

**ONE DREAM
CAN CHANGE THE WORLD**

SELMA

C O M I N G S O O N

**FAITH & FAMILY
DISCUSSION GUIDE**



ORDINARY MAN, EXTRAORDINARY FOCUS

So if you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth, for you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.

– Colossians 3:1-3



Towards the end of Selma, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and his fellow civil rights champions prepare for their march from Selma to Montgomery. Dr. King meets with Jim Doar to talk about the route and safety concerns. In their conversation, Dr. King tells Doar that he's just an ordinary man focused on what God wants.

We often idolize great historical figures like Dr. King, and rightly so. Without their vision, leadership, and determination, the world might be a drastically different place. However, Selma reminds us that Dr. King was indeed an ordinary man: he laughed, he cried, he loved, he was a husband, a father, and a friend. But Dr. King kept a laser focus on justice and helped create a more equal and just world, a world that more closely resembles the kingdom of God.

We are surrounded by distractions. We worry over and obsess over things that will ultimately pass away, all the while ignoring what really matters in life. Selma and the life of Dr. King encourage us to discern what really matters in life and to keep a determined focus on it. Maybe, just maybe, we can make the world a better place too.



Questions for Discussion

1. Have you ever felt extraordinary? If so, what did you do or what happened to you that made you feel this way?
2. What is or should be important in your life? How do you maintain your focus on those things? What distracts you from them?

SACRIFICING FOR OTHERS

“This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you.”

– John 15:12-14



The opening scene of *Selma* sets the tone for the rest of the film and beautifully sums up Dr. King’s life. Dr. King and his wife Coretta are in Norway to accept the Nobel Peace Prize. In their luxury hotel room, Coretta helps Dr. King put on his formal attire. Dr. King expresses his feelings of guilt over this comfortable reprise while other civil rights workers are suffering back home. For a moment, he and Coretta talk about the life they could enjoy together. They could move to a small college town where Dr. King could pastor a church and teach classes. Coretta could continue to raise their children. It would be an easier, more peaceful life for sure. Despite the temptation, the two return to the South and continue to struggle for civil rights.

How many of us can say we would have done the same thing? Such self-sacrificial decisions are the stuff of legends and saints. Jesus knew as much when he told his disciples that there is no love greater than a willingness to lay down their lives for their friends. While we often immediately interpret this as a willingness to literally die for someone else, it can also be understood on a much smaller scale. We can lay down our lives daily, in small ways, for others. We can set aside our desires (even though they may be healthy) for the pursuit of a greater purpose, the well-being of others. We might not give up a comfortable life to be physically beaten or outcast, but we can give up small things every day to help someone else.



Questions for Discussion

1. Talk about the ways that other people have sacrificed for you. Who are these people and what have they sacrificed?
2. How do you sacrifice for others? How can you be better at this in your life?

WINNING ANOTHER WAY

“But I say to you that listen, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt. Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again. Do to others as you would have them do to you.”

– Luke 6:27-31



It took three attempts for the civil rights workers to march from Selma to Montgomery. On the first attempt, state and local authorities turned the marchers back with extreme violence: using batons, tear gas, and whips to beat and terrorize them. As the marchers nurse one another’s wounds at a local church, an angry black man proposes a violent response: they will gather up whatever guns they can and retaliate. Andrew Young, one of the legendary civil rights leaders, overhears this and points out the obvious: they are woefully out-gunned and out-manned. For every two authorities they take down, they will certainly lose ten of their own. Young tells him, “We have to win another way.” This other way is the way of non-violence. Though Dr. King and his fellow civil rights workers were not the first group to practice non-violence, they are among some of the most famous non-violent revolutionaries in history.

We live in a violent world and are either explicitly or implicitly told that violent problems demand violent solutions. But it is easy to see, as Young did, that this creates a cycle of violence that will continue forever, unless someone chooses to act non-violently. Choosing to act non-violently is a grave sacrifice. We open ourselves up to great emotional and physical risk. But this other way quickly exposes the evils that plague individuals and communities and makes it nearly impossible for others (and eventually even the powers that be) to keep turning a blind eye.



Questions for Discussion

1. Where do you see cycles of violence around you—in your community, in your region, in the world? Who are the opposing forces? How and why does violence continue?
2. Where do you see acts of non-violence around you—in your community, in your region, in the world? Have you ever acted non-violently in a violent, or potentially violent, situation?

BUILDING A FIRM FOUNDATION

“Everyone then who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock. The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on rock. And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not act on them will be like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell—and great was its fall!”

– Matthew 7:24-27

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No matter how familiar you are with the various facets of the Civil Rights Movement, you will learn something from Selma. The film gives us a very real behind-the-scenes glimpse into one key battle of the Civil Rights Movement, the voters' rights march of 1965. This was no spontaneous revolution. Few ever are. Civil rights workers like Annie Boynton and members of SNCC (the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee) had been laying the groundwork in Selma for years. Even when Dr. King arrives on the scene, they analyze their surroundings, particularly the psychology of their opponents, and determine a proper course of action, which, again, was always non-violent. The civil rights workers laid a firm foundation for direct action.

The efforts of civil rights workers and Selma are helpful instructions on how to confront injustice with not only courage and determination but with proper planning and preparation. If we take time to plan over the long term, to build a firm foundation, we will be better equipped to not only reach our goals but to overcome the unexpected obstacles that get in the way on our journey.



Questions for Discussion

1. Have you ever set a goal for yourself that required long-term planning and preparation? What was it and how did you prepare?
2. When and where have you seen plans fall apart or people fail to achieve a goal? What happened? What could they have done differently to achieve a different outcome?

UNSUNG HEROES

Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot would say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear would say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many members, yet one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you," nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and those members of the body that we think less honorable we clothe with greater honor, and our less respectable members are treated with greater respect; whereas our more respectable members do not need this. But God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior member, that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it.

– 1 Corinthians 12: 14-26



Dr. King is a name that has universal recognition. On the other hand, names like Amelia Boynton, Diane Nash, James Bevel, and Hosea Williams might not. One of the many gifts of Selma is that it celebrates these "unsung heroes" of the movement. It fleshes out the body of the Civil Rights Movement. Dr. King may be the face of that movement, but that face belongs to a larger body that is composed of arms, legs, a heart, and other vital organs.

The "unsung heroes" of the Civil Rights Movement represent the other components of that body. These participants sacrificed so much and often without the accolades or recognition. No doubt there were times when they felt overlooked or undervalued, even by those who sympathized with their cause. Many of us know something of that feeling, even if on a much smaller scale. We may have done something good and have not gotten credit for it or watched someone else get it. We might feel inferior to the leaders that we follow, but we must remember that we all can and do play a vital role in making our world a better place. At the same time, we should persevere knowing that the reward is in doing good itself, not in others' recognition of it.



Questions for Discussion

1. Have you ever felt small or over-looked, but knew in your heart that you were important? Talk about the situation and how you persevered.
2. Have you ever seen a group of people working together as a single unit? Who were they and what was their purpose? How did they work collectively?

SURROUNDED BY A GREAT CLOUD OF WITNESSES

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us.

– Hebrews 12:1



As the march approaches, tensions heat up between the authorities and the civil rights workers. Malcolm X, something of an opponent to Dr. King as well, comes to Alabama for a secret meeting with Coretta. Just before the meeting, Coretta expresses her anxiety about meeting with Malcolm X to her friend Amelia Boynton. Amelia gives her words of encouragement and reminds her of her regal heritage and how she is a descendant of a line of great kings and queens. As a result, she has already been prepared for what lies ahead. She is, in a real way, surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses.

We live in a world that is still plagued by injustices. We are not living the dream that Dr. King envisioned. However, we are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses, both past and present, that remind us of his vision. In a very real way, we have been prepared by the lives that they lived and the lessons they taught. We are descendants of great champions for civil rights of all races, and we should honor their legacy. We should take hope in the strides they made and draw inspiration from their determination and sacrifice. We need to be witnesses for the next generation.



Questions for Discussion

1. What witness surrounds you? Who are the heroes in your heritage? How did they live their lives and what did they accomplish?
2. How will you be a witness for others in your community? What will you be a witness to?