

THE TRUTH HAS A MAN ON THE INSIDE.



FAITH + FILM + JUSTICE

DISCUSSION GUIDE

DARK WATERS

MARK RUFFALO ANNE HATHAWAY TIM ROBBINS BILL CAMP VICTOR GARBER AND BILL PULLMAN
FROM PARTICIPANT, WHO BROUGHT YOU *SPOTLIGHT* AND *THE POST*
SCREENPLAY BY MARIO CORREA AND MATTHEW MICHAEL CARNAHAN DIRECTED BY TODD HAYNES



ABOUT DARK WATERS

DARK WATERS tells the shocking and heroic story of an attorney who risks his career and family to uncover a dark secret hidden by one of the world's largest corporations and to bring justice to a community dangerously exposed for decades to deadly chemicals.

Corporate environmental defense attorney Rob Bilott (Academy Award®-nominee Mark Ruffalo) has just made partner at his prestigious Cincinnati law firm in large part due to his work defending Big Chem companies. He finds himself conflicted after he's contacted by two West Virginia farmers who believe that the local DuPont plant is dumping toxic waste in the area landfill that is destroying their fields and killing their cattle. Hoping to learn the truth about what is happening, Bilott, with help from his supervising partner in the firm, Tom Terp (Academy Award®-winner Tim Robbins), files a complaint that marks the beginning of an epic 15-year fight—one that will not only test his relationship with his wife, Sarah (Academy Award®-winner Anne Hathaway) but also his reputation, his health and his livelihood.



PFAS: Forever Chemicals

The DARK WATERS story centers on per- and poly-fluoroalkyl substances, known as PFAS. This class of nearly 5,000 chemicals are used in consumer products such as nonstick cookware, food packaging, and waterproof clothing. Best known are perfluorooctanesulfonate (PFOS), formerly in 3M's Scotchgard, and perfluorooctanoic acid (PFOA), formerly used to make DuPont's Teflon. Firefighting foam used by the military also contains these two types of PFAS — PFOS and PFOA. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences, PFAS chemicals, which take a long time to break down in the environment or leave the body if consumed, are now linked to multiple health problems such as thyroid issues, liver and kidney damage, and cancer. PFAS chemicals are considered by scientists to be among the most hazardous contaminants ever produced.



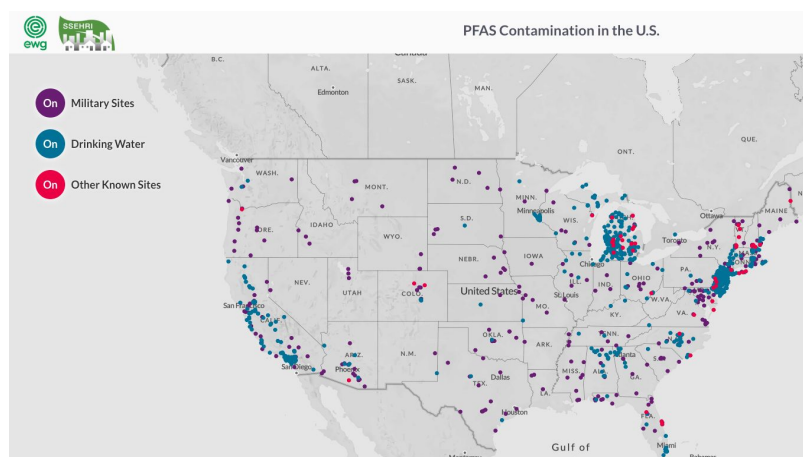
For millions of people, the primary exposure to PFAS is through their drinking water and food. According to the Environmental Working Group, tests of tap water, military bases, and industrial sites have found PFAS contamination in more than 712 locations in 49 states. According to an analysis of 131 military facilities done by the Union of Concerned Scientists, military families and communities are at an especially high risk. PFAS contamination of groundwater or drinking water measured in some locations was 100,000 times over the safe limit as determined by the Department of Health and Human Services. Despite the health risks of PFAS, the Environmental Protection Agency is not currently regulating PFAS.

Environmental Justice and PFAS

As people of faith, we have a moral call to pursue environmental justice: the sustainable and equitable sharing of the gifts of God's creation among all people. Yet, we know that communities of color, indigenous populations, and low-income neighborhoods suffer disproportionate impacts from environmental problems. A recent study by the Union of Concerned Scientists found that the communities of color and low-income communities had a disproportionate exposure to PFAS contaminated sites in the U.S.

Map of PFAS contamination in the US

[\(CLICK TO SEE\)](#)





HOW TO HOST A VIEWING EVENT

Step 1: Pick a date, time and location for your movie event. You will need to check your local movie theater listings to determine show times or visit darkwaterstickets.com for local showtimes. Consider hosting your post-viewing discussion near the theater so that it is easy to gather after viewing the film. A local coffee shop or restaurant may offer a good venue for discussion and reflection conversations.

Step 2: Invite your guests. Make a guest list and invite about three times as many people as you want to show up. Think first of inviting those in your faith community or other congregations in your area. You may want to make this a women's ministry, small group, or adult education class outing.

Step 3: Advertise and promote, as appropriate. Make the announcement at your congregation, on social media, on an announcement screen in your congregation, and through fliers.

Step 4: Follow-up invitation. You may want to reach out to guests personally to invite them. Keep an RSVP list going and update it as people reply. Send out a reminder announcement a day or so prior to the event.

Step 5: Time to Gather. Meet at the theater ahead of showtime to greet each other. After the film, head over to the post-film viewing event location. Use the below agenda and list of discussion and reflection questions to make the gathering both informative and faith-filled.

AGENDA

OPENING

Welcome everyone and allow time for people to get food and/or beverage if it is available.

PRAYER

“Oh, how beautiful are your ways, O God, the works of your creation. We are concerned because we hear and experience increasing threats to your creation. Raise our awareness of our connectedness to all that is. Instill in us the gift of being co-creators and sustainers of life. Grant us wisdom and guidance as we work to address injustices to your creation. Give us the courage to live in solidarity with all creation and the strength to see our work through. Amen.”

INTRODUCTIONS

Ask each person to introduce him or herself and describe one reason they came to this event.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Wilbur Tennant had a willful persistence for justice throughout the movie. What can we take away from his story for our own lives?
- What role do you think Rob Bilott's family's Catholic faith played in this story?
- Dark Waters focuses on one community in West Virginia, yet there are other locations, many of them in communities of color like along "Cancer Alley" in Louisiana¹, that have been exposed to toxic chemicals, environmental health issues, and environmental racism for decades. What can we, as a people of faith, do to work in solidarity with those seeking justice and particularly those working to address environmental racism and environmental justice?
- What can we take away from these characters' trials and tribulations as we work for justice in our own communities?
- The film is touted as a David and Goliath story, yet the ending does not portray a slaying of the corporate giant. How can the fact that this story about combatting forever chemicals is not over inform us?
- Joe Kiger is quoted as saying: "People put an awful lot of faith into corporate America." How do we, in our communities, congregations, and families, misplace our own faith and place that in things and entities that are not appropriate?

¹ National Public Radio, March 6, 2018, "After Decades of Air Pollution, A Louisiana Town Rebels Against a Chemical Giant" and ProPublica, October 30, 2019, "Polluter's Paradise: Welcome to 'Cancer Alley,' Where Toxic Air is About to Get Worse."

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- Mark Ruffalo is quoted as saying: “What we are talking about is the power of the individual to affect massive change, with the help of a community.” How can we, as a faith community, work in solidarity with the broader faith community and other communities on environmental health and other environmental issues? What is the role of the faith community in efforts to care for creation and protect communities from toxic pollution and other environmental hazards such as climate change?
 - Wilbur Tenant was angry at the injustice of the situation both for himself, his family and his community. How can we use anger as a motivator to address injustice?
 - Tom Terp is in a place of power in the law firm that allows his own moral compass to support the work of Rob Bilott. How can we, in places where we hold power, follow his example of using our own power for good?

FAITH REFLECTIONS

FORBIDDEN FRUIT

In the Old Testament, Adam and Eve are faced with a choice about whether to eat fruit from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. Their choice to eat of the fruit causes grave and immediate consequences. According to the Jewish Hasidic traditions, the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil showcased that although we may know the right thing to do we may still not act in rightness. How does this story about the “forbidden fruit” echo in the DARK WATERS story and what we know about PFAS? What promises are made about PFAS? What consequences are we experiencing from our use of PFAS?

A WORLD RENEWED

Deuteronomy 30 and Matthew 6:10, 15:15 present the assurance of a renewed landscape—both on the earth and in our being. In Deuteronomy God restores what is lost. In Matthew, we proclaim a new heaven and new Earth. The Earth is included in the promise declared in Matthew and the land and animals are included in the return to abundance in Deuteronomy. How then do we move from the living of “now” to living the fulfillment of the vision outlined in the Old and New Testament? How do we make a conscious journey to a state of fullness of life? What is causing death and sickness among us? How do we bring about the fullness of life within our own contexts and livelihoods?

CLOSING PRAYER

Don't merely expect to find or to believe that life is worthwhile; make it worthwhile. Don't merely see life whole; make it whole. Not knowing which should come first, to improve one's self or to improve the world, we end up doing neither. Actually, the only way to improve the world is by improving one's self, and the only way to improve one's self is by improving the world.

-Rabbi Mordecai M. Kaplan

TAKE ACTION

- 1) Minimize packaged food including microwave popcorn and fast foods, which can contain PFAS.
- 2) Use cast iron instead of non-stick cookware.
- 3) Avoid items that have been treated for water, stain, or dirt repellency, or fire resistance such as some furniture, carpets, and clothing. Instead, buy products with natural fibers such as cotton or wool, which are naturally fire-resistant.
- 4) Conduct a Toxic Inventory at Church. Hunt down chemical usage in your church by making a list of chemicals used to clean the buildings, maintain the property, and serve foods at fellowship meals. Research the effects these chemicals have on the environment and people. Present your findings, as well as safe alternative suggestions, to your congregation.
- 5) Contact policymakers and urge them to:
 - a) Expand monitoring for PFAS in our food, air, water, and bodies.
 - b) End the use of PFAS in packaging, food handling equipment, and cookware
 - c) End sewage sludge applications on farm fields when PFAS has been detected and update EPA's "sludge rule" to require testing
 - d) Designate PFAS as "hazardous substances" to expedite cleanup of PFAS contamination
 - e) Quickly set cleanup standards for PFAS in tap water and groundwater
 - f) End ongoing PFAS releases into the air and water



TAKE ACTION: Urge Congress to Regulate PFAS

Send a letter to your Member of Congress and the Administration.

SAMPLE LETTER

As a person of faith concerned about human health, God's creation and the common good, I am alarmed by the presence of "forever chemicals" in our food and water. These chemicals have been linked to serious health risks like cancer and thyroid disease. I urge you to use your voice and vote to enact safer environmental protections and work to remove "forever chemicals" from our products, waterways, and food.

Sincerely,



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