



## Applied Faith Men's Bible Study

South Hills Baptist Church

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## God in Our Lives

### Lesson #1

reference

The first time I read Isaiah 42:20 it blew me away. The prophet says, "You have seen many things, but you pay no attention; your ears are open, but you do not listen" (NIV). I read it and immediately took it to heart; Yes, I've seen many things, but have I paid no attention? This passage spoke powerfully to me about how I want to approach my life.

We're each given experiences in our lives and I believe we're meant to reflect on them—to milk them for meaning and try to discover what God might have for us in them.

How is God present in a certain experience? What might God be teaching me? How might God be changing me?

Yet so often we're so rushed and busy that we simply don't pay attention. For example, a person might go on mission trip, to a fantastic concert, on a cross-country road trip, or have some other really amazing experience. But instead of reflecting and noticing where God was in that experience, he just adds it to his big, accumulating pile of experiences.

Too often we make the mistake of turning to a generic prescription for spiritual growth. We prescribe things like, "Read your Bible and pray, go to church on Sunday, try a mission trip, memorize Scripture." We prescribe the spiritual disciplines. While I believe spiritual disciplines are important, they are not generic. Spiritual disciplines are not an aspirin we can pass out to people and say, "If you do this, you'll feel better and your relationship with God will grow."

We each have a unique relationship with God. Relationships are dynamic, growing, and changing; what you're doing at a certain point in your relationship with God may be different from what I am doing in my relationship with God, and that's okay. My spiritual practices need to be the ones that bring me to God; yours need to be the ones that take you to God. And so the way to reflect is for each person to pay attention, to listen to God. And to discern, with God, what specific practices or disciplines will best allow him to do so.

When we think about reflecting on our experiences and noticing God, often we think first of "mountain top" experiences—times in which we've experienced something amazing or have sensed God's presence in a meaningful way. But what about "valley" times? Periods in which God seems anything but close?

There are experiences of what I call "the presence of the absence of God." In these times, we sense God as a God who hides himself; it may be that we cannot "feel" God or it seems God is distant from us.

But being aware of that feeling of absence is also a way of knowing God.

Martin Luther talked about how our mysterious God, in some ways, is hidden from us—how sometimes we feel a dark side of God's love. And so, it is crucial to know that even when a person is in a place of profound spiritual desolation, that too is a real place in the spiritual journey with God. God's hiddenness—what Christian mystics called "the cloud of unknowing"—is as real as it would be if you saw God's handwriting on the wall.

### Application/Activity

We are going to spend time with God for this activity. We are going to reflect on different scenarios that have occurred in our lives. I want you to think of six different instances in your lives. Two should be instances of happiness. Two should be instances of sadness. Two should be instances of anger. Meditate on a separate instance each night. Think of the details of these occurrences. With the assistance of hindsight, think of how God was present during these separate moments in your life. How did He work in and through the entire ordeal? Draw something of a roadmap of these different occurrences and see how God was with you and at work throughout these moments of happiness, sadness and anger.