

FROM
A SEED OF FAITH
GROWS HOPE

JOHN CORBETT
ALL SAINTS

BASED ON THE INSPIRING TRUE STORY
IN THEATERS NATIONWIDE AUGUST 25



STUDENT DISCUSSION GUIDE
JOEL MAYWARD

INTRODUCTION AND PLOT SYNOPSIS

ALL SAINTS is based on the inspiring true story of salesman-turned-pastor Michael Spurlock (John Corbett), the tiny church he was ordered to shut down, and a group of refugees from Southeast Asia. Together, they risked everything to plant seeds for a future that might just save them all.

After trading in his corporate sales career to become a pastor, Michael's first assignment is All Saints, a quaint country church with a dozen members. It comes with a catch: he has to close the church doors for good and sell the prime piece of land on which it sits. While developers eagerly eye the property and the congregation mourns the inevitable, Michael and his family look forward to moving on to an established church where they can put down roots.

But when the church hesitantly begins welcoming Karen (*kuh-REN*) refugees from Burma—former farmers striving for a fresh start in America—Michael feels called to an improbable new mission. Toiling alongside the Karen people, the congregation attempts to turn their fertile land into a working farm to pay the church's bills and feed its newest people.

Jeopardizing his family's future by ignoring his superiors, Michael must choose between completing what he was assigned to do—close the church and sell the property—or listening to a still, small voice challenging the people of All Saints to risk it all and provide much-needed hope to their new community.

ALL SAINTS is a story of how following God's plan is a risky step of faith, one that ultimately leads to the transformation of both individuals and communities. This movie-discussion guide is meant for small groups, youth groups, and families to use before and after watching this film. As you use this guide to foster discussion about the themes and ideas presented in **ALL SAINTS**, we hope you have an open mind and heart. There are different portions of the guide, including:

- **Activity** for setting the tone for a discussion
- **Questions for Discussion** for guiding a conversation about the overall themes in the film
- **Diving Deeper**, a short devotional with a passage of Scripture.

Use any or all of the elements to foster great conversations and further steps of faith!

ACTIVITY #1

TRACTOR PULLING *(for before the film)*

In **ALL SAINTS**, the need for a tractor becomes crucial to keep the church's farm alive. For this fun opening activity, each participant will create his or her own cardboard tractor and race each other in a tractor pull.

SUPPLIES:

- Various sizes of cardboard boxes
- Packing or duct tape
- Scissors
- Green and black paint or markers
- Sturdy rope
- 8-12 cans of food to serve as weights.

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Set up a short racecourse in your context—this can be as long or short, difficult or easy, as you would like.
2. Each person should make his or her own tractor using the cardboard and paint, trying to make the tractor as strong as possible. The tractor should be large enough to hold cans of food, but small enough to be able to carry in one's arms. If you have time, decorate your tractors with the green and black paint or markers. The body of the tractor should still be a box able to carry the cans of food.
3. When the tractors are done, place the cans of food into one of the tractors.
4. Attach the rope to the "front" of the tractor, either by tying it on or via the tape.
5. Holding the rope, take turns racing each cardboard tractor through your designated course and time each person to see how long it takes. If their tractor loses any cans, add 3 seconds to their time for each can lost. Add more tape or cardboard if a tractor isn't sturdy or strong enough.
6. Have fun!
7. As a further step, take the cans of food used for the activity and donate them to a local food bank or shelter.

ACTIVITY #2

CONNECTING COMMUNITIES

In **ALL SAINTS**, there are a variety of different communities that come together across cultural boundaries: the All Saints congregants and the Karen refugee community; the small All Saints Episcopal church and the megachurch Riverview; the Southern town folks of Smyrna, Tennessee and newcomers, the Spurlocks; Christians and Buddhists, along with agnostics and “nones.”

For your own community or neighborhood, do your own version of an ethnographic survey, or the study of a particular people and culture. Here are two experiments you can try, individually or as a group:

1) Notice your neighborhood. This experiment is purely observational; you don't have to talk to anyone! Find a place in or around your neighborhood to sit for 30 minutes; if you want a real challenge, do it for an hour. Find a place where people gather or pass through—a coffee shop, the mall, a grocery store, a sporting event, or for students, before or after school. Sit quietly and write down everything that you see during this time. Don't make judgments or any conclusions—the goal is observation.

GUIDELINES FOR OBSERVING:

- Divide a piece of paper into four sections. Label the sections: *Gender, Age, Race, and Shoe Color*. Write down quick notes under each section.
- Divide another piece of paper into four sections. Label the sections: *Alone/Group, Clothing, Activity, and Time*.
- Keep a tally of each person you see and write as many observations about each under the eight sections. If there's a lull in the action, start observing other things that seem interesting to you. Maybe draw a layout of the place you are at and start to track which door people come in. The point here is just to write down as much of what you're seeing as possible.

The purpose of this experiment is to become more aware of your neighborhood and community. The Karen refugees were living in Smyrna for awhile before coming to All Saints, yet people hadn't truly seen them before.



2) Serve your community. Do some research and learn about all of the different organizations that are currently in your region. Come up with a big list of all the different places who are currently serving the community in your context. Then prayerfully choose an organization to partner with—a rescue mission, a refugee resettlement group, a counseling center for at-risk youth, etc.

One organization helping refugees worldwide is **World Relief**. Visit their website, www.worldrelief.org/advocate, to learn how your group can be advocates and take action in serving and loving refugees.



QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

FAMILIAR OR NOT?

Have you ever planted a garden or grown your own food? If so, what was the most difficult part of the process? If not, what has prevented you from doing so?

Have you ever had to move to a brand-new environment—a new city, a new state, a new country? What was that experience like? What was fun or exciting about the move? What was stressful or caused fear?

Have you ever had a meal in the home of someone from another country or culture? What habits or manners were different from what you were used to? What food(s) did you eat? How did the host practice hospitality?

IF YOU WANT TO GO FAST, GO ALONE; IF YOU WANT TO GO FAR, GO TOGETHER.

Michael tells his son, Atticus, “Let’s keep them [the Karen] in our prayers and ask for God’s help.” Atticus replies, “Aren’t you God’s help?” How do you think God answers our prayers? Share a story about a time God sent you help in the form of a person.

Michael tells his wife, Aimee, “God spoke to me.” The bishop later tells him, “Be sure it’s God’s voice.” Have you ever felt like God spoke to you or led you to do something? What are different ways God might communicate to us? How can we tell whether God is speaking or if it’s just in our heads?

Aimee tells Michael, “You can’t be a lone gunslinger; you need to ask for help.” In Western culture, why do we tend to celebrate individuals over and against communities? What are the benefits of doing a project alone, as an individual? What are the weaknesses? What are the benefits of doing a project in community? The weaknesses?

WHAT DID I ASSUME?

The welfare office mistakes the Karen people for Korean and invites the wrong translator. The Karen people are refugees from Myanmar/Burma. Have you ever made an error regarding someone’s race or ethnicity? How did you handle the situation? What are ways to grow in our understanding of different cultures and races?

Forrest goes to Ye Win’s home to offer some gruff advice, but ends up being invited for dinner. Ye Win practices hospitality, even as an immigrant and outsider. What are practical ways to practice hospitality and welcome others into your home or church? Describe some actions and attitudes that show hospitality.

All Saints Church gains the help of nearby Riverview Church. What other church denominations are represented in your area? Do the churches in your area have a relationship of collaboration or competition? Why do you think that is?

When the All Saints community has a farmer's market, some young men offer to help, saying one is a Buddhist and two are "nothing." What is your perception about other faiths or religions? What are some helpful habits to foster healthier relationships with those from other faiths, or no faith at all?

THE ROLES WE PLAY

In **ALL SAINTS**, there are different portrayals of businesses and business leaders. Some are shown as thinking only about their business, while others provide significant help to the All Saints community. How can businesses be a good thing for serving others in God's name? How might business or financial pursuits lead people away from God or serving others?

Michael struggles with submitting to authority figures in the film. How do you respond to authority figures—are you more of a rebel or someone who follows the rules? Do you like to be "the boss" in a situation or would rather someone else took charge?

Some marriages go through difficulty in **ALL SAINTS** due to the stress of the situation. How would you describe an ideal healthy marriage? Make a list of all the characteristics or habits you think are necessary for a solid marriage that can withstand difficult circumstances.

AN ACT OF GOD

Two key scenes feature prayer and rain; in the first, Michael hears God speak, but in the second scene, God seems silent. Matthew 5:45 says that God sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. What might we learn about God's character through these scenes and this verse?

Various characters in **ALL SAINTS** display sacrificial love towards other people. What is a good definition of "love"? What makes an act of love "sacrificial"? How does God demonstrate love towards people in Christ?

Michael takes a risky step of faith by listening to and obeying God's voice. What might God be calling you to do right now? How will you respond to God's voice in your life?

DIVING DEEPER:

THE CHURCH IS A BODY

Question: *If you could have one superpower, what would it be?*

Each of us has strengths, talents, and gifts. Some of us are good at basketball. Some are good at math. Others are great musicians. People can be friendly, great with animals, able to make others laugh, or can solve problems quickly. These are all wonderful gifts. The Bible describes how we all have gifts and strengths, but there are particular ones that God gives for His purposes. There are a few key passages in Scripture that describe spiritual gifts, and the passage we're reading today is one of them.

READ 1 CORINTHIANS 12:12-14

First off, the apostle Paul lays out to the Corinthians a picture of what the church can look like when it embraces the idea of being the body of Christ. Think about this: my body makes up me. That sounds silly and simple, but it's true—without my body, I'm not me anymore. Yet our bodies are made up of millions of little parts and cells that make this "me" even possible. I am one person with one body; yet I am made up of individual organs and cells. When my body's parts work together, they move as one. They all work together as a unified body.

Question: *What would happen if my body parts began to have minds of their own? Imagine a body where the parts stopped working together—what would happen?*

Picture yourself as just one body part, like a giant eyeball rolling around or a single, solitary toe. We couldn't communicate, we couldn't move, and we'd look like something out of a sci-fi movie. We might exist, but we wouldn't truly be alive. Paul actually addresses this:

READ 1 CORINTHIANS 12:15-20

A body without unity begins to fall apart. So it's no accident that Paul uses the image of a body as a metaphor for the church. In **ALL SAINTS**, the entire community comes together—the Karen community, the original members of All Saints Episcopal, Riverview Church, even locals who have no church affiliation. When the church begins to act like a body, valuing the individual parts while serving together as a whole, it comes alive.

Question: *Why is unity in a group so hard to attain? What are common obstacles that prevent this sort of unity in the church?*

Here's the bottom line: we need each other. Yet we often don't think about needing others for help. In **ALL SAINTS**, Michael is used to doing things on his own, being the hero and standing up to the system for what he believes is right. It's only when he finally comes to the end of himself that he realizes he needs others' help and support. He welcomes others into his life, just as they welcome him into theirs.

In a culture that focuses on the individual, the idea that we would actually need another person in the church feels pretty foreign to us. We might think, "I may want these friendships, I may like some of these people, I can hang out with some once a week on a Sunday, but I don't need them." Yet Paul suggests in 1 Corinthians that we can't fully function without each other. We're incomplete without the entire body of Christ. And this body extends beyond just my own local church—it includes all the churches in our town, in our nation, and across the world. In meeting Ye Win, Michael found a friend in Christ with a faith even greater than his own.

Question: *What are some ways to build greater friendships between different local churches and Christian communities in our city?*

READ 1 CORINTHIANS 12:21-26

Paul suggests that it's okay to be different from one another. The church of Jesus is marked by unity, not uniformity. So often in church, when someone walks in the door who doesn't look like us, doesn't like the same activities, doesn't dress the same, doesn't fit the mold, we secretly reject them. It's so easy to divide people into categories of "us" and "them." If you're not one of "us," then you must be one of "them," and we fear what is different. God turns this idea on its head, saying "You need to embrace one another because you're different, and you're all loved in Christ." The church should be the most diverse group of people in existence, because the mission of God requires saving a diverse world.

In the body of Christ, we all have something to offer. A body doesn't look at the various parts and judge them just because they are different. The stomach doesn't see at the arm and say, "Hey, you're not a stomach, so you're just not as great as me." Similarly, we can't look at ourselves and say, "I have nothing to offer because I'm not _____ enough." God has said otherwise: He thinks you're valuable to the body and has given gifts for you to use. This body of Christ is invited to be on mission with God to serve and love others in tangible ways. Let's put our body into practice!

Question: *What are ways you as an individual can use your gifts to serve others? What are ways your small group/youth group/family can practice love and justice in your local context beyond the church walls?*

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