



**Movie discussion resource** **Lion (2017)**  
*Engage with culture without disengaging your faith.*

**Genre:** Drama  
**Rating:** PG-13 (for thematic material and some sensuality)  
**Length:** 120 minutes  
**Starring** Dev Patel, Nicole Kidman, David Wenham, Rooney Mara, Sunny Pawa  
**Director:** Garth Davis

**Brief synopsis**

‘A true story that will elicit your empathy through the miracles in the life of a man who goes on a quest to locate his birth family’. Four year old Saroo (Sunny Pawa) lives in a small rural village in India with his mother (Priyanka Bose) who works as a labourer collecting rocks, and his siblings including big brother Guddu (Abhishek Bharate). One night, Guddu leaves the sleepy boy in a train station, telling him to stay put until he comes back from working. But when Saroo wakes up, he panics in the empty station. He climbs into a decommissioned train looking for his brother and falls asleep again. When he wakes up, he can't get off the train and ends up 1600 kms away in Calcutta, far from home and family. Alone, unable to speak the local language and with no knowledge of his mother's name or where he lives, Saroo must learn to survive on the streets. The police take him to an orphanage, from where he is adopted by a loving couple in Tasmania (John and Sue Brierley, played by David Wenham and Nicole Kidman). Twenty five years later, when a handful of memories return to him, he painstakingly tries to track his birth family using Google Earth technology.

**Questions for discussion**

*Some general questions might provide enough framework for you to discuss the movie, such as:*

- ❖ What stood out as the main points/highlights in the movie?
- ❖ What themes are explored?
- ❖ What assumptions were embedded in the story?
- ❖ What challenged you? What questions did it raise for you?
- ❖ Are there aspects of the story that resonated with your own experience or with the experience of others in a similar situation?
- ❖ Are there biblical or theological themes or characters that come to mind?

*The following provides some particular aspects of the movie that could be explored. Feel free to use these ideas as a catalyst for further discussion and reflection.*

**What's in a name?**

The audience learns the meaning of Saroo's name at the end - Lion. The 13th century Sufi mystic and poet Rumi used many metaphors to describe aspects of the spiritual journey, and the lion is one of them. "The lion is the point of necessity that comes at a certain moment, the fierce intensity that destroys ego-imprisonment, and opens one out into light and another field of being." *Discuss why you think the name 'lion' may have been chosen for the title.*

**Empathy**

"Could a greater miracle take place than for us to look through each other's eyes for an instant?" (writer and naturalist Henry David Thoreau). Many will have already heard that this is a 'tissue box' movie that evokes strong feelings of empathy and compassion for the little boy whose daily life is so desperately difficult in rural India, who finds himself in even more desperate circumstances when he becomes lost far from home, who is taken from his birth country to an adoptive country, and who awakens as an adult to a deep yearning to find home. *What were the connecting points for you that evoked emotion, empathy, and compassion?*

**Hidden dangers**

In his rural village, Saroo is protected from harsh realities, including poverty. He experiences wonder and delight with butterflies, he helps his mother move rocks in what seems more like a game to him, and cradles hope for the day he can enjoy special food treats. When he is lost as a four year old, he is suddenly immersed in a world where danger and abuse is imminent - child snatchers, prostitution rings, child trafficking, paedophiles, and physical and emotional abuse,

where the apparent kindness of strangers belies their suspect motives. If Saroo's story was a single story, or a work of fiction, then this would simply be a heart-warming story. But elements of his story as a four year old are true for millions of innocent children around the world. The film credits notes that over 80,000 children go missing in India each year.

*How has the film conveyed a deeper understanding for you about the perils vulnerable children face around the world? Are there other situations that come to mind?*

### **One loving family for another**

How fortunate is Saroo to have been raised in India by a loving mother, and a watchful brother, despite the grinding poverty in which they were trapped. How fortunate Saroo was placed with a loving family who chose to adopt this little 'brown skinned child' not as a second best to having their own children but as a particular choice. How fortunate Saroo was able to find his birth family and gain a fulsome sense of identity, while both his birth and adoptive mothers gave their grateful thanks to the role each had played in Saroo's life. How fortunate the adoptive couple chose a more difficult life inspired by a bigger vision than their immediate circumstances suggest with their wealth and a life of ease.

*Perhaps adoption may be something you have a particular connection with, or you may know others who have adopted or been adopted. Was Nicole an inspired choice for the role of the adoptive mother, given her adoption of two children (with Tom Cruise). What particular insights do you bring to the characters portrayed in the film? In a less formal sense can 'adoption' be understood as an attitude or lifestyle as we 'adopt' and care for people longing for a sense of 'home', 'community and connection', particularly offering welcome and hospitality to people from other countries. What does this sense of 'adoption' require of us that transcends cultural and religious divides, and requires a bigger vision of humanity?*

### **Compassion fatigue**

Saroo's story evokes an emotional response. And yet, the saturation of media with decontextualised images and stories of tragedy and suffering has been blamed to widespread compassion fatigue in society, causing people to become cynical, or become resistant to helping people who are suffering. The producers of "Lion" are committed to a social impact campaign designed to help the over 11 million children living on the streets of India. The non-profit organizations that #LionHeart will support include Magic Bus, which educates at risk children and provides them with life-skills necessary to move out of poverty, as well as Railway Children, a charity that works with kids living on the streets and railways stations in order to prevent them from being exploited or abused.

*Do you identify with the description of compassion fatigue? Perhaps you feel disquiet about the administrative costs for organisations that support children, and no longer have confidence to make financial commitments. What might give you confidence to support projects aimed to address the circumstances for vulnerable and at risk children?*

### **Biblical narrative - are there stories that come to mind?**

1. 'I'm lost - save me', cries Saroo desperately. Explore the 'lost' parables in Ch 15 of Luke's Gospel (lost coin, lost sheep, lost son). Being found and finding one's place in the world (as compared to alienation and separation) is the one true story of our humanity - a seeking of wholeness and healing (salvation).
2. Prodigal son (Luke 15) - discuss the relationship with the Saroo and his birth brother, and Saroo and his adoptive brother and adoptive parents.
3. Paul's writing to the early church created a new type of theological grammar, using the metaphor "adoption" which was a common practice in the Roman empire. Paul used the term five times (Gal 4:5; Rom 8:14, 23; Rom 9:4; Eph 1:5) to refer to God's adoption of God's covenant people. Discuss the metaphor 'adoption' as it relates to a relationship with God.
4. Are there other stories and metaphors that suggested by the biblical narrative?

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