

TOGETHER: Be prepared for 'Passion' follow-up_22304

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"I love him more than I ever knew possible. ... I connected to a place I could have never, ever gone. I don't want people to see me. All I want them to see is Jesus Christ."

That's what James Caviezel, the actor who portrayed Jesus in "The Passion of the Christ," recently told a Newsweek reporter.

Churches are buying tickets for this movie, and their members are taking friends to see it.

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The Baptist General Convention of Texas has prepared an ad to play in theaters inviting people to visit a Baptist church for the continuing story of redemption. Christians around the world are praying this motion picture

might be an event God uses to touch hearts and change lives.

Do you remember when you first realized what Jesus did on the cross was for you? Do you remember how that prompted a willingness to follow him with your whole soul?

Thousands of people will feel that in the next few weeks. Many of them will make it to some church soon thereafter.

Be ready for them. Many will have never been to church before. They will need a warm and accepting reception.

I suspect we particularly need to be alert to their moods. They may be eager to meet people who might help them understand what they have felt. But if they seem hesitant, a big smile and a joking manner probably won't help. Welcome them, but don't crowd them. Give them a chance to be quiet. Provide them with worship guides.

Understand that their cinematic encounter with the crucified Lord may be the closest they ever have felt to God. That experience has brought them to church, hoping to find an idea about their next step. Pray God will help you connect to them.

Pastors and Sunday school teachers, let the deep places of your heart's experience with God be open to those who will hear you preach and teach. We are approaching the season when we remember the passion of our Lord, his cross and resurrection. As you prepare, ask God to help you sense what may be in the hearts of those who will sit before you after they have seen "The Passion of the Christ."

Make the gospel plain.

Make the invitation clear.

Help people do something more than feel.

Call them to follow Christ.

Some have expressed fear that the film may spark animosity toward Jews. If you see this film and blame the Jews rather than yourself, you miss the whole point of the gospel. Do you see yourself in the crowd when you have gone along to get along, in the soldiers when you have done what you have done because you were expected to do so, or in the religious and government leaders when you have loved the status quo and feared the new thing God might be doing? If you don't, you need to pray, "Open my eyes, Lord."

Let the words of Jesus shape our attitude toward ourselves and others. He died forgiving. All of us are guilty. All of us need his forgiveness. To those who have received great mercy, it is required that we be merciful.

I pray this film will cause all who love Christ to love the Jews and all others more than we ever have before. Unless I somehow missed it, that is what Jesus died to make possible.

We are loved.

News of religion, faith, missions, Bible study and Christian ministry among Texas Baptist churches, in the BGCT, the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) and around the world.