

FAULT LINES

group leader's guide

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This guide is to be used in conjunction with *FaultLines: Challenges That Transform Your Soul* by Steve DeNeff (Indianapolis: Wesleyan Publishing House, 2014).

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CONTENTS

About This Study	4
Week 1. Growing Up	5
Week 2. A Call	7
Week 3. A Crisis	9
Week 4. A Conflict	11
Week 5. A Compromise	13
Week 6. A Failure	15
Week 7: A Success	17
Week 8: A Death	19

ABOUT THIS STUDY

Steve DeNeff's book, *FaultLines*, forms the basis of this eight-week group study. Written in a conversational style, *FaultLines* overflows with biblical truth, inspiration, and practical application. This group study guide is designed to harvest the author's insights and involve group members in eight weeks of meaningful interaction and implementation of truth for daily living. As you and your group members read *FaultLines*, you will undoubtedly find some hard-to-resolve issues, but they will make you stronger in the faith and better equipped to make decisions that honor the Lord!

week 1

GROWING UP

TO THE FACILITATOR

Begin this session with a brief get-acquainted time. Ask each person to give his or her name and tell where he or she grew up.

FOCUS ON GOD'S WORD

Spiritual growth is not an option; it is a mandate. The apostle Peter commanded us to “grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Pet. 3:18). However, God does not expect us to achieve spiritual growth on our own. He has made it possible for us to grow into the likeness of his Son. He “has given us everything we need for a godly life” (2 Pet. 1:3). He has made us participants “in the divine nature” (v. 4), and we “share in his holiness” (Heb. 12:10). Further, he has given us his Spirit, who transforms us into the image of Christ (2 Cor. 3:18).

But just as earthquakes occur along fault lines and are caused by shifts deep in the earth, so spiritual FaultLines bring change to our lives. For example, trials can bring about upheaval. How we respond to this upheaval can make us better and stronger, though. Romans 5:3–5; 8:18, 28; and 1 Peter 1:6–7 make this truth clear.

When Jesus faced the FaultLine of imminent crucifixion, he was troubled (John 12:27). Yet he refused to ask the Father to save him from the cross. Instead, he prayed, “Father, glorify your name!” (v. 28). If we are to grow spiritually, we must see God’s benevolent purpose in each trial and trust him to sustain us in the trial and grant us victory over it. Trust enables us to rejoice in our trials, knowing that they test our faith and develop perseverance (James 1:2–3). In turn perseverance brings about spiritual maturity (v. 4). Rather than indulging in self-pity when a trial strikes, we should pray for wisdom to discern God’s purpose (v. 5).

FOCUS ON LIFE

Discuss the following with your group.

1. *FaultLines* author Steve DeNeff states on page 22 that “spiritual growth for most people does not occur on a steady incline but through a series of growth spurts.” Why do you agree or disagree with this statement?
2. How would you define FaultLines? What FaultLines have you encountered recently?
3. How do you explain the fact that our loving heavenly Father permits trials to enter our lives?
4. How well do you think you would grow spiritually if you were constantly healthy and wealthy? Explain your answer.
5. What kinds of attitudes do you think hinder spiritual growth?
6. Why does spiritual transformation require “a change at the core of our being” (*FaultLines*, p. 25)?
7. DeNeff says, “Too much of our discipleship is only behavior modification” (*FaultLines*, p. 25). Why do you agree or disagree with his statement?
8. How do you explain the fact that Jesus’ heart was troubled (John 12:27)? How does his response to this trouble (v. 28) give you hope when your heart is troubled?
9. Why do you agree or disagree with the observation that God is more interested in what we are becoming than what we are doing?

WRAP-UP

If songbooks are available, have your group read or sing “O to Be Like Thee!” Otherwise, ask each group member to commit silently to give greater attention to daily Bible reading and prayer.

week 2

A CALL

TO THE FACILITATOR

Ask volunteers to tell briefly about a call that changed the direction of their lives. Explain that this week's study focuses on God's call in our lives.

FOCUS ON GOD'S WORD

Steve DeNeff, the author of *FaultLines*, describes a call as “a summons from God to get involved in something he is doing” (p. 40). A call to serve God does not grow out of self-confidence. It is not about our strength or capability to serve God. It is rooted in our weakness. When Moses received the call to lead God's people out of Egypt, he was merely a shepherd, not a military general. He didn't feel qualified for the task, but God would provide all he needed for the mission (Ex. 3:10—4:17). DeNeff reminds us: “A FaultLine occurs when we are called, like Moses, out of our weakness and not from our strengths” (*FaultLines*, p. 42). DeNeff points out that God's call to Moses was not about what Moses would do for God but what God would do through Moses.

In Matthew 4:19, we learn that Jesus called Peter to follow him. Later, Jesus summoned Peter to deny himself and take up his cross (16:24). Again, Jesus said, “Follow me,” but this time his call to Peter involved Peter's losing his life for Jesus' sake (v. 25). Following the resurrection, Jesus explained that his call to Peter would result in Peter's death (John 21:22). It was only after Peter faced up to his own weakness and inadequacy that he became the leader God would use in the early church.

When God calls us to salvation, we must depend entirely upon him to save us by grace (Eph. 2:8–9). But God also calls us to serve him with single-minded purpose. Paul urged Timothy to serve Christ with the single-mindedness of a soldier, the discipline of an athlete, and the industry of a farmer (2 Tim. 2:3–6). Just as Moses turned his back on the pleasures and wealth of Egypt in order to obey God's call (Heb. 11:24–26), so we must value God's call far above the beckoning call of the evil world system.

FOCUS ON LIFE

Discuss the following with your group.

1. Do you think God calls people to serve him because they have talent or prestige or super intelligence? Why or why not?
2. How does 1 Corinthians 1:26–31 support DeNeff’s claim that we are called out of our weakness and not out of our strengths (*FaultLines*, p. 40)?
3. Without identifying anyone by name, what evidence of self-confidence have you seen in ministry?
4. What evidence of genuine humility have you seen in ministry?
5. Why do you agree or disagree that materialism often keeps Christians from answering God’s call to serve him?
6. Do you think a pastor should feel nervous about preaching God’s Word? Why or why not?
7. Do you agree or disagree that God may call a believer to sell cars? Why or why not?
8. Generally speaking, how might we simplify our lives to focus more on serving God?
9. What kinds of things have little value in light of eternity?
10. What kinds of things have great value in light of eternity?

WRAP-UP

If songbooks are available, have your group read or sing “Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus.” If song books are unavailable, ask the group members to complete this sentence, “I feel incapable of serving God, but . . .”

week 3

A CRISIS

TO THE FACILITATOR

Ask volunteers to evaluate the past week in terms of blessings and challenges. Ask how faith helped them experience peace.

FOCUS ON GOD'S WORD

In *FaultLines*, DeNeff compares a crisis to a perfect storm that brings together elements over which we have no control. He lists expectation, faith, loss, futility, fate, and collateral damage. A “perfect storm” crisis is a FaultLine that will either make our lives better or worse. The outcome depends upon our response to the crisis.

The apostle Paul was aboard a ship when a horrendous storm engulfed it (Acts 27). It created a crisis of immense magnitude. The sailors tried to secure the ship by tying ropes around it, but their efforts failed. So they threw the cargo overboard to lighten the ship. Finally, when nothing worked, they abandoned all hope of making it safely to shore.

In the midst of this terrifying situation, when all expectations of survival faded, Paul addressed the crew. He told them to be courageous. Although the ship would be lost, God would spare the lives of all on board. He testified that he believed everyone would survive because God had told him so. Faith in what God has promised is a priceless treasure in the midst of any storm that beats our lives.

Paul gave one condition for survival. Everyone had to stay with the ship.

Often, when a crisis strikes us, our first thought is to escape, but we learn valuable lessons by staying in the crisis until God ends it. When the ship broke apart, everyone on board grabbed parts of the debris and floated safely to shore.

FOCUS ON LIFE

Discuss the following with your group.

1. How does “perfect storm” accurately describe a crisis you faced?
2. Do you think your faith would be strong if you never experienced a crisis? Why or why not?
3. What was the hardest thing you experienced in your perfect storm? Why was it so hard?
4. On page 78 of *FaultLines*, DeNeff affirms: “When the storm finally passes—it always does!—it leaves a depth and a richness that cannot be had except by those who have weathered the perfect storm.” Why do you agree or disagree with this statement?
5. How might you help a fellow believer who is struggling in the midst of a crisis?
6. Paul brought God’s word to all who feared the worst in the midst of the storm. What storms seem to alarm unbelievers in today’s perilous world? What message from God can you bring to them?
7. How has a believer endured a natural disaster or a battle with cancer in a way that honored God and inspired you?
8. How well prepared do you think most Christians are to survive a perfect-storm crisis? Explain your answer.
9. It has been said, “The servant of the Lord is immortal until his life’s work is done.” Why do you agree or disagree with this statement? If you agree, how does the statement encourage you?

WRAP-UP

Ask volunteers to tell what crises they are experiencing. Have volunteers pray specifically for those who are experiencing crises.

week 4

A CONFLICT

TO THE FACILITATOR

Have each group member identify both his or her favorite and least favorite food. See how many agree with each choice. This brief exercise will get the members talking in preparation for the Focus on Life discussion.

FOCUS ON GOD'S WORD

In chapter 4 of *FaultLines*, DeNeff says that people can be a kind of FaultLine. He refers to them as demeaning and unfair. They bring conflict into our lives. King Saul brought conflict into David's life. Although David did not deserve to be ill-treated by Saul, he was the object of Saul's radical mood shifts. One moment, Saul wanted David to play his harp for him, but the next moment he tried to kill David (1 Sam. 18:10–11).

Joseph experienced conflict in Egypt. He suffered injustice at the hands of Potiphar's wife. Because he refused her sexual advances, she accused him of raping her. In a fit of rage, her husband threw Joseph into a dungeon (Gen. 39:7–20).

DeNeff makes the point on page 84 of *FaultLines* that conflict may come from insensitive people. They may let equipment wear out, waste money, and underpay their employees. Although Moses wasn't an employee, he faced conflict from his own insensitive people. They spoke evil of him, refused to follow his leadership, and even threatened to kill him (Ex. 16:2–3; 17:1–4).

Steve DeNeff identifies Hagar as the victim of the conflict that arose, because Abram and Sarai misused and later despised her. She chose to run from conflict. However, she did not escape the Lord's sight. He took notice of her, commanded her to return to Sarai, and blessed her. Having been blessed by God, she could return to Sarai and submit to her authority (Gen. 16:6–14).

It isn't easy to submit to injustice, but we can do so if we know God sees us, cares about us, and promises to bless us.

FOCUS ON LIFE

Discuss the following with your group.

1. The Latin word for *conflict* means “to strike together or to press and squeeze.” Why do you agree or disagree that this definition accurately describes a conflict you have experienced?
2. On page 83 of *FaultLines*, DeNeff, suggests that one’s personal trouble has likely come from incompetence, injustice, or insensitivity. How have you experienced or observed conflict brought on by one of these conditions?
3. How would you advise a Christian whose employer makes unreasonable demands on his or her time and/or workload?
4. How would you advise a Christian who has not had a raise in five years, although the owner of the business lives lavishly and spends foolishly?
5. What was the most severe example of injustice in Bible times? Defend your answer.
6. How did Joseph handle injustice when he was wrongly accused of rape and kept in prison for a long time? Do you think it is right or wrong to adopt the attitude, “Don’t get mad; just get even”?
7. Why do you agree or disagree with DeNeff’s portrayal of Sarai in chapter 4 of *FaultLines*?
8. Is it ever best to run from conflict? Why or why not?

WRAP-UP

Ask volunteers to read aloud Psalm 27:1–3; Proverbs 15:1; and Isaiah 53:7. Instruct the group members to apply these verses to whatever conflict confronts them in the coming week.

week 5

A COMPROMISE

TO THE FACILITATOR

Stressing the need to pray, John Bunyon said, “You can do anything after you have prayed, but nothing until you have prayed.” His observation applies to every task we endeavor to perform for the Lord, including the ministry of leading a small group study. Therefore, make prayer a vital part of each week’s preparation. Pray for your group members by name, and pray for the Holy Spirit’s power and guidance.

FOCUS ON GOD’S WORD

On page 105 of *FaultLines*, DeNeff compares temptation to an advertisement to get something for nothing. Of course, if we yield to temptation, there is always a price to pay. Clearly, God doesn’t want us to have to pay the price of yielding to temptation, so he gave us Jesus as the model we can emulate to defeat the Devil and resist temptation. Jesus, our High Priest, is able to help us when we are tempted because he was tempted but did not sin (Heb. 2:18; 4:15).

No Christian is impervious to sin, but every Christian can overcome temptation. In *FaultLines*, DeNeff voices agreement with a Vatican report that the top three sins for men are sex (lust), substance abuse (gluttony), and shirking responsibility (sloth). For women, the top three sins are condescending or critical spirit (pride), jealousy (envy), and bitterness (anger). People confess to these sins, perhaps to get rid of the guilt while holding on to the pleasure (pp. 110–111).

DeNeff sees temptation as a FaultLine. Jesus faced this FaultLine. The Holy Spirit came upon him, and the Father declared Jesus was his Son whom he loved and with whom he was well pleased (Luke 3:22). But the Spirit led Jesus into the desert to be tempted (4:1). Temptation was necessary preparation for his public ministry (v. 14).

Could it be we are tempted in order to prepare us for ministry? If we know what it is to be tempted and overcome it, aren’t we better equipped to serve God?

Although the Holy Spirit leads us into holiness, we are not immune from temptation. We will face temptation for the rest of our lives, and we cannot stay holy if we yield to temptation. There is no middle ground. James 4:7 calls upon us to submit ourselves to God and “resist the devil.”

FOCUS ON LIFE

Discuss the following with your group.

1. Why do you agree or disagree with the statement, “The Devil made me do it”?
2. Do you believe Jesus could have sinned? Why or why not?
3. How would you counsel a believer who confessed to indulging in pornography?
4. How might a Christian face temptation on the job? How would you respond if he or she asked, “What’s so wrong about padding my expense account? Everybody does it?”
5. Why do you agree or disagree with the Vatican report DeNeff refers to on pages 110–111 of *FaultLines*? It lists the top three sins for men are sex (lust), substance abuse (gluttony), and shirking responsibility (sloth).
6. Why do you agree or disagree with the same report that lists the top three sins for women as condescending or critical spirit (pride), jealousy (envy), and bitterness (anger)?
7. What kinds of places do you think a Christian should avoid if he or she harbors sexual lust? If he or she succumbs to the temptation to squander money?
8. What should Christians do if they find themselves around gossiping Christians?
9. How might temptation make someone a stronger follower of Jesus?

WRAP-UP

Ask volunteers to find and memorize Bible verses in the coming week that will help them overcome temptation.

week 6

A FAILURE

TO THE FACILITATOR

The apostle Paul told the Philippian believers, “I thank my God every time I remember you” (Phil. 1:3). Perhaps you thank God for your group members when you pray, but why not also thank them directly for participating in these group sessions? A little bit of thanks can produce a whole lot of positive response.

FOCUS ON GOD’S WORD

As DeNeff points out in chapter 6 of *FaultLines*, the Bible includes many examples of failure by his servants. Moses was often angry, reluctant to do God’s will, frustrated, and ready to throw in the towel (Ex. 2:11–12; 3:11; 5:22; 17:4; 32:19). Nevertheless, the Lord ascribed high honor to Moses as a preeminent prophet and his faithful servant (Deut. 34:10; Heb. 3:2–5).

King David, too, experienced failure. He caved to temptation and committed adultery. Later, after learning that Bathsheba was pregnant, David engaged in a cover-up that involved bringing Bathsheba’s husband Uriah home from war. But Uriah did not have relations with Bathsheba, so David assigned him to the frontlines where he would be killed (2 Sam. 11:1–26). But David repented, and throughout the centuries has received high esteem by God’s chosen people.

And then there was Peter. Like Moses and David, Peter often showed strong faith, but also like them, he experienced significant failure. Not long after pledging unflinching loyalty to Jesus (Mark 14:29, 31; Luke 22:33), Peter denied Jesus three times in the presence of a servant girl (Luke 22:54–60). Yet, the Lord restored Peter and used him mightily on the day of Pentecost and in the formative years of the church (Acts 2:14–41; 3:1–26). He also employed Peter to write the inspired epistles of 1 and 2 Peter.

In chapter 6 of *FaultLines*, the author passes along advice that we can implement when we fail: (1) “Own up to your failure”; (2) “stay in the body” (the church); (3) “entrust yourself to God”; and (4) “discipline yourself” (pp. 140–142). We must stay alert and resist the Devil (1 Pet. 5:8).

FOCUS ON LIFE

Discuss the following with your group.

1. Do you believe it is possible to reach perfection in some endeavors, including spiritual endeavors? Why or why not? Do you think a person should not strive to be a perfectionist? Why or why not?
2. What adverse effects may occur if a perfectionist fails to achieve perfection? How can these adverse effects be only temporary?
3. How might the failure to achieve perfection work out for the best? Defend your answer.
4. In *Faultlines*, DeNeff cites Moses, David, and Peter as examples of failure. Why do you agree or disagree that John Mark (Acts 15:36–40) and Demas were also failures (2 Tim. 4:10)?
5. Read 2 Timothy 4:11. Why do you agree or disagree that Mark became a strong servant for the Lord?
6. How should a believer who has failed the Lord in some way deal with his or her failure?
7. What role do you think the Holy Spirit plays in restoring a fallen believer?
8. Why do you agree or disagree that a pastor who commits adultery should never serve again as a pastor?
9. How can a believer successfully resist the Devil? How has the Holy Spirit helped you to resist the Devil?

WRAP-UP

Ask volunteers to tell how God used their failure(s) to strengthen them for his service.

week 7

A SUCCESS

TO THE FACILITATOR

Ask who is celebrating a birthday or anniversary. Congratulate those who are, and invite the group members to give them a round of applause. It is always good to show you care about your group members.

FOCUS ON GOD'S WORD

Author Steve DeNeff notes that we are most likely to feel good fortune in power, possessions, and popularity (*FaultLines*, p. 148). He cites the rich farmer mentioned in Luke 12:16–20 as an example of someone who suddenly ran into good fortune. He also offers as another example of a sudden run of good fortune the servants who received stacks of money from their master (Matt. 25:14–30; Luke 19:12–27). The third servant, DeNeff explains, represents people who are tyrannized by two evils when they suddenly come into a great deal of money. They are (1) the obligation to produce more, and (2) the fear of losing what they have (p. 153).

We are stewards of the possessions we have. We are obligated to faithfully invest what the Lord has entrusted to us for his purposes while we wait for his return (Luke 19:13; 1 Cor. 4:1–2).

Joseph was a good steward of what was placed at his disposal. He recognized that God had charged him with the responsibility to use Egypt's stored crops to preserve life (Gen. 45:45, 7).

DeNeff challenges us to be good stewards by sharing what we have with those who have less (1 Sam. 2:8; Ps. 82:3–4). He says we must look for people with good character “who are ambitious and unselfish, who will not use it on themselves” (p. 161). We must also remember we have an obligation to those who come after us. We can invest some of what God has entrusted to us to influence future generations. Joseph's legacy extended to his descendants. He blessed the children of Manasseh's son Makir, promised that God would take the Israelites to the Promised Land, and commanded them to carry his remains from Egypt to the Promised Land (Gen. 50:22–25).

FOCUS ON LIFE

Discuss the following with your group.

1. DeNeff opens chapter 7 of *FaultLines* with, “Nothing succeeds or fails like success” (p. 145). Why do you agree or disagree with this statement?
2. How would you answer a gambling Christian who says, “I gamble for fun, and I tithe whatever I earn from gambling. So gambling is harmless, isn’t it?”
3. If a Christian suddenly received a million-dollar inheritance and asked you for financial advice, what would you tell him or her?
4. Why do you agree or disagree that a sudden gain of money or possessions may not be a good thing?
5. Do you agree that 10 percent of what a Christian earns or receives belongs to the Lord, but the other 90 percent is his or hers to spend as he or she wishes? Why or why not?
7. Without identifying anyone, what foolish use of money and/or possessions have you seen?
8. How would you define faithful stewardship?
9. How might parents help their children establish good stewardship habits?
10. Why do you agree or disagree that money should not be given to the poor simply because they are poor?
11. What criteria would you want to put in place if you were appointed the director of a welfare program?
12. How can Christians pass along a rich legacy to succeeding generations of believers?

WRAP-UP

Ask the group members to track how they spend their income this week. At the end of the week they should evaluate whether they practiced faithful stewardship, and then ask themselves how they can improve their stewardship.

week 8

A DEATH

TO THE FACILITATOR

This final session discusses death. Pray that your group members will want to serve the Lord wholeheartedly for the rest of their lives, knowing, “There’s only one life. ‘Twill soon be past. Only what’s done for Christ will last.”

FOCUS ON GOD’S WORD

Author Steve DeNeff notes that death is “the one FaultLine we will all be on at one time or another” (*FaultLines*, p. 168), and he writes that it makes us “better saints or sinners” (p. 169).

Two criminals were crucified alongside Jesus. One threw insults at Jesus; the other acknowledged his sin and believed in Jesus (Luke 23:39–43). They followed different approaches to death. One wanted to be saved from death; the other wanted to be saved through death. One died unforgiven; the other died forgiven.

Some minimize death, and even joke about it. Many try to avoid death by doing whatever they can to stay young. Nevertheless, everyone has an appointment with death (Heb. 9:27). As DeNeff points out, we must anticipate death and prepare for it by slowly disentangling from the world. We need to let go of our attachments—“to de-clutter. To downsize. To live simply on less” (*FaultLines*, p. 175).

Joseph knew he was dying, so he requested that his family carry his remains to the Promised Land. We ought to face death as an opportunity to bless our successors, to pass down a spiritual legacy to them, and have them carry us where God is taking us.

The greatest prospect of heaven should be that of seeing Christ (Acts 7:55; Phil. 1:21–23). Paul instructed the believers at Colosse to set their minds on things above, “where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God” (Col. 3:1).

Death changes so much for the better, including our weariness, frailty, and mortality. Paul wrote, “Meanwhile we groan, longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling. . . . For while we are in this tent, we groan and are burdened, because we do not wish to be unclothed but to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling” (2 Cor. 5:2, 4).

FOCUS ON LIFE

Discuss the following with your group.

1. How do some people minimize the FaultLine of death?
2. Have you observed a difference in the way Christians approach death from the way unbelievers approach it? If so, describe the difference.
3. DeNeff identifies the kingdom the repentant thief entered as “a realm or a domain under [Jesus’] influence” (*FaultLines*, p. 176). How does this definition agree with or differ from your definition of the kingdom?
4. How do you think heaven differs from this current world?
5. What concepts of heaven do some Christians hold that you believe are unbiblical?
6. Why is heaven such an attractive place?
7. DeNeff writes in *FaultLines*: “We are living in a culture that avoids death. Even among Christians, the memorial service has replaced the traditional funeral, often with the body not present. A private disposition of the body has already taken place so that no one will have to confront the lifeless” (p. 172). Why do you agree or disagree with the author’s observations?
8. Why do you agree or disagree that a Christian should not be cremated?
9. In what practical ways should a believer prepare for death?
10. What would you most like to pass along to your surviving family members? How would you like to be remembered after you die?

WRAP-UP

Distribute paper and pencils to the group members, and ask them to write what they would like to have written on their tombstone. Ask a volunteer to close this week’s session with a prayer of thanks that Jesus has given believers eternal life.