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**Of Grief and God**

The Lovely Bones Explores Death and Heaven

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**What Happened:**

On Jan. 22, 2010, Director Peter Jackson's new film *The Lovely Bones* will roll nationwide. The film, starring Saoirse Ronan, Mark Wahlberg and Stanley Tucci, is based on the Alice Sebold novel of the same name; and it tackles a desperately difficult topic – the murder of a child.

In *Bones*, 14-year-old Susie Salmon is brutally raped and murdered by her neighbor, George Harvey; and she spends most of her time in the film looking down on the living in an afterlife that's not-quite-heaven.

Meanwhile down on earth, Susie's family desperately tries to come to grips with her disappearance and death.

The book's subject matter is unspeakably grim, but Jackson found Sebold's novel surprisingly optimistic, "I came away from [the book] feeling a lot of comfort and hope, that life is precious, and you have to enjoy every moment you get," he told the *Los Angeles Times*. "There is also profound comfort in that death is not the end. There is an immortality that happened."

To keep that same sense of optimism in the film, Jackson and his co-writers dialed back the graphic violence found in the book. The rape and murder are not explicitly shown. Even so, the process of filming was hard on everyone – particularly Tucci, who plays the killer.

"It was harder on him than anybody," Jackson says, referring to the scene in which the killer entices Susie into a cave where he kills her. "After we shot, Stanley would be most affected by it. Saoirse would come over and give him a big hug. She'd wrap her arms around him. She was almost taking parental care of him."

**Talk About It:**

If *pretending* to lose a child in such a horrific matter was painful for *The Lovely Bones* cast, it must be unimaginable to feel such a loss in real life. Yet all of us are destined to lose someone close to us during our lifetimes, and it's never easy. Have you ever lost someone close to you? How did you deal with it?

If death is almost always sad, it's particularly devastating when a child or a teen dies. Have you ever lost a young friend or family member? Do you know anyone who has?

It can be tough to know how to help someone who's grieving. How do you help people who are suffering a loss? Do you tend to want to comfort them? Cheer them up? Just listen to them? How would *you* want to be comforted?

*The Lovely Bones* tells viewers that death is not the end – that there is an afterlife, and it can be pretty beautiful. What do you imagine heaven looking like? What are you most looking forward to seeing when you get there?

**What the Bible Says:**

“Then Jacob tore his garments and . . . mourned for his son many days. All his sons and all his daughters rose up to comfort him, but he refused to be comforted and said, ‘No, I shall go down to Sheol to my son, mourning.’ Thus his father wept for him” (Gen. 37:34-35).

“My soul longs, yes, faints for the courts of the Lord; my heart and flesh sing for joy to the living God” (Ps. 84:2).

“Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you” (Ps. 73:25).