



# GEEKS UNDER GRACE

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I CAN ONLY IMAGINE (2018) | *The Pain Behind the Mask* | BIBLE STUDY

Facilitator Note: We encourage facilitators to take this Bible study and expound on it throughout the week, allowing it to be a springboard for deeper conversation and personal meditation.

## PRESS START

The song “I Can Only Imagine”, which the movie is based on, is a multiplatinum hit. As explained in the introduction, it has inspired and helped millions of people who have heard it with its message of hope. **Name a song that has inspired you or helped you through a difficult time.** If you have time, try to listen to some of the songs mentioned.

## EQUIP

The story Bart tells in *I Can Only Imagine* is one of redemption; not only for Bart’s father, but also for himself. Bart struggled throughout the movie with a mask he was afraid to drop. He had been hurt so deeply that it affected every area of his life—from his music to his relationships to his relationship with God. He knew the pain was slowly destroying him from the inside, but his fear allowed it to continue to control his life. It was much easier for him to put on a mask and pretend everything was fine until people started seeing through the mask. They could tell his worship was not completely authentic, causing his career to suffer.

Bart was not the only one in the story to hide behind a mask. His father used abuse as a mask to hide the pain of disappointment he lived with every day of his life. Instead of facing the pain himself, he took out his anger on his wife and son. This pushed them both away, and threw his son into the same cycle of feeling like a failure no matter what he did.

## LEVEL UP

**Matthew 23:27-28** *“What sorrow awaits you teachers of religious law and you Pharisees. Hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs – beautiful on the outside but filled on the inside with dead people’s bones and all sorts of impurity. Outwardly you look like righteous people, but inwardly your hearts are filled with hypocrisy and lawlessness.”*

The Bart that leaves his home to pursue a music career can be compared to the religious teachers Jesus scolded in these verses. He led worship for youth events, wrote songs that glorified God, and knew how to play the part of a Christian musician. However, when he tried to connect with a manager and record labels that spent their life working with Christians, they saw right through him. They knew he had talent, but they also could see he was wearing a mask because they spent all of their time with other musicians who were genuine. They knew fake because they worked with the real thing.

This is a trap everyone is in danger of falling into. Perhaps there is some hidden sin or hurt in our lives we do not want to come to light, so instead of dealing with it, we push it down as deep as we can and focus our efforts on doing "good" things. The Pharisees used their good work to hide their pride and unloving attitudes. Without realizing it, we try to justify our sin by outwardly being good, while inside we are full of "all sorts of impurity."

**James 2:13** *"There will be no mercy for those who have not shown mercy to others. But if you have been merciful, God will be merciful when he judges you."*

God did not bless Bart's music until he made amends with his father. His unforgiveness was the sin hidden behind the mask. Once he learned to forgive, God began pouring out blessings on him. God will do whatever it takes to get us where we need to be, and sometimes that's incredibly painful. Bart had to go through the pain of rejection before he was willing to face his father and learn to forgive. When we are going through trials, it is possible God is trying to tell us something. **Zechariah 13:9** says *"I will bring that group through the fire and make them pure. I will refine them like silver and purify them like gold."* Fire is not something people want to go through. It is uncomfortable and burns, but it removes the impurities keeping us from really knowing God.

Once we have made things right with God, He can then start using us to reach other people. Bart was a talented musician and a decent worship leader before his transformation, but he did not really understand the power of the gospel until he personally saw the change it had on his father. He was then able to share his experiences and bring hope to millions of people through his music. God can work despite us, or we can surrender fully to Him and be everything he intended for us to be. He can use our pain and our struggles, but he cannot use our dishonesty.

## MOD

**What are some common masks people wear to church? What are some common things they hide behind those masks?**

**Sometimes people do not even realize they are putting on a mask for others. How can we identify any issues we ourselves are hiding and need to get out into the light?**

Take some time to pray individually about hidden sins or hurts that need to be dealt with. Invite anyone who feels comfortable to share those hurts and get them out in the open.

## PRAY

**Does anyone have anything we need to pray about?**

Pray and thank God for us as we are, including all of our hurts and hidden sins. Ask Him to help reveal anything hidden in our lives keeping us from serving him.

## THE NEXT LEVEL

**Romans 12:2** *“Don’t copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God’s will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect.”*

**2 Corinthians 12:9-10** *“But he said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.’ Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.”*

**1 John 4:20** *“If anyone says, ‘I love God,’ and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen.”*

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