

## Little Miss Sunshine

### A Cinema and Spirit Event

1. What did you enjoy about *Little Miss Sunshine*? Do you think you would have enjoyed it more or less without the features that make it darker than a typical family comedy?
2. *'I absolutely loved the script and also really loved this dysfunctional family who are just learning to get along for the first time. Their frustrations and their yearnings felt very real to me...I found myself laughing and crying at the same time.'* (Toni Collette)  
How did you respond to the family? To what extent do you think their frustrations and yearnings are universal? Which members of the family did you particularly connect with?
3. *'Now there's no sense in entering a contest if you don't think you're going to win. Do you think you can win Little Miss Sunshine?'* (Richard)  
*'A real loser isn't someone who doesn't win. A real loser is someone so afraid of not winning they don't even try.'* (Grandpa)  
How do the various members of the family see success? To what extent do you think they are an accurate reflection of western society? What does success mean for you?
4. **Dwayne:** *I wish I could just sleep until I was eighteen and skip all this crap – high school and everything – just skip it.*  
**Frank:** *You know Marcel Proust? Dwayne: He's the guy you teach.*  
**Frank:** *...he gets down to the end of his life, and he looks back and decides that all those years he suffered, those were the best years of his life, because they made him who he was. All those years he was happy? You know, total waste. Didn't learn a thing. So, if you sleep until you're eighteen . . . Ah, think of the suffering you're going to miss. I mean high school? Those are your prime suffering years. You don't get better suffering than that.*  
What truth is there in what Frank says? How do the members of the family react when their dreams lie in ruins?

*Little Miss Sunshine* is full of dysfunction. Richard is an unsuccessful motivational speaker, Dwayne stops speaking, Grandpa's a coke addict and Frank is suicidal. Even their VW bus is falling apart. For the first part of the film, things only seem to get worse. In their own way, each character must endure the disintegration of their dreams. Their last remaining hope—the thing they looked forward to more than anything else—is suddenly destroyed. As an audience, we watch them react with despair, panic and profanity. But by the end of the film, everyone seems to be laughing and smiling. Their family is closer than they've ever been. By embracing their dysfunction and rethinking their definition of success, they become more hopeful than ever.

It's easy to believe that life should be easy. It seems unfair when we experience pain, failure, discomfort or humiliation. Often we wonder: what's the point of all this? Why do I deserve to be put through this? Why am I the way I am?

The Bible tells us that there's a point to our pain: “Don't shrug off God's discipline, but don't be crushed by it either. It's the child he loves that he disciplines; the child he embraces, he also corrects. God is educating you...He's treating you as dear children. This...isn't punishment; it's training, the normal experience of children...God is doing what is best for us...”<sup>a</sup> In the same way Frank encourages Dwayne with his story of Marcel Proust, God tells us that suffering helps make us who we are. Instead of spending our lives avoiding conflict and pain, we must enter fully into it, learning the lessons only real, hard life can teach. It will be awkward and frightening, but God says, “Don't be afraid. I'll be with you.”<sup>b</sup>

Sometimes we can feel like we're riding through life in a broken-down VW bus. Complaining about it or giving up doesn't get us very far. Instead, we can view difficult times as an opportunity to learn more about ourselves and how we fit into the world around us.

**Thanks for coming! We hope to see you at our next Cinema and Spirit event!**

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a Hebrews 12:5-11

b Isaiah 43:5