

STUDY GUIDE: FAITH OUT LOUD

This series is designed to help people name, claim and speak their own unique experience of God. The stories shared in these 11 segments are both common and extraordinary. We often look for the powerful, transcendent experiences where God's power and presence is evident. This series will also help us to recognize God's activity in the mundane and simple experiences of our lives.

The leader for this series merely needs to ask the simple question of each vignette to get the ball rolling. If there is a large gathering it may help to break into smaller sharing groups. Assure the participants that there are no right ways to talk about faith and that most of us feel inadequate to share our experience of God,

Start by asking the group to reflect on what makes for ineffective witness.

- Lack of a trusted relationship
- Inappropriate timing or setting
- In authentic or self-righteous attitude
- Judgmental posture

Ask the participants if they have had a good experience with the sharing of faith.

Ask the group what keeps them from sharing their faith.

Then show the introduction to the series and then ask for a response. If no response you can move right to the other video segments which may be viewed in any order from the menus. You might ask the participants which questions they would like to see addressed.

Each segment has a brief introduction and lasts about 10 minutes. After showing the segment you could prompt a brief discussion of the whole group by asking them for their immediate response to what they heard and what stood out for them and why.

DVD ONE

- a time when you experienced grace [9:12]
- a time when God's people came through for you [9:42]
- how God came alive in your life [11:41]
- a time when God felt present [9:23]
- a time when God felt absent [10:04]

DVD TWO

- how God makes a difference in your daily life [11:25]
- an idea of God that you find meaningful [10:29]
- a time of suffering in which God made a difference [9:19]
- a person who made a difference in your faith [11:01]
- a time when you were surprised by God [11:27]
- your favorite passage in the Bible [11:03]

The following is brief recap of each segment and a way to enter into a discussion.

DVD ONE

A time when you experienced grace:

- Jack: A father's grace
- Terri: Grace and public failure

Grace is understood as undeserved love and mercy. When we expect judgment but receive acceptance. The ultimate experience of grace is God's unconditional love for us demonstrated in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Christ, who took on himself our deserved judgment offers his righteousness in exchange. We know grace when we experience it even in human interactions. Ask the participants to remember a time when they expected judgment and punishment but were met with grace.

A time when God's people came through for you:

- Rolf: A cancer diagnosis
- Janet: A divorce
- Hal: A son with disabilities
- Terri: Support in divorce
- Edith: family in a strange new land

We often think of our relationship with God as a one-on-one relationship, but we can experience God's love for us through the response of God's people. Ask the participants if they remember a time when God's people came through for them and how it felt.

How God came alive in your life:

- Erik: A trip to India
- Julianna: It isn't dramatic
- Todd: Rejected faith
- Diane: A betrayal of Judaism?
- Walter: Leadership training school

Some people have dramatic stories of awakenings. Some have a gradual sense of the dawning of God's presence. There is no one way to experience God. Ask the participants to think about how God came alive in their lives and what that has meant to them.

A time when God felt present

- Antonio: In despair felt God's presence
- Kara: Near-death experience in giving birth
- Julianna: God's presence through people
- Kathryn: Surprised by people God uses
- Edith- God's presence in new country

We know that God promises to always be near but we often don't feel it. There is no burning bush, booming voice, rainbow or bright star. Ask the participants how they have experienced God's presence.

A time when God felt absent:

- Jack: Children dying in Somalia
- Walter: A time of doubt
- Matt: The question of evil

The Psalms express the lament that God seems far away and that notion resonates with many of us. Could it be that even sharing our experience of God's absence is a form of witness? Ask the participants about a time in their lives when they felt God was absent.

DVD TWO

How God makes a difference in your daily life:

- Terri: Walking with kids
- Amy: Awareness of humanity
- Tanya: Working with sick and dying kids
- Andrew: Radical honesty
- Edith: Caring for children
- Diane: Hospitality as a spiritual gift
- Julianna: Praying about what?
- Erik: God as partner in eye surgery

It's easy to take God for granted and forget to acknowledge the difference God makes in our lives. It can be productive to reflect on what God's presence and activity means in our daily lives. Ask the participants to do just that.

An idea of God that you find meaningful:

- Amy: God for me
- Fred: Incarnation
- Julianna: A vulnerable God
- Andrew: Grace and honesty
- Walter: Christ's presence in the world
- Antonio: Created in God's image

We all carry images and ideas about God that shape our understanding of the world, Ask the participants to share how their view of God informs their faith.

A time of suffering in which God made a difference:

- Andrew: Loss of childhood friends
- Julianna: Father's death
- Edith: Death of mother
- Tanya: Cancer diagnosis

Suffering is inevitable experience at some point in our lives. For some suffering challenges faith and brings doubt about God goodness or power. For some suffering is an entry point for God's healing and grace. Ask the participants to reflect on a time of suffering and how God used that suffering for good.

A person who made a difference in your life:

- Antonio: Peasant mentor
- Diane: William Sloan Coffin
- Todd: Mark, the weird guy
- Kathryn: Grandfather's calling
- David: Father's support

There are people who enter our lives and provide for us a glimpse of God's love and who mentor us in our faith. Ask the participants to think about and share who most influenced their life of faith.

A time when you were surprised by God:

- Janet: A miracle
- Edith: A child, peace and comfort
- Erik: A dream about God's glory
- Amy: God works through people like me
- Kathryn: Grandparents' 50th anniversary

God is trustworthy and constant but shows up in ways that can surprise us. Ask the participants to reflect on those moments when they were surprised by God.

Your favorite passage in the Bible:

- Rolf: Psalm 26
- Kathryn: Jacob wrestles with God
- Matt: Thief on the cross
- Edith: Psalm 23
- Tanya: I will never forsake you
- Fred: God is not mortal
- Diane: Ecclesiastes

There are moments in our lives when we draw on the truths of scripture. Ask the participants to talk about their favorite Bible passages, stories or characters and why.