

Youth Culture Lesson

Finding Teachable Moments in Culture

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Father Issues

Running Away from Dad and God in *Grace Unplugged*

By Paul Asay

What Happened:

Growing up can be tough on both and their kids. Teens, eager to explore the world and make their own decisions, can rebel against their parents and all their restrictions. Moms and dads can wonder how their wonderful children turned into such brats. Still, few can match the family dynamics found in *Grace Unplugged*.

In the movie (starring A.J. Michalka and James Denton), Johnny Trey is a former music star—a one-hit wonder who fell into alcohol and drug use before he was rescued by faith. Perhaps that’s why he named his only daughter Grace. God’s grace, after all, saved him.

Grace learns to love music and God from her parents. She sings and plays in Johnny’s church-based praise band; but as time goes on, Grace feels a yearning to stretch her musical wings—to shake free of her father’s yoke and show the world what she can do.

However, Grace does more than simply press her familial boundaries: The 18-year-old girl begins to shout, pout and lie. Johnny and wife, Michelle, don’t see a young woman ready for new challenges; they see a spoiled, sullen teenager, too immature and rebellious to be trusted.

Then one day, Johnny’s former agent stops and encourages him to get on the road again. Johnny says no. He’s happy as the music pastor for his church. Grace, overhearing, decides to record her daddy’s old hit and give it to the agent. He loves it and invites her to Los Angeles, an invitation she immediately accepts. So she leaves home without her parents’ permission—or knowledge—ready to become a star.

Grace does find success, but it costs her dearly. The price of fame can be high. She struggles with the compromises she’s asked to make. She breaks hearts back home, and we’re left to wonder whether it’s just her earthly father from who she ran away.

“Grace, why do you want this?” a friend asks her. “Is Jesus Christ really who you’re living for? I think maybe you’re fighting God.”

Talk About It:

People sometimes fight, even if they love each other; but sometimes they don’t need to. When you look at Grace, what could she have done better to diffuse some of the tension with her father? What could Johnny have done differently?

“You are not ready for this,” Johnny tells Grace, pleading for her to come home after she runs away. In a way, he’s right. Have you ever found yourself in a situation for which you weren’t fully prepared? Taken on more responsibilities than you could handle? When? What happened? How did you eventually either overcome or back away?

Grace’s friend says she might be fighting God. Have you ever felt as if you were fighting God? Struggling with the responsibilities of being Christian? Battling against His directives for us? Have you ever thought God had plans for you that you didn’t want to fulfill?

“Your body is your biggest asset you have,” someone advises Grace. “Sometimes you have to spend it.” A great deal of our culture is based on how you look and dress. There’s pressure, particularly on girls and young women, to be sexy. Have you ever keenly felt that pressure? How did you deal with it?

What the Bible Says:

“Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord. Fathers, do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged” (Col. 3:20-21).

“Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight” (Prov. 3:5-6).

“Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body” (1 Cor. 6:19-20).

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