



GROUNDHOG DAY

Rated: PG • **Running Time:** 1 hour, 50 minutes

Starring: Bill Murray as Phil Connors; Andie MacDowell as Rita; Chris Elliott as Larry; Stephen Tobolowsky as Ned; Brian Doyle-Murray as Buster; Robin Duke as Doris

Director: Harold Ramis

Themes: Overcoming self-centeredness, making the most of second chances, servanthood, futility in life, true love

Cautions: Just four mild profanities pop up, but the film includes a few sexual references and dark comedic images of

failed suicide attempts. To show the fullness of Phil's inner transformation, the story reveals his ugly side via crass remarks, a cheap sexual fling, unhealthy or illegal behavior and an inappropriate gesture (counting down for the camera, he intentionally leaves his middle finger for "one"). Alcohol use is common (social drinking and drowning sorrows). A scene plays drunkenness for laughs. This comedy raises mature issues such as superficial sexuality, despair and mortality. Best viewed by older teens and adults, if possible using an edited-for-TV version.

Story Summary

Punxsutawney Phil is a groundhog. Make that *the* groundhog. Residing in Punxsutawney, Pa., he's the nation's "most famous weatherman," called upon annually to check for his iconic shadow. Phil Connors, on the other hand, is a common TV weatherman—not that you'd know it by the way he acts. He's an insufferable egomaniac. Selfish. Condescending. "A prima donna," smirks his long-suffering cameraman, Larry. Phil meets Phil in *Groundhog Day*, a clever, multi-layered comedy some families will want to watch more than once.

Under duress, cynical Phil Connors travels from Pittsburgh to Punxsutawney on assignment for WPBH to cover the town's Groundhog Day festivities. It's a fluff piece and Phil knows it. It grates on him that his life has been reduced to this. Then again, pretty much *everything* grates on Phil. So he takes out his frustration on the people around him. Accompanied by Larry and a fun-loving new producer named Rita, he doesn't even try to mask his sarcasm as he races through the gig and heads home, far away from the small-town "hicks" he holds in contempt. But a blizzard blocks his retreat, forcing the crew back to Punxsutawney.

The next morning at 6:00 a.m., Phil is awakened by a clock radio playing Sonny and Cher's "I Got You Babe" ... again. More than just a case of déjà vu, he proceeds to relive Groundhog Day all over again. And again. And again. Caught in a bizarre time warp, Phil repeatedly finds himself waking up to Feb. 2. He encounters the same people in the same places. They greet him in the same manner. What's really strange is that he can remember these previous days in vivid detail, but everyone around him seems to be coasting through Groundhog Day for the first time. First he's perplexed, then frightened, then invigorated by a pair of drunks he meets at a bowling alley:



Phil: "Let me ask you guys a question. What if there were no tomorrow?"

Gus: "No tomorrow? That would mean there'd be no consequences. There would be no hangovers. We could do whatever we wanted!"

Phil: "That's true. We could do whatever we want. ... I'm not gonna live by their rules anymore."

The self-centered, newly liberated meteorologist takes advantage of his powerful position. He plays chicken with an oncoming train. He leads police on a high-speed chase. He woos (and sleeps with) townswomen. He robs a bank and slugs an annoying insurance salesman. Nothing matters, because tomorrow is always today. Everything starts over from scratch. No one remembers but him. Weeks and months go by as Phil indulges every carnal whim that flits through his mind. That is, until despair sets in.

Seeing the futility of this existence, Phil sets his mind to suicide. But not even death can silence the inescapable 6:00 a.m. chorus of "I Got You Babe" that rouses him each morning, announcing a repeat of Feb. 2. He steps in front of a truck, jumps off a tall building, electrocutes himself and even drives over a cliff. Nothing works. Despair turns to desperation. Then, after repeatedly being rebuffed by Rita (the one woman he respects and has been unable to manipulate into bed), he hits rock bottom and realizes that satisfaction lies not in changing his environment or the people in it, but in changing *himself*.

Phil's desperation gives way to hope. Rita's kind heart inspires him. He realizes he's been "chasing after the wind" (as in Eccles. 1-2) and focuses his attention on the needs of others. He works to better himself and begins practicing random acts of kindness. He tries to keep a homeless man from dying on the street. He saves the mayor (played by Bill Murray's real-life brother) from choking. He repairs flat tires and rescues a boy who falls out of a tree. He

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patches up a young couple's relationship. Most importantly, selfish attempts to woo Rita turn into genuine attraction and love. Phil Connors learns to care. It is that selflessness that brings an end to his inexplicable "curse."

Before You Watch

Look into the history of the holiday. When did Groundhog Day originate? Why? Informative Web sites such as groundhog.org and punxsutawneyphil.com provide avenues to learn more about this lighthearted tradition.

Bible Bookmarks Psalm 27:14; Prov. 18:1; Eccles. 1-2; Is. 55:8-11; Matt. 25; Luke 10:25-37; Acts 16:25-34; Rom. 12:3-5; 1 Cor. 6:19-20; Phil. 2:3-7; James 2:14-26

Talking Points

1 In the beginning of the movie, Phil's arrogance alienates his co-workers. Do you know anyone who acts like that? How does it make you feel? Do *you* ever act like that? Read Romans 12:3-5 and Proverbs 18:1. How should we behave (Phil. 2:3-7)?

2 Phil's friends think he's just full of himself, but a closer look reveals hidden insecurities and fears. Discuss how such inner turmoil can create boastful, mean people, and note that bullies and braggarts are often just covering up their own pain and disappointment. How are Christians uniquely equipped to offer them hope?

3 At first, Phil uses his newfound power to exploit, hurt, manipulate and humiliate people. Have you ever abused a newly discovered talent or ability in order to take unfair advantage of a sibling or friend? How did that affect your relationship?

4 Many people, at some point in their lives, are tempted to spice things up with dangerous or even immoral behavior. How does Phil prove that the best cure for monotony is turning our eyes away from selfish desires? Imagine how it would feel to be a full-time Good Samaritan as described in Luke 10:25-37. What ways could you use that freedom to share the love of Christ? What's stopping you?

5 What's the significance of the "reformed" Phil asking Larry what he thinks about moving the camera? Explain how we can validate people and make them feel good simply by seeking their opinions.

6 Death isn't a solution for Phil. He keeps waking up again. But while suicide appears here in a darkly humorous context, it's a very serious, very final act. Talk about it with your teen. Why should suicide never be an option, especially for a Christ follower? Read Acts 16:25-34, 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 and Psalm 27:14.



7 Phil finds his way out of the maze by doing good. By helping those around him. By being selfless. And by discovering true love. What does the Bible teach about how we can find our way out of the maze of sin? Is "doing good" enough? Talk through James 2:14-26 and Matthew 25 to determine the healthy balance between God's grace and those works that show the fruit of our faith.

8 Phil asks Rita to describe her "perfect man." What do you think of the qualities she values? How do they measure up to godly virtues? Also, when you get right down to it, at the end of the movie Rita is fully sold on Phil after only one day in her life. Is it possible to know someone that well in such a short period of time? Why or why not?

9 Discuss how you might live your life differently if nothing you did affected any permanent change. Take comfort from the promise in Isaiah 55:8-11.

10 Novelist Stephen King once said, "Movies are the highest popular art of our time, and art has the ability to change lives." Do you agree? Do you think films like this have any effect on how close you feel to your family, friends or God?

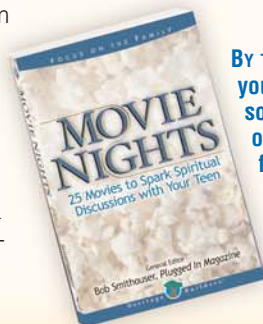
Follow-Up Activity

Be on the lookout for news stories about common people who make a difference simply by availing themselves to their fellow man. Challenge family members to hunt for those clippings, too. Then read them around the dinner table and consider ways you and your teen could team up to be Good Samaritans in your community (volunteering at a soup kitchen, cleaning the church, collecting gloves for the homeless, etc.).

Just for Fun

Groundhog Day in Punxsutawney used to be a fairly modest event. But ever since this movie was released in 1993, crowds as large as 30,000 have gathered each year to celebrate at Gobbler's Knob. (Who says movies don't impact people's attitudes and behavior?) In fact, Bill Murray and Harold Ramis have even served as honorary Grand Marshals. —by Steven Isaac

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