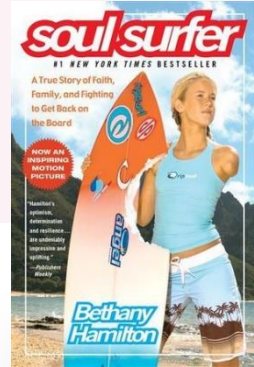




LEADER'S GUIDE

SOUL SURFER BY BETHANY HAMILTON



"I don't pretend to have all the answers to why bad things happen to good people. But I do know that God knows all those answers, and sometimes He lets you know in this life, and sometimes He asks you to wait so you that you can have a face-to-face talk about it."

BETHANY HAMILTON

THEMES

Faith Family Determination Resilience Surfing

HEADS UP! (TRIGGERS AND DELICATE TOPICS)

Trauma (Shark Attack)

BOOK SUMMARY

"Soul Surfer is a true story of Faith, Family and Fighting to Get Back on the Board."

Bethany begins her autobiography with the re-telling of the shark attack and the moments leading up to the life changing event. She then pauses to reflect on her family, sharing the story of her parents falling in love and coming to find faith in Jesus. This is crucial because so much of Bethany's determination and strength has come from the closeness of her family unit and the Christian role models her parents have been. Bethany also describes her competitive nature being a result of having two brothers, who are especially supportive of her dreams and surfing aspirations. Overall, besides the blessing of being home-schooled (which allowed her more time to surf), Bethany's life was very much the same as your average young surfer girl.

After sharing about her past, Bethany jumps back to the moment after the attack and the realisation that she had lost her arm. She shares about the significance of her island prayer chains, the love and support from her youth pastor, and how all these things helped her through. Upon returning home, Bethany describes the trial of living in the "what ifs" and how she battled with the idea of never being able to surf

again. Battling fear and doubt, Bethany strengthens her resolve to get back in the water and finds her determination met with support from people all over the world. Bethany accidentally becomes a celebrity and understands that God is using her to tell others about His love.

Bethany wraps up her journey by sharing about her saving faith in Jesus and the trust she has to believe Him for a happy and worthwhile life. She says, "I'm proud to be part of God's plans, and I hope, in some small way, this surfer girl from Hawaii can make Him proud, too." (p210)



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS & TALKING POINTS

1

Q. What did you find most inspirational about Bethany's story?

TALKING POINTS

Answers may vary and could include;

- Bethany's strong faith.
- Bethany's resilience and determination.
- Bethany's joy despite her circumstances.
- Bethany's trust in God.
- Bethany's wisdom and understanding of God's sovereignty.
- Bethany's family unit and upbringing in the faith.

2

Q. How did Bethany's family contribute to her healing, strengthened faith, and determination after the shark attack?

TALKING POINTS

Quote:

"My family is like that: when one of us wins a contest or a prize, it's like we all won, because we all supported each other and helped get that person to the place where they could win" (p38).

- Bethany's parents role-modelled faith, trust and belief in God.
- When Bethany is feeling discouraged, weak, and angry/confused, her family help her to re-focus her heart and eye's on the Lord. This fills her with supernatural peace and joy, and allows her to pursue God's plan for her life without becoming weary.
- Bethany's parents remind her that all things are possible with God, and that despite her circumstances, He still has a good plan for her life.
- Bethany's brothers and father help her to remain strong, competitive and encouraged to keep surfing.
- Ultimately, Bethany's family are her biggest fans. They love and support her through her trauma, recovery and celebrity status; keeping her grounded, focused on Jesus, and determined to share the good news.

3

Q. On page 106, Bethany asks the question "Why me? Why did God choose me and what does He have in mind for me?" Can you relate to how Bethany was feeling?

TALKING POINTS

This was not a negative or complaining 'why me?', but a sincere question about her future and how the Lord would use the shark attack for His glory and her good.

Often when the Lord calls us to a task we can feel ill equipped, unworthy, or fearful that we're not the best person for the job;

- The Lord loves to promote those who are obedient, faithful, and keep their trust in Him.
- When the Lord calls us to a task bigger than ourselves, it is to show His glory and ensures we cannot claim credit for what He is doing.
- If we can achieve our "calling" in our own strength, we are not thinking 'big enough'.
- Sometimes we may not understand Gods will, His plans, or why we have endured suffering or trials. We can be reassured that nothing is wasted with God. He promises to use every hurt and pain to bring His kingdom closer, to encourage others, and to display His goodness.
- His power is made perfect in our weakness; He will use our weakness to show His strength.

4

Q. Bethany's response to "Why would you still believe in God?" is; "It's a tremendous relief to be able to put your trust in God and take the burden off your shoulders" (p135). Do you trust God with your burdens, or do you hold onto them yourself out of fear?

TALKING POINTS

Often non-believers refer to faith as a 'band aid' for when life gets hard. The theory is that we have a 'false hope' or can just pretend like everything is magic and rainbows. The fact is, it can be hard to remain in the faith when we experiencing pain and suffering - it takes mature faith and incredible trust in the Lord, to hold onto our hope when our world seems to be falling apart. It can be harder to have faith sometimes, than to believe there is no loving God.

Our faith may be strengthened during trauma;

- It is a relief to trust God in the suffering - knowing our pain has a purpose and will be used for His glory.
- It is a relief to admit we are not capable of carrying our own burdens, and that Jesus desires to take them and carry them for us.
- It is a relief to know that the Holy Spirit fills us with His joy and peace, when our world seems chaotic and stressful.
- It is a relief to know our hope is in heaven, where there will be no more suffering or hurt.

5

Q. "I always try to say something about my belief in God" (p140). Do you share your faith at every opportunity?

TALKING POINTS

Points to consider while discussing this question;

- Sharing the gospel is about so much more than just our words; our Godly lives, acts of kindness, and role modelling of the Christian faith, can often speak much louder than our words and are a fantastic method of sharing the gospel.
- We must always be prepared to give an answer for the hope that we have, but always with respect and kindness.

How can we feel more prepared to share?

- Follow the prompting of the Holy Spirit.
- Pray for guidance as we speak or share.
- Pray for opportunities to share our faith, expecting that the Lord will equip us and bless our words as they reflect Him and His story.
- Understand what we believe and read our Bible regularly.
- Be able to refer to scriptures such as 1 Corinthians 15:1-8.
- Regularly read and review a 'gospel points' summary to keep them fresh in our minds and hearts – making it easy to share the key aspects of our faith at any moment.

6

Q. "You can do it...but quickly another voice inside my head yelled back, "Forget it, you're going to fail" (p179). Can you relate to Bethany's inner dialogue? How do you conquer feelings of inadequacy?

TALKING POINTS

It is not wrong to experience doubt, fear, or inadequacy, but we need to tackle it by speaking gospel truth to our hearts, and not allow it to overcome us;

- There is no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:1).
- We have assurance of our salvation, we cannot be snatched away (John 10:28-29).
- We are made right before God purely because of Jesus and His sacrifice on our behalf.
- God sees Jesus when He looks at us.
- We are justified when we are declared righteous in the sight of God.
- We are pardoned for our sins and promised eternal life through the work of Christ on the cross (Romans 5:11 p89).

7

Q. Bethany says where we put our hope is crucial; "The only thing that will never...fail you is your faith in God"(p206). Is your hope and faith in Christ, or do you tend to rely on your own strength?

TALKING POINTS

We may not get the 'good thing' that we wanted and our circumstances may seem bleak, but what remains is far greater;

- Christ our saviour.
- God the Father.
- Holy Spirit our Comforter.

We can rely on God and put our faith and trust in Him because;

- God is love.
- God is powerful.
- God is sovereign and in control.

Above all, if every good thing were taken from us, we would still be deeply grateful for our God, who He is, what He has done for us, and is still yet to do.

8

Q. "Father Damien" is a role model to Bethany (p136). Share an inspirational person or role model in your life.

TALKING POINTS

Jesus is our primary role model, He is the perfect representation of the Father. There have been, and will be, many faithful Christians who also encourage us in our faith;

- A family member or friend.
- A Pastor or leader within our Church.
- A well known preacher or teacher of the Word of God.
- A missionary.
- A Christian singer-songwriter.
- Other people from the Bible.

9

Q. Bethany has a beautiful perspective on the sovereignty of God. She says; "So I think this was God's plan for me all along. I am not saying that God made the shark bite me. He knew it would happen, and He made a way for my life to be happy and meaningful in spite of it happening." (p208). Discuss.

TALKING POINTS

Answers may vary and could include;

- God is sovereign and ordains suffering, ultimately for His glory and our good.
- God does not make mistakes.
- God is not mean.
- We can trust Him even though we do not understand.
- If we had no pain in life we might be tempted to be self-sufficient.
- God is not the author of evil.
- Evil things happen because God has given us free will.
- God does not tempt us or send storms into our lives.
- Often the consequences of sin are in the form of 'natural consequences' (we reap what we sow).
- God is worthy to be praised in all circumstances, not for all circumstances, but in them.
- God is there for us in our trials, to comfort and give us peace and hope.

Please anticipate a lively and emotive discussion for this issue. The topic of suffering has been and will always be just outside our reach to fully comprehend this side of eternity. It's OK for your group to share different opinions as long as the conversation is kept life-giving. If it begins to get heated, or two individuals are arguing different view points and dominating the conversation, reign it in and move on by suggesting they continue the conversation at a later stage.

10

Q. Bethany's story shows us that a relationship with Christ means no matter our circumstances, good things can come out of a bad situation. Share a time in your life where this has proven to be true.

TALKING POINTS

Allow time for the women to share their stories to uplift and encourage one another.

Our suffering may have been used to;

- Support another person experiencing grief.
- Transform us to become more Christ-like.
- Draw us closer to the Lord.

- Role model Christianity to non-believers.

Some things to consider, which may be discussed;

- Our circumstances reveal the true condition of our hearts, when we examine our hearts and recognise a flaw, we can repent and be transformed by the presence of Jesus.
- Everything the enemy has meant for evil, God has destined for our good.
- God comforts us so we can comfort others (2 Corinthians 1:3).
- Our troubles produce glory which outweighs them, and lasts forever.
- Trials may produce a confident hope of our salvation (Romans 5:3-5).
- God is there for us in our trials, to comfort and give us peace and hope.
- God is not responsible for our suffering, but will use it.



ADDITIONAL NOTES FOR LEADERS

You may like to organise a movie night with your book club and watch "Soul Surfer" together as a group. It is available to purchase on DVD at Koorong https://www.koorong.com/product/soul-surfer_9317731086120?ref=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.koorong.com%2F on DVD or to stream online.

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