

Movie discussion resource Supernova (2021)
Engage with culture without disengaging your faith.

Genre: Romance drama

Rating: M (coarse language)

Length: 93 minutes

Starring Colin Firth, Stanley Tucci, Pippa Haywood, Peter MacQueen

Writer-director: Harry Macqueen



Brief synopsis

Oscar nominee Stanley Tucci (Tusker) stars in this romance drama as a man diagnosed with early-onset dementia. Academy Award winner Colin Firth (Sam) co-stars as his partner of 20 years, comforting and caring for the love of his life. It's a 'roadtrip movie' as we follow their travels across the Lakes District in England in their old camper van, visiting friends, family and places from their past. The trip unearths some confronting questions that must be answered before the illness fully takes hold. The movie gently explores the dementia journey - the gradual, long-term and irreversible deterioration, the decline in physical capacity, the emotional toll of confronting mortality, psychological manifestations, difficulties in communication, depression, as well as moral choices including reasons for taking one's own life. It also tenderly explores the role of the carer, in this case one who has shared many years of love which grounds the caring and gives context for the burden he accepts.

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?
- ❖ Are there biblical or theological themes or characters that come to mind?

The film may be a catalyst for conversation leading into deep sharing and mutual support.

Dementia/Alzheimer disease

Tusker knows what lies before him. We see his difficulties in memory, confusion in physical coordination, the inability to write or do up shirt buttons. We see him lose his ability to remember where he is and conceive of stories, and even the coordination required to write legibly. Sam must live with the slow-coming sorrow of inevitable loss. A difficulty of terminal illness is that you may begin to mourn the dying - who are still alive, still here - as if they are already dead. "You're not supposed to mourn someone before they die." (Tusker)
=> The conversation may centre around the experience of watching loved ones on that journey, or your own fears of entering that journey.

'One liners'

'If you had one wish in the world, what would it be?' 'I wish this holiday wouldn't end'.

'Can you tell, that it's gotten worse?'

'I need to be remembered for who I was, and not for who I am about to become' (Tusker)

'It's not fair to you/it's not about fair, it's about love'.

'We will not starve for lack of wonders, but from lack of wonder'.

'Being sad when something is gone, just means it was great while it was there. right?'

"Am I strong enough? Can I do it?" (Sam)

"I'm becoming a passenger. And I am not a passenger. This thing is taking me to a place where I don't want to go." (Tusker)

=> What thoughts and ideas stood out for you in the movie, for further reflection?

Imagery of supernova (noun: a star that suddenly increases greatly in brightness because of a catastrophic explosion that ejects most of its mass)

Supernova is used as metaphor for human life. The movie begins with gazing at the stars in the night sky, with a small dot growing brighter and flaring vividly, then disappearing, dying. "People are like grass; their beauty is like a flower in the field. The grass withers and the flower fades". (1 Peter 1:24, New Living Translation)

Pat Brown, SlantMagazine.com: "There is a visual metaphor more suited, and literally more grounded, than the one about exploding stars: the landscape with trees and denuded mountaintops reflected in placid lakes. Reflections in water, their clarity marred by slight, unpredictable perturbations, evoke the relation between outer and inner worlds, the mystery of the fragile human consciousness". (*Is this a less obvious but equally meaning metaphor?*)

The two main characters have each had their times of brightness in their professional fields - Tusker as a respected novelist, and Sam as a well known concert pianist. And still, even the best and the brightest will fade away, and relationships will come to an end through death. But we so often resist talking about dying as part of our living.

=> Discuss your own (or family and friends) reticence to discuss death and dying, and put in place advanced care directives, and make plans for living in the midst of dying.

When I consider the heavens...

When I consider the heavens, the work of God's fingers, the moon and the stars, which God has ordained; who are we that God takes thought of us? (Psalm 8:3,4)

=> The vastness of the universe helps these two amateur astronomers cope by showing the smallness of human lives and fates. Recall a time you have experienced the wonder of the stars and planets in an expanding universe, and your place in the universe.

Dying to Know

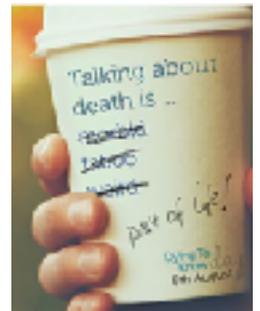
75% of us have not had an end of life discussion. 70% of us die in hospital despite most preferring to die at home. We all have the right to be involved in what the end of our life looks like. How do we bring to life conversations and actions around death, dying and bereavement and to grow the capacity of individuals and groups to take action toward end of life planning, to develop 'death literacy' (the practical know-how needed to plan well for end of life).

=> Die-alogue cafes/Death Cafes are a meeting place for people to talk about death before it becomes the next event on the agenda, and for those who may be seeking directions at a difficult time and a safe place to learn and share. Would you welcome such an opportunity to talk about death and dying in an informal, relaxed setting?

=> Dying to Know Day, August 8 each year, is a national event designed to bring to life conversations and actions around death, dying and bereavement and to help grow the capacity of individuals and community groups to take action toward end of life planning.

www.dyingtoknowday.org

=> Dying to Know: Bringing Death to Life, a book by Andrew Anastasios



Developing a theology of dementia and the love of God for human persons

Tusker dreads losing his memory and his sense of self. The psalmist says all personhood is given by God, because human life is God's gift. The psalmist said, 'For it was you who formed my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works.' (Psalm 139:13-14)

Sam's sister Lilly says: 'You're still you Tusker. You're still the guy he fell in love with'.

Tusker replies: 'No. I'm not. I just look like him'.

We are made in the image of God; nothing can take that away. For a person with dementia, their personhood hasn't ceased or mysteriously disappeared because of the disease's influences upon them.

=> what biblical stories and verses help you to reflect theologically on the decline of a person's capacity - mentally, physically, psychologically, and yet affirms they are still held in the love of God?