

Movie Synopsis:

Born with facial differences that, up until now, have prevented him from going to a mainstream school, Auggie Pullman becomes the most unlikely of heroes when he enters the local fifth grade. As his family, his new classmates, and the larger community all struggle to discover their compassion and acceptance, Auggie's extraordinary journey will unite them and prove you can't blend in when you were born to stand out. (Lionsgate, 2017)

Redemptive Analogy:

The main character, Auggie, is terrified of showing his flaws to others. But when he opened himself up to others, he found that he was lovable after all... just as he was. Like Auggie, many of us live behind masks to hide things that we are ashamed about ourselves, whether it be our looks, our mistakes, our fears, etc. Through Christ, we can safely put our masks down and live in freedom as who He created us to be. We are valuable, lovable, precious and wanted, even though we aren't perfect. God knew exactly what he was doing when He made us and He has an extraordinary calling for our lives.

Wonder

INTRO before showing the movie:

Today, I want to show you an emotionally moving story about an extraordinary kid that did not look ordinary on the outside. I want you to meet Auggie, and as you do, notice how many times this lovable little boy talks about how he deals with the struggle of not being ordinary.

TO SHARE AFTER THE MOVIE:

Many people have talked about how this movie has impacted them. Everyone from young kids to teenagers, to mature adults. Why does this story move so many people?

It's because in some ways we're all similar to Auggie. We may feel ordinary, but there's something or a lot of things that we don't like about ourselves, things that are not ordinary. I'm guessing that you're insecure about something. It might be the way you look, what you can't do, or what you're not. Maybe you have the feeling that your legs are too short or your ears are too big. Maybe you've struggled with not being smart enough, pretty enough, talented enough, or successful enough. Maybe there's a dark secret in your past that no one knows.

So what do we do? Well, we do our own version of what Auggie did. We put on the helmet. We cover our insecurity by masking it or hiding it. Or we might try to compensate for the parts of us that we don't like. It might be lots of makeup or buying a lot of things. Maybe you only wear brand name clothes, trying to create an image of something that people will like. Maybe you try everything to fit in... you even make compromises to fit in, but there's something, some part of who you are that you still don't like. And you wonder deep down, "Why am I like this?"

Well first of all, let me say something very important, you are no accident. You are the handiwork of God. The Bible says:

"For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place, when I was woven together in the depths of the earth. Your eyes saw my unformed body; all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be." Psalm 139

In other words, God knew exactly what He was doing when He made you and He has an extraordinary calling for your life. Remember in the movie when Auggie's sister said, "If they stare, let them stare. You can't blend in when you were born to stand out." I hope you'll embrace the fact that you were created to stand out. You were born to make a difference.

You may feel like there's something in your life that disqualifies you – but it doesn't. God wants to know you – and then heal you. He wants to help you take off the mask. One of the most powerful scenes is when Auggie's mom asked him to take off his helmet. Just like God, she gently helped him see that we all have marks – some our fault – and some not our fault, but nothing powerful can happen as long as we're hiding behind something that we don't want others to see.

These marks on our life are things that make us feel insecure, unworthy, or inadequate. So what do we do? Well, we try to hide them.

That's the first thing Adam and Eve did in the very first story of the Bible. When they ate the fruit on the forbidden tree in the Garden, the Bible says that they hid themselves. That's what we do. We cover up the things we don't want people to see, then we live our lives behind a mask – only letting people see what we want them to see. I know I do. For you it might be looking smart, cool, or popular. For some you're trying to look stylish, or look like the mom who has it all together, or the businessman who is successful.

But then, when we are alone, we feel the clash between the mask and the person behind the mask. What we don't realize is that the masks don't work.

Proverbs 14:13 says, "Laughter cannot mask a heavy heart. When the laughter ends, the grief remains."

So what is the solution? Well we need to understand that the first step in our healing comes when we get honest. We'll never find freedom with the mask on. It happens when we take the mask off. And that's what happened to Auggie. His life began to change when he took off his mask and let others in.

Jack Will, Auggie's new friend, wasn't scared or turned off by Auggie's flaws. He loved Auggie for who he was. And that's what can happen when we have the courage to drop the mask and let people in. But with transparency also comes risk, and that's what happened when Jack was dealing with his own insecurities. Even though he loved Auggie, his need to feel popular and fit in drove him to do something that he'd later regret.

You know, when someone disappoints you, you have a choice to make. You can put the mask back on and go back into hiding – and that option feels safe – but it's the worst thing we can do. Although Auggie was hurting, he still left the mask off and was willing to let new friends in.

His friend Summer overlooked the things that Auggie didn't like about himself. She wasn't afraid of the things that he was trying to cover. When she cared about Auggie, she cared about all of him, even the flaws. And you know, God does the same thing. Too many people think that God will only accept perfection, holiness. That God will only accept them after they get their act together. But He loves you just the way you are.

Maybe you've gone through a divorce, or you've had to file bankruptcy, or you're struggling with an addiction. You need to know God loves you, and so do those around you. You need to know that there are people all around you today who will love and accept you exactly as you are, and take the journey of healing and change with you. That's what happens in this story. Summer helped Jack realize what he'd done to hurt his friend Auggie, and that was the first step toward real healing.

One of the things I want you to know today is that God loves you. He has a great future for you, but you're not going to be able to do it alone. By God's own design, He puts us in a family of other people. He calls it the Church. And as imperfect as it is, you need a family of people who will go through life with you. Some of you maybe haven't been in church for a long time, or you've been very sporadic in your connection to church, or maybe you've never been to church. It could be that right now your life is falling apart. You need a family. And I want to personally invite you to be a part and to get planted again.

Galatians 6:2 says "Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ."

Remember, God wants to move in our life, but we've got to take off the mask and let God do His work in us. So how about it? Why not today? Why don't you let God give you a fresh start? You're not an accident – and the things you're hiding behind can become a thing of the past. You are fearfully and wonderfully made.

When the story began, Auggie constantly hid behind the mask. But with the mask down, he discovered that he was something special. How about you? Imagine the life you could live if you stopped trying to be someone else? If you embraced who God uniquely created you to be? We all have marks. We all have a past. But every one of them can be healed by and even used by God in a good way.

There's only one person who can do that in us. There's only One who can make old things new. The Bible says,

"Anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun!" 2 Corinthians 5:17

In other words, God doesn't exist just to forgive you, He wants to make you brand new. Auggie said, "Be kind – for everyone is fighting a battle. If you really want to see what people are, all you have to do is look."

Some of you are carrying the weight of your life – your sin. How do we deal with that? Well, the truth is we can't. We don't have the ability. And that's why God sent his Son, Jesus who was perfect in every way. Jesus died on the cross and God raised Him from the dead.

Why did He do this? He did this to make us new. And there are some of you here today that need what He did – You recognize that you need forgiveness and you need grace. The good news is that when you call on Jesus, He will hear your prayer. He will forgive your sin. If you're here today and you need to turn from your sin, you need to embrace his grace. You are here today, not by accident, but because of his love.

I want to take a moment and pray for you.

Closing prayer example:

Dear God, please minister to everyone in this room right now. You know who we are and exactly what we are ashamed of. Please show everyone just how much you love them. Give us the courage to put down our masks and live as the people you always created us to be. If there are people here who are struggling with insecurities, depression, or loneliness, let them see themselves the way that You do. They are precious and wanted. Help us to also love others as you love them.

To everyone who would say, "Yes, I need his forgiveness. I need his grace. I want to turn from my sins and turn toward God," please say this prayer with me:

"Father, I thank you that in this simple act of surrender you make me new. You wash me clean from guilt and shame and you transform me and my life into a life of freedom and joy. Jesus, I give you my life. Thank you for healing my past and bringing about a new future through your death, burial and resurrection. This I pray in the powerful, life transforming name of Jesus. Amen."

