



Introduction:

RING THE BELL provides many opportunities to discuss how God works in bringing the lost to Himself and how we, as sharers in the life of Christ, take part in that redemptive act. The following questions are designed to challenge the members of your small group to explore the specific events leading to the conversion of Rob Decker and how this story might apply to our own lives and the lives of those we encounter every day.

Plan to watch the film as a group (it's about 90 minutes long) and then, over dessert or snacks, work through the questions in this guide. Know that the heart of the filmmakers is to touch lives for Christ with the Gospel ... we hope this study helps you do just that!

He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose. Jim Elliot

QUESTIONS

As the group leader, choose the questions that fit your group and the amount of time you have for the discussion. (The Discussion Guide can be found on Pages 7-8.) Answers and discussion starters follow each question in italics.

Question One: How would you describe Rob Decker at the beginning of the film? What does he value? From what does he draw his identity?

In the high-wealth world of sports, Rob Decker is a stereotypical materialist who values money, fame, power, and the symbols of wealth including fashionable clothes, a corner office, and a high-end sports car. He states at the beginning of the film that his life is his work and his clients are his children; he doesn't need anything else. His identity is wrapped up in his work, his positional authority over others and his perception of himself as the best at what he does.

Consider asking your group members to compare themselves to Rob. How are their values similar to Rob's? How are they different?

Scriptures to consider: Matthew 6:25-34; Matthew 16:26

Question Two: What is Rob’s first impression of Middletown? How does he feel about the people he encounters? Do you think he feels superior to the Middletown residents? Why or why not?

Rob’s attitude is clearly superior in the way he acts toward the people of Middletown. He treats them as if they are not very smart, easily manipulated, and beneath him. Many times people who are successful in a worldly sense make the assumption that people who are less successful by the world’s standards must be so because they are (1) ignorant fools; (2) not as capable; (3) lacking in drive or commitment; or (4) inferior in some other way. They often cannot conceive of someone intentionally choosing a life that would be considered less successful by the world’s standards.

Scriptures to consider: Philippians 2:1-4

Question Three: How do the values of Shawn Hart and Scooter differ from Rob Decker in three key areas: integrity, money, and fame?

	<i>Rob Decker</i>	<i>Shawn & Scooter</i>
<i>Integrity</i>	<i>An agreement is only binding if it is in writing.</i>	<i>Giving your word is as binding as any written agreement.</i>
<i>Money</i>	<i>Money is everything. Even if you want to do good, go for the money, then you can do more good.</i>	<i>God’s call is more important than money. Money is simply a tool. Following God’s call is everything.</i>
<i>Fame</i>	<i>If you become famous you can use that fame to have a “bigger platform.”</i>	<i>Scooter and Daisy both state that their boys’ home is as big as any platform. Size doesn’t matter; what does matter is that the children in their care come to know God.</i>

Question Four: What symbols are used in the film to contrast the difference between Rob’s life and Middletown?

<i>Symbol</i>	<i>Rob’s World</i>	<i>Middletown</i>
<i>Phones</i>	<i>Rob is addicted to his cell phone. He is a world-player and his phone is his link to the world.</i>	<i>No cell phone coverage. He is forced to use old-fashioned landlines. This represents a disconnect from his old life.</i>

<i>Transportation</i>	<i>Rob's sports car is a symbol of his faced-pace life of power and wealth. It breaks down as soon as he enters Middletown.</i>	<i>In Middletown Rob is forced to walk, just as Jesus walked (as Daisy points out). Walking represents slowing down, taking time to think.</i>
<i>Technology</i>	<i>Rob comes from a hi-tech world filled with iPhones, iPods, iPads, as Daisy says, "That's a lot of 'i's."</i>	<i>In Middletown we see very little technology. No TVs, no computers, no video games.</i>

Question Five: Following the Casting Crowns concert, Rob prays a prayer that includes the words, "God, I know you're up there. And I know you're real because I've seen you ... here ... in this place. Thank you for letting me see this." In what ways has Rob seen God?

This is the heart of the film. God is revealing Himself in so many ways. Practically every person Rob encounters is showing him a life very different from what he experiences in his regular life. There are Christians in his other world, like his secretary Claire and his employee Peter, but, Rob is moving too fast to see them. The "revelation of God" takes on three forms: the living witness of the lives of those he encounters, the spoken witness of the testimony of the Gospel, and the written witness of Scripture.

The Living Witness:

Rob begins to see God more clearly as he encounters a completely different worldview and value system in everything from the simplicity of a church dinner to the rejection of bribes and the manipulative techniques that serve Rob so well in his other world. The most powerful living witness in the film is Rob's observation of different boys "ringing the bell" symbolizing God's transformation of yet another lost soul. Scriptures to Consider: Matthew 5:13-16

The Spoken Witness:

Beyond the testimony of transformed lives, Rob also encounters the spoken witness of God's grace. Pastor Steve shares the story of Jim Elliott. Daisy and Scooter repeatedly testify to the grace of God in their lives and call Rob to prayer and reflection on his life. Mark Hall of Casting Crowns shares the simple transforming message of the Gospel. Scriptures to Consider: Romans 10:14-15; 1 Corinthians 1:20-30

The Written Witness:

After experiencing the convicting message given at the concert, Rob returns to his room at the bed and breakfast and finds a copy of the Holy Bible in the drawer of the bedside table. He encounters God's written word and begins reading. Scriptures to Consider: 2 Timothy 3:14-17; Isaiah 55:9-11

Question Six: What barriers in Rob's life keep him from accepting God? Why is it so hard for him to accept God's grace?

At first Rob is so busy and self-absorbed, the testimony of those around him make no impression at all. When his employee, Peter, tries to explain the role of God in his life, Rob just ignores the message and threatens to fire him. As Rob's outer defenses of busyness and shallowness begin to drop through the constant witness of God's grace in the lives of those around him, his more deeply held defenses begin to be revealed. Rob's view of himself as rich, powerful, and successful is in stark contrast to the lives he sees around him. As he begins to see the value of those simple lives, he initially wants to cling even more closely to his view of himself. He begins to realize following God will cost him everything.

Break: At this point, you could share the lyrics to the Casting Crowns song "Come to the Well." The first verse perfectly describes the battle going on in Rob's soul as he struggles to stand on his own.

Come to the Well

Leave it all behind (4 times)

I have what you need, But you keep on searchin',
I've done all the work, But you keep on workin',
When you're runnin' on empty, And you can't find the remedy,
Just come to the well.

You can spend your whole life, Chasin' what you're missing,
But that empty inside, It just ain't gonna listen.
When nothing can satisfy, And the world leaves you high and dry,
Just come to the well.

Chorus:

And all who thirst will thirst no more.
And all who search will find what their souls long for,
The world will try, but it can never fill,
So leave it all behind, and come to the well.

Question Seven: What changes do you see in Rob throughout the film? How does his attitude about the town change? How does his attitude about God change?

The more time Rob spends in the slower-paced environment of Middletown, surrounded by the constant witness of people who have surrendered their will to God, the more he begins to value the simplicity of the lives he sees. He stops trying to "sell" and begins to listen. He moves from "offense" to "defense" as the people he came to persuade become increasingly more persuasive towards him. And, he moves from mocking the fact that they actually ask him to pray to trying to pray. Even his attitude toward his appearance and deliberate "dress for success" approach softens as his defenses continue to drop.

Question Eight: What do you believe was the final barrier keeping Rob from accepting Jesus? What do you think broke past that barrier?

In his final conversation with Daisy, it becomes clear that the powerful combined testimony of Daisy and Scooter choosing to walk away from fame and money in order to pour their lives into a handful of orphaned boys is in sharp contrast to everything upon which Rob Decker has built his life. He cannot reconcile the fact that these simple people, people he thought so foolish at the beginning of his time in Middletown, are actually living richer, fuller, more meaningful lives than he is with all of his money, fame, and power. He is still focused on all he has to lose instead of all he has to gain.

The scriptures highlighted below translate “mammon” to “money,” but there is more than money involved here. There are many people who have lots of money who have no problem following God. It is the love of the world’s values that hold back Rob. Money, power, symbols of wealth, fame ... these all represent a value-system that is what the Bible is referring to when it says “mammon.” Rob has built his entire life on the idea that these are the things that matter.

Scriptures to Consider: Matthew 19:23-24; Matthew 6:24

As Rob drives away in his car, which has come to represent everything he treasured in his old life, he finally begins to see that the life he is rejecting by leaving Middletown has become more valuable to him than the life to which he is returning. The pain of driving away from the invitation to receive Christ drives him to the side of the road where he finally submits to his Lord and Creator.

Scriptures to Consider: 2 Corinthians 5:17-19

“I never had the experience of looking for God. It was the other way around; he was the hunter and I was the deer. He stalked me ... took unerring aim and fired.” C. S. Lewis

Question Nine: In thinking about your own life, would you say your world is more like Rob Decker’s or Middletown’s? Are there any barriers in your life that are keeping you from accepting Jesus as your Savior?

This is your opportunity to extend an invitation to those in the group who may be struggling against a call of God in their lives to surrender fully to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Maybe they are faced with choices between running after success, money, and power versus following God’s call and gifting. Perhaps they have bought in to the worldview of Rob Decker and need to find a place in their lives more like Middletown.

Scriptures to Consider: Matthew 6:19-21; Romans 10:9-13; Matthew 11:28-30

Question Ten: Do you know anyone like Rob Decker? What could you do to be part of revealing God to them?

*This is your opportunity to challenge the group to be living testimonies to the grace of God. There is no one person in **RING THE BELL** who could claim to have led Rob Decker to Christ. It was a work of God from beginning to end with many people playing a part. Some had only a small role, others did more, but all were simply willing instruments of the Holy Spirit. We must all live lives worthy of the calling until those we know and love find within the desire to “ring the bell.”*

Scriptures to Consider: Ephesians 4:1-6; Matthew 5:14-16



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The movie you just enjoyed, **RING THE BELL**, is a story of redemption. Like all of us, Rob Decker, the film's protagonist, is being relentlessly pursued by God. He begins to notice almost from the moment he steps out of his fast-paced world and enters the simplicity of life in Middletown. As the story unfolds we see Rob confronted by the grace of God at every turn until he finally drops his last barrier of resistance and "rings the bell," accepting Jesus as Lord.

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