

OFFICIAL 2017

# I'll Push You

## Faith Discussion Guide



# Introduction

*I'll Push You* is an inspirational exploration of the true meaning of friendship, generosity, and vulnerability. It tells the story of Justin Skeesuck and Patrick Gray, two friends who embark on an epic journey when Patrick agrees to a crazy proposition, to push his lifelong best friend Justin in a wheelchair across the 500-mile pilgrimage of El Camino de Santiago in northern Spain.

**The result?** A one-of-a-kind documentary film that chronicles a pilgrimage touching audiences worldwide that crave stories of love, hope, hospitality, and the power of community.

*The following pages are a series of conversation starters for discussions of the themes in I'll Push You.*





# The Antidote for Our Times

*When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him.*

*Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying: “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

*Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.*

*Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.*

*Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

*Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”*

**Matthew 5:1-11**



We live in fearful, angry times. Our news feeds are daily doses of anxiety and depression. Our on-line and in-person encounters are plagued by resentment and mistrust. Because of—or in spite of this—we long for a better way, for stronger communities, and sense that there must be more to life than this.

*I'll Push You*, and the actions of the pilgrims in it, are the antidote for our times. Through their journey, Justin, Patrick, the filmmakers, and their fellow pilgrims show how our lives depend on sacrifice not greed, vulnerability not security, community not isolation, and love not fear. While news outlets and politicians profit from making us believe that danger awaits us at every turn, *I'll Push You* reminds us that kindness and hospitality wait around every corner, if we are bold enough to seek it.

If we consider the life and ministry of Jesus, we see an individual who lived in politically, economically, and religiously volatile times. Yet his life and ministry was (and still is) nothing if not an antidote to the suffering and basic difficulties inherent in being human. Much of his preaching and teaching was (and is) counter-intuitive to popular

opinion. Consider who he considers blessed in the Sermon on the Mount: the poor in spirit, those who mourn, the meek, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers, and the persecuted. They will see nothing less than the kingdom of heaven. These aren't the communities that popular culture celebrates. Ironically, many Christians flee from poverty, meekness, mercy, and peace-making.

To be sure, there are very real problems and dangers that threaten our communities. Danger does exist in the world. But the only way to face it is with a self-sacrificial, community and other-oriented worldview and practice.

### Questions for Consideration

1. What do you do when you feel overwhelmed by the news of the day? To whom or what do you turn for comfort?
2. How are you working to be an antidote to the suffering and despair in your community?



# The Two Sides of Sacrifice

*Greater love has no one than this, that  
one lay down his life for his friends.*

**John 15:13**





*I'll Push You* conveys a variety of spiritual and life-changing themes, none of which is as powerful as the notion of self-sacrifice. Patrick's snap decision (born out of a life-long friendship) to lay down his life for Justin is one of the most inspiring elements of the film. It is important to note, however, that sacrifice here is a two-way street. In being pushed and carried and supported along the journey, Justin sacrifices as well. And this is, perhaps, one of the most challenging aspects of the film. Thankfully, there's a complexity to these sacrifices that make them accessible to the rest of us.

We live in a me-centered world. The greatest threat to our local and global communities might just be selfishness and greed, from the individual to the corporate level. The pilgrims on the Camino show us there is a better way...a brighter future. As Christy says, "We are not just here for ourselves." Patrick shows the life-changing power of self-sacrifice. Through his service to Justin, he realizes powerful truths about his own life and the state of his other relationships. Justin shows us the power of vulnerability...of laying down our pride and

desire for independence to let others (and by extension ourselves) flourish in and through love and service.

As people of faith, when we think about selflessness and sacrifice, we often hear the words of Jesus in John, "Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends." Our minds immediately rush to the crucifixion, the ultimate expression of sacrificial love. However, *I'll Push You* encourages us to pause and take a step back to consider the ways in which our daily lives can be composed of countless little sacrifices that build a Christ-like life.

### Questions for Consideration

1. Think about a time when you were overwhelmed by someone's service to you? What did they do? How did it shape your life?
2. In what ways can you practice selflessness in your local and global communities?



# Beautiful Because It's Not Forever

*So I commend enjoyment, for there is nothing better for people under the sun than to eat, and drink, and enjoy themselves, for this will go with them in their toil through the days of life that God gives them under the sun.*

**Ecclesiastes 8:15**



As *I'll Push You* progresses, we hear from various members of Justin's and Patrick's families. They reflect on their life-long friendship, their character, and their respective childhoods, marriages, and relationships with their spouses and children. In one scene, Justin's wife Kristin talks about the early days of their relationship and her desire to stay with and marry Justin in spite of his diagnosis. She says, "To find someone that you're so happy with and you have so much in common with and then to say, 'But it's not going to be forever, and it's going to have an end point...'".

Kirstin's choice and her relationship with Justin are profound examples of both marital love and partnership and what it means to be human. Whether we enter into a new dating relationship or walk down the aisle with a spouse with whom we want to spend the rest of our lives, we do so knowing that, one day, that relationship will end. We are all in relationship with an eventual widow or widower. We don't dwell on it, but we *know* it.

While it might seem morbid, this is actually what makes life precious and beautiful. It will come to an end, sooner or later.

At the same time, this is essentially a defining characteristic of being human—we are aware of our own (and others') mortality, at times painfully so, yet we still get out of bed, date, fall in love, marry, have children, go on pilgrimages, and simply and profoundly live. And this recognition of the beauty of life juxtaposed to toil and suffering is even embedded in scripture. Consider the command in Ecclesiastes to eat, drink, and be merry to counter the difficulty of life. There is profound beauty in this tension.

### Questions for Consideration

1. How do you and your family talk about the future? What principles do you hold to that will help you navigate the painful parts of life?
2. Where have you seen new life spring up in the face of loss? What have your own losses taught you?





# Defining Challenges

*My brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of any kind, consider it nothing but joy, because you know that the testing of your faith produces endurance; and let endurance have its full effect, so that you may be mature and complete, lacking in nothing.*

**James 1:2-4**



*I'll Push You* does a masterful job of capturing the beauty and the trials of the Camino de Santiago. They seem to come in equal measure for the pilgrims who take this journey, but adding a wheelchair to the mix ups the ante. From ankle-deep mud to a broken wheel to steep terrain, the way was laborious. More than one person attempts to talk the team out of it. But Justin, Patrick, and the filmmakers press on, meeting every challenge with courage and determination.

Watching the team persevere through the journey brings to mind two truths: in life, challenges define us while we simultaneously define the challenges that we face. At the end of the film, it is clear that the challenges of the Camino have re-defined Patrick, Justin, and their team. They are physically, spiritually, and emotionally stronger. They have new visions and directions for their lives, re-committing themselves to their families and taking on new vocational opportunities.

But they have not been passive in this process. They experience positive change because of the ways in which they shaped the challenges they encountered along the way. Their perseverance embodies one of the most popular verses of scripture, which encourages people of faith to look at trials through the lens of joy, knowing that these experiences mature us and make us whole.

Few of us know the rigors of pushing (and being pushed) across a 500-mile path of rough terrain. But we all know the frustrations of unmet expectations, missed opportunities, and major and minor setbacks. We've all met them with anger and cursing or laughter and joy. It takes a mixture of all these reactions to keep our challenges in life from overwhelming us.

### Questions for Consideration

1. Think about moments in life when you have felt defeated. What happened? How could you have reacted in ways that would have brought about a different feeling or experience?
2. Think about moments of victory in your life. How did you overcome challenges and what attitudes, actions, and emotions carried you through them?



# What is Your Pilgrimage?

*Now every year his parents went to Jerusalem for the festival of the Passover.*

*And when he was twelve years old, they went up as usual for the festival.*

**Luke 2:41-42**





The concept of pilgrimage might be foreign to most of us. Even if you grew up in a religious environment, you likely never took a pilgrimage with your family or members of your faith community. In an increasingly non-religious world, the concept grows stranger every day. The Camino de Santiago is just one of many Christian pilgrimages, and other faiths have their own as well. A pilgrimage even plays an integral part in Jesus' life. Shortly after the verses quoted above, we get a peek into Jesus' understanding of his identity and purpose on earth:

*After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. When his parents<sup>[1]</sup> saw him they were astonished; and his mother said to him, "Child, why have you treated us like this? Look, your father and I have been searching for you in great anxiety." He said to them, "Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?"* **Luke 2:46-49**

Traditionally defined, a pilgrimage is a journey to a shrine or a sacred place or the course of life on earth. This second

definition suddenly universalizes and broadens our understanding of what pilgrimages can be. Whether we call them sacred or not, we all have—or long for—places that have had a profound influence on our lives. These might be a childhood home, a best friend's house, the bar where you met your spouse, a yearly vacation, a baseball stadium, a film festival, or a house of worship. We might not call these pilgrimages, but we revisit them in our minds or with our bodies. Each time we return to them and leave them again, we are different people...older, but hopefully a little bit wiser and stronger.

### Questions for Consideration

1. How can you integrate the practice of pilgrimage into your faith community if it isn't already a part?
2. Name some of the special locations in your life. Where are they and why are they special?





# The Power of Presence

*He said, “Go out and stand on the mountain before the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by.”*

*Now there was a great wind, so strong that it was splitting mountains and breaking rocks in pieces before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a sound of sheer silence.*

*When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave.*

*Then there came a voice to him that said, “What are you doing here, Elijah?”*

**1 Kings 19:11-13**



The notion of presence is a major theme in *I'll Push You*. Patrick and Justin are present to one another. The filmmaking team is present to witness (and share with us) their journey. Fellow pilgrims are present to aid in the journey with their bodies and their spirits. Family members are present at the end of the pilgrimage to welcome the team to the “finish line.”

But there is a deeper understanding of presence at work in the film. Pilgrimages like the Camino force you to be present to yourself. Distanced from the distractions of daily life, pilgrims are forced to take stock of their own lives, their accompanying strengths, weaknesses, challenges, and opportunities. Over the course of the journey, Patrick and Justin are reminded of important lessons about the power of presence, whether it's being a more faithful presence to a wife and children or being faithfully present to others who long to love and serve.

On top of this, the challenge for people of faith is to not only be present to—attentive to—those around us, but to be attuned to God's presence and work in the world, which often comes, as we see in the story of Elijah in 1 Kings, in the silence. But there


is a beautiful synchronicity here: the more we are *truly* present with one another, the more attuned we will be to the presence of God.

### Questions for Consideration

1. Think about your daily life. What are the distractions that derail you or vie for your attention?
2. In what ways do you strive to be more fully present for your family and friends?



# The Necessity of Friendship



*Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil.  
For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow. But woe to him who is alone when he falls  
and has not another to lift him up!*

**Ecclesiastes 4:9-10**



Justin and Patrick's 500-mile journey across the Camino de Santiago isn't the only unique element to their story and the film. The heart of the film and the basis of their journey is their lifelong friendship. *I'll Push You* revels in something that we don't often see in pop culture, authentic adult (and specifically here adult male) friendships.

Growing up can be difficult for a variety of reasons. One of those is the tendency for us to lose touch with our oldest friends. We move away, we marry and have children and pursue careers, or friends pass away suddenly or tragically. For a variety of reasons, we grow apart, and don't have the time or freedom to be with one another as much as we would like.

As adults, there are so many demands on our time, but we can't afford to sacrifice friendships and need to take the time required to nurture them. Scripture reminds us of the importance of friendship, and Jesus even spoke about his followers as friends. We have companions on the journey who lift us up when we fall, share the burdens of life, and give us opportunities to do the same in return. You might not be able

to take an epic five-week trip across northern Spain with your best friend, but you can schedule time each week to connect and journey through life together.

### Questions for Consideration

1. Think about the friend that you have had the longest. Are you still in touch with one another? How do you maintain that friendship?
2. Think about the concept of friendship. Has your definition of a friend changed throughout your life? Do you make friendships differently than you did when you were younger?



# About The Camino

The history of the pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela dates back to the ninth century to the discovery of the body of the apostle St. James. Scholars believe St. James was a great evangelist in Spain at the time during the reign of King Alfonso II (792-842).

Gradually, people started making their way to Santiago to pay homage to St. James at the Cathedral which was built over the site of the tomb. Between the 12th and 13th centuries, the pilgrimage became more established and more popular.

In the last 30 years, in particular, there has been a huge growth and interest in the number of pilgrims traveling on foot, by bike, on horseback, or in our case, by wheelchair!

Although originally known as a Christian pilgrimage, the Camino now attracts people of all faiths and backgrounds, from atheists to Buddhists, adventurers to mourners, and college students to retired friends. Regardless of background, all who take this pilgrimage are transformed in some way when they unplug from the world and live in community together.



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