

A photograph of two men walking away from the camera on a set of railroad tracks that stretch into the distance. The scene is set at sunset or sunrise, with a warm, golden light filling the sky and casting long shadows on the tracks. The man on the left is wearing a dark jacket and pants, with his hands on his hips. The man on the right is wearing a dark jacket and jeans, gesturing with his right hand as if in conversation. The background shows a hazy landscape with trees and fields.

SPECIAL NEEDS DISCUSSION GUIDE

An unexpected journey. An unexpected friendship.

where hope grows

Developed in collaboration with Young Life Capernaum

WHERE HOPE GROWS – DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR LEADERS

Suzanne Williams and Pam Harmon, Young Life Capernaum

Discussion One- More Alike Than Different

Intro Questions

- When do you interact with people with disabilities?
- In what ways have you found that you are alike?
- What qualities can you name in the people you know who are affected by disabilities that are gifts and abilities rather than dis-abilities?
- How does it feel to think of people with disabilities in ways that emphasize how they are like you or in ways that they are gifted?

Scripture

I Corinthians 12:14-20, 27

When we are part of the Body of Christ, we all have a place and reason for which God has put us together.

If we assume that the Bible is written for everyone and is true,

- Did God intend that every part of the body look alike or serve the same function?
- Why is diversity needed?
- What are some of the parts of the Body that you see represented in the group of you that are discussing this together?
- What are some ways in which you could value one another better?
- How would you live differently if you believed that God has placed you in the Body just as God wants you to be?
- What if this is true for people who learn differently than you do or walk or talk differently than you do?
- What is one thing that you could do differently this week in order to value the parts of the Body that look different than you?





God tells us that though our actions may be different, we need one another in order to be whole. It's easy to look at others and judge their worth, but Jesus' calls us to bring our eyes away from judging and to see the similarities between us and to see the ways in which we need those that we see as different from us.

Let's watch a video about some people with disabilities who talk about their gifts and abilities.

Video

https://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=-cA3t1HW1Ow

Discussion Questions

- What surprises you about this video?
- If you were to see one of these people in your school, would you have thought any of these things to be true about them?
- What things did these people mention that are similar to you?
 - Sports fans, American Idol fans, Loving exercise, Going to College, Wanting to be skinny....
- Think back to "Where Hope Grows" and in what ways are you similar to Produce?
- After watching both this video and Where Hope Grows, how has your understanding of people with disabilities been challenged?

Response

- Who, in your school, is different than you from an outward appearance?
- Look for opportunities in the next two weeks to find ways that you are "more alike than different" from one or two of those people.



Discussion Two- Invited, Celebrated and Needed

Intro Activity

Play ROYALTY CARD GAME

Use a deck of cards. Beforehand separate out enough 2,3,4,7,8,9,J,Q,K so that you will have only those to hand out to the people participating.

Tell them the rules are:

- Pick a card.
- DON'T look at it.
- When you say to begin, hold the card face out on their forehead so everyone else can see it.
- They are to try to make friends with the J,Q, K holders and avoid the 2,3,4 card holders. You will give them 2 minutes to make as many friends as they can without telling anyone what their card actually is. Show them an example of how you would go up to a K and say, "What's up" and try to hang out with them. And how you would turn your back and walk away from a 2.

Then pass out the cards.

Say "Start". Give them a couple minutes to mill around.

Say "STOP" and ask them still to NOT look at their card but to split up into the group that they think they are in. 2,3,4 in one part of the room/ 7,8,9 in one part of room/ J,Q,K in another part of room

They will be right, Point that out to them.

In 2 minutes they were able to classify themselves by how people treated them.

How do you think it might feel to be someone that the world classifies as a low number for their whole life?

We want to treat every person who attends our events/church/youth group like a king or queen.

Scripture

Luke 14:15-24

Jesus is speaking at the banquet table and encourages them to go to the “roads and country lanes” to invite everyone in to the table.

Imagine the scene and what everyone may have been feeling or experiencing.

- How do you think the disciples felt when Jesus sent them out to get others?
- Do you think they were comfortable around people with varying disabilities?
- Why do you think Jesus wanted the “blind, the lame, the poor” to fill the table?
- What do you think the table looked like once it was filled?
- How do you think the people with disabilities reacted when they got to the table?
- What do you think the reaction may be have been from the people who made excuses and didn’t come to the table? (oxen, too busy, too tired)

Discussion Questions

Think back to “Where Hope Grows” and consider the characters as you share together about these questions.

- What kind of excuses did Calvin make to not interact with Produce at the beginning of the movie?
- Tell us what you think about the manager of the grocery store. In what ways did he welcome Produce, and yet what kind of excuses did he make when not fully including Produce? Did he treat him like a number 2 card or a King card?
- How did Colt treat Produce throughout the movie? Share some specific examples.
- What was different about Amy and how she interacted with Produce?
- In what ways did we see how Amy and Produce’s lives intertwined?

- How did Produce treat each of these characters?
- Which character was the most inviting to Produce?
- Which character celebrated Produce and when?
- How was Produce needed in the story?

Response

- Think of a time in your life where you treated someone based upon appearances.
- Think of a time in your life where you treated someone like a king or queen (like the game we played at the beginning). How did you feel after this and how did it change your relationship with this person?
- If Jesus pushed the disciples to go out and invite people with disabilities to the table, what would it look like for us to do the same?
- In the next week, how can you celebrate someone in your life that is different from you?
- How might someone with a disability be needed in your story? It may or may not be as drastic as Calvin's story, but consider the impact.

Discussion Three- How He Loves Us

Intro Question

- What are some of the ways in which you worship God?

Scripture

Mark 12:41-43

Jesus watches the crowd give their offerings at the temple. Many rich people give and also a widow approaches the offering table and throws in two coins. Jesus commends her gift.

- What do you think the crowd thought about this woman?
- How did the rich people view what she had to give?
- How did Jesus view what she had to give?
- What do you think the disciple's response was to Jesus' teaching?

Video

<http://vimeo.com/109597317>

Discussion Questions

- What surprises you about this video?
- Would you have the courage to sing in front of hundreds of high school kids if your voice sounded like Joe's?
- How did Produce show this same confidence in the movie?
- Share about a moment in "Where Hope Grows" where you were surprised by Produce's courage.
- Why do you think Joe and Produce were confident enough to do what they did?
- How are Joe and Produce similar to the widow that we read about in Mark?

Response

- Tell us about a time where you gave all you had to give, like the widow and like Joe and Produce?
- What is an area of your life where you can ask God for more freedom?
- What is something in your life that you have taken the credit or glory for, when it was really God's to have?
 - How can you change your response to that and give the credit to God, the way that Joe and Produce do?



NOW WHAT?

Here are some statistics that may surprise you:

- According to the World Health Organization (2011), more than **one billion people** around the world have a disability.
- This population **leads the nation in homelessness and poverty**.
- 18 million people in the world **need wheelchairs and don't have them**.
- There are **54 million Americans** with disabilities.
- **20 percent of the teen population** has a disability.
- Only **10 to 15 percent churches** in the United States **have a disability ministry or are planning one**.

Often we don't even see people with disabilities around us because they may not have been invited to join in the activities in which we are participating or maybe they don't have transportation or friends to enable them to join in. One would think that everyone that would like to attend church would be able to do so, and yet statistics tell us that 70% of parents of children with disabilities considered congregation-wide disability awareness to be among the most helpful efforts faith communities could undertake.* It takes more than building a ramp into the building, we need to build relational ramps too.

How to begin*:

- Gather a small team of ministry leaders, family members, people with disabilities, and others to pray and to consider in which programs and activities people with disabilities are participating in the life of your congregation.
- Educate church volunteers and staff about how to talk respectfully about disabilities and to communicate effectively with people with disabilities and their families. Be sure that needed supports are available so that everyone might be welcomed.
- Initiate a congregation-wide survey to find out who in your community is impacted by disability and how you might best support them.
- Emphasize themes of welcome, inclusion, and accessibility within congregational brochures, websites, bulletins, and other materials.
- Find out what resources related to welcoming people with disabilities are available within your own denomination or faith tradition. Let leaders and others in your congregation know about these resources.
- Periodically offer training in disability etiquette. Promote people-first language and positive views of disability in all of your communications.

*Many of these ideas come from The Congregational Practice Guide Full reports of their project findings will be posted at kc.vanderbilt.edu. For questions about the project or associated research, contact Erik Carter, Associate Professor of Special Education, at erik.carter@vanderbilt.edu.

For Further Information Here are Recommended Books:

Disability & The Gospel - How God Uses Our Brokenness to Display His Grace - Michael S. Beates

Including People with Disabilities in Faith Communities - A Guide for Service Providers, Families, and Congregations - Erik W. Carter

Amplifying Our Witness - Giving Voice to Adolescents with Developmental Disabilities - Benjamin T. Conner

same lake different boat - Coming Alongside People Touched by Disability - by Stephanie O. Hubach

Gospel Light's Special Needs Smart Pages - advice, answers & articles about ministering to children with special needs - Joni and Friends

Beyond Suffering Study Guide - A Christian View on Disability Ministry - Joni Eareckson Tada & Steve Bundy

Wrestling With An Angel - A Story of Love, Disability and the Lessons of Grace - Greg Lucas

Accessible Gospel, Inclusive Worship - Barbara J. Newman

Adam God's Beloved - Henri J.M. Nouwen

Special Needs Ministry for Children - Creating a welcoming place for families whose children have special needs - Pat Verbal

The following organizations would love to connect and support you and your church in this journey:

Ministries that would love to connect:

For children/families/churches/respite care:

Joni and Friends www.joniandfriends.org This ministry is dedicated to extending the love and message of Jesus Christ to people who are affected by disability around the world. They will help your church become more inclusive as they reach out to individuals and families affected by disabilities.

CLC Network www.clcnetwork.org CLC Network promotes the development of people with a variety of abilities and disabilities to live as active, integrated members of their communities. They partner, provide consultation and training with families and organizations to understand

more fully the individuals we serve and to build support systems that enable their inclusion in all aspects of life.

99 Balloons www.99balloons.org 99 Balloons Inc. was founded in 2007 to serve as a non-profit umbrella organization. rEcess was the first 99 Balloon's initiative. The capitalized "E" in rEcess is no mistake. The Mooneys were on the receiving end of much help and assistance from others that enabled them to better care for their son Eliot, and that is what this night is all about- serving families in ways that help them better care for their children. 99 Balloons has grown to become an organization that helps others engage children with special needs locally and globally.

Specifically for teens with and without disabilities:

Young Life Capernaum <http://bit.ly/1E1dEED> Young Life is deeply committed to the idea that all teenagers have the right to experience the abundant life God intended for them. This includes meaningful relationships, fun, adventure and acceptance. Young people who need assistance can and should participate fully in activities that build self-esteem, challenge their limits and help them discover their abilities to do new things. And all adolescents deserve the opportunity to explore a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and to grow in their faith. Young Life Capernaum, which started in 1986, is an outreach of Young Life with teens and young adults with developmental and/or intellectual disabilities. The goal of Capernaum is to give kids with disabilities the same opportunity to hear the Gospel and experience the gift of life as able-bodied kids. To find the closest Capernaum ministry to you, or if you may be interested in helping to start a Capernaum group, please contact:

Contact Information for Young Life Capernaum

- Vice President — **Pam Harmon**
- Eastern Division — **Brad Mowry**, Eastern Coordinator
- Midwest Division — **Lyn TenBrink**, Midwest Division Coordinator
- Northwest Division — **Jodi Green**, Northwestern Coordinator
- Southern Division — **Suzanne Williams**, Southern Division Coordinator
- Southwestern Division - **Christen Morrow**, Southwestern Division Coordinator





“Where Hope Grows is a great film about friendship, redemption and love. Powerful message with lots of themes for students to talk about.”

– *Josh Griffin, co-founder of DownloadYouthMinistry.com
and High School Pastor of Saddleback Church*

A full-page photograph of two men walking away from the camera on a railway track. The track is made of wooden ties and metal rails, leading into the distance. The man on the left is wearing a dark jacket and cargo pants, with his hands on his hips. The man on the right is wearing a dark jacket and jeans, gesturing with his right hand. The sky is a mix of orange, yellow, and grey, suggesting a sunset or sunrise. The overall mood is contemplative and hopeful.

YOUTH DISCUSSION GUIDE

An unexpected journey. An unexpected friendship.

where hope grows

WHERE HOPE GROWS – DISCUSSION GUIDE

Joel Mayward

Introduction and Synopsis

Former professional baseball player Calvin Campbell is sleepwalking through his life. The father of teenage daughter Katie, Calvin spends most of his time drinking with his buddies and trying to forget his past faults. His spiral into self-destruction is slowly turned around through a newfound friendship with a grocery store clerk with Down Syndrome named Produce. Happy and content, the cynical Calvin is awakened to a new outlook through the eyes of an unlikely mentor. As Calvin and Produce grow in their friendship, Calvin is forced to confront his various flaws and struggles and seek redemption. His faith and confidence are put to the ultimate test when a painful accident affects every person in Calvin's life, and Produce's future hangs in the balance.

Where Hope Grows is a story of redemption, healing, and the unlikely relationships God brings into our lives. This discussion guide is meant for small groups, youth groups, and families to use when watching this film. As you use this guide to foster discussion about the themes and ideas presented in *Where Hope Grows*, we hope you have an open mind and heart. There are different portions of the guide, including **Activities** for movement and play, a **Discussion Guide** for having a conversation about the overall themes in the film, a **Dive Deeper** section as a short devotional with a passage of Scripture, and a **Parent's Guide** offering questions for parents to discuss with their children as a family.



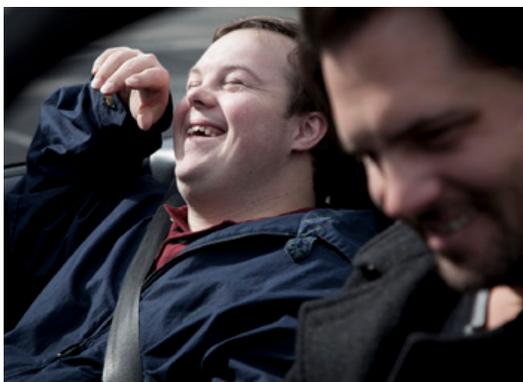


Activity #1: Living Room Baseball

Calvin teaches Produce how to hit a baseball using fruit and a broomstick (he later takes him to the batting cages). Play your own version of indoor baseball using some simple supplies:

- A rolled up newspaper or magazine, or a large cardboard tube used for wrapping paper. (the baseball bat)
- A large balloon (the ball)
- A bucket or bowl
- 4 pieces of construction paper or small cones (bases)

How to Play: After setting up the four pieces of paper or cones as the bases, the batter tosses the balloon into the air and hits it with the bat (rolled-up paper or cardboard tube). When the ball is hit, the batter must run to first base. The outfielder(s) must get the hit balloon into the bucket or bowl, set on the floor in the center of the room at the “pitcher’s mound.” The runner is “safe” if they are touching the base before the ball is placed in the bowl; they are “out” if they are not touching a base. When a runner makes it around all four bases and touches home base, they score one point. An on-base runner does not have to run when a ball is hit. Each base can have multiple runners on base at a given time, and runners can run all at once or one at a time after the ball is hit. There is no stealing bases or leading off. There are no limits for outs, strikes, or balls; each player on a team gets one opportunity to hit, then teams switch. Play three innings.



Activity #2: Is it a Fruit?

Produce shows a lot of knowledge of the fruits and vegetables in his store, and he knows the differences between the two. Take this quick quiz with your group and see if you can tell the difference. Simply ask aloud “fruit or vegetable?” and ask people to vote for one or the other by a show of hands. You might be surprised!

1. Apple (Fruit)
2. Carrot (Vegetable)
3. Celery (Vegetable)
4. Tomato (Fruit)
5. Rhubarb (Vegetable)
6. Olive (Fruit)
7. Butternut Squash (Fruit)
8. Potato (Vegetable)
9. Cucumber (Fruit)
10. Okra (Vegetable)
11. Avocado (Fruit)
12. Cauliflower (Vegetable)
13. Pumpkin (Fruit)
14. Coffee (Fruit)

Discussion Questions

Produce asks Calvin, “Do you think I’m smart?” What would you tell Produce if he asked you? What is the difference between being smart and being wise?

Calvin comes to Produce to ask about his secret to being so happy all the time, and discovers that Produce always carries around a large Bible and goes to church. “Is this your secret?” he asks. Produce replies, “It’s no secret!” Why do you think Produce responds this way? How might the Bible and church be considered a way to finding happiness? Have you experienced any joy from either the Bible or church? Why or why not?

Why do you think Calvin initially befriends Produce? What are his motives—good and bad—that prompt him to spend more time with Produce?

Describe Katie and Colt’s relationship. Why do you think Colt continues to spend time with Katie? Why do you think Katie keeps hanging out with Colt?

In a scene at Calvin’s home, Produce asks him, “Do you want to come to church with me?” Calvin replies, “...No,” but ends up giving Produce a ride. Have you ever invited someone to come to church with you? What was their response? How did you feel about making the invitation? What are some obstacles that prevent us from inviting people to church?

Calvin finally chooses to give up alcohol and attend his first Alcoholics Anonymous meeting. What situation prompts him to repent? Why does it seem to take “hitting bottom” for people to choose to turn their lives around?

Characters use different labels to describe Produce—some call him a “retard,” some say he’s “different” or “disabled,” others say he has Down Syndrome, and some never give him a label at all. What labels do you think are best? Which labels are not appropriate?

At the hospital, Katie and Calvin pray for Produce and Milt. Katie asks Calvin, “What good is it to pray if you don’t get what you ask for?” How does Calvin answer her question, and would you be satisfied with his answer? How would you answer the question? What do you think is the purpose of prayer?

At a funeral service, the pastor says to “make your dash count,” to live your life to the fullest. Who is someone you know who is making their dash count? How can you tell? What are key elements needed to live a full life? What are the dangers or costs of not “making your dash count?” Who makes their dash count in the film?

Who or what “saves” Calvin? What relationships bring about his transformation, and what realizations does he make in order to grow?

Where is God in Where Hope Grows? Describe how He is portrayed in the film, and each character’s relationship with Him.

Think about the story and themes in the movie: what is the primary message of *Where Hope Grows*? What scenes or characters support this message?

What do you think will happen with each of the characters beyond the end of the movie? Imagine and describe a future for Calvin, Katie, Produce, Amy, and Colt—what will the next year hold for them?

Which character did you relate with the most—Produce, Calvin, Katie, or another character? Why do you think you felt a connection with that character? Which character did you dislike the most? What bothered you about them?

Why do you think the movie is titled “Where Hope Grows?” Discuss how you see the growth of hope throughout the story. Who or what is the source of hope?

How has watching *Where Hope Grows* changed or altered your perspective on people with Down Syndrome? What steps could you take to love and support people with Down Syndrome in your neighborhood or community?

Who are some people with special needs in your life? What have you learned about life and about yourself from knowing this person?

How does your school welcome and serve people with special needs? Your church? Your neighborhood?

Parent's Guide (For Parents and Families)

Calvin and Katie have a strained relationship at the beginning of the movie. What are some of the sources of their tension or the obstacles that prevent them from a healthier relationship? Describe how Calvin might be frustrated with Katie, then describe how Katie might be frustrated with Calvin.

In a key scene, an embarrassed Katie must pick up a drunken Calvin from the police station. She tells him "I've given up on you." What would you want to say to Calvin in this moment? What would you say to Katie?

At the beginning of the film, Calvin is a distant and dysfunctional parent. What does it look like to "honor your father and mother" if they are acting irresponsibly? Do you think Katie honors her dad or not?

What lessons does Calvin learn from his daughter? What does Katie learn from her dad? What are some things your children have taught you about life?

As a side plot, Milt and Sue host their friend, Frank, in their home. This ends up leading to a potential affair between Frank and Sue. What were the mistakes or faults of each character (Milt, Sue, and Frank) that led to the situation? If you were their friends, what advice or counsel would you give them? How can you take steps to protect your own marriage and family in this area?



Calvin is a single parent struggling to keep his small family afloat. What are some difficulties or stresses that are unique to being a single parent? A child in a single parent home? How could you and your family support single parents in your neighborhood and community?

Do you or your family know anyone with Down Syndrome? What would it look like for your family love and support people with Down Syndrome? What are some practical steps you could take together?

Who is someone you know with special needs? How does knowing them impact you and your family? What have you learned as a parent from knowing this person?

What language or labels are used in your family regarding people with special needs? What are some labels your family agrees upon? What are some labels your family will not use?

How can your family welcome and serve people with special needs? What are the obstacles people may have to knowing and serving people who need special attention or care?

Dive Deeper: Romans 5:3-5

At some point, we all begin to think about our future, what we will become, what will happen to us. We do this because we don't know what's going to happen. Will I ever fall in love? Will I get married? Will I have a good job? Will I be rich or poor? Will I change the world? Will I be happy? When will I die? Ultimately we are asking the question, what does my future hold?

The scary part about this question is that, to some degree, we know the answer: we will die. It's the greatest common denominator: whether it's tomorrow or 100 years from now, our bodies will pass away. With this knowledge that we will eventually die, we generally have two views about our future:

First, we can have a pessimistic view. This view is generally filled with despair, a feeling that everything good eventually comes to an end.

Calvin had this view, leading him to alcoholism, isolation, and cynicism about everything around him. Saying that we don't really care about the future is not a neutral view. It's pessimism, saying that the future is not worth thinking about, not worth planning for, not worth valuing.

It's pretty easy to have a pessimistic view of the future. Let's be honest, if our past and present circumstances are any indication, how can our future be any better? We see pain and suffering all around us in our world; how can we have any other view?

But the second view is optimistic. This view says that the future has something for us, something good is coming our way, that there is hope. And hope is what keeps Produce filled with an infectious joy, even when circumstances shouldn't keep him happy. He has hope for his future—a sense that everything will be okay in the end.

What gives Produce hope? We can find some insight in the book of Romans chapter five. **Check out Romans 5:3-5:**

Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us. (NIV)

We rejoice in our sufferings? This doesn't make any sense, unless we have genuine hope in our lives. The source of hope described in Romans is a recognition that our present sufferings don't compare with the knowledge of being in relationship with God. In the economy of God, suffering ultimately leads to hope. We can choose to have an optimistic view of the future because we know God is taking care of us and present with us in our circumstances.

This isn't saying, "just put on a happy face even if life is terrible, because God only wants happy people." We don't have to pretend that life doesn't hurt when it does. Instead, this is saying, "Life is terrible right now. And life may even continue to be filled with pain for a season. But it's a season. In the larger story, God is good. God loves me. God is with me. God has not and will never give up on me. I can have hope."



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Near the finale of the film, a pastor gives a brief sermon at a funeral, speaking about the meaning and purpose of our lives. We all have a “dash” between two dates—our date of birth and our date of death. The pastor encourages the listeners to “make your dash count.” The message is clear: our time on this earth is brief, but meaningful, and we are meant to live it to the fullest. We can be overwhelmed by despair and cynicism, or we can choose to live by hope, sharing compassion and goodness with those around us. With our lives grounded in a relationship with God, we can become a voice of hope for others.

Produce was a voice of hope for Calvin. How can you be a voice of hope in our world? We are all looking for some reason to have hope, to have a reason to keep going, to see that we have a sense of purpose and destiny, a reason to see what our future holds. If we have a relationship with Jesus Christ, we have the good news of hope to share with our world. The gospel is a message of hope to a world filled with despair, and we are called to share that hope with those around us.