

# A Reel Ministry Bible Study

## The Shawshank Redemption

Group Member Guide

By  
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The Shawshank Redemption  
Directed by: Frank Darabont  
Screenplay: Frank Darabont  
Based on the Novella by: Stephen King  
Warner Brothers/Castle Rock Entertainment  
1994

Reel Ministry Presents:

# The Shawshank Redemption

## What is the purpose of Reel Ministry?

Reel Ministry Bible Studies offer individuals and small groups a unique way to engage topical issues found in popular films. These innovative studies will engage Biblical knowledge and broaden the scope of one's understanding of Scripture.

While a summary of the films will always be included within the bulk of each Bible study, it is my hope that the individual or small group will watch the movie being studied. By doing this, Christians will have a better understanding of the material; thus, they will be much more confident in engaging friends and co-workers about these varied topics.

It is vitally important that we engage our culture with the paramount truth that Jesus Christ is "...the way and the truth and the life" (John 14:6).

## Suggestions for all Participants

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- 1) Pray before you begin each study. Ask for God to speak through the Word.
- 2) Come prepared. Watch the film and/or the scenes before you engage in the study.
- 3) Be willing to participate. This Bible study has been designed to help you discover what Scripture is saying via motion pictures. You'll find three types of questions: *Scene Observations* – these are questions taken directly from the film in discussion; *Reel To Real* – these are interpretation questions which further delve into the film by trying to discover real world applications; *Director's Chair* – these are questions geared towards bringing a better understanding of filmmaking to the group.
- 4) Stick to the topic being discussed. Answers should be based on the scenes viewed and the Bible verses given. These studies focus on particular passages of Scripture, so try not to refer to other verses. By sticking to the verses chosen within the Bible studies, this will allow an equal footing for all members involved.
- 5) Don't dominate the discussion. Participate, but leave room for others to engage the questions. Always be affirming to others in the group. Remember, there is no wrong answer here.
- 6) Please note that anything said within the group discussion should be considered private. Many times in these group settings, people share private thoughts and feelings that shouldn't be discussed outside of the discussion.
- 7) Prepare to be challenged. The whole nature of Reel Ministry is to allow Christians the opportunity to engage secular issues with Biblical answers.

## Bible Study Agenda

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Introduction

Central Theme

Key Verse

Film Summary

**Part One:**

Scene 1.

Scene 2.

Scene 3.

“...from Reel to Real...”

Director’s Chair

**Part Two:**

Scene 4.

Scene 5.

Scene 6.

“...from Reel to Real...”

Director’s Chair

**Part Three:**

Scene 7.

Scene 8.

Scene 9.

“...from Reel to Real...”

Director’s Chair

**Part Four:**

Scene 10.

Scene 11.

Scene 12.

“...from Reel to Real...”

Director’s Chair

## **Introduction**

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Although nominated for seven Academy Awards upon the year of its release, “The Shawshank Redemption” (1994) was considered to be a box office disappointment. In subsequent years, the film has garnered such a substantial following that it is now frequently cited as one of the greatest motions pictures ever produced. The film itself deals with the inhumanity of prison life, but the driving themes of the story -- loyalty, friendship, hope -- make “Shawshank Redemption” ideal for an in-depth Bible study.

## **Central Theme**

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There are circumstances in life where it seems impossible to cultivate a sense of self-worth in hopeless situations. During these moments, a free person might feel like they are imprisoned. While trapped behind the gates of Shawshank, Andy Dufresne never allowed the prison walls to close off the hope that kept his spirit alive.

## **Key Verse**

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“When you go through deep waters, I will be with you. When you go through rivers of difficulty, you will not drown. When you walk through the fire of oppression, you will not be burned up; the flames will not consume you.”

– Isaiah 43:2

## Film Summary

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“The Shawshank Redemption” begins in 1947 when Andy Dufresne arrives at the Shawshank prison. Unlike the other convicts being housed there, Andy is not a hardened criminal. He’s a soft-spoken banker falsely accused of killing his wife and her lover.

Andy soon befriends Red, an inmate who is known for being able to get almost anything smuggled into Shawshank prison. One day, Andy approaches Red and asks him to get him a rock hammer, which he subsequently uses to shape rocks into chess pieces.

After helping a prison guard understand a tax loophole, Andy becomes a successful financial advisor inside the prison to other guards. Soon thereafter, Andy takes over as the head librarian. During this time, Andy begins to help several other inmates to get their high school diplomas.

Meanwhile, the nefarious Warden Norton starts a scam in which Shawshank inmates work outside the prison for very low wages. This illegal cash has to be laundered, so Warden Norton turns to Andy, who agrees to do it for continued privileges and the sake of expanding the library.

During this time, a new prisoner arrives at Shawshank prison. Tommy tells Andy about a previous cellmate who bragged about killing a banker's wife, and the innocent banker ended up getting wrongly convicted for the crime. Believing this story, Andy sees the possibility of a new trial since this evidence would prove his innocence. Warden Norton dismisses the tale and sends Andy to a long stretch of solitary confinement.

Norton interviews Tommy about the information and, because of his fear of losing Andy’s cash laundering services, ends up having the new prisoner killed. When Andy returns from his stint in solitary confinement, he realizes that Tommy’s death has removed his chance of freedom.

After this, Andy confides in Red about his dream of moving to the small Mexican town of Zihuatanejo. Andy further tells Red of a farming town Maine that holds a special place for him. Andy tells Red that after he gets paroled, he is to locate a specific tree in a certain field and look what’s been buried beneath a hidden volcanic rock.

The very next morning, Andy is discovered missing at roll call. An initial search does not find any trace of him. The warden is looking in Andy's cell when he discovers a poster covering the wall. The warden removes the poster and finds a man-sized tunnel cut through the walls. For two decades, Andy had been spending his evenings slowly digging through the prison walls. On the night of his escape, Andy broke into a sewage pipe and crawled 500 yards through it, and finally came out into a ditch beyond the grounds of Shawshank prison.

Soon after, Red is paroled and travels to the farming town and finds the tree Andy had told him about. Red finds a buried tin, with a note from Andy, and a sum of money. Red then catches a bus to Mexico and his reunited with his friend Andy on the shores of Zihuatanejo.

# Part One

## DVD Chapters

- Chapter 4: 11:50 – 12:12
- Chapter 7: 26:15 – 26:36
- Chapter 7: 28:30 – 29:00

## Scene 1.

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**HEYWOOD:** Let's see. Fifth from the front. Put me down for a quarter deck.

**INMATE:** Fresh fish! Fresh fish today! We're reeling 'em in!

**RED:** I must admit I didn't think much of Andy the first time I laid eyes on him. Looked like a stiff breeze could blow him over. That was my first impression of the man.

Red was eventually proven wrong about Andy. As the film indicates, first impressions can oftentimes be faulty indicators of a person's true spiritual worth. Read Matthew 3:4-6. Although it was John the Baptist's unusual dress and behavior that initially sparked people's attention, how did this become a positive tool for his ministry? How can you imitate John in this regard?

In much the same way the Shawshank inmates were judging the new prisoners; our society has become obsessed with outward physical appearances. Read Isaiah 53:2-3. How was Jesus described? Why is this important for us to understand?



## Scene 2.

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**RED:** So?

**ANDY:** So, I'm a rock hound. At least I was in my old life. I'd like to be again.

**RED:** Or maybe you'd like to sink your toy into somebody's skull.

**ANDY:** No, I have no enemies here.

**RED:** No? Wait a while.

Red had lived in Shawshank long enough to understand that an unfortunate aspect of prison life is acquiring enemies. Read Psalms 69:4. What was the focus of David's cry of distress? What was David's unconventional solution?

When Andy asked Red to get him a rock hammer, Red wrongly assumed what his friend's intentions were. Read John 13:5-15. When Jesus approached Peter with the basin of water, what was his initial reaction? Why did Peter change his mind?

### Scene 3.

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**RED:** I could see why some of the boys took him for snobby. He had a quiet way about him... a walk and a talk that just wasn't normal around here. He strolled like a man in the park without a care or a worry in the world. Like he had on an invisible coat that would shield him from this place. Yeah, I think it would be fair to say that I liked Andy from the start.

People took particular notice of Andy because of the unusual way that he conducted himself. Read I Peter 3:15-16. How does Peter encourage Christians to respond when non-believers take notice of them? Why does Peter believe our conduct is so vital to our testimony?

Although Andy was confined in prison, his attitude gave off an aura of inner contentment that others found amazing to behold. Read Philippians 4:11-13. When Paul wrote this letter, he was also in prison. What advice did the apostle give about dealing with unpleasant circumstances? To whom did Paul attribute his strength?

### **“...from Reel to Real...”**

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Although given a guilty verdict and sentenced to Shawshank Prison, Andy never once stopped telling others he was innocent of the charges leveled against him. Think of a situation in your life when you were wrongfully accused of doing or saying something. How did you respond? What did it feel like to be accused of something you didn't do? Do you think God used this incident to teach you a life lesson?

### **Director's Chair**

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One of the most strikingly original aspects of “The Shawshank Redemption” is how director Frank Darabont stages the film's antagonists using a side-shot framing scheme. From the initial assault by the prison guards to the first attack against Andy by the “sisters,” those frightening moments are done using silhouette compositions. Why?

# Part Two

## DVD Chapters

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- Chapter 10: 39:35 - 40:11
- Chapter 16: 59:43 - 1:00:25
- Chapter 20: 1:11:37 - 1:12:30

## Scene 4.

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**RED:** Why did you do it?

**ANDY:** I'm innocent, Red. Just like everybody else here. What are you in for?

**RED:** Murder. Same as you.

**ANDY:** Innocent?

**RED:** Only guilty man in Shawshank.

Red had the courage to fully admit his guilt to Andy. Read James 5:16. What does the Bible have to say about confessing our sins to another believer?

Andy and Red shared many private moments together during the course of the film. Read Matthew 18:19-20. What does Jesus promise when two or more believers gather together?

## Scene 5.

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**RED:** You believe whatever you want. But I tell you these walls are funny. First you hate them. Then you get used to them. Enough time passes and you get so 1you depend on them. That's institutionalized.

**JIGGER:** I could never get that way.

**ERNIE:** Say that when you've been inside as long as Brooks.

**RED:** Right. They send you here for life, and that's exactly what they take.

Just like the character of Brooks in the film, it is easy for Christians to become "institutionalized" when it comes to where God has placed them. Read I Kings 17:5-8. Even though Elijah was obedient and went where God instructed, why did the Lord eventually dry up the brook?

Read Ephesians 5:15-17. How do the Apostle Paul and Red agree when it comes to "life sentences" given out in the world?

## Scene 6.

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**Andy:** That's the beauty of music. They can't get that from you. Haven't you ever felt that way about music?

**Red:** Well, I played a mean harmonica as a younger man. Lost interest in it, though. Didn't make much sense in here.

**Andy:** Here's where it makes the most sense. You need it so you don't forget.

**Red:** Forget?

**Andy:** Forget that there are places in the world that aren't made out of stone. There's something inside that they can't get to... that they can't touch. That's yours.

**Red:** What are you talking about?

**Andy:** Hope.

After spending time in solitary confinement, Andy shared with his friends the importance of protecting your spirit. Read Proverbs 4:23. What did Solomon urge his readers to safeguard? Why is this important as a Christian?

Like Andy, the Apostle Paul also stressed the power of hope. Read Romans 8:24. Why did Paul believe that the best kind of hope is one that produces patience?

### **“...from Reel to Real...”**

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When faced with a literal and figurative prison of isolation and desolation, Andy risked the wrath of the Shawshank warden by playing Mozart’s “The Marriage of Figaro” over the prison yard loudspeakers. As he explained later to his friends, Andy felt that music was important for enriching the hope he kept locked safely away in his soul. Think back to a time when music meant something important in your own life. Was there a song that changed your perspective on a situation? Was there a time when music allowed you cope with a difficult circumstance?

### **Director’s Chair**

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In the world of literature, an ellipsis in the storytelling narrative leaves out a portion of the plot. This can be used to either condense time, thus allowing the reader to fill in the missing portions of the narrative with their imagination. Which similar film device does Frank Darabont employ in “The Shawshank Redemption”?

# Part Three

## DVD Chapters

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- Chapter 23: 1:23:30 – 1:03:06
- Chapter 27: 1:37:13 – 1:38:00
- Chapter 29: 1:42:21 – 1:43:33

## Scene 7.

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**RED:** Does it ever bother you?

**ANDY:** I don't run the scams. I just process the profits. A fine line, maybe, but I also built that library and used it to help a dozen guys get their high school diploma. Why do you think the warden lets me do all that?

**RED:** Keep you happy and doing the laundry. Money instead of sheets.

Even though Andy was being used by the warden for nefarious purposes, he took the opportunity of his position to improve the lives of those around him. Read Genesis 50:20. After being sold into slavery and abandoned by his brothers, what lesson did Joseph glean from the ordeal?

Red found it difficult to accept that Andy wouldn't be morally compromised by assisting the warden in his illegal schemes. Read 2 Peter 2:19. What point does the apostle make concerning slavery and corruption?



## Scene 8.

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**WARDEN:** The right thing to do... sometimes it's hard to know what that is. Do you understand? I need your help, son. If I'm going to move on this there can't be the least shred of doubt. I have to know if what you told Andy was the truth.

**TOMMY:** Yes, sir. Absolutely.

**WARDEN:** Would you be willing to swear before a judge and jury, with your hand on the Good Book, and take an oath before Almighty God Himself?

**TOMMY:** Just give me that chance.

**WARDEN:** That's what I thought.

Tommy was willing to testify about the truth for Andy even if it killed him. Read Acts 7:51-60. Stephen is the first Christian martyr in Scripture. What did Stephen say that was so offensive to his audience? What was so significant about Stephen's final vision?

The warden had already decided on a predetermined course of action when he was asking Tommy those questions. Read Luke 23:66-71. When Jesus was interrogated by the chief priests, those men had also made up their minds about putting Him to death. What does the answer Jesus provide teach about how to deal with persecution for our faith?

## Scene 9.

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**ANDY:** Bad luck, I guess. It floats around. It's got to land on somebody. It was my turn, that's all. I was in the path of the tornado. I just didn't expect the storm to last as long as it has. Think you'll ever get out of here?

**RED:** Me? Yeah. One day, when I got a long white beard and two or three marbles rolling around upstairs, they'll let me out.

**ANDY:** I'll tell you where I'd go. Zihuatanejo.

**RED:** Say what?

**ANDY:** Zihuatanejo. It's in Mexico. A little place on the Pacific Ocean. You know what the Mexicans say about the Pacific? They say it has no memory.

Andy speaks very eloquently concerning the hardships he has had to endure in his life. Read 1 Peter 1:6-7. What does Peter have to say about the trials we face in our own lives?

Andy tells Red that one of the things that appeals about the Pacific Ocean is the Mexican belief that it doesn't have a memory. Read Psalm 103:12. What does Scripture tell us about the memory of God when it comes to our transgressions?

### **“...from Reel to Real...”**

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Andy went to great lengths to justify his money laundering scheme to Red by stating that the good he achieved by engaging in the behavior far outweighed the bad. Think to a time in your own life when something positive came out of an unpleasant situation. How was God able to use something that was meant for bad and turn it into something good?

### **Director's Chair**

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Throughout the various lunchroom sequences in the picture, director Frank Darabont continually shows Andy in a single shot, while the rest of the prisoners are framed in groups of two or three. Why?

## Part Four

### DVD Chapters

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- Chapter 34: 2:05:05 – 2:05:46
- Chapter 35: 2:06:55 – 2:08:00
- Chapter 39: 2:17:08 – 2:17:45

### Scene 10.

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**RED:** Sometimes it makes me sad, though, Andy being gone. I have to remind myself that some birds aren't meant to be caged. Their feathers are just too bright. And when they fly away the part of you that knows that it was a sin to lock them up does rejoice. But still, the place you live in is that much more drab and empty that they're gone. I guess I just miss my friend.

Many people experience the pangs of loneliness when friends and family members leave them. But like Red, there are times when we must accept that sometimes those situations are ultimately for the best. Read John 3:26-30. What was John the Baptist's reaction when he discovered that his followers were leaving him in order to follow Jesus?

Loneliness can sometimes be unbearable to endure. Like Red, we can feel trapped in a prison while those around us appear to be set free. Read 2 Timothy 4: 9-13. Confined to a cell and facing execution, Paul was feeling abandoned and lonely. What comforts can believers glean from this passage of Scripture?

## Scene 11.

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**RED:** What do you want to know? Am I sorry for what I did?

**MAN #2:** Well, are you?

**RED:** There's not a day goes by that I don't feel regret. Not because I'm in here and you think I should be. I look back on the way I was then -- a young, stupid kid who committed that terrible crime. I wanna talk to him. I want to try and talk some sense to him. Tell him how things are. But I can't. I got to live with that.

Like Red shared with the parole board, living with regret can be a terrible burden. Read 1 Samuel 15:11. Do you believe God can ever regret giving us blessings in our lives?

Red made a poor decision early on in his life that cost him his freedom. But he learned from his mistakes and became a better man because of it. Read Proverbs 24:16. What does God tell us about how to deal with the mistakes we make?

## Scene 12.

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**RED:** I find myself so excited I can barely sit still or hold a thought in my head. I think it's the excitement only a free man can feel. A free man at the start of a long journey whose conclusion is uncertain. I hope I can make it across the border. I hope to see my friend and shake his hand. I hope the Pacific is as blue as it has been in my dreams. I hope.

Much like his dream of the Pacific, Red hopes in things that he hasn't yet seen, but believes them to be true. Read Romans 8:24-25. What does the apostle Paul have to see about hope?

At this point in his life, Red fully understands the power of hope to bring someone out of despair and into a better future. Read Proverbs 24:14. What does Scripture teach us about the power of hope?

### **“...from Reel to Real...”**

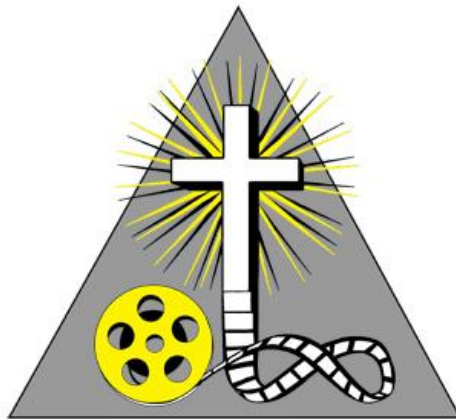
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A key linking element between the events in “The Shawshank Redemption” and the Bible is the concept of hope. Think back to a time in your life where it seemed like hope was the only thing that kept you moving forward. Why do you think that hope is so powerful in the life of a Christian? How did hope work in your life to help you overcome a difficult situation?

### **Director’s Chair**

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In Stephen King’s original novella, the story ends with Red on the bus heading off to meet up with Andy. Like the film, “I hope” was the last line in the novella. While that was also the way original cut also ended, studio pressure eventually forced director Frank Darabont to film the uplifting beach reunion between the two leads. While the scene at the beach certainly reinforces the film’s theme that hope never dies, do you think that Darbont’s original ending (showing the bus Red is on and then fading to black) would have been just as powerful?



Be sure and check out [www.ReelMinistry.org](http://www.ReelMinistry.org) for additional resources and study materials.

The Bible verse commentaries found within these materials are strictly the opinions of the creative team behind Reel Ministry. We strongly encourage you to seek out a Study Bible and gain additional perspective on these important verses.

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