

The Unbreakable Boy

BASED ON A TRUE STORY

This discussion guide is a thoughtfully designed resource that combines the inspirational themes of **THE UNBREAKABLE BOY** with the mission and expertise of **Nathaniel's Hope**. This guide is created to spark meaningful conversations, encourage reflection, and foster understanding within faith-based and autism communities.

Austin reminds us of the value of embracing neurodiversity, showing how unique perspectives can enrich our lives. We need people like Austin in our lives, and should promote greater inclusivity and understanding in a world that sometimes is quick to judge those who are different.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

In light of this verse, reflect on the questions about **THE UNBREAKABLE BOY** below. *"Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive."* 2 Corinthians 1:3-4

What stood out most to you about Austin's story? Was there a particular moment in the movie that really resonated with you?

What can we learn from Austin as he sees every day as "the best day ever"?

How has a painful trial you've faced inspired you to help others?

How did Austin remain resilient and earn the title "The Unbreakable Boy"?

If the grace of God can sustain a boy like Austin, how can God meet you in your brokenness?

Have you had moments where practicing gratitude has made a difference for you in the midst of challenges?





A GUIDE TO TALKING ABOUT DISABILITY

Kids with special needs and their families often feel like they are not seen. All too often they live in isolation and are disconnected even from the Body of Christ. Did you know that in the United States, more than 42 million people have a disability? Around the world, around 1.3 billion people have a disability and 240 million of them are kids.

A person can be born with a disability or acquire a disability through injury, an illness, or a mental health condition. Disabilities can vary. They can be mild, moderate, or severe. Disabilities can impact movement or mobility, vision, hearing, mental health, thinking and learning, communication, and/or social relationships. It is possible to have one or multiple disabilities.

Sometimes you may hear disability referred to in many different terms:

- Special needs
- Varying abilities
- Additional needs
- Extra needs
- Special abilities
- All abilities
- Unique needs
- Kids with differences

Austin is not autistic. He is a kid with autism. He is a kid first. Let's learn how to use people-first language. Always put the person before the disability.

We are all created in God's image. Kids with disabilities are no different. We are all image-bearers of Christ.

How do you personally see people with disabilities? Do you view them as "less fortunate" or do you see them as individuals that God has made in His image, VIPs aka people with Value and Incredible Purpose?

Take a moment and examine your heart. Ask God to help you "see" this community the way He does.

AUTISM IN SIMPLE TERMS

Autism is a developmental condition that affects how a person thinks, interacts, and experiences the world. It is often referred to as Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) because it varies widely in symptoms and severity. Individuals can be low-functioning or extremely high-functioning. Autism is not a disease, but rather a different way of processing information and experiencing life.

People with autism may have challenges with communication and social interactions. They might also display repetitive behaviors or have specific interests.

Sensory sensitivities are common, meaning they may be more or less sensitive to sounds, lights, or textures. Some people will have mild symptoms while others will have severe ones. A person with autism has feelings and can feel love, happiness, sadness, and pain just like everyone else. Every person with autism is unique, with their own strengths and challenges. It is often said that if you meet one person with autism, you have met one person with autism.

Did anything surprise you about Austin and his family's journey with autism?

Are there kids like Austin in your church or community?

What can you do to support them?



LET'S GET PRACTICAL

Now that you "see" this community, you might be asking one of two questions:

- 1. What can you personally do? How can you personally respond?***
- 2. What can your church do to intentionally welcome families affected by disability?***

Everyone needs to be loved and find a place of community and belonging, and it can be lonely for a kid with special needs and their families to find these things. Play dates and party invites are not always freely extended because sometimes fear keeps those around them from reaching out. If we are afraid of what we don't know, then one of the ways to get over our fear is to step out of our comfort zone and get to know someone with a disability.

Many families with a special needs family member live in "survival mode" and find it difficult to reach out and ask for help. Or if they say "help," few may hear them. Your efforts to intentionally reach out and care for them can be critical for their survival. Small acts of kindness can pull a family member out of isolation and bring hope to a weary soul. Simple things can make a big difference.

Take a moment and think about what you could do to join them on their journey.

EMBRACING NEURODIVERSITY IN OUR CHURCHES

We are all created in God's image. There are aspects of the character of God that neurodivergent kids can teach us that neurotypical kids cannot. Neurodiverse kids have diverse ways of thinking, learning, and behaving.

God has created the different parts of the body to teach us. That means every part of the body needs to be present in our congregations in order to function in a healthy and biblical way.

Sadly, that is not always the case in our churches.

Why do you think that is? Disability can make us feel uncomfortable, because we don't understand. We are afraid of what we don't know. We may not feel equipped. We just don't know what to do.

Families have to fight insurance companies, school systems, etc. They should never have to fight for a right to come to church.

Embracing kids with disabilities is not about creating a separate room "for them." When Austin was removed from the typical classroom and placed in a special ed room, he went into depression. He wanted to belong and have opportunities like every other kid.

Though disabilities may vary, the need to be loved, find a community, and know the love of Christ is the same.

Jesus invites all children to come to him.

"Let all the children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these."
Mark 10:14



GIVE THEM A BREAK — Provide a Respite Care Program

One of the greatest needs that families who have kids with disabilities have is to get a break. They can't just call the girl down the street to babysit. Many moms, dads, and grandparents are in caregiver mode 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. The weight and stress of finding proper doctors, teachers, financial resources, and other needs for a child can be overwhelming. Those responsibilities along with daily caregiving to the family, working, etc. make it nearly impossible to find time to care for oneself or relationships. Marriages can bond or the inability to manage the stress and additional pressures may cause them to end in divorce.

Tim and Marie Kuck, co-founders of **Nathaniel's Hope**, share the challenges of raising their son Nathaniel, who was medically fragile and required care 24/7. They began to consider how to practically support other families by providing respite care.

There are so many benefits to providing a Respite Care Program!

- 1. Kids have fun.**
Activities are geared to the needs of kids with varying abilities. They can also find friendship and community with a buddy friend.
- 2. Parents get a much-needed break.**
Help them avoid caregiver burnout. Time can be spent to rest, restore, connect with a spouse, etc.
- 3. It can be a great missions outreach to the community.**
Reach out with the love of Christ to meet a practical need.
- 4. Volunteers are trained** for Sunday morning inclusion.

Nathaniel's Hope provides training online and support, and can help you become a part of the growing national network of churches providing Buddy Break respite care.

You don't have to have all the answers and be perfect. Just start with love.

"Love never fails."
1 Corinthians 13



"Love each other as I have loved you."
John 15:12



**Celebrating Kids with Special Needs,
our VIPs ... of All Ages!**

<https://nathanielshope.org/>

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