

The background is a solid orange color with numerous thin, white, hand-drawn scribbles and lines scattered across it, creating a textured, artistic effect.

# SERIOUSLY,

Making Sense of Life Not Making Sense

# GOD?

Small-Group Discussion Guide



# Getting Started

Welcome! This discussion guide is designed for use in eight small-group meetings of one-to-two-hour duration, but this schedule can be adjusted to meet the needs of your particular group. Please note that some of the questions offered here for use in a small group are the same or very like those offered in the book for private reflection. We hope the two different approaches to spiritual reflection and growth will be mutually enhancing.

## Preparation Guidelines for Group Leaders

If your small group has been created specifically to discuss the spiritual themes of this book, you might want to have a short meet-and-greet gathering to distribute books and information about how members can download this guide. Before or after a weekend Mass is often a convenient time for this kind of brief meeting, but of course another time and setting may be more suited to your circumstances. Be creative and hospitable!

Use the following guidelines to help gatherings and conversations go smoothly. Respect for each person is, of course, paramount.

1. Ensure that each group member has a copy of *Seriously, God? Making Sense of Life Not Making Sense* and a copy of the *Small-Group Discussion Guide*. If group members are using digital editions of either, a notebook for writing responses and notes by hand may be helpful. It is best to avoid using laptops, tablets, and phones during group meetings so that due attention can be paid to other group members.
2. Encourage every group member to read this or a similar guide to fruitful conversations at [learninginnovation.duke.edu/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/ITF-H1-discussionguide-17h5iob.pdf](https://learninginnovation.duke.edu/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/ITF-H1-discussionguide-17h5iob.pdf). As the group's leader, be sure to follow these yourself.
3. Ask group members to read the preface and introduction of the book (pages xi–xxvii) and work through the accompanying questions on pages 3–5 in the small-group guide prior to your first meeting.
4. Make sure the space where you will meet is clean, comfortable, and welcoming. Ask another group member or two to bring snacks and beverages. Decide with your group if you want to enjoy these before, during, or after your discussions.
5. Consider some simple focal point to place in the center of the group, such as a prayer candle, a Bible, a cross, or another symbol of faith.
6. Be sure to read the text and prepare for your dual roles of participant and facilitator. The three norms listed on the next page for a group leader to follow and to ask others to follow are key to enjoyable and fruitful group interactions. Let your group know what these are and that you will use them.

# First Meeting

## Discussion Questions

1. What led you to start reading this book? Is there a singular struggle or event that nudged you toward learning more about God? Only say as much as you are comfortable sharing.

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2. What do you remember most clearly about your childhood experience of religion? What did you believe about God as you were growing up?

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3. What questions do you now want answered about God?

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## Discussion Questions

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# Second Meeting: Seriously, No?

## Discussion Questions

1. Before you began reading this book, what did you think of the idea or belief that God answers prayers? Share an experience that led you to your view on this.

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2. Has reading this chapter changed your understanding or beliefs? In what ways?

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3. Have you experienced a no that you believe came from God? What was your response? How did the situation turn out for you in the end?

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## Second Meeting: Seriously, No?

4. Is there an evil you don't want your children to know? What is it? How does this help your understanding of how God is working in your life when you receive a no?

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5. What is one favorite takeaway from this chapter for you? Why is it compelling, or how has it helped you grow spiritually?

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# Third Meeting: Seriously, You Let Me Down!

## Discussion Questions

1. Are you in the midst of a storm right now—emotionally, financially, spiritually, or physically? Share some of your worry or fear if you are comfortable doing so. What questions are you asking God about your situation?

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2. When have you been through a storm in the past? Did that experience open your mind and heart to how God is present in your life? If not, why do you think that didn't happen? If so, what did you discover about God?

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3. Has a storm in your life ever taught you about what is truly important to you? Do you think those things are equally important to God? Why or why not?

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## Third Meeting: Seriously, You Let Me Down!

4. If what is truly important to you are things that you think God doesn't want for you, what do you think you should do about this situation?

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5. What is one favorite takeaway for you from the Bible stories retold in this chapter? Why is this takeaway compelling, or how has it helped you grow spiritually?

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# Fourth Meeting: Seriously, Those People Are in Charge?

## Discussion Questions

1. Are you one of the people in charge of something or some people? What is it like? How does that leadership role intersect with your relationship with God?

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2. We all have experienced frustrations, impatience, and even anger at someone in charge at one time or another. Share about one instance of your own frustration with someone in leadership. What would you rather that leader have done or understood?

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3. After reading this chapter, why do you believe God allows the wrong people to sometimes remain in power?

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## Fourth Meeting: Seriously, Those People Are in Charge?

4. What has been your personal response to the revelations over the last two decades of terrible abuse of power among the clergy and other Catholic Church leaders? How have these truths changed your understanding of the Church, of God, and of your personal relationship with the Church?

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5. What is one favorite takeaway from this chapter for you? Why is it compelling, or how has it helped you grow spiritually?

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# Fifth Meeting: Seriously, You're in My Way

## Discussion Questions

1. Share about one experience when you thought you had the right plan in place but still experienced obstacles to achieving your goal(s). Were you aware of God in that experience? If so, what did you think God was doing? Looking back, do you see anything differently now?

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2. With which character(s) do you most resonate in the Bible stories retold in this chapter ("The Thirsty Crowd," pages 76–85, and "The Hungry Crowd," pages 85–92)? Why do you think this is so? Are you happy with being like this character? If not, what can you do to change?

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3. In the last paragraph on page 83, the authors write, "God isn't interested in making your life easier. God isn't interested in making your life more comfortable. That's often our goal, but not God's. God does want to give you rest. God does want you to live in joy. God can bring you comfort and grant you peace. But there are no times in scripture when Jesus teaches, 'And when you pray, say, 'Heavenly Father, make my life easy and comfortable.'" What does this mean for how you approach your life, your dreams, your goals, and your priorities?

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## Fifth Meeting: Seriously, You're in My Way

4. When you are frustrated by obstacles to achieving something, are you more inclined to get angry and rail against God or to complain to God? How do you think you arrived at that kind of response? Do you want to change it? How might you?

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5. What is one favorite takeaway from this chapter for you? Why is it compelling, or how has it helped you grow spiritually?

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# Sixth Meeting: Seriously, Pain Is a Problem

## Discussion Questions

1. Think about an encounter you've had with serious pain—emotional, physical, psychological, financial, or any other. How did you respond to that pain? Did God play a role in your response? If so, what was it?

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2. In this chapter, the authors explore three ways that God brings good out of evil—specifically, out of pain. Share a story from your own life about how pain or hardship helped you correct your life's course in some way—what the authors call a disciplinary purpose of pain (see pages 99–100). What good thing(s) came of the pain? Did you recognize God working through this experience? If so, in what way?

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3. A second way the authors show that God works with our pain is for the good of others (see pages 100–109). Share about a time when you believe God used your pain to bring about something good for someone else. What is your takeaway from that experience?

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## Sixth Meeting: Seriously, Pain Is a Problem

4. In the first paragraph of page 115, the authors write that the third way God uses pain for our good is to help us grow and mature to live in the place of perfect joy that is heaven (see pages 109–17). Tell about an experience of pain that helped you grow toward being a better person.

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5. What is one favorite takeaway from this chapter for you? Why is it compelling, or how has it helped you grow spiritually?

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# Seventh Meeting: Seriously, Why Did He Have to Die?

## Discussion Questions

1. Whose death have you struggled to make sense of because it seemed so unfair? Were you able to heal in time from this struggle? If so, what helped with the healing?

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2. Has reading this chapter helped you make any better sense of the death you told about in the first question? In what ways? If it hasn't, what are your pushbacks?

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3. On page 130, the authors share about how their friend and colleague, Rob, faced his death. They write, "There was more than grace in this experience; there was 'glory.' While his death was certainly a huge loss to us and our community, in the end Rob won." What do you think of these statements? Does Fr. Michael and Tom's understanding of Rob's passing make sense to you? In what ways? If not, why not?

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# Seventh Meeting: Seriously, Why Did He Have to Die?

4. The authors use the Bible story of Jesus meeting disciples on the road to Emmaus to invite us to share with Jesus and with the Father the truth of our pain, frustrations, heartbreak, and even anger. Do you ever take this approach in times of darkness? Why or why not?

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5. What is one favorite takeaway from this chapter for you? Why is it compelling, or how has it helped you grow spiritually?

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# Eighth Meeting: The Middle of a Larger Story

## Discussion Questions

1. Share with the group your most important lessons or takeaways after reading this book. Has your outlook on life changed at all? If so, in what ways?

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2. Has your understanding of who God is changed at all? If so, in what ways?

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3. What questions or doubts do you still carry that you hope to keep searching into? How will you go about digging deeper?

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## Eighth Meeting: The Middle of a Larger Story

4. What do you think of the big picture of the book of Revelation presented in this conclusion to *Seriously, God*? What hope, if any, do you find these words: “Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth. The former heaven and the former earth had passed away, and the sea was no more” (Rv 21:1)? Or in these words from J. R. R. Tolkien’s *Lord of the Rings* character Samwise Gamgee: “Everything sad [is] going to come untrue”? What sad things in your life do you hope will come untrue in the end?

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