

Invincible:  
Skill and Character  
By Patrick Donovan

Purpose

Using clips from the movie “Invincible” this session asks participants to look at their own gifts and talents and discern what might be possible for their own lives. This session is for high school youth, but may also be used with middle school youth. Groups of any size, depending on materials available, may participate. Note that the clips used are based on chapter points and the timing will be different for those using VHS format.

Session at a Glance

7:00 p.m. Welcome and Introductions  
7:05 p.m. Opening Prayer  
7:15 p.m. Down and Out  
Clip 1: Down and Out  
7:45 p.m. Making the Team  
Clip 2: He Has Heart  
Extend the Session: Desire and Determination (add 15 minutes)  
8:17 p.m. Closing Prayer  
8:20 p.m. Announcements and Refreshments  
8:30 p.m. Good Night!

Extend the Session: Desire and Determination (15 minutes)

Play the first minute or two of Chapter 10, “Desire and Determination.” Start the clip when the coach says, “Welcome to special teams...” and end when the players are running down the field. Consider these reflection questions:

The assistant coach says that “to be successful, you must throw away all fears.” Do you think that’s true? Can you think of a situation where fear actually helps you be more successful?

The coach also says, “speed and agility are critical, but desire and determination are even more important.” What’s the coach really saying here?

Have you ever found yourself in a situation where the desire to accomplish something was even more important than the skill to actually accomplish the task?

Materials Needed

- Movie, Invincible (Walt Disney Pictures, rated PG, 2006)
- Television or projector and VCR or DVD player

Note to Leader: Your audio visual set up needs to be adequate for everyone to be able to hear/see the movie clips.

- Handout 1, To Whom Can I Turn?, one for each participant or group
- Handout 2, Missionaries and Cannibals, one for each group of six (see #5 in Prepare in Advance)

- Resource 1, End Quotes (see #4 in Prepare in Advance)
- Pens or pencils, one for each participant
- Newsprint and markers
- A hat, jar, or envelope (from which participants can choose a piece of paper)
- Bible

#### Prepare in Advance

1. Review the entire session plan and gather necessary supplies.
2. Watch the entire movie before using this session so that you are familiar with the story line.
3. Set up your meeting space so that everyone can enjoy the movie clips. Cue the videotape or DVD to the appropriate starting point.
4. Before the session begins, cut Resource 1, End Quotes, along the dotted lines. Put the quotes in something like a hat so volunteers can draw one at random.
5. Cut off the bottom of Handout 2, Missionaries and Cannibals, before copying.
6. Set up tables for refreshments (if you are serving any) and sign-in. Have one or two people at the sign-in table with a check-in sheet and name tags. (Skip the name tags if participants know each other and you know them. However, if they wear nametags, you wear one, too.) Hospitality is important: As the facilitator, do not use the gathering time before the session begins to take care of last minute preparations. Spend the time moving among the participants, greeting and speaking with them.
7. Invite a young person to proclaim 1 Timothy 4:11-16 for the Opening Prayer.

#### Welcome (5 minutes)

Greet the participants and provide a simple explanation of the session. If necessary, ask the participants to introduce themselves to each other.

Note to Leader: If there are several new faces in the crowd, ask everyone to meet someone they don't know and then introduce each other to the larger group.

#### Prayer (10 minutes)

##### Gather

Invite the participants to spend a few moments in silence. Play soft music (instrumental) in the background.

##### Listen and Respond

Invite the reader to proclaim 1 Timothy 4:11-16.

Invite the participants to share their answers to these questions:

Can you name a word, phrase, or image that came to mind as you listened to the reading?

Has anyone ever looked down on you because you are young?

Invite the reader to proclaim 1 Timothy 4:11-16 again. Then invite the group to reflect quietly on these questions:

St. Paul is telling Timothy “do not neglect the gift you have.” Has anyone ever told you that? What do you think they meant?

What in your life today is “absorbing” your energy? How can you change that?

Go Forth

Ask participants to share their intentions (simply ask, “For what shall we pray?”) and then allow participants to share their petitions aloud.

After a short period of reflective silence, conclude that prayer by praying the Our Father together.

Down and Out (30 minutes)

Note to Leader: This movie, *Invincible*, is based on the true story of the NFL player Vince Papale, who, at 30 years old, became the oldest rookie in the NFL. Left by his wife of five years, out of money and nearly out of work, he attends an open tryout with a new coach who has nothing to lose. Impressed by his skill and inspired by his heart, the coach puts him on the team. His teammates, unimpressed and unsure that someone who never played college football should be in the big leagues are not willing to give him a chance. Their indignation does little to stop Papale, who might be the only one on the team who thinks they can win.

The movie is set in South Philadelphia. It’s the mid-1970s, and many people are out of work. You may need to set the scene economically so the young people understand what was happening in the world (soldiers coming home from Vietnam, many unions out on strike, etc.). Because the actors do a good job of speaking like they are from South Philly, you should watch the clips with subtitles turned on.

This first scene occurs before the tryouts. Encouraged by his friends to tryout for the team but down on his luck financially, Vince goes to visit his father. It becomes clear pretty quickly that the two are not close. Vince’s dad has heard that Vince’s friends have been hassling him about trying out for the Philadelphia Eagles and remarks that “maybe you should let this (dream) go” because it would just be another failure in the long list of recent failures. Participants will use this clip to talk about when they have felt like a failure or when others have discouraged them from pursuing a dream.

Step 1: (2 minutes) Set the scene for the participants. Let them know that this first scene helps us to better understand the relationship between Vince and his friend and

Vince and his dad. We also see how his dad misses a chance to encourage his son to pursue his dream and to do his best.

Step 2: (8 minutes) Show participants the first clip from *Invincible*. Begin as Vince sits alone in his house. End as Frank Papale (Vince's dad) sips his coffee. The scene is Chapter 4 on the DVD, 13:30 into the movie on VHS. It will end at 21:15.

Step 3: (10 minutes) Use some or all of the following reflection questions to unpack the scene:

When Vince first enters the bar, he is greeted by his friend Tommy, who has just heard that Vince's wife left him. His friend is waiting for him outside the bar. What does that say about their friendship?

Vince is getting a lot of encouragement from his friends. Why do you think he hesitates to try out for the team? What is it about his life right now that makes him afraid to fail?

It's obviously hard for Vince to go to his dad for help. He has lost his job, his wife of five years left him (and took everything in the house they rented together), he is working only part time tending bar, and he is about to miss a rent payment. You probably have never experienced a situation quite so desperate, but have you ever had to ask for help from someone who doesn't always support you? What was that like?

Vince's father agrees to give Vince the money "because we are family." What does that say about how his dad feels about his son? What does that say about his understanding of family as community?

Vince's dad says he knows about the "boys down at Max's" giving Vince a hard time about trying out. What did you think of his dad's advice? Was it good advice? How do you think it made Vince feel?

Has anyone ever told you that you should let something go so you don't get your hopes up? What does that feel like?

Step 4: (10 minutes) Ask participants to complete Handout 1, *To Whom Can I Turn?*. This activity challenges young people to think creatively about various situations and name the people to whom they can go to for advice, support, and encouragement. If the participants know each other well enough, this would be a good exercise for small groups to share with one another.

**Making the Team (45 minutes)**

Step 5: (2 minutes) Set the scene for the next clip, "He has heart" in a way similar to the way you set up the previous scene. In this scene, Coach Vermeil polls his coaching staff about which player should fill that last receiver spot. All the coaches vote against Papale.

Step 6: (5 minutes) Show participants clip two from *Invincible*. Begin as the coaches are sitting around the table. End as Vince and Tommy pull out of the parking lot. The second clip is Chapter 12 on the DVD and 1:03:30 into the movie on VHS. End at 1:08:40.

Step 7: (10 minutes) Use some or all of the following reflection questions to unpack the scene:

Why do you think the other coaches vote against Papale? Does their reasoning make sense?

How would you have voted?

What do you think of the line, "People don't want heart Dick, they want wins"? Is that true in sports today? Is it just in the NFL? Who do you think is most to blame for that attitude? The players? The coaches? The parents? The media?

When Coach Vermeil's wife, Carol, comes to visit with the Vermeil children, she and her husband have this exchange:

Carol Vermeil: What was it that you used to say to your kids at Hillsdale High? That character is tested when you're up against it?

Dick Vermeil: Yeah.

Dick Vermeil: And that's not the problem here. He's got plenty of character.

Carol Vermeil: Who said I was talking about him?

Do you think it was hard for the coach to hear that?

When the coach meets with Papale, do you think he was going to dismiss him? If so, what do you think changed his mind?

It sounds like the coach was surprised when Papale asked him how he was. Do you think Papale's question surprised the coach? Why?

Describe how you think Tommy felt.

Step 8: (3 minutes) Using a piece of newsprint, draw two columns. Mark one column as "Skill" and the other as "Character." Ask the participants to call out words or phrases that help to define each of those words. See how many they can come up with, and then see if they can name people who have exhibited either skill or character. You might make it even more interesting if you challenge the participants to put people in the column depending on whether they exhibited more of one than the other (Gandhi, for instance, was probably more a man of character than skill, though he exhibited both). Explain that the two words are not mutually exclusive of each other. It is possible to have both.

Note to Leader: The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines character as “moral excellence and firmness.” It defines skills as “the ability to use one's knowledge effectively and readily in execution or performance or dexterity or coordination especially in the execution of learned physical tasks”

Step 9: (15 minutes) Divide participants into groups of six. If the groups are uneven, have a few people act as observers. Using Handout 2, Missionaries and Cannibals, challenge each group to solve the puzzle by acting it out. The solution should be cut off the bottom of the page before making copies. After giving the groups some time to work on the puzzle, ask each group to volunteer to act out their group's answer. Discuss what was difficult about the puzzle. How was skill used to solve the puzzle? What about character? Use words from the newsprint to see what other traits were exhibited by members of the group.

Final Thoughts (10 minutes)

Conclude the session by asking for volunteers to pick, at random, a quote from a hat (or jar or envelope) and tell the rest of that group what they think the quote means. If they struggle coming up with an answer, ask for another participant to help them.

Closing Prayer (3 minutes)

Say a simple, spontaneous prayer of thanksgiving for these gifts and asking that God continue to bless each one gathered with the Light that is Christ.

Announcements and Refreshment (10 minutes)

Thank the young people for their participation in tonight's session. Make any needed announcements, and invite them to enjoy some refreshments.

This session was written by [Patrick J. Donovan](#), Director of Youth Ministry, Diocese of Wilmington, Delaware.

Handout 1

To Whom Can I Turn?

For each situation...think of a person to whom you can go to for advice. Think about those who would treat your situation with respect, encouragement, and love.

Situation      To Whom Can I Turn?

You have a test coming up and you feel like you are totally unprepared.

You fail the test, and you know it is going to adversely affect your grade and, perhaps, your extracurricular activities.

At home

At school

You do something pretty stupid that gets you in trouble at your job. You are not sure how to make it right.

Your boy/girlfriend dumped you.

Your best friend confides that she is pregnant (or his girlfriend is pregnant).

You just got into the college of your dreams and you can't wait to tell...

You have been asked to be a sponsor for Confirmation for someone, but you don't know what that means or what's involved. You have loads of questions.

Life is overwhelming.

## Handout 2

### Missionaries and Cannibals

This logic puzzle has been around in various forms since the 13th century. It is used by scientists, philosophers, and youth ministers who love a challenge.

Here's the problem:

Three missionaries are standing with three cannibals on a riverbank somewhere in the Amazon Jungle. All six wish to get to the other side of the river. There is only one two-person boat in which to cross the river. The river is filled with the deadly man-eating fish known as piranha, so swimming is not an option. There is one other problem: at no time can the cannibals outnumber the missionaries on either side of the river, for if this were to happen, the cannibals would have the missionaries for lunch. There is no rope available for use. The problem: How can all six people get safely across the river?

As a group, solve the problem by acting it out.

----- Cut this portion of the paper off before photocopying -----

### The Answer

2 cannibals over  
1 cannibal back  
2 cannibals over  
1 cannibal back  
2 missionaries over  
1 cannibal and 1 missionary back  
2 missionaries over  
1 cannibal back  
2 cannibals over  
1 cannibal back  
2 cannibals over  
Resource 1

### End Quotes

Before the session begins, cut this page along the dotted lines. Put the quotes in something like a hat so volunteers can draw one at random. If you have a small group or are limited on time, choose those that you think will be most understood by your participants.

Character is what you are in the dark.

— Unknown

What lies behind us and what lies before us are small matters compared to what lies within us.

— Ralph Waldo Emerson, American essayist, philosopher and poet (1803-1882)

If you will think about what you ought to do for other people, your character will take care of itself. Character is a by-product, and any man who devotes himself to its cultivation in his own case will become a selfish prig.

— Woodrow Wilson, 28th American president (1856-1924)

Character cannot be developed in ease and quiet. Only through experience of trial and suffering can the soul be strengthened, vision cleared, ambition inspired, and success achieved.

— Helen Keller, American social activist, public speaker and author (1880-1968)



Character is an essential tendency. It can be covered up, it can be messed with, it can be screwed around with, but it can't be ultimately changed. It's the structure of our bones, the blood that runs through our veins.

— Sam Shepard, American playwright, actor and director (b. 1943)

If we want children to possess the traits of character we most admire, we need to teach them what those traits are and why they deserve both admiration and allegiance.

Children must learn to identify the forms and content of those traits.

— William J. Bennett, author and former U.S. Secretary of Education (b. 1943)

No change of circumstances can repair a defect of character.

— Ralph Waldo Emerson, American essayist, philosopher and poet (1803-1880)

You can easily judge the character of a man by how he treats those who can do nothing for him.

— Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, German poet, novelist, playwright, scientist and philosopher (1749-1832)