

## Some thoughts on watching films

Stories are the stuff of life. They allow us to reflect on all sorts of issues at a safe distance as we engage with the characters, cry with them, laugh with them, get cross with them and generally share their experience. How they deal with the issues they come across may frustrate us, or give us new insights; cause us to laugh or cry; result in us hurling abuse at the screen or willing there to be a happy ending. And through it all we can encounter God in all sorts of unexpected places if only we take time to look.

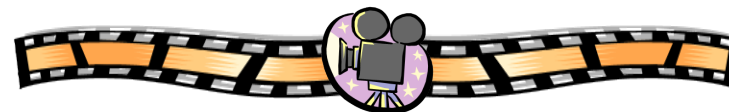
### Questions to ask yourself

- ▶ What did you think of the film? What do you like most? Least?
- ▶ Which incidents made you think or feel most strongly? How well did you think the film treated those incidents?
- ▶ What issues did the film raise for you?
- ▶ What character(s) do you most identify with and why?
- ▶ Does the film have any echoes of Christian beliefs or stories from the Bible? Does it support or challenge Christian values?

### Some facts about the film

- ▶ Many have seen similarities between the film and Tennessee Williams' "A Streetcar Named Desire", though Woody Allen himself denies any such connection. Instead, he says the inspiration for the film came from a story that his wife, Soon-Yi, told him. She described a friend, the wife of a wealthy financier, who enjoyed ten years of parties, jewels and more parties before disaster struck. Allen felt it was a tragic and important story, which accidentally chimed with contemporary concerns.
- ▶ Cate Blanchett and Sally Hawkins were the only members of the cast to have the complete script during filming.
- ▶ Costume designer Suzy Benzinger had a budget of only \$35,000. The Hermès bag that Jasmine carries was worth more than the entire budget and was borrowed, as were most of the designer outfits.
- ▶ The film has been nominated for three Oscars: Best Actress, Best Supporting Actress and Best Original Screenplay. It has already won a Golden Globe and a BAFTA for Cate Blanchett's performance as Jasmine.
- ▶ This is the only Woody Allen film in which two principal American characters are played by non-natives: Australian Cate Blanchett and British Sally Hawkins.

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**A chance to watch films together.  
An opportunity to discuss the issues raised.  
A time of friendship, food and fun.**

2nd Mar	<b><u>Blue Jasmine</u></b>
6th Apr	<b><u>Untouchable</u></b>
4th May	<b><u>SoS's 100th Film - Philomena</u></b>
1st Jun	<b><u>Gravity</u></b>
6th Jul	<b><u>Ruby Sparks</u></b>
3rd Aug	<b><u>Hedd Wyn</u></b>

**Films start at 5:30pm  
Followed by food, coffee and conversation**

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Islip**

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## Blue Jasmine

Jasmine French (Cate Blanchett) is the elegant wife of wealthy businessman Hal. She excels at buying stylish clothes, hosting dinner parties and planning charity fundraisers. Then, one day, her comfortable life implodes. As a consequence, she suffers a nervous breakdown that leaves her dependent on a strong cocktail of vodka and Xanax. Financially and mentally unable to support herself, she moves to San Francisco to live with her sister Ginger (Sally Hawkins). As the film progresses, we learn both more about how she has ended up in this situation and the toll it continues to take on both her and those around her.

### Deluding ourselves

The name of the film, *Blue Jasmine*, is no coincidence. It sums up what Woody Allen feels are his two core concerns: depression and delusion. Jasmine is not the main character's real name. She was christened Jeanette, only later choosing the alternative, more exotic, Jasmine, hoping that it would change the way other people looked at her.

Meanwhile, *Blue Jasmine* refers to the deeply depressed state of her life, with the song *Blue Moon* being almost her soundtrack which mourns her situation. *Blue Moon, You saw me standing along without a dream in my heart, without a love of my own*. Even when she can no longer remember the lyrics, they remain a poignant description of her situation. She is someone who feels desperately alone, with no dreams and no love. She is barely able to "whisper please adore me", but her actions make it clear that this is what she desires. She is lonely, depressed, and desperate to appear as someone other than herself.

### Being spoilt

Jasmine once had a luxuriously comfortable life. She and her husband, Hal, are both aware that they are particularly prosperous, and Hal tells his son, "not everyone is as lucky as us." Nonetheless, they inevitably take their lifestyle for granted and thus it is easy for Jasmine to "look the other way" when questions arise. Woody Allen has insisted that *Blue Jasmine* is not a "credit crunch movie", but there are powerful resonances for a culture struggling to understand the moral consequences of wealth, greed and economic depression.

### Warts and all

Is Jasmine a tragic character? If so, this habit of "looking the other way" is her fatal flaw. She chooses to ignore anything which is too difficult to understand or accept, preferring the rosy glow of fantasy. Blanchett says of her character: "It's very difficult for a human being to truly look at themselves. Our fantasies are always more than what we are." Jasmine's fantasies come to consume her and, when she is confronted with reality, the consequences are severe. She suffers anxiety, claustrophobia, and experiences a nervous breakdown. As she declares: "There are only so many traumas a person can withstand before they take to the streets and start screaming."

### Distractions and delusions

Woody Allen is known for having what he describes as a "bleak outlook" on life. In 2013 he said: "It's just an accident that we happen to be on earth, enjoying our silly little moments, distracting ourselves as often as possible so we don't have to really face up to the fact that we're just temporary people. You can distract yourself a billion different ways, but the key is to distract yourself." Religion, he claims, is just another of those distractions. He therefore disparages religious beliefs whilst simultaneously seeming jealous of the peace that they offer believers. "I personally don't have any faith in anything. It's great if you can. The only trouble is, sooner or later, reality sets in. But it's nice if you can delude yourself for as long as possible." Surprisingly, then, *Blue Jasmine* seems to offer the alternative view: there are terrible consequences for people who, when faced with the harsh truth of reality, choose to look the other way.

Based on material from *The soul of the socialite* by Rachel Helen Smith, Damaris Trust

## Questions to ponder

**"Jasmine is a woman without any agency, without any autonomy. She's given that away to her husband." (Cate Blanchett)**

What did the film have to say about female autonomy and feminism? How might our society respond to the figure of a wife who is financially and emotionally reliant on her husband? Or is that what it means for "two to become one"?

**"Having wealth is nothing to be ashamed of." (Jasmine)**

Why is Jasmine so keen to emphasise that she is not "just a mindless consumer"? How well does the film tackle the issue of the responsibility that comes with wealth? Are there any resonances for you with the way our own society responds to those with extreme wealth?

**"Some people don't put things behind them so easily." (Augie)**

What, if anything, does the film have to say about the role of forgiveness and reconciliation (eg. thinking of the relationships between Jasmine and Danny or Ginger and Chili). Why does Jasmine find it so difficult to leave her past behind and move on? What advice might people in your community give to someone in her situation?

**"I wanted you to want me, and now you do." (Jasmine)**

What is Jasmine's deepest desire: love, acceptance, recognition, security, or something else? Where does this longing stem from, and what does it tell us about human nature? Putting the issue of wealth aside, to what extent could you empathise? In our own longings for love and security, where do we look for comfort, and are we successful in our search?

**"She's family." (Ginger)**

Despite the strains on her own life and relationships, Ginger willingly opens her home to her sister. Is blood truly thicker than water? How much allegiance do we owe to our families? Or, put the other way, should non-family members receive less care because they are not family? Or is the boundary of "family" an artificial one? (Mk 3: 33 - 35). What would you have done in Ginger's place?

### Mental illness

How did you feel the film portrayed depression and anxiety? How well does our society respond to mental illness? And, if we are all made in the image of God, does mental instability have anything to say about God himself?

### The ending

Some have said that the film comes to a rather abrupt ending. How did you react to the ending of the film? What do you think the future holds for Jasmine?