

**SARGE, SHIRLEY, AND THEIR SON JOE WEST**  
in

**"A SONG CAN  
CHANGE  
A LIFE"**



**A story of  
Reconciliation  
through Music**

**The Previously  
Untold Story  
of Country Music's  
First Black Duo**

**Small Group  
Discussion Guide**

by Warren Matson

## **Suggestions for Film Screening Small Group (60 to 90 minutes)**

**Pre-gathering welcome.** Give a few minutes for small talk. Maybe play some background music. Allow folks to get snacks and get comfortable prior to screening. (10 minutes)

**Open gathering with a short prayer.** Turn off music, thank everyone for coming and offer a short prayer of thanks and asking God to open hearts.

**Serendipity Moment (5-8 minutes)** Choose an **Opening Dialogue Experience**. Consider a suggestion from the list on the next page or create one yourself. The purpose is to break the ice and provide an atmosphere of looking at things from a different perspective.

**Play - A Song Can Change A Life (31min)** Adjust lighting as needed.

### **Take A Five Minute Break**

**Time for Discussion (15-30 minutes)** - Allow for initial reactions to the film. Transition into the 3 or more of the questions you have chosen for discussion.

Introduce each question by reading the description (or as an option, play the selected short clips) for the questions you have chosen to discuss. Encourage the group process wherein people feel safe to share their thoughts and emotions along with encouraging people to listen empathetically and non judgmentally to each other's sharing.

Move in to a closing time of prayer with people offering single sentence prayers followed by group leader closing in prayer.

**Final Prayer Suggestion:** Father, you know our hearts better than we do. We ask for the love of the Spirit to fill our hearts and overflow to others. Help us to recognize the beauty of Your creation in every man, woman and child from every race, tribe and nation. Give us the courage to love and forgive one another even as You have loved and forgiven us. In Jesus name, Amen.

### Opening Dialogue Experience - Choose one or make up your own.

- \* Have you ever been in a situation where you felt extremely awkward because you are a different race than the other people that you were around? What was that like?
- \* **Part 1:** If Martin Luther King Jr, Rosa Parks or another iconic person who advocated for civil rights was with us at this very moment, what would you like to ask him/her? (Wait for a responses.)  
**Part 2:** How do you think the person you choose might answer the question?
- \* **Short End of the Stick** - Before letting the group have access to the refreshments, have everyone in the group blindly picks a stick from a container. (The number of sticks needs to be the same number as the number of people in the group with one stick that has a unique mark on it.). Have the group experience something super fun, but to the exclusion of the person who got the uniquely marked stick. ( need to work out more details of this exercise - For 3 minutes, Pass snacks and share pleasantries but refuse to serve or acknowledge the person with the Uniquely marked stick. The person who chose the unique stick can ask for a snack and try to engage in conversation with others in the group. If anyone does engage the person with the unique stick, other group members need to bring the straying group member back into the fold and to ignore the person with the unique stick). After 3 minutes, explore with the unique stick person how it felt to be left out? And how did everyone else feel leaving that person left out?

**Discussion Questions** - For the optional short clips mentioned in the six questions below, you will find downloadable/playable links to the clips available in the last section of "Host A Screening" on the webpage:  
<https://www.asongcanchangelife.com/screenings>



Sarge used humor during his performance to connect with his primarily White audience. He would ask if the town they were performing in had any Black people. He asked a white man on the stage to come over by him just to see if he could get a white man to do what he asked him to do. He had his White guitar bandmate stand between him and Shirley and said to the audience, "kinda looks like an Oreo Cookie, doesn't it?" doesn't it?"

### Scripture uses humor to teach valuable lessons

**Matthew 7:3-6,26** Why do you look at the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' and behold, the log is in your own eye?

**Matthew 7:6** Do not give what is holy to dogs, and do not throw your pearls before swine, or they will trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces.

**Matthew 23:24** Blind guides, who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel!

### Discussion Questions

#### **How can using humor help or hurt the process of racial reconciliation?**

Like Sarge, we can recognize that problems exist and employ the use of humor as a gentle way of recognizing differences and building bridges without building walls. In the **15th Chapter of Acts** there was a great controversy brewing among God's people. In **verse 10** Peter said to everyone "why do you test God by putting a yoke on the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved in the same manner as they."

#### **What is the best way to deal with differences in the church?**





Sarge and Shirley recorded Ain't It A Shame which began to get some radio play. It speaks to inequities in life. Verse one is about the poor and wealthy. Verse two speaks about an alcoholic father and his neglected child. The Chorus says: "Ain't it a shame the way it hurts to give? Ain't it a Shame the way God's Children live?"

### Scripture speak about being poor and wealthy

**Revelation 3:17** Because you say, "I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing," and you do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked.

**Luke 6:20,21** Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are you who hunger now, for you shall be satisfied. Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh.

**Isaiah 58:10** And if you give yourself to the hungry And satisfy the desire of the afflicted, Then your light will rise in darkness And your gloom will become like midday.

### Discussion Questions

**How is it that some poor people are really rich in life while some wealthy people are really poor?**

**Micah 6:8** He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.

**What is our response to inequities around us? How do we as the body of Christ act with generosity?**



Sean discussed growing up with the fondest admiration for Joe, his siblings and parents. Rather than seeing “a color thing” as a child, he saw his friends with whom he enjoyed mutual respect and a love of playing music together..

### Scripture Gives Us Everyone The Ministry of Reconciliation

**2 Corinthians 5:11-19** Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade men, but we are made manifest to God; and I hope that we are made manifest also in your consciences. We are not again commending ourselves to you but are giving you an occasion to be proud of us, so that you will have an answer for those who take pride in appearance and not in heart. For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God; if we are of sound mind, it is for you. For the love of Christ controls us, or the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died; and He died for all, so that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf. Therefore from now on we recognize no one according to the flesh; even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him in this way no longer. Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come. Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation.

### Discussion Question

**How can we promote healthy relationships in the lives of our children with people of different ethnicity?**



Robin's mother was especially upset at the idea of her daughter marrying an African American man. She feared what family and neighbors would think. Her response initially was to shun her daughter. One night before their wedding, Robin was involved in a roll over accident. Unharmed for the most part, Robin and her mother had a heart to heart talk. While attempting to talk her daughter out of the marriage, and

made speedy progress towards coming to not only accept Joe, but came to love and appreciate him.

### Scripture Speaks of Unconditional Love and Acceptance

Acts 17:24-28 God who made the world and all things in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands; nor is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since He Himself gives to all *people* life and breath and all things; and He made from one *man* every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined *their* appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation, that they would seek God, if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; for in Him we live and move and exist

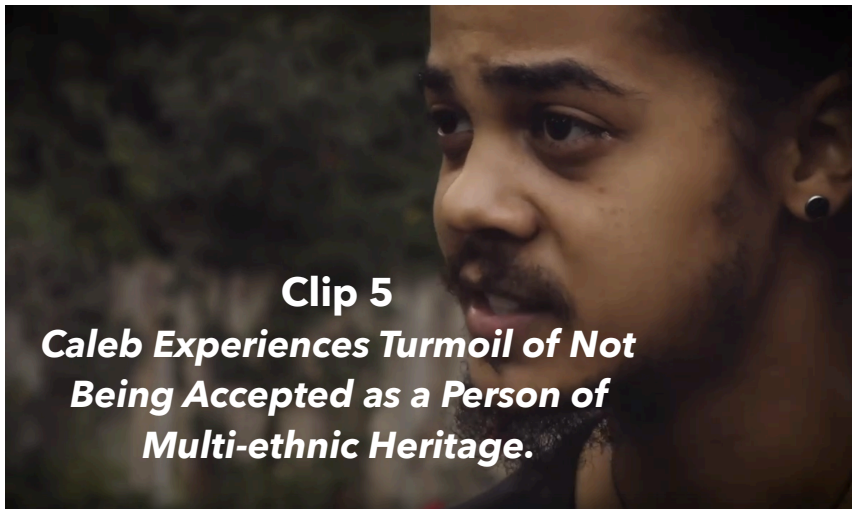
Romans 10:12-13. For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same *Lord* is Lord of all, abounding in riches for all who call on Him; for "Whoever will call on the name of the Lord will be saved.

### Discussion Questions

**What needed to happen for Robin's parents to finally accept Joe and Robin as a couple and move in the direction of celebrating their marriage?**

**Robin's Dad said "...I'm not so much as a racist, but everybody is to some extent...". Do you agree with his statement? Why?**

**What does it take for us to accept and celebrate the image of God in each other?**



### Clip 5

***Caleb Experiences Turmoil of Not Being Accepted as a Person of Multi-ethnic Heritage.***

When questioned by a classmate if he was "full black", Caleb answered with examples that contrasted the white half and black half of his ethnicity. He seemed to never be enough of one race or the other to gain full peer acceptance. Challenging the premise of her initial question, Caleb leaves her a question: "Instead of asking if I am full black', why don't you ask me what my name is?"

### Scripture Which Speaks of the Redemptive Value of All People

Revelation 7:9 I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could count, from every nation and *all* tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes

Matthew 28:19. make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit,

Romans 15:7-11. Therefore, accept one another, just as Christ also accepted [us](#) to the glory of God. <sup>8</sup> For I say that Christ has become a servant to the circumcision on behalf of the truth of God to confirm the promises *given* to the fathers, <sup>9</sup> and for the Gentiles to glorify God for His mercy; as it is written, "Therefore I will give praise to You among the Gentiles, And I will sing to Your name." Again he says, "Rejoice, O Gentiles, with His people." And again, "Praise the Lord all you Gentiles, And let all the peoples praise Him."

### Discussion Questions

**What is it you think Caleb wants the girl in his class to understand about himself and his ethnicity?**

**How would knowing his name change or enhance her response or relationship to him?**





As a young child, Joe develop some resentment toward his father that carried over into early adulthood. After Joe become a father himself, he felt compelled that it was time to express forgiveness for his father. Following in his singer-songwriter father's footsteps, Joe wrote a song entitled Daddy. Joe traveled back home during a vacation and sang this new song to his family. After

finishing the song, Joe and his father, for the first time as adult men, embraced and told each other "I love you." Their relationship was transformed from that time on.

Scripture relates to father/son relationships  
and the importance of forgiveness

**Malachi 4:6** He will restore the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers, so that I will not come and smite the land with a curse."

**Proverbs 10:1** A wise son makes a father glad.

**Ephesians 4:30-32** Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.

### Discussion Questions

**What did Joe come to understand that made it easier to move in the direction of being reconciled to his father?**

**How does a reconciled relationship like a father and son compare to the reconciled relationship between you and God?**

The gospel breaks down every barrier- because Jesus is our peace. He has brought peace between us and God. We now can stand in His presence because of His mercy and forgiveness, not because of anything we have done. He has brought peace between each of us because he now carries the penalty for our sins through the Cross and calls us to a life of generous forgiveness through the power of His Resurrection.