

Session Six

“Walking Across Egypt” Rated PG-13. Running time: 1 hour and 40 minutes.

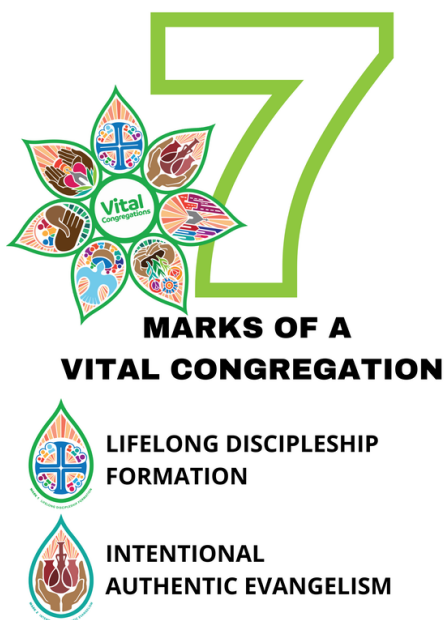
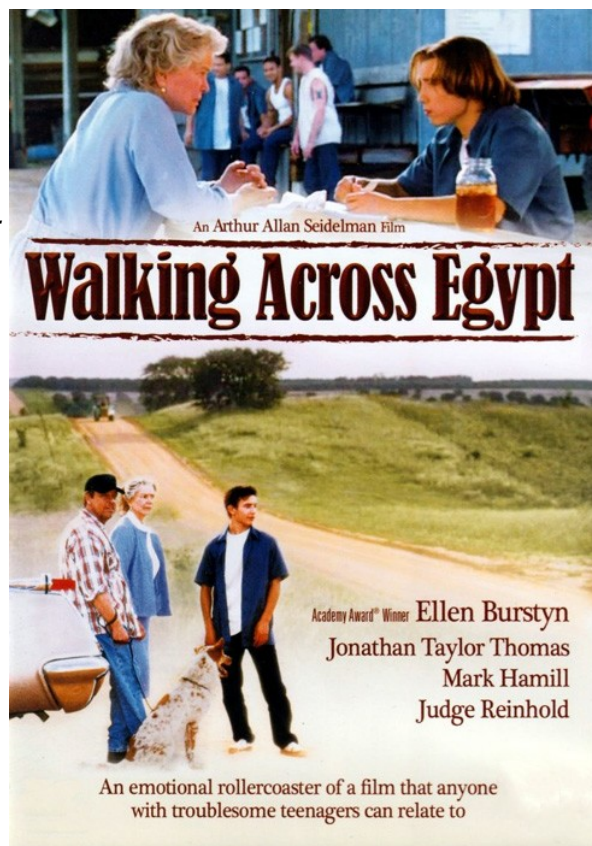
Indeed, the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow; it is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. — Hebrews 4:12

Then they also will answer, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?’ Then he will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.’ — Matthew 25:44-45

Ellen Burstyn is wonderful as the elderly Mattie Rigsbee, a woman admittedly slowing down yet still capable of caring for herself and others. Based on the novel by Clyde Edgerton, the story presents a sympathetic view of a small-town widow and the Christian faith that sustains and motivates her. This is a film to place alongside “Tender Mercies,” “Places in the Heart,” “The Apostle” and “The Trip to Bountiful,” a small but vibrant genre that every Christian should know about and use.

Mattie lives in a small Southern town where she is prominent in the leadership of her church. Her grown son and daughter live fairly close by but have strayed from her church-centered ways. Both are concerned that she is too old to be living by herself. Had they

known of the funny but potentially serious predicament she is about to find herself in at the beginning of the film, they would be downright alarmed. Mattie, after feeding a stray dog, finds herself falling through the seat of a rocking chair and being unable to extricate herself from it. How she is rescued and what chain of events this initiates adds up to viewing that is both enjoyable and inspiring.



-  **OUTWARD INCARNATIONAL FOCUS**
-  **EMPOWER SERVANT LEADERSHIP**
-  **SPIRIT-INSPIRED WORSHIP**
-  **CARING RELATIONSHIPS**
-  **ECCLESIAL HEALTH**





For Reflection/Discussion

1. What seems to motivate Mattie? How is she like “the child” Jesus said we must become in order to enter the kingdom of God? How do we see that her faith is biblically based?

2. What do you learn of the other characters?

- Wesley: Why is he in the reformatory? What could very well happen to him if he had stayed there?
- Lamar Benfield: Why doesn't he take custody of his nephew? Do you think it would really have been good for either of them if he had?
- Robert and Elaine Rigsbee: Do you think that Mattie's comments and badgering advice to them is justified? Or is she just being an interfering mother?
- Alora and Finner: What do you think of them as neighbors? How is their nosiness motivated by good intentions? How would you handle them if they were your neighbors?
- The Rev. and Mrs. Vernon: From the part of Rev. Vernon's sermon that we do hear, what seems to be at the heart of his theology? Does he practice it?

3. How does the little stray dog's coming to Mattie set the stage and introduce the main theme of the story? How are the dog and Wesley similar to each other, including Mattie's initial reaction to each of them?

4. What is it that sets Mattie to rethinking her decision concerning each of them? Note that in the film, Rev. Vernon uses just half of Jesus' parable. Which half? How is this a perfect fit for Mattie and the decision she had made about not getting involved with the dog and with Wesley?

5. What is Wesley's thinking about Mattie when he first meets her and then comes to her house? How does her treatment of him affect him in the long run? What significance do you see in his bathing scenes (beyond the humor and his naiveté regarding indoor bathrooms)?

6. When I showed the film to a group, one person regarded Wesley's transformation as unreal. What do you think? Was this shown as being too easy, or does the story show that being a change agent is difficult, never a cinch? At what points in the story do you see Mattie taking up her cross? (See Mark 8:34.)

7. The theme of grace is well displayed in the scene in which Mattie visits the Rev. and Mrs. Vernon following Wesley's abuse of their car. How are the Vernons the guardians of law rather than grace? How is Mattie more faithful to Christ's teachings than those charged to study and teach them?

8. Running through the film is the uneasy relationship between Mattie and her grown children. How typical is this?

9. For those who are parents: In an age when every parent is supposed to be able to boast how well their children turned out, do you feel that way — or are you more like Mattie? Do you sometimes wish you had done things differently? Do you now feel better that you spent more time at your workplace, or with the children? Also, does acting on one's Christian faith always lead to family solidarity? Check out what Jesus said about families and doing his will in Matthew 10:34–38.

10. For those who are grown children: Do you sometimes feel about an elderly parent the way Robert and Elaine do about Mattie? When you are together, do you listen to each other, or have you been turning each other off because of complaints and comments based on different values? How do you fulfill the commandment to honor parents and yet live your own life?

11. How might this film contribute to a deeper awareness of the nature and role of your church? In the article you have been directed to before, "Building Congregational Vitality," is the following list of relevant Scripture passages for study and reflection:

Acts 2:42–47

John 4:1–41

John 13: 2–17

Isaiah 6:1–13

Acts 6:1–7

2 Corinthians 5:11–21

Divide into groups if yours is a large group and ask them to read and discuss the passage in relation to their congregation. What must your church do to conform to the Scripture?

15. To see what a vital church is doing, explore the website of Palma Sola Presbyterian Church(www.pspchurch.org/). What activity might be adopted (and adapted) for your church?