

The Difference Maker: A Novel by Steve Teel © 2006 from Very Bold Ministries and verybold.com

Some of the Scriptural themes and references in *The Difference Maker*:

- Matthew 6:25-34 (worry, anxiety)
- Psalm 35 (David asking for God not to be silent)
- Psalm 38 (David's passionate plea for God's help)
- Matthew 6:1-15; Matthew 7:1-5 (hypocrites)
- Romans 5:6-8 (God's grace)
- Revelation 3:14-22 (lukewarm Christian faith)
- Jeremiah 16:20 (false gods)
- Matthew 16:24-26 (call to discipleship)
- John 6:28-29 (Belief in the one God sent)
- Hebrews 9:26-28 (God's judgment)
- Romans 8:31-39 (If God is for us... God's presence)
- Hebrews 2:11-12 (Jesus not ashamed to call us brothers)
- John 7:53-8:1-11 (Christ's grace to adulterous woman)
- Matthew 10:34-36 (Christ causes division)
- Luke 19:1-10 (Jesus came for the lost)

Notes to discussion leaders:

- Adapt this guide to fit your group's dynamics, needs, and time.
- This discussion guide was written with the intent that you could pick and choose the best questions for your group.
- And of course, you will know your group better than anyone and may find it helpful to come up with your own questions and adapt others to fit your group.
- If you want to add an experiential element to your group, experiment with holding your discussion in settings that parallel the story. Below are some possibilities:

Session 1 (chapters 1-4): A church sanctuary

Session 2 (chapters 5-8): A basketball gym, school, or living room

Session 3 (chapters 9-12): A great burger place

Session 4 (chapters 13-16): A Christian club, youth room, small concert venue, or chapel sanctuary, pizza place

Session 5 (chapters 17-20): A Sonic type drive-in; baseball field/bleachers

Session 6 (chapters 21-25): A sanctuary/chapel, an amusement park setting

Session 7 (chapters 26-30): A basketball gym, or a chapel

Session 8 (chapters 31-34): A great burger place, a basketball gym

DISCUSSION SESSION 1 (Chapters 1-4)

Chapter 1

Tommy Maker was a coach who made a difference. Have you had a coach or teacher that made a difference in your life? Who? How was he or she a difference maker?

Tommy Maker was a hero. When you think of an heroic act, what do you think of?

What do you hope you'll be remembered for?

Have you ever grieved the loss of someone? What did the funeral feel like? What do you remember about the memorial service?

Brother sees that his mom looks lost. Has tragedy or difficult circumstances ever shaken your faith, or someone close to you? What happened?

Chapter 2

What nicknames have you had? What's the coolest nickname you've heard?

Jimmy does not want to move to Oklahoma. What place would you not want to move to and why?

Have you ever had to move or change schools? How did you feel when you found out?

Chapter 3

Are you a morning person like Tommy Maker or night person like Jimmy?

Jimmy, Brother and their dad watched Seinfeld together. What TV show or activity do you share with a parent or adult close to you?

Tommy Maker had an extraordinary enthusiasm for life, quite different from his son Jimmy. Explain a personality trait of yours that is different from your dad or a father figure.

Chapter 4

When has it been hard for you to leave some place and start anew? What made it difficult?

Are there specific memories that you won't forget?

DISCUSSION SESSION 2 (Chapters 5-8)

Chapter 5

Brother's cousin Elijah moves to California with his buddies to become a rapper. If you could move anywhere with your friends, where would you want to move?

What does Uncle Will feel about his son, "E", trying a career as a rapper? What do you think E's mom, Linda, feels?

Have you ever wanted to try something a parent did not particularly support? Has a parent ever surprised you by giving you support when you didn't necessarily expect it?

Chapter 6

What do you feel like the night before the first day of a new school year?

Brother describes Southside as his mission field. What do you think that means?

Has anyone ever advised you to stay clear of certain people? How did that make you feel?

How would you feel if Reed showed up at your school and you had heard the same rumors Southside students would hear? Your neighborhood? Your youth group or small group?

Why do you think the principal, Uncle Will, lets Brittany stay at Southside? Why does he let Reed become a student?

Chapter 7

What's it like for Brother, Jimmy, and Mark to walk into Southside that first day, not knowing another student?

How does Brock feel about Brother and Jimmy?

Do you think Brother and Jimmy are intimidated by Brock? Why or why not?

Chapter 8

What helps a new team come together?

When have you really enjoyed a team you were on? Why did you enjoy it? How was it different from a team you really didn't enjoy?

DISCUSSION SESSION 3 (Chapters 9-12)

Chapter 9

What's the best burger you've ever had?

If you could pick out any new vehicle you wanted, which one would you choose?

How do you bond with new friends?

Chapter 10

What makes a good coach?

Ever experienced a coach that coached the joy out of a sport? What was that experience like?

Ever had a coach who yanked you out of the game after one mistake? How did that impact your game performance?

Chapter 11

What is your first impression of Brittany?

What do you think Brittany means when she says there's no safe place for her?

Where do you feel safe?

Chapter 12

How does Brittany feel about meeting Brother's family on their date?

What do you feel when meeting a date's parents or parents of your friends for the first time?

DISCUSSION SESSION 4 (Chapters 13-16)

Chapter 13

Describe Brittany's attitude during the evening? How does it change through the evening?

Brittany admits she is not a Christian and blasts hypocrites at Southside. Do you feel her opinion of hypocritical Christians is fair? Why or why not?

Do you feel Brittany really hopes Brother proves to be a hypocrite? Why or why not?

Brittany asks Brother if he thinks of her as a person or a project. What does she mean and do Christians ever treat non-Christians as projects instead of people?

Smashing Flies drummer Scotty describes sin as garbage that needs to be taken out. How do you think of sin and how should Christians deal with sin?

Chapter 14

Have you seen one of your parents seeming to struggle through hard times? How did it make you feel?

Have you ever been in a chapel or church service where something out of the ordinary happened? What happened?

Why do you think Jimmy wishes Brother would just stay in the background?

Chapter 15

Do you agree with Cindy that God's plans are "puzzling and complicated?" Why or why not?

Cindy describes the Christian faith as inconvenient, difficult, and challenging? Do you agree? Why or why not? What words would you use to describe the Christian faith?

Cindy speaks of her child-like faith as something of the past. Do you feel like you have more faith today than in the past or less? Explain.

Though it's not spoken of directly, it seems Cindy has had some powerful experience with God in the past. Have you experienced God's presence in a meaningful way? If so, do you ever doubt that experience and how?

Do you feel Brother was a comfort to his mom? How?

Chapter 16

Cindy makes cookies when she is stressed. What do you do?

Mark's confidence is down. What factors into an athlete's confidence level being high or low?

Mark treasured sharing the bond of baseball with his dad. Why was it special to him?

Playing catch was therapeutic to Mark. What activity or sport is therapeutic to you and why?

DISCUSSION SESSION 5 (Chapters 17-20)

Chapter 17

Brother believes coach-player relationships are important. How important do you think they are to a team's success?

What hopes and expectations do athletes and coaches have on the first day of practice?

Can you think of a season in which your hopes and expectations were fulfilled? What was that like?

How are pre-season hopes and expectations sometimes derailed during a season?

What is Coach Jack's attitude towards Reed?

What teacher or coach have you noticed really cares about students?

What do you think Reed thought when Coach Jack told him he was giving him an "A" just for showing up?

How do you think Reed's classmates might have felt about Coach Jack's arrangement?

Chapter 18

Brother surprises his friends with a night out. Who would you trust to plan a surprise Friday night for you and your friends?

Do the guys believe Jimmy could become a comedian or do they discourage him? How does their response affect Jimmy?

Why does Brother believe Jimmy could become a standup? How do you think Brother's affirmation impacts Jimmy?

Has a family member or friend ever surprised you by believing in you?

Has anyone ever told you that you don't have what it takes to reach a certain goal? How did that impact you?

Chapter 19

What do you think Mark is feeling when his teammates yell from the bench to "turn around?"

Have you ever prayed during an athletic competition? What did you pray?

What do you think Mark felt about being the benchwarmer, always last in the game?

Was Mark disappointed with his foul ball? Why or why not?

Ever had a "foul ball" experience that still really felt good?

Chapter 20

Brittany says God has never answered her prayers. Have you ever felt like God has been silent to answer your prayers? How did it impact your relationship with God?

Brother himself claims that God has sent him to Brittany. Do you feel like God ever sent someone to you as an answer to a prayer?

Do you believe God has ever sent you to someone as answer to prayer?

DISCUSSION SESSION 6 (Chapters 21-25)

Chapter 21

What do you think of Betty Agnew's attempt to expel Brittany? Is it justified? Why or why not?

What would you say to Betty Agnew if you were the principal?

Do you agree with Principal Will's statement, "lukewarm kids are harder to reach than the Brittany's of the world"?

How do Christians become lukewarm? How can they be "reheated" for God?

Chapter 22

Has a sermon ever made you feel condemned?

Have you ever felt convicted by a sermon? What's the difference between feeling condemned or convicted?

What do you think Banks was feeling as he waited for Principal Jordan to confront him?

Chapter 23

Brother talks about teams not winning the big one. Can you think of a coach, athlete, or team who has been branded by media or others as not being able to win the big one? Can you think of someone who has overcome that label?

Do you agree with Brother that the games leading up to the championship game are also "big wins"? Why or why not?

What do you think Brother means by playing and living for an audience of One?

Can an athlete play for God? How?

Do you think Brother would be able to quit basketball? Why or why not?

Brother's new advice to Coach Jackson is to invite Reed to a basketball game. Why do you think Coach is less than thrilled with Brother's advice?

Chapter 24

Do you think Brother and Jimmy should have had to run as punishment for missing an optional practice?

In what game or situation have you felt a little extra nervous energy?

If college coaches were scouting you, how do you think that would affect your game performance?

What's the best pre-game talk you've heard?

Chapter 25

How do you define or describe mental toughness?

How do you think one gets stronger in mental toughness?

How important is mental toughness in sports?

DISCUSSION SESSION 7 (Chapters 26-30)

Chapter 26

Would you rather attempt a game-winning 3-pointer at the buzzer with a defender in your face or shoot free throws for the win? Why or why not?

Ever airball or brick an important shot? How did you respond?

Who supports Brock despite his failure and how?

Who has supported you in defeat and how?

Who have you encouraged in defeat or failure and how?

Chapter 27

Can a sport really be like a god to someone? How?

How could God use disappointment to bring someone closer to Him?

Why do you think "thanking God" helped Brock with his free throws?

What do you give thanks to God for?

Chapter 28

How do you think Jimmy will react to the news they are moving back to Texas?

Chapter 29

What do you think Brother may have written on the white board?

What do you think was going through Brittany's mind when she realized her accusers were gone?

Chapter 30

Brittany's life has changed dramatically. What changes have you seen in people who have become Christians?

Brittany now sees her parents as her mission field. How do you think she can go about winning her parents to Christ?

Who would you say is your mission field?

Why do you think Betty Agnew removed her kids from Southside?

Why do some events seem to draw some people closer to God, while seeming to push others away from God?

Have you ever known a family divided by their faith in Christ? What about a friendship divided by Christ?

DISCUSSION SESSION 7 (Chapters 31-34)

Chapter 31

Brock says he asked God for guidance in making his college choice. When have you asked God for guidance? How did you go about trying to listen for God's guidance? What happened?

Have you ever argued with God over guidance or direction? What was the situation and what did you do?

Have you ever felt like you made a decision according to God's will only to later have second thoughts? How did you deal with that?

What guidance and direction would you ask God for today?

Chapter 32

Why do think God might call Brother to quit basketball and to play football instead his senior year?

Do you think Brother should try to play both sports his senior year? Why or why not?

What are the risks of Brother playing football and not playing basketball?

Do you think God will allow Brother to play college basketball?

Chapter 33

When has a teammate fired you up?

Have you ever been losing in a game and still felt confident your team would win? Why? What actually happened?

Why do you think Reed came to the game?

What do you think Reed was feeling when Brother called him down from the bleachers?

What's the difference for Brock with these free throws compared to the ones he missed?

Chapter 34

Who has Brother been a difference maker for and how did he impact their lives?

Where do you imagine Brother and Jimmy's relationship will be in a year? Closer and stronger or more strained and difficult? Why?

Do you think Brittany will continue to grow strong in her relationship with God? Why or why not?

Do you think Southside will continue to be different even though Brother is no longer there?

How can you become more of a difference maker in people's lives?

What attitudes and actions will help you to be a difference maker?