

# GOD IN PURSUIT

## Introduction to the Leader’s Guide/Study Guide:

This guide is designed to help lead a group through a study of *God in Pursuit: The Tipping Points from Doubt to Faith*. It may also be adapted for use in individual study of the book. Some leaders may want to use the guide for their own preparation only, while others may choose to print a copy for each group member to use.

Although this study guide divides the book into six sessions, since that time frame works well for many groups, some may want to extend the study to spend more time on each chapter.

## What is *God in Pursuit* About?

What is the turning point that causes a curious journalist and atheist to walk into a church and be converted to Christ the first time she takes communion? At what point is a lifelong atheist and head of one of the greatest scientific breakthroughs of the twentieth century persuaded to turn to Christ? What leads a woman, who had a Mafia contract on her life and who appeared on the FBI’s Ten Most Wanted list, to become a Christian in prison and then start a national outreach ministry that has touched the lives of thousands of children?

*God in Pursuit* traces and celebrates the sparks that allow faith to catch fire in the lives of new believers who were once hostile or indifferent to God. It also examines the ways those tipping points from doubt to faith operate throughout the Christian life as people confront spiritual crises or grapple with questions that did not arise at the time of conversion. The author sought out the common tipping points into faith through interviews with people about their conversions and through studying spiritual memoirs of Christians across hundreds of years.

The book shows how God is monumentally *unsettling* in people’s lives, not only at the time of conversion, but throughout the Christian journey. In addition to the tipping points themselves, the book touches on concepts such as “foreshadowing,” the idea that even though a conversion to Christ may look “sudden,” it is usually preceded by clues—people and books and experiences and other details—that have prepared people for the day when God arrives. Another element that surfaces in many faith stories is “*kairos*,” or “loaded time,” a period of time separated from all the ordinary moments of life when a person is particularly awake to the presence of the Holy Spirit. The person may have heard the Christian message a thousand times, yet it never penetrated. But during this “loaded time,” God seems particularly close, and the truth of the Gospel burns inside of the person as never before.

*God in Pursuit* reveals a Father who does not sit and wait for his children to search Him out. Instead, even before they realize they're looking for Him, He is already busy laying clues, preparing people to hear Him, loving them into His presence.

## Session 1

This session introduces readers to the following chapters in *God in Pursuit*:

### *Introduction*

#### 1. *“I Didn’t Want to Be a Christian, but . . .”*: *The Pursuing God*

### Key Ideas

One of the main themes of the Introduction and first chapter of the book is that **God pursues people even when they are not searching for Him**. Before your group delves into the specific questions and activities in the study guide, it might be helpful to discuss their first impressions of this idea.

- Were they surprised by anything they read in these chapters?
- How did what they read relate to their own experiences with how God has worked in their own lives and in the lives of people they know?
- What do they hope to learn more about as the series continues?

### **FOCUS: God breaks down barriers to belief in even the most unlikely prospects for conversion to Christianity.**

If your group is large enough, break it into smaller groups, and assign each one to review and summarize the stories of reluctant converts discussed in Chapter One, such as Anne Lamott, Sara Miles, Ziya Meral, and Jim Vaus.

As the groups discuss the person assigned to them, ask them to compile a list of all the likely objections and barriers to belief in Christ that might have prevented that person from becoming a Christian.

Once each group has finished, ask them to tell the highlights of each of these stories of reluctant converts, and write their list of barriers to belief on the board. Then discuss the similarities and differences in these stories, including such questions as:

- How much overlap is there in the list of barriers to belief?
- What were the key tipping points to belief for each of these people?
- Of all of these reluctant converts, whose conversion was most surprising, and why?
- If God can break through in difficult cases like this, what does that indicate He might do in your life and in the lives of people you know?

### **FOCUS: Scripture celebrates the God who pursues.**

Chapter One discusses Jesus’ parables of the lost coin, the lost sheep, and the lost son (better known as the prodigal son). Each of these stories tells of a God who pursues those who are lost. The author quotes Timothy Keller, who points out that the word “prodigal” describes God better than it describes the lost son, since the word refers not to waywardness but rather to ex-

travagant spending. In what ways have the people in your group experienced God's extravagant love and forgiveness?

Also discuss:

- Much of the focus in the parable of the lost son is on the rebellious younger son, but the older brother is also a key figure in the story. Review what the chapter says about him. Which brother do members of your group most identify with?
- This chapter probes three parables that highlight God as pursuer, but the Bible is filled with many other passages that also illustrate that characteristic of God. Ask your group to come up with as long a list as possible of scriptures that reveal God as pursuer. This may need to be a homework assignment, with the results shared at a later meeting, but it is inspiring to see how pervasive this theme is throughout scripture.

### **FOCUS: The church can do more to reach out to unlikely converts.**

This chapter tells of very unlikely people who became Christians. Spend some time asking your group to brainstorm on these questions:

- Is the church as a whole (as well as individual Christians) too quick to write off people as beyond hope for ever turning to Christ?
- What are some steps the church could take to reach out to even the most skeptical, hostile, or indifferent non-believers?

### **Additional Questions for Reflection and Group Discussion**

1. Chapter One quotes Eugene Peterson's paraphrase of the Psalm 23 verse, "Your beauty and love chase after me/everyday of my life." List all the ways in which you sense God pursuing *you*.
2. In what ways do you ever find yourself *striving* for God's love or trying to prove yourself to Him in order to earn it? How does the idea of a pursuing God alter your perspective on that?
3. One of the most common literary descriptions of God as pursuer is Francis Thompson's poem, "The Hound of Heaven." In this work God—the Hound of Heaven—hunts the narrator of the poem, even though that man is afraid of him and feels unworthy of him and does everything he can to avoid getting caught. Here is an excerpt:  
"I fled Him, down the nights and down the days;  
I fled Him, down the arches of the years;  
I fled Him, down the labyrinthine ways  
Of my own mind; and in the mist of tears  
I hid from Him, and under running laughter."

Consider the meaning of each of these phrases. Are they accurate descriptions of the ways people flee from God and hide from him? Is the “Hound of Heaven” an appropriate description of God?

4. The idea of a pursuing God implies that someone is running from him, but *why* would anyone run from a God who loves them? What are the most common ways people do so?

## Session Two

This session introduces readers to the following chapters in *God in Pursuit*:

2. *Awakened: Light and Foreshadow*

3. *Breaking Through to Faith: The Meaning of Conversion*

### Key Ideas

This session emphasizes three concepts that are significant in the movement toward faith in Jesus Christ:

- **Foreshadowing**, the idea that even though a conversion to Christ may look sudden, it's usually preceded by clues—people, books, experiences, and other details—that have prepared that person for the day when God arrives.
- **Kairos, or “Loaded Time,”** a period separated from all the ordinary moments of life when a person is particularly awake to the presence of the Holy Spirit.
- **Conversion:** What does it mean to become a follower of Jesus Christ? What are the crucial elements of this experience? How is it defined?

### FOCUS: God uses “foreshadowing” to prepare people for belief in Him.

Even in “sudden” conversions, people can look back and see how God was at work, sometimes for years, laying clues that would help lead them to Christ.

Lead your group in a review of the examples of spiritual foreshadowing presented in Chapter Two and earlier in the book. Which ones were the most inspiring or unexpected?

Then give them some time to reflect silently on their own spiritual lives and to write down a list of all the examples of foreshadowing they can think of. Remind them that foreshadowing ranges from large issues to small. It may be a significant relationship with a Christian early in life, a song overhead on some else's car radio, a phrase in a sermon, a small act of kindness that the person was barely aware of, and so on.

After people have compiled their lists, ask them to share the ones they feel comfortable talking about. It is amazing the wide variety of ways God reaches out to draw people to Himself.

Also discuss:

- Did you recognize any of these clues at the time, or did you realize their significance only later?
- How do these examples of foreshadowing make you see God differently? Was He more present and active in your life than you thought at the time?

**FOCUS: Paul's conversion, while unusual, teaches us much about how God leads people.**

Chapter Two begins by saying it's easy to envy the clarity and drama of Paul's conversion. Does your group agree?

Ask them:

- What would be the advantages to such a dramatic encounter with Christ? What would be the drawbacks to it?
- Why do you think God rarely uses such spectacular methods to draw people to Him? What methods does he more often use instead?

Chapter Two shows that many aspects of Paul's pre-Christian background were preparing him for the important role he would play in the Christian church.

Ask your group to brainstorm a list of other biblical figures whose backgrounds prepared them for the roles they were most known for, even though they didn't know where God was leading them earlier in their lives.

**FOCUS: Chapter Two discusses the concept of *kairos*, or "loaded time," moments separated from all the ordinary minutes and seconds of life, when time is particularly loaded with God's presence.**

Lead your group in a discussion of what they thought were the most significant examples of "loaded time" in Chapter Two and also in the stories from Chapter One.

Did any of those examples remind them of such moments in their own lives? What examples come to mind?

**FOCUS: Chapter Three describes the meaning of conversion.**

Several ways of describing conversion are offered in this chapter. Divide into small groups and assign one of the definitions of conversion to each group (the four circles, the four spiritual laws, etc). Ask each group to learn that way of describing the movement to faith in Christ. Then gather together again and ask each group to explain their definition to the larger group.

Discuss whether learning and sharing it this way helps them to know how to better convey their faith to others. Are there aspects of their relationship with Christ that these definitions miss?

Ask the group members, if you are a Christian, was your own conversion influenced by these kinds of formal descriptions of salvation? How did you understand conversion at the time? Are there aspects of faith you wish had been explained to you better?

**Additional Questions for Reflection and Group Discussion**

1. Although Charles Spurgeon was a regular church-goer and heard the Gospel repeatedly, he was not converted until a snowstorm forced him out of his regular routine and diverted him to another church, where he heard the message of Jesus Christ in a new way. How common

is it for the familiarity of the Gospel to dull people to its message? What can be done to help people hear it fresh?

3. Chapter Three emphasizes the limitations of language when trying to describe the joy and experience of conversion. Do you agree that it is difficult to capture your faith in words? If so, why is that? Are there ways to make discussing faith easier?
4. Think back on the most memorable and powerful presentation of the Gospel you ever heard. What made that explanation so effective?

## Session Three

This session introduces readers to the following chapters in *God in Pursuit*:

4. *Tipping Point 1: When God Finds You at Your Lowest Point*

5. *Tipping Point 2: When Circumstances and a Spiritual Messenger Conspire*

### Key Ideas

These two chapters examine two powerful tipping points from doubt to faith. The first is the way that reaching a low point of health, finances, or other devastating circumstances sometimes acts as a spiritual wake-up call to help a person focus on what is important in the long run—in other words, eternity.

The second tipping point recognizes that becoming a Christian is rarely a solitary event. Even people who are alone at the actual moment of conversion almost never reached that moment on their own but were led there in various ways by others whom the Lord seems to have carefully placed along the way. Some of these messengers are people you might expect, such as pastors and Sunday school teachers, but others are more surprising, even miraculous, as the examples in the chapter show.

**FOCUS: Tipping points can tip people either way. Which way will reaching a low point tip someone?**

Ask your group members:

When you consider people you know, have crises such as illness, career meltdowns, and other disasters been more likely to tip someone *toward* faith in Christ or *against* it? Think of specific examples you know about in either direction. What made the difference in which way the tipping point led?

**FOCUS: One effect of a life crisis is that it may jolt someone out of spiritual complacency.**

Chapter Four discusses how easy it is to go through life in a spiritual daze, avoiding life's big questions. Ask your group:

- What evidence do you see around you that supports the idea that most people live in spiritual complacency? List as many things as you can.
- What evidence (or hope) do you see to the contrary?
- Do you think the tendency toward spiritual indifference has always been this bad, or are there aspects of our current culture that particularly contribute to that indifference toward spiritual issues?
- In your own life what forces, events, or circumstances make you more spiritually alert? What ones cause you to drift spiritually?

**FOCUS: Spiritual messengers may play important roles in the journey toward a relationship with Jesus Christ, even in cases in which they are not the key tipping point into faith.**

Chapter Five shows the various ways spiritual messengers may function. Ask your group:

- Look back on your life and make a list of all the people you can think of who served as spiritual messengers, in big ways and small. Is the list longer than you would have expected? Do you think all these people were aware of the role they served? What do you think would have happened if they hadn't been there?
- Now make a list of all the ways in which *you* may have served as a spiritual messenger. Can you also think of cases in which you failed to fulfill that role but now wish you had?

**FOCUS: Someday someone may show up at your door and ask you to be a spiritual messenger. What will you do?**

If the members of your group are already Christians, ask them to role play this scenario:

- From Chapter Five, imagine yourself in the situation that David found himself in when Linda Freeman showed up at his door asking for answers to the most crucial questions of the Christian faith. Walk through what you would have told her and what you would have done. Has anything like this ever happened to you? Are there areas in which you feel you would need to be better prepared?

**FOCUS: Sometimes messengers push people further from Christ rather than closer to Him.**

Review Tom's story in Chapter Five, which includes some bad messengers, and then ask your group:

- Can you think of examples like those in Tom's story in which Christians send exactly the opposite message from what they intend? If you are a Christian, what are some things you can do to avoid being a bad messenger?

**Additional Questions for Reflection and Group Discussion**

1. Of the stories told in these chapters, which one surprised you the most because of its outcome?
2. It has been suggested that some of the spiritual messengers in the examples discussed in Chapter Five actually may have been angels. Do you believe that may be true? If so, which of the messengers you read about is most likely to have been an angel?

## Session Four

This session introduces readers to the following chapters in *God in Pursuit*:

*6. Tipping Point 3: When the Convicting Need for Spiritual Transformation Won't Let You Go*

*7. Tipping Point 4: When the Word Speaks with Undeniable Clarity and Power*

### Key Ideas

These two chapters deal with tipping points from doubt to faith that have characterized conversion stories for centuries. One is the idea of “conviction,” or the process by which people come to see their deep need for God’s forgiveness and salvation. It is not a popular concept in our day, but it is still a powerful force in awakening people to their need for Christ.

The second tipping point is the crucial and sometimes almost miraculous role that scripture plays in drawing people to Christ. While it may seem that the Bible would be too complex and strange for non-believers to relate to, the Holy Spirit often uses it to speak to people at just the right times.

### **FOCUS: “Conviction” is an important concept, but is it an outdated term?**

In order to make sure that everyone in your group understands the concept of conviction, review a couple of the stories from Chapter 6 that illustrate conviction as a tipping point from doubt to faith.

Then ask your group:

- Chapter Six points out that the term “conviction” is not used as much today as it used to be. Why do you think this term is not used as much as before? Is the concept still valid? Do you think there might be a better name for it?
- What differences do you notice between the more recent conversions described in this chapter and the ones from a few hundred years ago? How do you account for those differences? In what ways are the conversions the same regardless of when they took place?

### **FOCUS: Not everyone experiences conviction in the same way.**

This chapter points out “repentance and forgiveness are essential elements of Christian conversion, but not everyone reaches that by way of the kind of conviction of sin I have described. Conversion requires an insight into one’s sinful nature and a turning toward Christ, forgiveness, and salvation, but wrestling with guilt is not necessarily what triggers the insight or turning.”

Review Richard Peace’s list on page 83 of people in the Bible whose turn to Christ was not motivated by a guilty conscience.

Then ask your group:

- When you think of your own experience and the experiences of people you know, is it more common for conviction to be part of conversion or for it to be absent?

**FOCUS: A sense of conviction leads to the need for a response.**

Chapter Six ends with Billy Graham's way of asking people to respond to conviction, which is to publicly come forward to turn their lives over to Christ. Several other examples in the chapter show people making a public move toward repentance. Do you think the *public* nature of the commitment to Christ is important?

**FOCUS: Scripture is a turning point toward faith for many, and we may have more of it in our minds than we realize.**

Ask your group:

- Think of all the scriptures you carry in your head. Recite as many of them out loud as you can think of. Keep this going for as long as you can. Include even brief scriptures that people know only partially.
- Are you surprised by how many quotes from the Bible you and your group know? How did the people in your group learn scripture? Have they spent time trying to memorize it, or have they learned it gradually over the years?
- Do verses of scripture come to your mind at key moments? Give some examples of that.
- Do you know people who came to faith in Christ primarily through the influence of scripture? Tell about any examples that you may know of. How typical do you believe the stories told in Chapter Seven are?

**FOCUS: Individual verses of the Bible may be a tipping point into faith, but real knowledge of the Bible requires deeper study.**

Chapter Seven points out that even though there may be times when particular verses of the Bible become the tipping point into faith, looking at individual verses randomly or out of context is not the best way to study the Bible on a long-term basis. Mary Kay Beard, for instance, read the entire Bible eight times in the aftermath of her conversion.

- What are some good ways to study the Bible more systematically?

The Bible has become a “dormant document” for many Christians, according to the final paragraph in this chapter. They revere it but don't read it. They use it as a prop to carry to church, but they don't spend much time learning what it says.

- How big a problem do you think lack of biblical knowledge is in today's church? What can be done about it? What else can the church do to get scripture into people's lives?

**Additional Question for Reflection and Group Discussion**

1. Think of five passages of scripture that you would want to have in your memory even if all the others disappeared. Compare your choices with those that others in the group chose. Why these scriptures? How much consensus is there among your group members?

## Session Five

This session introduces readers to the following chapters in *God in Pursuit*:

8. *Tipping Point 5: When a Long Intellectual and Spiritual Persuasion Pushes You Toward Christ*

9. *Slightly Beyond the Tipping Point: Attacks of Doubt, the Impulse to Serve*

### Key Ideas

In many of the conversion stories discussed so far, the tipping point toward faith involved a “sudden” life-changing encounter with the Holy Spirit, followed by conversion, followed by years of working out the intellectual and spiritual questions this new faith raised. Chapter Eight looks at very different kinds of conversions. These believers followed a much slower and more deliberate path toward Christianity that sometimes took decades. Some reached the tipping point so gradually that they barely even recognized it when it came.

Chapter Nine begins a section of the book that moves beyond conversion to examine how the tipping points continue to function during the Christian life, when spiritual crises arise. One common time for such a crisis is immediately after the turn toward faith, when some converts are besieged with doubts and second-guessing. But another impulse that often emerges during that time is impulse to serve, to spread the love of Christ to others in various ways.

### **FOCUS: The move toward faith is sometimes crowded out by people’s absorption with the everyday demands of life.**

Malcolm Muggeridge’s story includes an episode in which he lies on his cot in his barracks during the war and begins to think deeply about spiritual issues. But just as he reaches the verge of kneeling to pray and proclaim his faith, cowardice steps in, and instead he scolds himself for missing the chance to be first in line to take a shower.

Review that story with your group, and then ask,

- How common is it for the everyday details and demands of life to interrupt or undermine deep spiritual contemplation? In what ways has this happened in your own life?
- Do you think some people purposely *try* to keep their thoughts only on this mundane level? Why might they want to avoid spiritual questions?
- What practical steps can you take to make sure that time for prayer and contemplation are not drowned out by the noise of everyday life?

**FOCUS: People who arrive at faith in Christ only after long periods of questioning and resistance often have to overcome the barrier that God is an unwanted “Interferer” in their lives.**

C. S. Lewis said that one of the things he disliked most about Christianity was that it represented “Interference” with his individualism and his lawlessness. At the center of Christianity was a “transcendental Interferer,” and he had trouble coming to terms with that.

Review Lewis’s objection with your group, and then discuss:

- What do you think he means by “interference”? Can you relate to this objection? How did Lewis resolve it?

**FOCUS: For some, the tipping point from doubt to faith can take years, even decades, to reach.**

The conversions discussed in this chapter were more gradual and took longer than many of the others described in previous chapters.

Discuss with your group:

- In the long run, are there benefits to a long and cautious movement toward God? Might these converts have fewer questions to struggle with later in their Christian lives?
- Are there dangers to a long, slow conversion?

**FOCUS: Review the major tipping points from doubt to faith discussed in Chapters Four through Eight.**

- Of the five tipping points examined in these chapters, which surprised you most?
- Which story did you find most inspiring or gave you the most hope?
- Are there other tipping points that you believe could have been included in this list?

**FOCUS: The immediate aftermath of conversion may be joyful, but some also experience an attack of intense insecurity and doubt.**

John Bunyan and John Wesley are giants of the Christian faith, but even they suffered strong attacks of doubt in the aftermath of their conversions. Review their stories in Chapter Nine, and then ask your group these questions:

- Why is the time immediately following conversion a particularly vulnerable period for new believers?
- What are ways that other believers might help them through it?

**FOCUS: Conversion may be instant, but spiritual transformation takes time.**

Chapter Nine tells the story of the 33-year-old clergyman’s son in England who converted to Christianity one day and came home drunk the next. His sister was devastated by this falling away, but the man himself was confident that the work God had begun in him would not be lost. After reviewing his story, discuss this:

- Are long-time Christians sometimes too impatient with new believers?
- What struggles might they anticipate from new followers, and how might they support them in these early days of being a Christian?

**FOCUS: Skepticism toward a person's movement toward serving Jesus Christ may come not only from non-believers, but also from other Christians.**

Ask your group whether they were surprised by the point made in Chapter Nine that sometimes new Christians meet more resistance from fellow Christians in following their bold new calling to serve than they do from non-Christians. This was particularly true in Albert Schweitzer's story.

- The chapter says, "Sometimes new Christians enter the body of believers with such zeal that it makes the more settled and complacent church members uncomfortable." Have you found this to be true? If so, what can be done to change it?

## Session Six

This session introduces readers to the following chapters in *God in Pursuit*:

*10. Far Beyond the Tipping Point: The Dance of Doubt and Faith*

*11. Where Doubt May Lead: A Small Complaint About Suffering*

### Key Ideas

One of the main ideas of Chapter Ten is summarized in the opening paragraph: “To be spiritually alive is to be in spiritual danger. The leap of faith into conversion is a jump across one hurdle but by no means the final one. For the spiritually alive Christian, doubt and spiritual struggles continue and may even intensify, though in different forms and accompanied by different questions than in pre-conversion days.” This chapter explores whether doubt is a force to be feared and denied or whether it may actually lead to deeper faith.

The emphasis in Chapter Eleven is not so much on the *issues* that raise doubts in the Christian life but rather on the *process* of how those doubts may creep in and how Christians really deal with them.

### **FOCUS: Which should Christians fear most, doubt or spiritual indifference?**

One point this chapter stresses is that Christians should fear spiritual indifference more than doubt. Does your group agree? Ask them to discuss this quote from Chapter Ten that describes Christians who are “spiritual drifters”:

“Doubt doesn’t touch them because they live their spiritual lives on such a superficial basis that any doubt that comes up is kept as amorphous and free-floating as their faith itself. They don’t truly engage in either one. They drift away from doubt just as easily as they coast along in their faith.”

### **FOCUS: Some issues of doubt may get settled at one point of the Christian life but may recur at a later point, with harder questions to answer.**

Review the section in Chapter Ten that is titled “Crisis of Doubt May Lead to Spiritual Triumph.” It makes the point that some issues of doubt may return as we approach them from deeper points in our faith. It says, “Regardless of the conclusions you may come to about the question at any particular point, the question is likely to come back in a different form with a different degree of relevance at another time. This cycle of questioning and deepening your understanding may happen not only on particular questions, but also with regard to your overall faith itself.”

Discuss this with your group:

- If you are a Christian, have you experienced this kind of cyclical nature of doubt and belief? If so, can you give an example of a question that has recurred in different ways throughout your Christian life?

- Do you agree that working through a period of doubt with new understanding can lead to deeper faith rather than a battered faith?

### **FOCUS: How should a years-long period of spiritual struggle be interpreted?**

Some critics of Christianity have argued that Mother Teresa's decades-long spiritual crisis is evidence against the validity of the Christian faith. She couldn't sense Christ's presence, they say, because His presence doesn't exist.

Others interpret her faithfulness to Christ in the midst of her inability to sense His presence for so many years as a true sign of her deep faith. She continued to follow God even though she could no longer sense His comforting Spirit emotionally. Her faith went beyond feelings.

After reviewing that section of Chapter Ten, split your group in half and, regardless of their own personal feelings about the topic, ask one group to gather a list of evidence and arguments for the first position listed above, and ask the other group to gather evidence and arguments for the second position. Then ask the groups to present their findings to each other and debate the issue for awhile. Then allow them to break out of their assigned positions and discuss their personal feelings on this issue.

### **FOCUS: What causes people to leave the church and abandon their faith in Christ?**

Ask your group:

- In your experience, when people have left the church, has doubt been the main tipping point away from faith, or have other reasons for leaving been more prominent?
- What could the church do better to help people who are wavering in their faith?

### **FOCUS: Not all doubts announce themselves in a clear-cut way.**

Chapter Eleven points out that in books of apologetics or in issue-oriented books, the questions are presented in a formal, succinct way that can be answered with cleverly argued responses. But in life, the process is often much less direct.

Ask your group to discuss the following quote from that section of the chapter:

“In life, doubts often arrive in a messier fashion. The creeping doubt slinks in and threatens to undermine my faith even before I'm aware that I have any doubt. How much easier it would be if the doubt arrived by clearly announcing itself so that I could immediately engage it by consulting the relevant philosophers and scriptures.”

- In your own experience, what generally triggers doubt? Does it creep in the way this quote describes? Do circumstances trigger it? Do questions from skeptical people generate it?

### **FOCUS: Doubt or Complaint: What's the Difference?**

- When the author discusses the issue of suffering, he describes his personal struggle with the issue as a crisis of *complaint* rather than a crisis of *doubt*. Does the actual crisis he

describes strike you as a complaint rather than a doubt? Is there a meaningful distinction between the two?

Ask your group to discuss this quote from Chapter Eleven:

“Not every crisis of doubt is as high-stakes or as long-lasting as the one that encompassed Mother Teresa. Some crises of creeping doubt and complaint operate at a more subtle level, gnawing at faith without drawing enough attention to itself to demand that the believer stop and find an answer immediately.”

How does that conform to your own experience with times of spiritual questioning?

- Ask your group to examine and comment on the conclusions the author comes to about suffering. What insights did they find helpful? What ideas might they challenge?