

FAULT LINES

group leader's guide
video discussion

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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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HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

Steve DeNeff's book, *FaultLines*, forms the basis of this eight-week video group study. Written in a conversational style, *FaultLines* overflows with biblical truth, inspiration, and practical application. This group leader's guide for the group study videos is designed to harvest the testimonies and insights from the *FaultLines Group Study DVD* 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* and watch the videos, 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!

1

INTRODUCTION

PART 1

In this video clip, Steve DeNeff reflects on severe seasons of his life. He admits they were difficult times, but he learned to view them as times of spiritual growth. He concludes that spiritual growth does not depend on what we do, but on what God does in us. Because the life of God is in us and he plans to grow us into the image of Christ, we will grow spiritually.

ASK: How did a painful season of life affect your faith? How did it ultimately cause you to grow spiritually?

Have a volunteer read aloud Philippians 1:6.

ASK: How can you be sure God uses even painful trials to accomplish his purpose for your life?

PART 2

DeNeff points out that outside influences may hinder our spiritual growth. However, we can grow spiritually by responding appropriately to those influences. If we use a difficult trial—a FaultLine—as an opportunity to learn, try, confess, and endure, God will move us to the next level of spiritual growth.

ASK: If a believer receives a diagnosis of terminal cancer, how might he or she grow spiritually by engaging in each of the following elements: learning, trying, confessing, and enduring?

Have group members read Romans 5:3–4.

ASK: How does this passage affirm DeNeff’s claim that God may use a FaultLine to move us to the next level of spiritual growth?

PART 3

In this video clip, a few Christians testify to the value of a hard trial, a FaultLine that enabled them not only to see God at work in their lives, but also help others grow stronger in their faith. DeNeff underscores the fact that we do not welcome a FaultLine, but God can use it as a SoulShift to shape us into the image of his Son. DeNeff notes that people who successfully managed a FaultLine and discovered God's purpose in it, brought together four forces: the predicament they were in; an interpreter, someone who stood with them like a coach or friend through the predicament; a word from the Lord that cut to the heart; and a new discipline or practice they began as a result of what they learned.

Have the group members read 2 Corinthians 1:3–4.

ASK: How does this passage reinforce the testimonies of those who said their personal FaultLine enabled them to help others?

ASK: What word from the Lord contributed to your SoulShift when you experienced a FaultLine? Why do you agree or disagree that no believer should try to survive a FaultLine by assuming the role of a “Lone Ranger”?

ASK: What new discipline or practice most often follows a FaultLine experience? Defend your answer.

2

A CALL

PART 1

DeNeff offers an interesting analogy of people drifting, speeding, or sailing on a lake. Some drift on rafts; some move quickly in speedboats; and others move along in sailboats, hoisting their sails to allow the wind to propel them to their destination. Like the different ways people move on a lake, Christians approach life differently. Some have no plan for their spiritual formation; they just drift along. Some aggressively and compulsively try to speed to their spiritual goal by their own power. The right way to pursue God's goal for us, DeNeff explains, is to raise our sails to cooperate with a FaultLine's force and allow it to move us forward to God's goal for us.

Have the group read Philippians 3:12–14. Remind everyone that Paul wrote Philippians when he was under house arrest and in chains.

ASK: Based on this passage, would you compare Paul's approach to his FaultLine of imprisonment to a person drifting on a raft, rushing aggressively forward on a speedboat, or hoisting the sails of a sailboat to catch the wind? Explain your choice.

ASK: Why do you agree or disagree that many believers and churches have no plan for spiritual growth?

ASK: How might you use the force of a FaultLine to move closer to the goal of spiritual maturity?

PART 2

This video clip portrays God's call as a FaultLine. He may call us to leave our comfort zone, as he called Abraham and Moses to do. Uncertainty may arise. We naturally fear the unknown. We feel unqualified. But gradually, the conviction settles in our souls that we must obey God's call. If we trust him, the FaultLine acts like a crosswind on a sailboat. It moves us where God wants to take us. He knows all about us, and he saw us before we saw him. When we obey his call, we may be amazed at what he will accomplish in and through us.

Have a volunteer read aloud Genesis 12:1, 4.

ASK: If you had been Abram when God called him to leave everything that was familiar and go to an undisclosed location, what would your first thoughts and feelings have been? How do you think Abram’s wife felt when he told her about God’s call?

ASK: What do you think God is calling most Christians to do today? What might be involved in answering his call?

PART 3

Continuing the theme of God’s call, we learn from the video clip that believers who said yes to his call learned that it made it easier to answer a future call. Their look back showed clearly that God had led them by the right way and strengthened their faith. DeNeff points to three divine calls that deserve and demand a yes: the call to salvation, the call to simplicity, and the call to mission. He observes that the happiest people are those who say yes to those calls.

Whatever our vocation is, we should be asking how we can honor God in it and be aware of his purpose. DeNeff suggests that we practice the presence of God in our vocation and develop the habit of journaling to trace what God is doing in our lives.

On page 56 of *FaultLines*, DeNeff issues the following challenge about answering God’s call: “Don’t argue. Don’t negotiate. Don’t think about how inadequate you are or about how little you have to offer. And don’t think that it’s too late. It’s never too late.”

Have volunteers review God’s call to Elijah in 1 Kings 17:2–4, 7–16; 18:1–2.

ASK: Why do you agree or disagree that by answering each of God’s calls by faith, Elijah was well prepared for the big test of confronting the false prophets on Mount Carmel?

ASK: When did you last say yes to God when he called you to perform a mission? What resulted from saying yes to God?

ASK: How would you encourage someone who is struggling with what he or she believes is God’s call to a new vocation?

3

A CRISIS

PART 1

A perfect storm, DeNeff explains, is the convergence of several strong winds that create such an overwhelming situation that we can do nothing but hunker down. Perfect storms—heavy trials—buffet believers, and when they do, we usually ask God “Why?” But a perfect storm can be an occasion of growth, when we commit ourselves and our questions to God. It can also be an occasion of thinking about God in new ways and walking more closely with him.

Have the group read Isaiah 55:8–9.

ASK: Why might it be impossible to know precisely why God allows a perfect storm to strike a believer? What perfect storm has God led you through without revealing precisely why the storm struck your life? What did you learn about God during the storm?

ASK: How can God use a perfect storm to encourage a believer? To grow him or her?

PART 2

Have you been in a crisis and felt all alone? Did no one help? Did no words console or encourage you? In this video clip, several believers tell how fellow believers acted in ways that brought healing and practical help to them when they were hurting. But, as DeNeff relates from his personal encounter with a season of severe physical need, nothing anyone did or said helped. As a matter of fact, some words hurt. DeNeff invites us to talk about the words that have helped us in our times of testing and draw upon those words to help others—or even ourselves—in a season of crisis.

ASK: In what crisis have you felt all alone, even abandoned by God? What helped you get through that crisis?

Have a volunteer read aloud or quote Romans 8:28.

ASK: Do you think it does much good to simply quote this verse to someone who feels helpless in a crisis? Why or why not? What do you think is the best way to help a friend who has lost a loved one?

PART 3

DeNeff appeals to the story of Jesus beckoning Peter to walk to him on the water to explain that we need to get our eyes off the storm and look around to see what God is doing. He suggests that we can do this by practicing silence. Instead of questioning or complaining, we ought to be silent in God's presence. Also, we ought to acknowledge our vulnerability. We are not invincible; we can be hurt. But in our vulnerability, we can hold fast to what we know for sure and seek counsel from an interpreter, a trustworthy friend. DeNeff concludes with a deeply personal, dark time in his life when he begged God to answer him. At that time, he learned that it is best to be with God in a storm than without him in a favorable situation.

Have the group read Psalm 73.

ASK: What troubled the psalmist? When did he see matters from God's perspective? What did he then value far above material prosperity (see vv. 23–26, 28)?

ASK: DeNeff said he would rather be in hell with God than in heaven without him. Why do you agree or disagree with his startling statement?

4

A CONFLICT

PART 1

A conflict, the speaker explains, is a situation we can do something about, but the cost is too high. It is a FaultLine between ourselves and unjust, unfair people, like a hostile work environment, a divorce, or persecution. Pushing back would only make matters worse. So what should we do? DeNeff suggests talking to a trustworthy person about our situation, and realizing that God often wraps his grace and virtues around us during our FaultLine conflicts.

ASK: What recent nerve-racking conflict severely tested your faith? How did you feel about God at that time?

ASK: Did you find help by talking things over with a reliable friend, pastor, or professional counselor when you experienced conflict? If so, what did you learn from the conversation?

PART 2

According to this video clip, when we are in a conflict, we may try to get justice by getting even. But this approach makes things worse and fails to understand that God wants to teach us and grow us in the conflict. We need to ask, why does this conflict irritate me? The answer may be unpleasant. It may show our sinful tendencies such as anger, resentment, pride, impatience, and lack of faith. It is far better to ask what God wants to accomplish through the conflict, and then trust him to grow us in it and carry us through it.

ASK: Were you disappointed with yourself in a conflict when you became angry with God and/or tried to get even with the person(s) who caused the conflict? Why or why not?

ASK: What spiritual lessons did you learn in a conflict that you will apply to future conflicts?

PART 3

According to the speaker, conflict may help us develop the discipline of humility. He suggests that we talk with a friend about some of the things God may be using the conflict to teach us. DeNeff also encourages us to pray for our enemies and do good to them. He cites his experience of having his home broken into by the sheriff's fourteen-year-old son. Three more times his home was broken into. Suspecting the same teenage burglar, DeNeff plotted ways to make him pay until his wife asked, "Have you prayed for him?" That was a turning point for DeNeff. He began to pray that God would change and prosper the juvenile, and in the process he noticed how God was changing him.

ASK: Do you think it would be extremely hard to pray for someone who has wronged you? Why or why not?

ASK: What might happen to an enemy you pray for? What might happen to you?

5

A COMPROMISE

PART 1

Temptation is a FaultLine, DeNeff insists. In a survey of twelve hundred Americans, the respondents cited worry as their top temptation; but two-thirds of respondents said they did nothing to resist temptation to commit one or more of the seven deadly sins. The Devil, DeNeff says, seeks the most opportune time to tempt us. He suggests we write down the place, person, or thing that tempts us the most, and talk to someone about that temptation and the ways we see it manifested in our lives.

ASK: Do you think most Christians minimize the harm of yielding to temptation? Why or why not?

ASK: If a friend told you he or she wanted to be free from addiction to pornography, what advice would you give him or her?

PART 2

Are there things—sinful urges—God can’t control? DeNeff wondered about that but became convinced that temptation is a FaultLine that God can use to transform us. He sent Jesus into the wilderness to face and overcome temptation. DeNeff suggests that God can transform us in the place of temptation if we cooperate with him.

On page 119 of *FaultLines*, DeNeff applauds the role of the Holy Spirit in helping us overcome temptation. He writes: “People who are full of the Holy Spirit have developed a pattern of yielding to his impulses and constraining their own, until the power and virtue that flows out from them is not something they have manufactured but something they have unleashed.”

Have a volunteer read aloud 1 Corinthians 10:13.

ASK: How can Christians win over temptation?

DeNeff noted that the Devil tempted Jesus, but Jesus relied on Scripture and successfully turned aside each of the Devil’s temptations. Have the group read Ephesians 6:17.

ASK: Why do you agree or disagree that many Christians fall to temptation because they battle the Devil with a broken sword—a limited familiarity with Scripture? How can we effectively “take the sword of the Spirit”?

PART 3

Continuing the theme of temptation as a FaultLine, DeNeff recommends spiritual disciplines that can turn old, dry places, into places that give life. In addition to the power of the Spirit, two disciplines can transform our lives. The first is regular confession in a small group of wise friends. DeNeff cautions that the confession should be straightforward and honest as we review our attention to Bible reading, prayer, and other spiritual matters. It should also expose any sinful attitudes we have. The second discipline is fasting. By fasting, we send the body a message that it will be our spiritual aspirations rather than our physical appetites that determines the shape of our lives. DeNeff advises us to fill the fasting time with the Word.

ASK: Why do you agree or disagree that public confession in a small group setting is beneficial to spiritual growth?

ASK: What objections, if any, do you have to fasting? Do you think others should know you are fasting? Why or why not?

6

A FAILURE

PART 1

DeNeff points out that we all fail, and either give credit to the failure or attach blame to it. Failure is a fork in the road, he claims. It can lead us to subsequent success or devastation. Failures proceed from and affect the soul. They can change our morale and morality. We need to determine whether failure was a failure of performance or a failure of character. The good news is, God can transform us if we handle the failure correctly.

ASK: Do you think people often blame God for a failure of their own making? Why or why not?

ASK: Which kind of failure do you think is most common: a failure of performance or a failure of character? Defend your answer.

PART 2

The two men featured in this video experienced the FaultLine of failure, and they questioned God's whereabouts until they realized he was not outside what they were experiencing, but alongside them. DeNeff identifies King David's adultery as a failure of character, an abuse of power, and a lack of humility. King Saul, too, was a failure. He abused his power and lacked humility.

According to DeNeff, when we fail, we should be open to grace and change. We should recognize that God can use the failure to make us better. Our life will only spiral downward, DeNeff says, if we close ourselves to God and others.

Have the group read Psalm 32:3–5.

ASK: How does this passage affirm DeNeff's words about openness when we fail?

Have a volunteer read aloud Galatians 6:1–3.

ASK: How can a believer best help a fellow believer who has experienced failure of character?

PART 3

The two men featured in this video express the confidence that God brought them through a stormy time so they could see that he was with them in the storm and to give them the opportunity to speak from experience into other people's lives.

DeNeff says we can learn new practices in the storm. Making things right with people negatively affected by our failure, or restitution, is one practice to learn. Serving others is another. Instead of withdrawing from church, we need to serve the body of believers in a low-profile way.

Have the group read Jude 24–25.

ASK: How does this passage encourage you to trust God to resurrect you from failure? Why do you agree or disagree that God can use even a failure to glorify himself?

ASK: What disciplinary action should a church take when a staff member succumbs to moral failure? What should be the primary purpose of the discipline?

7

A SUCCESS

PART 1

Success is a FaultLine that most people want to experience. It usually comes in the form of money, fame, or power. But success can make us better or worse. Success changes our relationships. We wonder if people really like us, or do they like what God has given us? Success also changes our stress load and our personality. It may make us more impatient with less successful people, and less transparent. However, God intends to use our success to make us better.

ASK: What unexpected consequences may accompany success?

ASK: Why do you agree or disagree with the successful businessman in the video who said that comparing himself to a turtle on a fencepost helped him put his success into proper perspective?

ASK: If a Christian suddenly received a million-dollar inheritance and asked you for advice, what would you tell him or her?

PART 2

If we suddenly come into success, DeNeff reasons, two dangers emerge. The first is pride. We compliment ourselves. The other is fear. It paralyzes us at the thought of losing what success has brought us. In the parable of the talents, the third servant was afraid of losing his sudden success, so he played it safe: he buried his success. Success is more given than earned. God gives success according to our ability to invest it for him—to use it to further what he is interested in. Further, God gives us success so we will be generous. We should ask what God want us to do with our success? The answer is, he wants us to change the lives of others by our passing the success along.

ASK: 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?

ASK: How might a financially successful believer avoid both pride and fear?

PART 3

In this video, a few believers reflect on success and offer excellent thoughts we can incorporate into our view of success. When we are successful, we ought to be generous. We should ask God to help us identify people he wants us to invest in. Also, we ought to empower two or three people by spending time with them, praying for them, and mentoring them. If God has given us success, it doesn't belong to us, DeNeff states, it belongs to God. Therefore, we should use it for him. On page 161 of *FaultLines*, DeNeff cautions, "As always, we have to be careful to spend our favor on those who have character, who are ambitious and unselfish, who will not use it on themselves."

ASK: Why is it easy to let success go to one's head? Why is hard not to fear losing whatever success has come to us?

ASK: Without using names, who might be worthy candidates of our generosity? How would you show generosity to people who have character?

8

A DEATH

PART 1

In this video, DeNeff refers to dying as perhaps the hardest FaultLine. He emphasizes that all our plans stop when we are dying, and we question our beliefs. We will never see the promises of God unless we look for them, he says. He encourages us to talk to friends in the FaultLine of their dying about their questions and faith.

ASK: What questions about death and dying trouble you?

ASK: Why do you agree or disagree that God gives his children not only grace to live victoriously, but also grace to die victoriously? How has his grace helped you cope with the death of a loved one?

PART 2

Jesus has a strong aversion to death, DeNeff tells us. He interrupted the mourning surrounding Lazarus's death by raising him from the dead. Death is not the cessation of life, DeNeff says. He emphasizes that beyond the boundary of death we will see Jesus, and until then we should focus more on him than on heaven. As we think about death and dying, DeNeff suggests two practices. We should practice spiritual reading by listening for the Lord's voice as we read the Bible. We should also practice meditation, in which we roll the words of Scripture around in our minds until we feed off them and are encouraged by them.

Assign the following Scripture passages to be read aloud by members of the group: Psalm 23; John 3:14–16; 11:25; 14:1–6; 1 Corinthians 15:50–54; 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18; Revelations 22:1–5.

ASK: What do you find most encouraging about the teachings given in these passages?

ASK: The death of a believer has been called such things as a graduation, a change of address, a home going, and an entrance into eternal rest. Which of these descriptions of death do you find most comforting? Why?

ASK: If you could give a one-sentence encouragement to a dying believer, what would it be?

PART 3

In this video, DeNeff relates a story about twins in their mother's womb. The story illustrates the fact that we aren't in a position to know everything and what we call dying may actually be a birth canal into a new world of enhanced senses and full joy. We know the resurrection lies ahead, and we will walk with our Christian friends and loved ones again—in a far better place.

Have the group read silently Philippians 1:20–23.

ASK: How does Paul's testimony in these verses encourage you about life beyond death? What practical results might we see if we said sincerely, "For to me, to live is Christ"?

Have a volunteer read aloud John 14:3, and ask another volunteer to read aloud 1 John 3:2–3.

ASK: What do you think is the best thing about heaven? Defend your answer.