

Holy Nudges



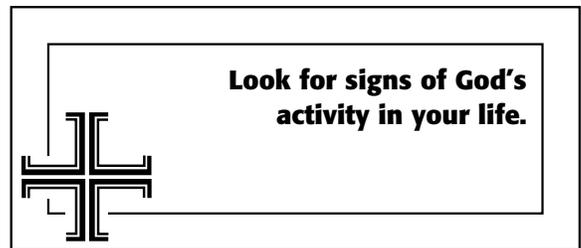
Gathering In (10 minutes)

Welcome people, provide treats, and give people a few minutes to catch up and get settled. (More specific suggestions for how this can be facilitated appear in the Introduction to the Leader Guide.)

Theme

You may want to either read this or paraphrase the theme and purpose before posing the opening question.

What's been on your mind lately? Do some topics or themes keep coming up over and over? Has God been tugging at your life in ways that open you to new aspects of your faith? Or maybe your normally crazy life has recently calmed into a peaceful and smooth rhythm. How might God have been part of that serenity? God cares deeply about each of us and about how we experience life. Maybe you've walked through some tough times recently. How has God been present during those times? It's God's wish for us to have abundant life, a life that is lived in the presence of God. Because we are in the presence of God, we should expect that God will be at work in our lives, nudging us toward being the people we were created to be, experiencing the life that God wants for us.



The purpose of this session is to develop an awareness of the big and small ways that God nudges us each day to be the people God created us to be. How can we be more aware of these holy nudges? How might we interpret and act on them? Can we ignore holy nudges? What are the consequences of ignoring them? How do we live differently when we believe that God has created us to be God's hands, feet, and face for the world? How do we live out our multiple roles in a way that reflects our faith?

As the group moves through the session, encourage members to explore on a deeper level what this means for their faith walks.

Opening Question (10 – 15 minutes)

Use one or a combination of the following questions to open

- What's your favorite sound?
- What do you most enjoy about your typical day?
- Tell about a time when you felt nudged to act as God's hands, feet, or face for someone else.
- Give an example of something that grabs your attention and pulls you away from what you're doing. How do your friends and family grab your attention? What would God have to do to get your attention?

Opening Prayer (1 – 2 minutes)

Read the following prayer.

Holy Spirit, move in us today. Open our hearts and ears to listen to your stirrings within us. We thank you, God, for wonderfully creating each of us as a unique individual with special talents and gifts that allow us to contribute in a variety of ways. Forgive us for the times that we devalue the gifts that lie within us or become so wrapped up in other things that we don't take the opportunity to use them in life-giving ways. Slow us down so that we can be open to feeling your holy nudges within us; then give us the courage to act when you nudge us. Amen.

What does the Bible say? (20 minutes)

Read the following passage together or ask members of the group to read the passage while the other group members follow along.

Briefly introduce the reading, "Abram is considered to be the patriarch of three of the world's great religions, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Abram paid attention to God's 'nudge' to leave the home and religion of his father and to follow God's call. As a result of Abram's obedience he received a new name, Abraham, a new God, and the promise of being the father of all of God's people throughout the ages."

Genesis 15:1-6

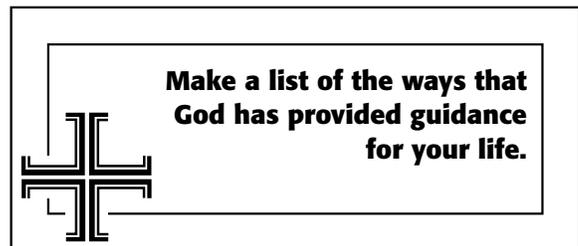
¹After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision, "Do not be afraid, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great." ²But Abram said, "O Lord GOD, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer (pronounced EL- E-AAY-ZER) of Damascus?" ³And Abram said, "You have given me no offspring, and so a slave born in my house is to be my heir."

⁴But the word of the LORD came to him, "This man shall not be your heir; no one but your very own issue shall be your heir." ⁵He brought him outside and said, "Look toward heaven and count the stars, if you are able to count them." Then he said to him, "So shall your descendants be." ⁶And he believed the LORD; and the LORD reckoned it to him as righteousness.

Briefly introduce the reading, "The story of Jonah is one of the most graphic and well-known stories in the Bible. This story has become a great example of how God's 'holy nudges' don't always make sense to us and sometimes cause us to rebel against God. However, God's love and compassion for humans always shines through, and what we think is a ridiculous task can help God transform lives through our actions."

Jonah 1:1-3, 3:1-5

¹Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah son of Amittai (pronounced A-MIT-TAHEE), saying, ²"Go at once to Nineveh, that great city, and cry out against it; for their wickedness has come up before me." ³But Jonah set out to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD. He went down to Joppa and found a ship going to Tarshish; so he paid his fare and went on board, to go with them to Tarshish, away from the presence of the LORD.



¹The word of the LORD came to Jonah a second time, saying, ²“Get up, go to Nineveh, that great city, and proclaim to it the message that I tell you.” ³So Jonah set out and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the LORD. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly large city, a three days’ walk across. ⁴Jonah began to go into the city, going a day’s walk. And he cried out, “Forty days more, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!” ⁵And the people of Nineveh believed God; they proclaimed a fast, and everyone, great and small, put on sackcloth.

Think About...

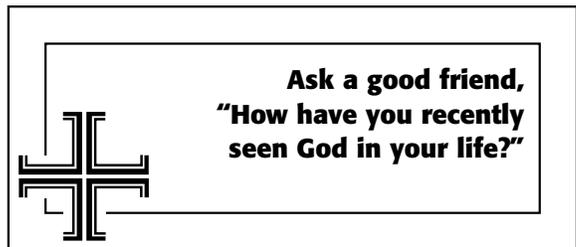
Provide a lead-in to the discussion, like “Before we look at what others have to say about these verses, let’s take a few minutes to talk about our own interpretation.”

- Have you ever wished that God would speak to you plainly? The text in Genesis 15 is one of the eight reported conversations that God had with Abraham. Do you think it would be easier to follow God if you could have “real” conversations with God rather than reading God’s word in scripture? What would you ask God if you could have a direct conversation? What would be the downside of having God speak to you audibly? (Genesis 15)
- What helped Abraham to believe God’s promise? What does God promise us today? Which of God’s promises are easy to believe and which are difficult? How would our lives be different if we trusted God’s promises? (Genesis 15)
- When have you tried to run away from something that you thought you were supposed to do, but didn’t really want to do? What are some of our typical excuses or barriers to being open to God’s nudges? When Jonah followed God’s nudge, God was able to accomplish great things through him. What encouragement does this story bring to you? Does it prompt you to do anything different today? (Jonah 1, 3)
- God encouraged Abraham and Jonah to accomplish the tasks that God knew they could do. How has God encouraged you to do something that might have seemed difficult or even impossible? How have you encouraged others to listen to God’s holy nudges? (Genesis 15, Jonah 3)

What do others say? (40 minutes)

Read the following reflections together or ask members of the group to read a paragraph while the other group members follow along.

In his book *Walking the Bible*, Bruce Feiler tells the story of St. Catherine’s Monastery in the Sinai Desert. This monastery is the reported site of the burning bush in which God called Moses to guide the Hebrew people out of Egypt. As Feiler contemplates a bush in the monastery cloister, he sees an out-of-date fire extinguisher nearby. He muses, “Was this in case the burning bush caught fire?” (*Walking the Bible* by Bruce Feiler, 2001). Although it’s a funny image, how many of us get out the fire extinguisher when we have the feeling that God is poking around in our lives?



Every day, the power of the Holy Spirit is working in and among us, nudging us to be what God sees for us rather than what we see for ourselves. God uses our bodies, feelings, minds, and spirits, even our intuition, to show us the way to live. How can we tap into this power? How can we be more aware of how God is nudging us? We can start by opening our eyes to look for the hand of God at work in everything that surrounds us, then making ourselves open and available for guidance from the Holy Spirit.

God's hopes for us may not be evident at first. God rarely screams at us or grabs us by the shoulders and shows us what to do. Instead, the Holy Spirit may whisper to us as we become interested in ideas or activities, as specific people come into our lives, or as unusual opportunities present themselves. "What's happening over here? Did you hear that? You could make a difference there." Sometimes we experience these whispers as a sense of uneasiness or restlessness that only goes away when we take action.

As we begin to pay attention to these holy nudges and respond to them in a way that honors God, we continue the lifelong process of transformation. Sometimes these nudges are scary or confusing, because they require us to come face-to-face with something we knew was out there, but wanted to avoid. Sometimes they are reassuring, and acting on them just feels right. In any case, acting on a "holy nudge" may cause us to ask, "Why didn't I do that a long time ago?"

Sometimes these nudges are not readily apparent when they're happening, but when we look back on them we see more clearly how the Holy Spirit is acting in our lives. A call from a friend asking me if I could provide lodging for two women from Africa resulted in a life-changing visit with them four years later. We may become great friends with someone because of a chance meeting. We may find ourselves on a board or action group because of a particular interest of ours. A holy nudge may even result in confirming that we are in the right career or may prompt a career selection or change. Wherever we find ourselves, God is calling us to let our faith permeate every aspect of our lives. Who we are and what we do are holy in God's eyes.

As you watch your own life story unfolding, try to become more aware of the Spirit's holy nudges. Take time to reflect and to ask questions, not just when you have a big decision to make, but during the ordinary days of your life. "How have the people in my life been a sign of God's presence recently? What things bring me great joy or comfort? What surprises have grabbed my attention lately? Where have I seen the possibility for new growth, forgiveness, or healing?" Notice what you're thinking about and talk things over with friends, family, or maybe a "listening professional." Journal about your thoughts or, if you like to be really creative, draw or paint them.

When you sense a nudge in a new direction, be thankful that you are open to new possibilities. Talk to others, read scripture, and pray about them. If and when it seems appropriate, act on them. God may not put a burning bush in your path, but there will be plenty of other clues about what God wants you to do or to be. You just have to look for them.

Optional Reflection:

You may read a selection from *Telling Secrets* by Frederick Buechner. Read the last paragraph on page 47 and the rest of the paragraph on page 48.

See TELLING SECRETS by FREDERICK BUECHNER.
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Reflection from "Listening for God's Calls"

"...given the way that the opportunities in my life have opened up, I have the impression that God has been there all along, sometimes nudging me, sometimes pushing me, but always allowing me the freedom to make my own choices."

From "Listening for God's Calls" by Eli Fischer, *Alive Now*, January/February 2003
 (Nashville: The Upper Room, © 2003), page 14. Used by permission.
www.upperroom.org/alivenow

Think About...

Groups that have been together for one or more years may want to use the questions with ■▣

- What did you want to be when you were a child? What attracted you to that profession? How close to that aspiration have you come in your adult life?
- When did someone do something out of the ordinary for you? How did it feel? How did you respond?
- Which people in your life have been God's holy nudges to you? Have you ever been a nudge for someone else? Did you know it at the time? How did the person react?
- The first reflection talks about holy nudges being experienced as a sense of unease or restlessness. Have you ever experienced this feeling? How did you act on it? What were the results?
- Talk about a time when you took a risk or did something unusual for you. What prompted you? What was it like? What did you learn from that experience?

■▣ When you are confused or uncertain, how do you work things out?

- Have you ever had something surprising turn out to be just the right thing in the long term? How did that work out for you?
- Sometimes we may get caught up in being busy rather than doing things that are meaningful or fulfilling. What is something you do that is life-giving or life-affirming? Can you imagine a way to make it more a part of your life?
- Being busy can make it more difficult to pay attention to God's nudges. What keeps you busy? How does being busy get in the way? What's one thing that you could do less of even though it might be important?

■▣ How has your own life been a journey in faith? What life or faith milestones can you point to along the way as you look back on this journey? Who were some of the important people who were present in these times?

■▣ How have you worked through tough decisions in your life? Who or what helped you? What role did faith play, if any? Is there anything from this session that you would like to remember for making future decisions?

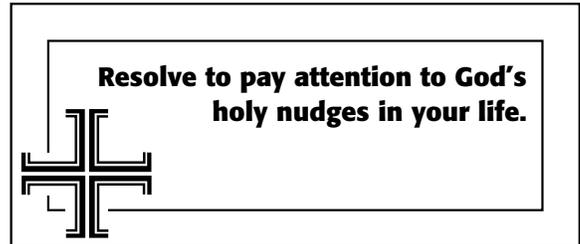
- What moves you to make your faith a bigger part of your life? What does God do to get your attention in accomplishing this?

■▣ How have others prompted you to be more intentional about your faith? Is there someone who serves as a role model, mentor, or guide for you? Do you fill that role in anyone else's life?

What's my response?

Point out this section to the small group. Read through the choices as a group and ask members to choose an activity that they would like to try for the month ahead. Group members don't need to choose the same response. Members may talk about their response and how they used it through the month at the next session, if they wish.

This month, resolve to pay attention to God's holy nudges in your life. Note the activities and interests that you find yourself drawn to. Notice the topics of your conversations with others. Pick one or two of the following activities to help you continue appreciating God's radical gift of grace.



- Make a list of the ways that God has provided guidance for your life. Thank God for God's guidance in a prayer of thanksgiving. Thank God for what each person brings to this small group. Set aside a specific time each week to pray that God will continue to reveal opportunities to grow in faith to each member of your group.
- Write letters of thanks to a public official, former teacher, pastor, and/or someone who has had an influence on your life and thank them for their unique calling.
- Select one of your favorite Bible stories. Read it slowly. Think about why it is one of your favorite stories. What life and faith lessons does it offer? How might it apply to your life today?
- Think about all of the ways that God has come to you throughout your life. Thank God for the many ways that you have been able to see God working in your life.
- Dream interpretation is centuries old. Many faithful people believe that insights into our lives can be revealed in our dreams. Keep a piece of paper and a pen by your bed. When you wake up from a dream, record significant items from the dream on the paper. During your quiet time, listen to what may be revealed to you from your dream.
- Select a common object that reminds you of God's presence each time you see it throughout the day or week.
- Talking about God's nudges can bring them into focus. During a conversation with a friend, practice by asking something like, "How have you seen God in your life recently?"
- If you are facing a decision right now, talk with a person who is a good listener and can help you focus on the faith aspects of your decision.
- Try journaling once a day or once a week. Use questions like, "Where might God be acting in my life?" "What signs of God have I seen recently?"
- Spend some time reviewing a book in the Bible. Think about God's promises and God's ongoing story in the Bible and what God might be saying through God's word. Good books to start with are Genesis, Esther, Ruth, Matthew, Luke, or Acts.

Closing (10 minutes)

Provide information about the session next month. Point out the importance of making the commitment to attend each session. Reiterate that one of the most important aspects of these groups is the relationship with other group members.

Read the closing prayer or pray the Lord's Prayer together.

Closing Prayer:

Gracious God, thanks for being involved in our lives. We ask for the insight to be able to recognize our feelings of unease or restlessness as your calling to become more of our true selves. Thanks for the people in our lives who challenge us to be more of who you want us to be. We know that you have gifted these pastors, parents, and friends with the gifts of listening and encouragement. Help us to listen to you as you call each of us to be a gift of your grace in our world. We ask this in the name of Christ, Amen.

If you'd like to read more....

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