

# DISCUSSION GUIDE

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## *The Imposter*



Awarded Dove Foundation's Family Seal of Approval with 3 out of 5 Doves. Ages 12+

**"THOROUGHLY ENTERTAINING AND THOUGHT PROVOKING."**

CHRIS GOODWIN, PROGRAM DIRECTOR, KVRK

# PURE FLIX

## About The Film

In *The Imposter*, from Pure Flix Entertainment, Christian rock's hottest band, "Grand Design" is heading to the top! Unfortunately, lead singer Johnny C (Kevin Max of dcTalk) is personally spiraling down. His nightly concert performances about Jesus are a stark contrast to the selfish lifestyle he finds himself in each morning. At the height of his fame Johnny's world comes crashing to a halt and thus begins a turbulent journey back home to find out if his shattered marriage can be restored. Now at odds over his lifestyle with his long time band mate and friend James, (Jeff Deyo former lead singer (SONICFLOOD) Johnny is removed from the band. As Johnny discovers who he is behind the mask of celebrity and religious stereotypes, he receives guidance from his mentor, Proff (played by Kerry Livgren of the band Kansas) and an eccentric homeless man, Popeye (Tom Wright of World Trade Center, Barbershop). Will Johnny really be able to change and live a life that is genuine?

## ABOUT THE DISCUSSION GUIDE

*The Imposter* is the story of one man's efforts to find out the truth about himself and His faith. Johnny C's crisis takes him from having it all to having nothing. His fall was hard and fast. Amidst Johnny's struggle to make his way back to his faith, he encounters several Christian brothers who aren't willing to forgive or forget. We learn that even though we may appear to espouse the tenets of the Christian life, we must actually demonstrate love, grace and mercy to those around us—not just preach about it. Johnny thinks his return back to the fold will be met with open arms and forgiveness. Instead he is met with indifference from those who can't forgive and tough love from those who are willing to give him the benefit of the doubt. Johnny is tempted to let the hypocrisy of some Christians deter him from his goal of putting his life back together. Johnny chooses to humbly begin again and accepts the consequences of his actions. His acceptance back into the lives of those he betrayed does not have an easy ending, but Johnny determines to take on the hard work of winning back the trust of those he cares about. Johnny's take on how God is working in his life is voiced at the beginning of the film as he remarks about himself: "God's more interested in 'our hero' [Johnny] going through a 'process' than zapping him with spiritual morphine." We suggest that you watch the film in its entirety, and then follow with the discussion and Bible readings. Related scriptures are provided for a more in-depth study of the themes. Also included are questions based on key concepts from the film. Use these questions to further enhance your discussions. As we follow the story of Johnny C's rise, fall and redemption, we'll look at the masks of good intentions we hide behind, how sometimes the "process" of losing it all can point us to what really matters, and how submission to God's transforming love can complete His purpose for our lives.

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## LESSON 1 “THE UNMASKING”

Johnny C. seemingly has everything—a successful Christian music career, a beautiful wife and daughter, adoring fans. He appears in front of thousands of people yearly, singing and extolling the virtues of a Christian life, yet we see his own life unraveling in the background. Johnny has taken the message of the Christian life and manipulated it to glorify himself, not God—and then eventually he turns his back on it altogether—making himself the center of his universe. He misguidedly thinks that he can sing or talk his way into or out of any situation, yet we see his actions are what truly measure his intent. As the constructs of his fabricated existence begin to disintegrate, Johnny must come face to face with real person behind the mask. As he looks at what he has become, he learns that true belief and repentance can only come from deliberate moves he must make to rebuild his life, not just the words or good intentions he may offer to become a different man.

Often we try to determine a way to live our lives that we think will benefit us—either monetarily, emotionally or physically. We identify a void we think we have and we conform our actions to fit what is needed to gain the desired effect. Johnny’s need for fame and affirmation was sated by performing for an audience of adoring fans nightly and in seeking the company of women who were not his wife. But the real longing he was trying to fill could only be met by submitting his life to God. As he became more and more desperate, he turned to drugs, which simply numbed the pain of his ever-empty soul. Ultimately, all his strivings to placate his wounded spirit were fruitless, but the fleeting satisfaction he obtained had him yearning for more. To make sure he doesn’t get caught while pursuing the temporary fixes he so desperately needs, he becomes extremely deceptive and manipulative. Keeping his mask of “Christian singer/father/husband” firmly in place, he was able to twist and contort himself to appear as if he had it all together, but before long, the cracks in his persona began to disclose what was behind the scenes of his life. Until he was willing to take off the mask, see his real need and be honest with himself and others, Johnny’s desperation had him hurtling down the road to destruction.

### SCRIPTURAL REFERENCES

1 SAMUEL 16:7 (NIV)

*“...The Lord does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart”*

#### Discussion Points:

- What masks have you worn in your life and to what end?
- What was the situation that caused you to realize you weren’t being “real” to yourself and others?
- Read Psalm 119:81. What does this verse say about our longings and where do you think our true hope comes from?
- What are some of the things that you are chasing after that may not be the best way to fill the needs of your life? How can you replace these ignoble pursuits with Godly pursuits?

## LESSON 2 "THE UNDOING"

As Johnny becomes increasingly more self-involved, he is ensnared in a web of lies that alienate everyone who is close to him. His misguided pursuits take over his every waking moment leading him to eschew his responsibilities to his band-mates, his family and his ministry. Before he knows it, he is penniless, destitute and alone. Even though his heart isn't truly fixated on finding his way back to God, he does try to make his way back to his family who left him months earlier. Out of a sheer feeling of "not knowing what else to do", Johnny, basically homeless, hitchhikes his way across 3 states to get back to his home base. Johnny imagines that his homecoming will be greeted in the typical fashion that a "prodigal" would be greeted—with tears of relief, open arms and forgiveness.

In a pivotal scene, Johnny arrives to his final destination where he goes to a diner. His wife's brother, Frank, who has never liked Johnny, sits with him at a table. At this point in the story, it is obvious what masks Johnny has worn and we can see them dissolving as God strips him of his "pride" and "haughty spirit". But the life of Frank is one that is much more complex. Seemingly a faithful Christian man, his mask is subtler. Behind the mirage of a life unencumbered by the obvious vices that Johnny succumbs to, his mask hides a judgmental and unforgiving spirit under a veil of Christian rhetoric and self righteousness. He longs for the same life of fame and adoration that Johnny has and preaches grace and redemption, but quietly seethes and walks away from Johnny's feeble attempts to make things right.

### SCRIPTURAL REFERENCES

*PROVERBS 16:18-19 (NIV)*

*"Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall. Better to be lowly in spirit and among the oppressed than to share plunder with the proud".*

### Discussion Points:

- Has there been a time in your life where you have been at such a low point you weren't sure what to do? How did you come out of this experience and what did you learn?
- Has your pride ever caused you to lose sight of what's really important? How did you deal with this situation?
- Describe what it means to you to be "lowly in spirit".
- Have you ever been guilty of judging others when they have fallen? Read Romans 14:1-13: "So then, each of us will give an account of himself to God. Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another." (Romans 14:12-13a NIV) Why do you think it's important that we not apply judgments to those around us?

Although Johnny doesn't get the "prodigal son" welcome home scenario he dreams of, there are those who are willing to give him the benefit of the doubt. His wife's uncle, "Proff", has tough words for him, but allows Johnny to help him with odd jobs as janitor. Johnny is still living on the streets and struggling with his demons, but he begins to do the work physically to survive and the spiritual work starts to seep in as well. Johnny is out drinking and is thrown out of a bar. A homeless man who he's found an odd kinship is walking down the street as well and sees a speeding truck coming towards Johnny. He barrels down the street with his shopping cart and saves Johnny from being hit, but gets hit himself. Once Johnny determines he is okay, he cries out "I thought you had died for me". The parallel to the death of Christ who gives us another chance to live is obvious and Johnny begins to see himself in the light of day. He remarks..."it's quite a picture when you see the 'real you' painted with such ugly streaks". It's never easy to see ourselves for the fallen, broken creatures we are. The good news is that we have a Savior and He can bring us through the process of redemption.

### **Discussion Points:**

- Have you or has anyone you've known ever had to demonstrate "tough love" to someone who needed to find their way back to a better place in life?
- Have you ever been brought to a point of desperation that opened your eyes up to the reality of your situation? What happened to your life after this moment?
- Can you think of a moment in time where you were given a new lease on life? What did you do with this gift?
- Read Romans 5:6-8 "You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." (NIV) Knowing that Christ's death gives us a second chance, how does this inspire you to live?

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## **LESSON 3**

### **"THE HEALING"**

Johnny C's journey to wholeness has not come without consequences. The ending to his story has yet to be written, but the reality he is experiencing as the film closes is one of hard work and determination to live an authentic life. Johnny may not ever be able to be with his wife again as a husband or with his daughter as a full-time father. However, the action he puts into motion towards the redemption of those relationships has begun and God will honor his obedience. Johnny's willingness to stop being the center of his own universe and submit to God is leading him down the road to redemption and healing. He tells Proff "I don't want to be what I used to be", but instead of just saying the words, he is ready to make the changes that accompany the statement. As a result, real transformation occurs as God takes the work He began in Johnny and completes it, as He promises to do for all of His children in Philippians 1:6.

## SCRIPTURAL REFERENCES

*JAMES 4:7-10 (NIV)*

*“Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come near to God and He will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up”*

### Discussion Points:

- Have you ever had to do something that was so hard you didn't think you could do it, but you found the strength to complete? To what do you attribute your ability to complete the task?
- How do you see God's work in completing the promise He has for your life? What are ways He shows you that He's making you all that you're meant to be?
- Name some things you believe in and speak about but may not actually practice and make an effort to turn those things into action items.
- How do you demonstrate to others that you are trustworthy? Think of some people that you trust. What qualities do they have that give you this assuredness?

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## WRAP UP

God wants us to realize the transforming power of His love in our lives. If this is something you have not experienced, you can know change right now, no matter how desperate your circumstances or how bleak the state of your heart. Ask Christ to come into your life and change you. Submit your life to His healing grace and as He promised, He will lift you up. It may not be today, tomorrow or even soon, but He will be faithful to complete His work in you if you submit to Him and draw near and you will know a life that you would have never imagined if you had tried to create it on your own.

