her definition, in what ways are you a hero?
- [Q]** Is Aunt May right—is there a hero inside *everybody*? Is there a hero inside Saddam Hussein, Ayatollah Khomeini, Joseph Stalin, Benito Mussolini, Hideki Tojo, Adolf Hitler, Osama Bin Laden?
- [Q]** What examples do the movies provide to support Aunt May's point of view?



Leader's note: Both movies include examples of ordinary people unleashing their inner hero. While Spider-Man dangles from a New York bridge, citizens hurl junk at the goblin. When Doc Ock is about to impale Spider-Man, Aunt May sternly whacks him with her umbrella. New York train commuters step between Doc Ock and Spidey, saying, "You want to get to him, you gotta go through me." Even MJ gets into the action, swinging a board at Doc Ock's head, attempting to save Spider-Man.

The Green Goblin's philosophy on the way of the hero is more cynical: "The one thing [people] love more than a hero is to see a hero fail, fall, die trying. In spite of everything you've done for them, eventually they will hate you. Why bother?"

[Q] Read John 16:33. There seems to be some truth in the goblin's premise: Heroes are lightning rods for trouble. Doing the right thing is its own reward, but doing the right thing frequently comes with a price. So, how do you answer the goblin's question: "Why bother?" Why should you bother trying to do the right thing?

[Q] What are some examples from the movie demonstrating the Green Goblin's point?

[Q] What makes a hero? Is it simply courage? Fearlessness? Great power? Good looks? Is it a mindset, an attitude? What makes one person a hero and another person ordinary?

Leader's note: Spider-Man seems to articulate the essential ingredient for heroism after he is unmasked and confronted by Harry Osborn: "There are bigger things happening here than me and you, Harry." Heroes go beyond their personal self-interests and serve others. Heroes see the big picture. However, like love, heroism is probably easier to recognize than define.

Read Hebrews 11:1–40.

[Q] Who are the real heroes in the passage? What made them heroes?

[Q] In what ways are these biblical heroes like—and unlike—Spider-Man?

[Q] How familiar are you with these heroic stories from the Old Testament? Are they vivid in your mind's eye, or do they seem flat and featureless to you?

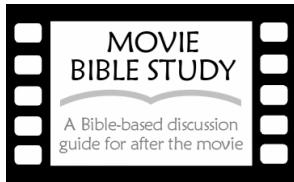
[Q] What can you do to help your children grow up thinking about and emulating biblical heroes?

[Q] Who are your personal heroes? How have you been a hero to others?

2. The Ability to Choose Whom We Become: "We are whom we choose to be. Now, choose!"

(Matthew 22:34–20; Romans 6:11–14; 12:1–2; Galatians 5:1; Philippians 4:8–9)

Several choices impact the destinies of the characters in the two Spider-Man films. In *Spider-Man*, Parker chooses to use his powers selfishly, leading to Uncle Ben's murder. Norman Osborn's choice to pursue profit and power deprives him of sanity. Dr. Octavius's



choice to disregard safety in pursuit of power leads to Rosie's death and his enslavement to artificially intelligent limbs.

[Q] How do choices shape character? If choices shape character, how does that affect culture?

[Q] What about intentions? Can you just *intend* to do the right thing? If you do bad things and feel remorse about it, is that okay?

[Q] Do choices involve more than external behavior? Must we make choices regarding our internal state as well? (Read Romans 12:1–2 and Philippians 4:8–9.)

Leader's note: It may be useful to lead the discussion toward whether one's emotional state is under one's mental control. Is it possible to choose to be joyful? (See the rest of Philippians 4.) Is it possible to choose to be depressed? How much of love is an emotion, and how much of that emotion can be controlled by choice? What about our passions and hungers? To what extent are those under our mental control?

3. Power and Responsibility: "With great power comes great responsibility." **Luke 8:40–48; 12:48; Acts 3:1–10; Romans 12:1–2; Ephesians 2:4–5; 2 Timothy 1:6–7)**

***Scene to Watch:* Uncle Ben's advice (*Spider-Man*: elapsed time: 0:34:33–0:36:36)**

Read Luke 12:48.

Uncle Ben's caution becomes Parker's mantra throughout the two films. His advice is timely: as Parker is mastering his gift, he is employing it irresponsibly. Rejoicing in his new abilities, Parker breaks his promise to help paint the kitchen. He also humiliates MJ's boyfriend at school. Parker's reaction is: "Are you afraid that I'm going to turn into some kind of criminal? Quit worrying about me! ... Stop lecturing me—please!" He already feels guilty, because he's planning to pummel an unsuspecting wrestler for profit, merely to impress a girl. Then, as an act of vengeance, Parker *refrains* from using his powers to stop a thief.

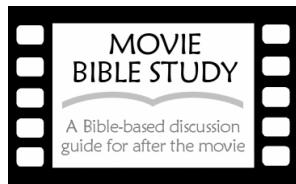
Of course, he pays a tremendous price for this chain of events. Uncle Ben's murder drives home the lesson better than any lecture or sermon ever could.

[Q] What do you think might have happened to Parker if things hadn't gone so wrong? What road would Parker's decisions have taken him down if he hadn't faced such grievous consequences?

[Q] How does Uncle Ben's advice apply to all of us?

[Q] How does Uncle Ben's warning to Parker compare with Christ's warning in Luke 12:48?

In *Spider-Man 2*, Parker becomes imbalanced after two years of exercising his powers. By working hard to honor his gifts and live heroically, he is failing at personal responsibility.



He betrays his responsibility to Joe's Pizza, he misses classes, he's late with schoolwork, he doesn't return Harry Osborn's calls, and he's an empty seat at MJ's play. All because of disturbances requiring Spider-Man's abilities.

Read Luke 8:40–48 and Acts 3:1–10.

- [Q]** Is it necessary *in every way possible* to use your abilities? If you have a God-given gift, does God require you to use it at every possible opportunity?

Leader's note: Jesus had the power to heal everyone he came near, yet he did not always do so. In Luke, Jesus chose not to react to the woman who touched his garment. In Acts, Peter and John passed by a beggar who was stationed at the Temple entrance.

As in all things, balance, wisdom, and submission to God's plan help us exercise our gifts responsibly.

- [Q]** When should you look out for yourself and when should you look out for others?
What choice do we have, and how do we decide?

Read 2 Timothy 1:6–7 and Ephesians 2:4–5.

The unspoken lesson of *Spider-Man 2* is that love brings responsibility. As Spider-Man, Parker honors responsibility to strangers and dishonors responsibility to his loved ones. As Parker cuts himself off from the love of family and friends, his Spider-Man powers fail him so Parker abandons his Spider-Man activities.

Then Doc Ock takes MJ hostage. Suddenly, Parker's separate lives join in a single goal, and his powers return. Now, for Parker as Spider-Man, love is the force that binds power to responsibility. He no longer uses his power out of guilt, shame, or duty; he uses it out of love.

- [Q]** Lord Acton said, "Absolute power corrupts absolutely." As Parker's character grows through both films, he doesn't seem corrupted. Does this maxim apply to God? There is no absolutely powerful being other than God—yet he is incorruptible. Why?

- [Q]** What do you think of Parker's character development in light of the 2 Timothy passage?

- [Q]** How do you think power, love, and self-discipline relate to using God's gifts?

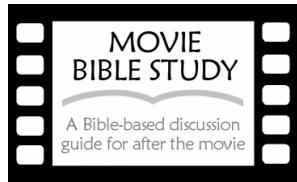
- [Q]** How are all three qualities opposed to timidity or fear?

Read Matthew 25:14–30.

- [Q]** Name some gifts you've seen God give people.

- [Q]** Does God give gifts and talents only to believers? Does being a believer change one's obligation to use gifts responsibly? Why or why not?

- [Q]** Have you identified the gifts and talents God has given you? How can you find out what undiscovered talents you may have?



- [Q]** What have you done this past year to nurture your gifts and exercise them responsibly? What have you done to help “fan into flame” the gifts that others have?

As the Credits Roll

- [Q]** On the *Spider-Man 2* bonus features, Alfred Molina says: “If I had all these super powers, and I could save the world, would I give everything up to do that?” What would you do if you had super powers? Would you be tempted to do crime? What super powers have you daydreamed about having? Why?
- [Q]** Aside from his guardians and mentors, how was Parker influenced by the people he spent time with?
- [Q]** How do responsibility and duty shape our identity?
- [Q]** What other messages from *Spider-Man* or *Spider-Man 2* encouraged your faith or helped you see truth in a new way?

—*Study by Rich Tatum, who lives in Romeoville, Illinois.*