



MOVIE-BASED DISCUSSION GUIDE – LEADER'S GUIDE

## Spider-Man 3

*The greatest battle lies within.*

The first two *Spider-Man* films established Peter Parker and his super-heroic alter ego as a popular and profitable theatrical draw: Spidey is loveably unstoppable and Peter Parker is the nice boy everybody wants to see get the girl.

But *Spider-Man 3* cuts those silky threads of comfortable niceness, dumping Peter Parker and Spider-Man into a dark place where evil infects the heart and vengeance slakes its thirst.

This guide will help you discuss some of the spiritual themes of *Spider-Man 3*.

**Based on:**

*Spider-Man 3* (Columbia Pictures and Marvel Enterprises, 2007);  
screenplay by Sam Raimi, Ivan Raimi, and Alvin Sargent; directed by Sam Raimi;  
based on the Marvel comic book character, Spider-Man, created by Stan Lee and Steve Ditko. Rated PG-13.



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## Movie Summary

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As the third chapter in Parker's life unfolds, we fully expect to hear wedding bells. Instead, we see Parker still in love, but struggling with commitment and insecurity, even while a crime-free city celebrates Spider-Man and awards him the key to the city—feeding Peter Parker's conceit and pride.

The film starts out romantically enough, with the pretty girl, Mary Jane, lounging in the center of Parker's web and still in the center of his life. But an ominous falling star is prelude to a venomous creature quietly attaching itself to Parker without his knowledge. The action starts when Harry Osborn, Parker's best friend and heir to the Norman Osborn legacy (insanity included) attacks the love-struck Parker, nearly killing himself in the process. In short order, Parker saves his mortal enemy's life, only to permanently disfigure him later; spurns Mary Jane with a thoughtless bit of grandstanding; is infected by the evil ooze from outer space; learns the true identity of his uncle's killer; attempts murder himself; and faces a tremendous battle on multiple fronts, both internal and external.

If warding off Harry as the new Green Goblin isn't enough, Spider-Man also has to face Flint Marko, his uncle's killer, who—by way of the usual freak accident—has become a nebulous, shape-shifting whirlwind of sand. When the space-borne symbiote infects Parker, Parker gains even more power and abilities than he previously enjoyed, but along with the power comes a compulsion to aggression and vengeance that the proud and complacent Parker is unprepared to resist.

As the film concludes, Parker has to find a way to not only resist the symbiote, but also to destroy it as Eddie Brock joins league with the Sandman to threaten Mary Jane and destroy Spider-Man for good.

—For more coverage of the Spider-Man movies, visit:

<http://christianitytoday.com/movies/reviews/Spider-Man.html>

<http://christianitytoday.com/movies/reviews/Spider-Man2.html>

<http://christianitytoday.com/movies/reviews/2007/Spider-Man3.html>

### Rated PG-13

*Spider-Man 3* trumps its two predecessors both in the number of villains and the amount of violence on-screen, earning it a PG-13 rating. While this film may be suitable for teens, parents should screen the film before allowing younger children to view it. There is also some profane language.

## Discussing the Scenes

Select one or more of these themes to discuss:

1. Pride Before the Fall
2. The Battle Within
3. Forgiveness and Redemption



## 1. Pride Before the Fall (Proverbs 11:1–3; 16:8; 29:23; Psalm 10:4)

The film opens with Peter Parker introducing himself in voiceover, and it's difficult to ignore the subtext of both pride and lingering insecurity:

"It's me, Peter Parker, 'Your friendly neighborhood—' you know. I've come a long way from being the boy who was bit by a spider. Back then, *nothing* seemed to go right for me. But now? ... *People really like me!* The city is safe and sound.

"I guess I've had something to do with that.

"My uncle Ben would be proud."

Later, when Mary Jane is struggling with critical reviews and her own insecurities as an actress, Parker offers up less-than-helpful clichés from his success as Spider-Man, who has "become something of an icon":

"Listen ... this is something that you're going to have to get used to. Believe me. I know. Spider-Man gets attacked all the time. ... You can't let it bring you down. You just gotta believe in yourself, and you pull yourself together, and you get right back on the horse."

Parker's ultimate fall begins as he is infected by evil, giving into a thirst for vengeance and the powerful symbiote that threatens to take over not only his suit, but his very soul. He revels in a newfound "bad-boy" persona strutting down a city sidewalk, flirting audaciously. He ultimately exercises his power to destroy his uncle's murderer Flint Marko; to humiliate his newspaper rival Eddie Brock; and to manipulate his lab partner, Gwen Stacy, into crushing Mary Jane's heart.

Pride is the exaltation of self above others and, ultimately against God. As Peter surrenders to his pride, he sees Mary Jane's plight only in light of his own experiences. As he surrenders to bloodlust for Flint Marko, he tells Mary Jane, "Okay. I get it. Thank you, but ... I'm fine. I don't need your help." Immediately after that, the symbiote begins to take over.

- [Q] Have you ever found yourself rejecting help for no good reason other than pride? How did you come to recognize the pride? What did you do about it?
- [Q] When Mary Jane hears the news about Flint Marko being uncle Ben's true killer, she immediately expresses her concern and offers help to Parker. How does pride come into play when you are the victim of someone else's ego?
- [Q] How does Jesus' command to offer forgiveness "seventy-seven times" combat pride?
- [Q] How do you guard against pride when helping others who are hurting or who are bound by sinful habits?
- [Q] What is the chief danger of doing ministry of any sort with pride in your heart?
- [Q] The proud are often unaware of their condition. What proactive steps can you take to avoid and address the sin of pride?



## 2. The Battle Within

**(Romans 7:14–19; Romans 8:5–17; Romans 12; Philippians 2:1–18; Philippians 4:8–9)**

Immediately after learning that Flint Marko killed his uncle Ben, Peter wants justice, but wants it on his terms, in his way, and by his own hand. Ultimately, his desire is not for mere justice, but it is a lust for vengeance, which Aunt May describes this way: “It’s like a poison it can—it can take you over before you know it—turn us into something ugly.”

All sin, vengeance included, is transformative: it corrupts from within, working its way out through our words, actions, and even inaction. When caught or snared in sin, even the believer has a difficult time doing what is right. Read how Paul describes it in Romans 7:18–19. Also read Romans 12.

**[Q]** If sin corrupts and is transformative, what is the antidote? What attitude and actions are necessary to reverse the corruption and to be transformed the way God wants?

**[Q]** Do sinful desires themselves cause us to sin, or is there something else at work? Besides a desire or temptation to sin, what is necessary to lead to sin’s bondage?

**Leader’s Note:** *In Romans 7, the key to freedom from sin is to have our minds set on what the Spirit desires. But what does the Spirit desire? Romans 12 says that when our mind is transformed and renewed we will know God’s will—what the Spirit desires. Philippians 2 further promises that as we work out our salvation with the attitude and mind of Christ, it is God himself “who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.”*

**[Q]** If the way we think is the key to living either in bondage to sin or as a slave to righteousness, then how should we go about changing our minds? Like Peter Parker/Spider-Man in the movie, how do we throw off the sin that entangles us?

**Leader’s Note:** *Try to guide the discussion toward repentance as a first step, which involves not only recognizing that one’s actions have been sinful, but also involves a permanent rejection of those sins. Subsequent steps would involve worship, prayer, and reading and meditating on Scripture.*

Read Philippians 4:8–9.

Regular spectator sessions in church aren’t enough to change thought patterns or behavior. Saying a few prayers here and there aren’t enough; reading a daily Bible verse isn’t enough; and neither is hanging out with good, upright Christians. Righteousness doesn’t “rub off.”

**[Q]** In light of this, why is Paul’s advice to the Philippians so critical, and so effective?

**[Q]** How have your thought habits changed over the years?

- How have these habitual ways of thinking changed your behavior?
- What’s been the hardest pattern to change?



### 3. Forgiveness and Redemption

**(Matthew 6:9–13; Matthew 18:15–35; Luke 7:36–50; Luke 11:2–4; Ephesians 4:29–32)**

The primary emotion driving Peter Parker/Spider-Man throughout this film is vengeance. On the surface, Spider-Man is just doing his job: helping to stop crime and fight evil. Even if he felt nothing toward Flint Marko, Spider-Man would still have had to stop the Sandman from theft and mayhem. Even if he had never seen the black, gooey parasite from space, Spider-Man would still have had to stop it in whatever form it took. And even if Parker had not been Harry Osborn's best friend, he still would have had to deal with Harry's madness, just as he had to deal with Norman Osborn's insanity.

But each of these cases gets personal. Parker has a real hatred toward Marko for having killed his uncle Ben, and he intends to make him pay with his life because "he deserved it." And the infected Spider-Man taunts Harry with mocking words, goading him into carelessness and justifying a satisfying *coup de grace*. With Venom, it became personal because Parker not only opposed its new host, Eddie Brock, but he utterly humiliated him, destroying his career and reputation.

Of course, other characters also struggle with forgiveness and old grudges. Harry Osborn is being driven mad in his belief that Peter Parker as Spider-Man killed his father. Eddie Brock cannot bring himself to forgive Parker for revealing his deplorable journalistic ethics. In fact, he prays to God: "It's Brock, sir. Edward Brock, Junior. I come before you today, humbled and humiliated to ask you for one thing—I want you to kill Peter Parker." Mary Jane struggles with her humiliation when Spider-Man kisses Gwen Stacy in public—with *their* kiss! Marko's wife cannot forgive his sin, and Marko cannot forgive himself.

While all the crossed lines of bitterness and sin don't get resolved in the storyline, by the end of the film, Peter Parker releases Marko from his debt of guilt, Harry Osborn releases his unfounded bitterness and forgives Parker, and Mary Jane forgives Parker for his actions while under the influence of pride and the poisonous goo.

But the most stunning sequence in the film is when Parker literally tears the black ooze out of his body in the form of the black suit. It is almost a near-perfect metaphor for repentance and redemption as he crouches underneath the cross, free of his stain, washed clean by rain from above.

**[Q]** Much has been made in popular literature of the need to "forgive yourself" before you can forgive others. What do you think of this concept? Is it biblically valid? Why or why not?

**[Q]** In Matthew, while speaking of forgiveness, Jesus describes our act of forgiveness as both binding and loosing things in heaven and on earth. What do you think this means? How does forgiveness, or the withholding of forgiveness, bind or release?

In Matthew 6:9–13 and Luke 11:2–4, Jesus gives us a model for prayer. In it, he demonstrates how we ought to pray regarding forgiveness: "Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us."

**[Q]** What implications does this part of the Lord's prayer have for us regarding forgiveness?



- [Q] What happens to our ability to pray effectively if we are knowingly harboring grudges? Why does this affect prayer?
- [Q] If we are entangled in sin ourselves, what does that do to our own ability to forgive others?
  - What should you do if someone asks you for forgiveness for a sin you also commit?
- [Q] How does forgiveness provide a release? What kind of release?
  - If someone withholds forgiveness, what doesn't get released?
- [Q] Have you ever sought forgiveness for something and had your request rejected? How did this make you feel. What happened as a result?
- [Q] What is the hardest thing for you to imagine forgiving? Why?
  - Is it possible for you to forgive anything, and if so, does that make you weak, or is it a sign of strength?
- [Q] Is there a difference between forgiveness and apathy? What's the difference? How do you know the difference when you see it?
- [Q] How do you let go of the anger and hurt when you've forgiven someone?

### **As the Credits Roll:**

- [Q] Why do the Spider-Man films resonate so much with their audiences?
- [Q] Do you think this third film is consistent with the spiritual themes from the first two movies? Explain.
- [Q] What encourages you in this film?
- [Q] What is hard to swallow philosophically, morally, or theologically?
- [Q] What do you think the major characters in this film "learned" by the end of the story? How were the characters changed by events?
- [Q] What do you think about Eddie Brock's prayer, that God "kill Peter Parker"?
  - Was the venomous ooze depicted as an answer to prayer?
  - Ultimately, Peter Parker was not killed, so how does the storyline change how you perceive that scene?



At the end of the film, Peter Parker says, in voiceover:

“Whatever comes our way, whatever battle we have raging inside us, we always have a choice. My friend Harry taught me that. He chose to be the best of himself. It’s the choices that make us who we are, and we can always choose to do what’s right.”

**[Q]** What do you think about that? Do our choices make us who we are, or are we revealed by the kind of choices we make? What’s the difference?

*—Study by Rich Tatum, [blogger](#), freelance writer, and former CTI online media editor*



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