



PAUL (Cert 15)

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Overview: Reappearance of the Pegg/Frost comedy duo. The pair portray comic book/sci-fi nerds who stumble on an alien - Paul. Together they dodge Paul's enemies in a bid to return Paul home.

Director: Greg Mottola (2011)

Producer: Universal Studios

Length: 99 mins

Cautions: Some bad language and sex references.

PLOT SUMMARY

Nick Frost and Simon Pegg team up again as two 'fanboys' who attend a comic book convention: 'Comicon'. Their characters are Clive Gollings and Graeme Willy – a writer and illustrator, respectively, of comic books. Having met their hero, Adam Shadowchild, and enjoyed the other delights of the convention, they decide to go on a road trip through the nearby UFO territory.

They meet an alien, Paul, (the voice of Seth Rogan) on their travels, and he persuades them to take him on board their RV. Later, they take Ruth, a fundamentalist Christian, with them. Paul has been kept as a prisoner of the government for 60 years, and is now trying to make a break for freedom so that he can be reunited with his alien chums.

The group are chased by federal agents and Ruth's father, who are all determined to stop Paul. Each of them has a different reason for pursuing the group of fugitives on board the RV. Paul is finally reunited with the person he encountered when he first arrived on earth. The film concludes with each character finding that his or her ultimate dream has come true.

FIRST REACTIONS

- Do you imagine there are other alien life forms outside our planet or galaxy? Would Paul be your idea of another life form? Why or why not?
- Ruth asks Graeme and Clive if they are 'men of God'; they confer and then agree that they are 'men of science'. How would you describe yourself – as men or women of God or of science? Are the terms mutually exclusive or is it possible to be both?
- There is a lot of bad language in the film. Paul uses it a lot and Ruth comes to use it following her 'revelation'. In your opinion, what do you think the swearing represents in the film? Do you think there is a place for bad language in expressing our difficult emotions? Do you ever use swear words? In what circumstances would you swear?

INTERACTIONS

- The film makes much of our assumptions about individuals and groups: aliens, two men travelling together, Christians, the police. List the stereotypes identified in the film. What are your assumptions about each of these groups? Do they match up at all with the assumptions depicted in the film? Are there particular stereotypes that you have found to be reliable or otherwise?
- Before Paul can leave earth, he feels a need to ask forgiveness from Tara Walton (Blythe Danner) and eventually she joins him on his spaceship. In this film, asking for, and receiving, forgiveness joins the giver and receiver of forgiveness and they travel into the future to explore new worlds. Taking this as a symbol, does this pattern apply generally to

- forgiveness between individuals? Read **Matthew 6.9–15** Do you agree that these verses use 'the pattern' to relate to the relationship between an individual and God? Can you apply this process to an episode in your own life? What form did your 'new world/s' take? What might this mean as we journey to the 'new world' that follows our death?
- In response to the shock of meeting Paul, Ruth gets down on her knees and sings 'Amazing Grace'. How would you respond in Ruth's place? How do you react when you are challenged or fearful? Who or what is it that gives you comfort, strength and protection?
- Read Psalm 46 What images in the psalm appeal to you? Do they relate to your experience? Might the final verses of the psalm encourage a different reaction to Ruth's?
- Paul shows exasperation when Ruth blocks debate by singing the hymn. And he imparts to her all his understanding. If there were such a being and such a process, what would you want to know? What are the questions you would ask a higher life form?
- The film seems to assume that religion closes people's minds to knowledge and understanding. Is this true in your experience? Can you list (1) the risks and (2) the opportunities if people are open to listening, to debate and to gaining new insights? Might this strengthen or weaken faith where it is present?

CLIP TO DISCUSS

Chapter 10 begins 0.00 mins – 5mins.

This is the first scene in which Paul and Clive have 'face time' and Clive admits to feeling cheated that his dream of meeting an alien has not worked out as he always hoped it would. Clive is jealous of the time that

Paul and Graeme have spent together, and jealous that Graeme seems to be forming a bond with Ruth.

- How acceptable is it for men to be 'just good friends'? Do you have experience of one of your friends spending time with another person, which made you feel jealous or envious or shut out in some way? How did you handle that?
- Ruth has been 'zapped' by Paul and she now has all his accumulated knowledge and insight. She is working this out and 'realises' that there is no God, no heaven, no hell, no sin. She concludes that her words and actions will have no consequences.
- If there were no God, would it still matter how we spoke or acted? Does the idea of there being a heaven or hell frighten you? Inspire you? Influence your behaviour in any way?
- Paul has insight into the disease causing Ruth's blindness. He offers to heal her: he lays his hand on her head and absorbs her blindness, leaving her with perfect sight while he is left weakened by the effort.
- Do you believe in physical healing of this kind? Have you had, or have you known someone who has, experienced a healing of some kind?
- **Read Isaiah 53.1-5**

This passage speaks of a 'suffering servant', whom Christians believe is Jesus Christ.

Depending on your Bible translation, verses 4 and 5 refer to infirmities, diseases or sorrows, transgressions and iniquities.

Which of these words stand out for you? If Jesus could take any of these, which would be your priority? Plainly, suffering continues in our world today; in what sense could Jesus 'take' these from us?

OTHER ANGLES TO TALK ABOUT

Read Leviticus 24.17–22

Paul quotes the Old Testament phrase 'an eye for an eye' out of context (see clip, above) and brings a sense of healing to the phrase rather than the negative emphasis of punishment, albeit limited, that is inferred in the Bible.

- Do you believe the punishment should fit the crime, as it seems to be saying in the passage in Leviticus? Why or why not?
- Do you believe that God works in this way ie., by inflicting a punishment that fits our 'crimes'? On what do you base your beliefs?
- Is Paul substituting the theme of 'healing' for 'punishment'? Might Paul be saying that science is more benevolent than religion? Where do you think Jesus stands on this? Read Matthew 5.38-48 and Luke 6.27-36.

Sally Bedborough is a Baptist minister and hospice chaplain. After training at Regent's Park College, Oxford, she contributed to the Regent's Study Guide Flickering Images: Theology and Film in Dialogue (2005). She was minister at Hill St Baptist Church in Poole until taking up her post as chaplain at Weldmar Hospicecare Trust in west Dorset in 2007.

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