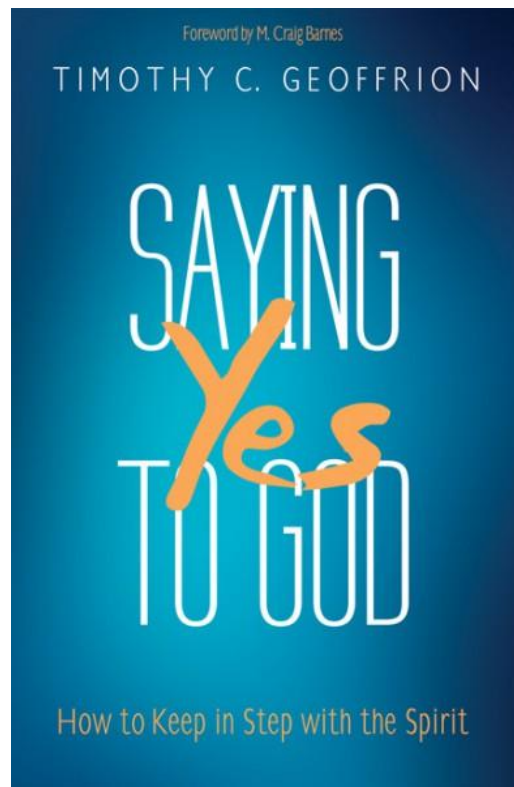


Saying Yes to God: How to Keep in Step with the Spirit

By Timothy C. Geoffrion

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LEADER'S GUIDE¹



This guide is intended for use for small group discussions of the book, Saying Yes to God, with or without a designated leader. One hour sessions, one chapter per week for 12 weeks, is recommended to allow adequate time for reflection and application of each topic. An additional week may be desirable at the beginning of the series to discuss the Introduction in order to better set the stage for the study.

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Chapter 1 “Listen and Cooperate”

Key Scriptures: John 14:16-17; 16:12-15; Mark 8:34-35; Romans 12:1

1. Which of the opening questions most connected with your own experience of listening to God? (See page 19.)
2. Discuss Mike's story (pages 20, 27-28). How does his experience resonate with your own struggles to know the will of God for some important matter in your life?
3. What makes sense to you about the author's "simple path" for the spiritual life, i.e., to listen and cooperate (pages 20-21)? What makes this path not so simple or easy for you?
4. How do you understand the central role of listening to God (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) from a biblical point of view? (See pages 21-24.)
5. What does listening to God look like today, in real life, everyday experience? What kinds of things might the Spirit say to you from day to day? (See pages 24-30.)
6. How would you describe an "appropriate response" to whatever you hear God say to you? What does it mean in real life experience to say "Yes" to God? (See pages 30-36.)
7. On pages 36-37, there are some suggestions in the section titled, "Your Next Spirit-Led Steps." What is one action step you could take that fits with how the Spirit spoke to you by reading and now discussing this chapter?

Chapter 2 “Be Humble and Open”

Key Scriptures: 1 Peter 5:6; Luke 18:9-14; John 8:32-36; Hebrews 4:12-13

1. Discuss Frank's story (pages 38-39). How does his experience resonate with your own struggles to be humble and open?
2. What does it mean to you to be humble before the Lord? How does Jesus' story of the Pharisee and Publican speak to you (Luke 18:9-14)? (See pages 39-40.)
3. How is humility different from self-denigration? How can a Christian maintain a humble attitude and still stand tall? (See pages 41-42.)
4. How would you know if you are truly open to the Holy Spirit? (See pages 42-44.)
5. How would you define the Word of God? From a biblical point of view, what are the multiple ways the Word of God can be understood? How does each of these various ways help us to better understand God and know God's will for our lives? (See pages 44-48.)
6. On page 50, there are some suggestions in the section titled, “Your Next Spirit-Led Steps.” Which of those questions strikes you as particularly relevant for your own relationship with God? What is one action step you could take that would help you to become more humble and open to the leading of the Holy Spirit?

Chapter 3 “Be Discerning”

Key Scriptures: Romans 12:2; Philippians 1:9-11

1. Discuss Ellie's Dilemma (page 53). How does her experience resonate with your own experience?
2. What is something that you're struggling to decide or understand?
3. What makes this discernment so challenging for you?
4. Which of the 10 steps are natural to you when you are engaged in a discernment process? Which ones do you tend to neglect? Which of these steps and suggestions strike you as particularly relevant in your life right now?
5. On page 61, there are some suggestions in the section titled, “Your Next Spirit-Led Steps.” What is one action step you could take to be more discerning in the coming week?
6. Discuss the following suggested prayer to begin a discernment process. How could this kind of prayer be helpful to you? Finish by praying it together.
Lord, please help me to see what I need to see,
Give me courage to face the truth, and
Wisdom and strength to act on whatever you reveal.

Chapter 4 “Commit to Yes”

Key Scriptures: Luke 1:38; Ephesians 4:11-16; 1 Chronicles 28:20

1. Discuss Bill's story (pages 62-63). How does his experience resonate with your own struggles to follow the prompting of the Holy Spirit?
2. What is something that you're struggling to commit to doing?
3. What makes committing so challenging for you?
4. What is the difference between obedience to and cooperating with God? (See pages. 65-68.)
5. Practically speaking, where do you need to obey more? How could you cooperate better with the Spirit? Is there some other kind of response that better describes what God is asking for from you right now? (E.g., trust, reflect, care, engage, etc.)
6. What does saying Yes to God *feel* like in your experience? (E.g., energizing, peaceful, powerful, frightening, joyful, etc.)
7. Apart from the big decisions in life, what would your life be like if you were more conscious of listening to and cooperating with the Spirit on a *daily* basis? (See pages 70-74,)
8. On page 77, there are some suggestions in the section titled, “Your Next Spirit-Led Steps.” What is one action step you could take that fits with how the Spirit is leading you? Will you commit yourself to taking it?

Chapter 5 “Join the Sacred Love Flow”

Key Scriptures: 1 John 4:7-8, 11-12; John 10:10; 1 Peter 1:22; 4:8

1. What kind of reaction did you have to the author's vision of the “sacred love flow” (pages 78-79)? How does his ideal of “living my whole life immersed in the love of God and being a conduit of God's to others” fit with your idea of God's will for you?
2. Discuss the author's foundational prayer for his daily life (page 79). What resonated with your priorities and desires for your own life?
3. If you prayed more “on purpose,” what would you include in your foundational prayer to help orient you and breathe new life into you on a regular basis?
4. Most Christians understand that we must depend on God to live the Christian life, but what struck you as significant as the author talked about *how to* rely better on God in the section, “Depend on the Holy Spirit” (pages 82-87)?
5. What does the author mean, “but don't believe in magic” (page 87)? How would you describe the proper balance between depending on God and taking initiative to put love into action?
6. What is “The Rule of Love” (page 88)? When and under what circumstances could this “rule” be helpful to you in your relationships?
7. In the Conclusion (pages 91-92), the author writes about choosing to participate in the sacred love flow regardless of how others respond to how you try to love them. Where are you already doing this? Where could you do so (more)?
8. On pages 92-92, there are some suggestions in the section titled, “Your Next Spirit-Led Steps.” What is one action step you would like to take that fits with how the Spirit is leading you? When are you going to take it?

Chapter 6 “Don’t Quit on Love”

Key Scriptures: Colossians 3:12-14; Romans 2:4; Luke 6:27; I Corinthians 13

1. Without naming names, who is a particularly “hard-to-love” person in your life, currently or in the past? What makes it so hard for you to love him or her?
2. Review the Four Step Process for loving hard-to-love individuals (pages 95-96). How might one or more of these practical steps be helpful to you in your relationships? Where you could better “see,” “accept,” “appreciate,” and “delight in” your spouse (if you’re married), your children or other family members, or some other significant person in your life?
3. How did you react to Jeremiah’s story (pages 97-98)? Do you think you could ever let the killer of your family literally get away with murder, as he did? What do you think of his reasoning for doing so?
4. Forgiveness is readily appreciated by Christians and is a well-known expectation for Christians, yet it is something nearly all of us struggle with. Discuss the author’s ten truths pertaining to forgiveness (pages 98-101). What jumps out to you as particularly meaningful or helpful from this list? What else do you struggle with related to forgiving those who have hurt you or someone you love, which is not addressed here?
5. Re-read or review Rwandan genocide survivor, Sarah’s story, under the section, “Forgiveness beyond belief” (pages 101-102). How did the story touch you? What thoughts or issues come up for you?
6. In the Conclusion (pages 102-104), the author talks about the importance of mental focus and spiritual practices in coping with hard feelings. What shifts in thinking and prayer practices do you need, in general and on an ongoing, daily basis?
7. On pages 104-105, there are some suggestions in the section titled, “Your Next Spirit-Led Steps.” What is one action step you would like to take that fits with how the Spirit is leading you? What do you plan to start thinking and doing differently to stay in the sacred love flow better with others?

Chapter 7 “Overcome Evil with Good”

Key Scriptures: Romans 12:6-9, 18-21; Luke 4:16-21; Galatians 6:9-10

1. How did you react to Sakindi's story of being thrown in a latrine to die during the Rwandan genocide (pages 109-11)?
2. Psychologists talk about the fight or flight or freeze response to danger, as various ways humans instinctively respond when they feel threatened. Similarly, in the face of evil, all of us tend to want to fight back, run away, or become paralyzed. What is your instinctive response to evil?
3. How do you respond to biblical teaching, which tells us to resist our natural instincts and instead learn to control our anger, and even overcome evil by doing good? (See pages 111-12; James 1:20; Romans 12:18-21.)
4. What do you think Professor Sandra Schneiders was getting at when she said that Christian spirituality must be “lived experience of faith” (pages 112-13)?
5. Discuss the author's experience of feeling compelled to serve in Cambodia after visiting the Killing Fields and torture center in Phnom Penh (pages 113-15). Where might love be compelling you to serve someone or somewhere, though you would rather not do so?
6. What impression does Jesus' example of sacrificial service on behalf of those who suffer make on you? (See pages 115-16; Mark 6:34-37; Luke 4:16-21.)
7. In the Conclusion, the author asserts that in the face of so much evil in the world, “It's easy to despair. But, a Spirit-led person does not focus on what cannot be fixed or done, but always asks the question, ‘What is possible?’” (page 117). How has God gifted, prepared, and possibly called you to do *something* out of your comfort zone to bring hope and help to others?
8. Review the final section titled, “Your Next Spirit-Led Steps” (page 118). What is one action step you would like to take to help in the ongoing struggle to overcome evil with good?

Chapter 8 “Take Sin and Grace Seriously”

Key Scriptures: 1 Peter 2:11; Acts 8:18-24; Romans 2:4; 6:10-14; 7:21-23; 8:5-10; Ephesians 6:10-20

1. What impression did the story of Derrick make on you (pages 119-21)?
2. Think about how you have struggled with sin, guilt, and shame in your own life. Talk about your own feelings of powerlessness and discouragement in your battle with sin. How has your own struggle affected your ability and confidence to serve Christ?
3. What lesson do you draw from Simon the Sorcerer's encounter with Peter? (See pages 121-22; Acts 8:18-24). What “chance” do you think God might giving you right now in your own struggle with sin (pages 122-23)?
4. Review the Bible study from Romans on the power of sin and God's remedy (pages 123-27). What strikes you as significant and particularly relevant to you?
5. What do you do when you know you need to repent of some sin, but for whatever reason you just can't or won't do it? What does the author mean when he says we must take grace seriously? (See pages 127-34 for suggestions.)
6. What lessons can you draw from Jonah's story that will help you in taking sin and grace more seriously (pages 129-31)?
7. Discuss the suggestions found in the section titled, “Your Next Spirit-Led Steps” (page 134). How is the Spirit speaking to you throughout this chapter? What is one action step you will take to take sin and grace (more) seriously in your life?

Chapter 9 “Be God-Confident”

Key Scriptures: Philippians 4:6-9, 13; 2 Corinthians 4:6-7; Ephesians 2:10; Isaiah 26:3

1. How can you relate to Jerry's struggles to experience God's presence when under pressure (pages 135-36)?
2. What helps you to stay connected to the Holy Spirit during the day?
3. Read Philippians 4:4-9. List all the specific instructions found in these verses. What does each one mean in practice? Which ones are most helpful to you? Which ones do you tend to neglect or struggle with doing? (See pages 136-38.)
4. Christians understand that God loves them and that God can be trusted, but sometimes still secretly are afraid of opening up to God. Do you ever find yourself fearful in approaching God? What could make you less afraid? (See pages 138-41.)
5. What happened to the author when he shifted his outrage over injustice and suffering of innocent victims to Sakindi's perspective? How did that shift affect his theology (beliefs about God) and attitude? (See pages 141-43.) What are the merits/limitations of such a shift in your own attitude and faith?
6. Where do you struggle with self-confidence? What does the author mean by “God-confidence,” and how might more God-confidence give you more self-confidence? (See pages 143-45.)
7. What do you think Paul meant when he said he could “do all things through [Christ] who strengthens me” (Philippians 4:13)? What could you do keep up your God-confidence more regularly? (See pages 145-48.)
8. Read “Your Next Spirit-Led Steps” (pages 148-49). What is one change you could to make to live with more God-confidence this week?

Chapter 10 “Keep the Faith”

Key Scriptures: Psalm 42:5; 22:9-31; Lamentations 3:19-24

1. Faith and disbelief produce two very different worldviews, both of which are often strongly defended on the basis of personal experience. Drawing on your most sympathetic self, how would you describe the reasons why some people just can't believe in God, or that God cares about human beings?
2. If you leave aside claims that God's existence can and cannot be *proven* (scientifically or logically), why do you believe in God? How do you respond to those you might challenge your beliefs as superstitious, illogical, or wishful-thinking?
3. How do you respond to author's discussion of why he has held on to his faith in the face of so much "suffering, distress, or anger over the injustice and horrors of this world" (pages 151-53)?
4. Some people argue that everything good or powerful within us that we call "God" is really just us. This point of view raises the question of whether we really need "God" or if we would be just fine, or even better off, just focusing on human potential. (See pages 154-55.) What do you think?
5. What if God let you down? Can you really keep trusting in a God who failed you (or failed to help you or someone you loved) when you most needed him? How so? (See pages 155-58).
6. How have you learned to cope with disillusionment in your life? When others let you down, when religious or spiritual leaders fail you, or life just doesn't turn out the way you thought the Bible promised it would, how does that affect your faith? How can you not get stuck in cynicism or bitterness? (See pages 158-62).
7. Reflect on the comments and suggestions in the final section, "Your Next Spirit-Led Steps" (page 162). What will you take from this chapter that will help you keep the faith better and move forward more confidently and peacefully? strengthen your faith in some practical way?

NOTE: Tim Geoffrion's 2010 Huffington Post article, which prompted angry, cynical responses from atheists and other wounded skeptics, is reproduced at the end of this guide.

Chapter 11 “Ask for the Help You Need”

Key Scriptures: Hebrews 4:16; Psalm 94:16-18

1. How would you answer the series of questions in the opening paragraph of this chapter (page 163)?
2. As you read through the examples given in the first section of people who recognized that they wanted some help outside of themselves, what came to mind (pages 163-64)? Where do you feel stuck or eager for some input in your life? How would you articulate what it is you are looking for?
3. The author states, “Keeping in step with the Spirit requires striking a balance between taking personal responsibility for one’s life and relationship with God and seeking the right kind of input and help from one’s community” (pages 164-65). If you struck the right balance for you, what would that look like?
4. The author gives an example from a frustrating teaching experience of how he was helped by both taking responsibility for a problem and seeking God’s help at the same time (pages 166-68). Interact with the story. Talk about a concrete situation in your life right now that may be calling you to both change your approach and reach out to God for help.
5. Sometimes, the help we most need is encouragement. How do you look to God for encouragement? Read Hebrews 4:16. What does it mean to approach the throne of God for mercy and grace in your time of need? How have you experienced God’s encouragement in helpful ways? (See pages 168-71 for ideas.)
6. In the Conclusion, the author points out that many of those who have received help through spiritual life coaching learned that “the help that was needed was not just answers to their questions [from experts]. Rather, they needed to grow in their relationship with God...” (page 173). How could a closer relationship with God be a game-changer for you as you face your challenges and pursue God’s vision for your life?
7. What help do you most want and need right now? In the final section, “Your Next Spirit-Led Steps” (pages 173-74), there are a number of possible answers suggested. What action are you going to take to get the help you need?

Chapter 12 “Live your Yes”

Key Scriptures: Matthew 5:37; Hebrews 12:1; 1 John 3:16-18; Mark 8:34-37; 1 Thess. 2:16-17

1. How can you relate to the author's “burning, existential questions” (pages 175-77)? For example, how have you struggled with the vast discrepancy between your standard of living and relative comfort and the billions of people who living in poverty, distress, and suffering globally (page 175)?
2. Where do you think you need to “pierce the fog of self-deception and cultural blindness to see the truth about how [you] have been living out [your] faith (or not) and what is truly in [your] heart related to [your] possessions and attachment to [your] own comfort and security” (page 176)?
3. Read Hebrews 12:1. Where do you see evidence of wanting the “best of both worlds” in your life? What would change if you were to make a better effort to “let go of [your] self-serving choices and behavior in every possible area of [your] life” (p. 177)?
4. How do you expect the Holy Spirit to work through your questions to help you to make the changes that are so hard to make on your own? (See pages 177-78.)
5. When are you mostly likely to feel “mixed up” or confused by the conflicting pushes and pulls of trying to follow Christ while simultaneously trying to be responsible and take care of yourself and your family? How could the author's suggested four steps to take repeatedly be helpful to you (page 180)?
6. Blaise Pascal famously spoke of following Christ as an intelligent “wager.” What kind of wager have placed on serving Christ? What would it look like if you increased the amount of yourself you were willing to “bet” on Jesus? (See pages 180-81.)
7. Read and discuss Mark 8:34-37, where Jesus calls would-be disciples to “deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.” Most of us think we are so far from this that we would be embarrassed to even quote the verse. Yet, the very fact that you care is evidence that the Holy Spirit is already at work in your life leading you to a deeper place of discipleship. Do you think that's true? (See pages 181-83.)
8. Read aloud the final section, “Your Next Spirit-Led Steps” (pages 183). Share your answers to these final questions with each other.

Huffington Post Article
“When Prayer Makes a Difference in Suffering”
BY TIM GEOFFRION | JUNE 4, 2010

Prayer is bringing hope, healing wounds, and transforming lives in some of the most troubled places in the world. From Bulgaria to Rwanda, Congo to Myanmar, my wife Jill and I have the opportunity to talk with many different people who suffer from poverty, war, oppression, hunger, disease, and sexual violence. Consistently, we meet students, community leaders, and pastors who are clinging closely to God in the midst of seemingly overwhelming problems and pain. They tell us that through prayer, they find peace and strength that they cannot access otherwise.

In 2008 Jill and I founded Faith, Hope and Love Global Ministries with a vision of better equipped, spiritually vitalized leaders serving Christ in significant positions of influence throughout the world. As ordained clergy with experience in the parish, teaching in seminaries, and authoring numerous books on spiritual vitality and leadership, we initially thought that the focus of our work would be on teaching. Yet it soon became apparent that theological students, pastors, and community leaders in our week-long intensive courses wanted and needed more than new ideas and methods.

Almost everyone we meet wears their weariness in their posture or looks back at us through tired eyes. Their faces are often creased with lines etched by fear and anxiety -- be they from years of tribulation or a single night of horror. Children and violated women sometimes just stare with hollow expressions, emptied of life by unspeakable atrocities witnessed or experienced personally. Even the most hopeful and motivated individuals have trouble masking their quiet despair and resignation to overwhelming forces beyond their control.

In such circumstances, what's needed is something far deeper than just theories and practices that work well in safe environments with ample resources. Our students are hungry for practical teaching, but they also want to know and experience God in the midst of their suffering. Here is where prayer has become so important to them and to the work we are doing with them. We now set aside 10 percent of our leadership training courses for sessions on prayer, often introducing labyrinth prayer as a tool for seeking God in a sacred space. The labyrinth precedes Christ but was adopted by Christians in various patterns, for uses that we cannot fully recover. The most well-known European labyrinth was built directly in the nave of the Chartres Cathedral in France at the beginning of the thirteenth century. The twisting and turning pattern on the ground resembles a maze but holds no tricks or obstacles. Walkers traverse a single path that takes them to the center, where one will usually pause for extended prayer.

Wherever we go, if possible, Jill will build a labyrinth, using whatever materials are available, and lead prayer walks as part of our curriculum. In most every context, none of the program participants has ever heard of a labyrinth. Yet, in every setting, those who walk enthusiastically welcome the new method for prayer that transcends language, culture, and denominational particularities.

The results are consistent and powerful. Most talk about experiencing peace. Many feel joy or overwhelming gratitude. After one walk in Butembo, in the middle of a Congolese war zone for the past fifteen years, several pastors and students returned to the classroom ahead of the rest. As I approached the door, I heard them singing together about the love of God in Swahili. Before someone translated their words for me, I could feel the depth of their peacefulness and heartfelt adoration. They had received more from praying on the labyrinth than I could have ever taught them or facilitated through group discussion.

In Myanmar, the reports from the walkers were similar. One woman called the labyrinth her "prayer village." A young lecturer in the seminary was able to quiet his mind and focus for the first time in two years during his first walk. When another found new strength to face her seemingly hopeless situation, she told us, "This is the first time I believe that things can change."

Routinely, the experience of walking the labyrinth serves as a metaphor for life -- a mirror for what the walkers are experiencing elsewhere. By winding back and forth along the single pathway to the center and back out again, many gain insight into themselves or their circumstances. Some experience new motivation for their work or renewal in their relationship with God.

For example, one construction worker at HEAL Africa compound (Goma, Democratic Republic of Congo) said, "When I prayed the labyrinth, I realized that even though there are many challenges, and different things happen, the important thing in the spiritual life is to keep going. Perseverance is necessary." A young man in scrubs told Jill, "As I walked, I saw the way was long and very difficult. Then I realized that what needed to change was my attitude. The way was long, but I had the possibility of choosing what I thought about it."

After another walk, a woman waiting for a fistula repair surgery after being raped, wanted us to know, "This is the path of my life. I am walking to God." They walk, they pray -- without liturgy, with few instructions -- and they find God. Some rediscover Jesus and find great encouragement from his experience of suffering and message of hope.

Most simply sense God's presence or hear a pertinent word from the Holy Spirit that comforts, encourages, or strengthens them to carry on.

Prayer, then -- especially labyrinth prayer -- has been transformative for many who are suffering in ways that many of us cannot fully fathom. In prayer, they are seeking comfort, healing, guidance, and strength to face the daunting task of creating and developing solutions to their country's problems and challenges. They cannot fulfill their callings on their own, and they know it.

At Faith, Hope and Love Global Ministries, we are trying to take our guidance from what the pastors and leaders are telling us is most meaningful and needed. We teach, train, coach, and, perhaps above all, seek to help those who are suffering to connect to God, who gives them far more than we could give them on our own.

To learn more about Faith, Hope, and Love Global Ministries go to www.fhlglobal.org.

To read sample chapters of Tim's books, download his articles, and access his teachings on video, sermons, and radio interviews visit the Resource Library on the <http://www.fhlglobal.org> site.

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For more information on the labyrinth and Jill's books on labyrinth prayer, see www.jillgeoffrion.com.