

***The Princess Diaries:* Saying "Yes!" to God**

The Walt Disney movie *The Princess Diaries* is about fifteen-year-old Amelia, an awkward teenager whose goal in life is to be invisible. "I'm good at it!" she says. The only child of a single mother, Amelia discovers her true identity through a grandmother who suddenly comes into her life. This movie is truly a fairy tale about a girl claiming her birthright as a princess, her "power," which she acquires not through anything she does but simply through being who she is.

As objective viewers, we witness the emergence of Amelia's grace and beauty and cringe with dread when we think that she is going to deny it all. Everyone around her can see it: her mother, her grandmother, her chauffeur, her teachers, even her friends. Will she say yes? We are held in suspense through several scenes in which Amelia seems determined to turn away from her destiny. Her reason for refusing her destiny is based on her own fear of inadequacy, despite all the evidence to the contrary.

The lovely message of the story is Amelia's breakthrough, when she realizes that her struggle isn't as much about her as a person as it is about her obligation to accept her God-given life. She has to acknowledge that the gift, her power, deserves to live and breathe despite the discomfort it might cause her. She comes to understand the moral responsibility she has to claim her birthright, which is the metaphor for the gifts that everyone has and can offer to the world.

The story also demonstrates the power of conformity and how limited Amelia's initial perception of her "comfort zone" was. She would have given it all up to fit into something very narrow and fleeting. How might she have felt two years down the road when her entire life had changed anyway and she became conscious of her lost power?

Though being a princess might carry its own temptation to conformity, consider the way that Amelia comes to terms with her destiny in her very own way. Both her grandmother and her mother seem to be strong role models for female independence and confidence. Amelia's deceased father also influences her through a letter he wrote before he died. In telling his own story, he inspires Amelia to go beyond her personal desires to recognize that she has the power to change the world in positive ways.

Consider the following discussion questions:

1. In what ways do your own fears of inadequacy prevent you from claiming yourself? Have you ever thought about those fears in the way Amelia came to see hers—that it was about something bigger than herself and her own life? Do your fears make you think any differently about the responsibility of your choices in life?
2. Consider this statement: “When you think you are giving 100 percent, it’s really just 100 percent of what you are comfortable with. You have to go beyond that to see what you can really do” (John C. Kingsley, age 14). How is Amelia being asked to go outside her comfort zone? How are you called to do the same thing?
3. Think about Amelia’s sacrifices in accepting the role. Do they seem great or small to you in considering what she took on? Do you think her life as a princess will be easy?
4. As a child of God, you are made in God’s image. That is your birthright. Imagine that God is watching you now. Is God waiting in suspense to see if you claim your birthright? How are you becoming the person God created you to be? Are you saying yes to God in your decisions about your life?

(Activity adapted from Mary Kingsley. Used with permission.)

Additional activity

Amelia’s physical makeover is a dramatic part of the movie, but girls often feel pressure to live up to impossible standards of beauty. Most women who have had a significant impact on the world did not achieve greatness because of their beauty. Check out this Web site about famous women who have made positive contributions to the world: <http://www.greatwomen.org/>.