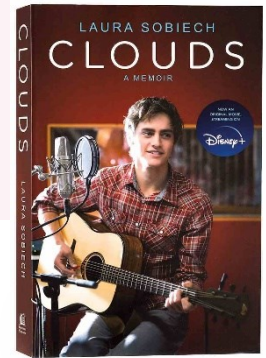




LEADER'S GUIDE

CLOUDS; A MEMOIR BY LAURA SOBIECH



"This story is about a boy who found himself tested by pain and loss. It's about a boy who learned to live while dying and in doing so brought hope to countless people who desperately needed it. But most of all, it is a story about a boy who showed his family, his friends, and eventually the world that everyone can choose to fly a little higher."

LAURA SOBIECH

THEMES

Trust

God's Sovereignty

Living while Dying

Family

Fame

Holy Spirit Gifting

HEADS UP! (TRIGGERS AND DELICATE TOPICS)

Terminal Illness

Death

Cancer

BOOK SUMMARY

'Clouds' is a memoir written by Zach's mother, Laura Sobiech, and is a chronological collection of memories during Zach's three-year battle with osteosarcoma. The book is called 'Clouds' because it is not a story that focuses on the death of a teenager – yet a celebration and testimony to God's goodness, faithfulness, and miraculous work amongst a terrible and unimaginable circumstance in which the Sobiech family found themselves.

It's every mother's worst nightmare, the unimaginable diagnosis of a terminally sick child. Zach's story is a story of a boy who learned to fully live while dying. For a young man, he had faith and wisdom beyond his years. His short life impacted so many around him. Despite his pain and knowing his time on earth was limited, Zach passionately committed himself to use his God-given talents. He made sure he didn't bury his giftings under his grief and diagnosis and showed others that it is possible to fully live while dying.

Zach's number 1 hit song 'Clouds' on iTunes not only shined Jesus' light and hope across the world but also raised much-needed funds to help with critical research and funding for the prevention of childhood cancers. Zach's story reminds us to celebrate God's goodness through absolute tragedy and, importantly, encourages us to assess our lives, our God-given calling, and how we might live to be fully in the moment, cherishing every day as the gift it is.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS & TALKING POINTS

1

Q. When Laura first realises that Zach could die, she says, "God is asking us for something big" (p31). Throughout this incredible memoir, which part of Zach's story impacted you the most?

TALKING POINTS

Answers may vary and could include;

- Zach's wisdom and faith are beyond his years.
- Laura's acceptance of God's sovereignty and will amongst such heart-breaking circumstances.
- Zach's ability to bless others throughout his journey.

2

Q. "He [Zach] was telling a story of his faith by being joyful in the midst of suffering, and he was doing it without uttering a word" (p93). Why is it more important to live out our faith through action and not just words?

TALKING POINTS

Actions speak louder than words;

- Often the way we live out our faith impacts a non-Christian person more than the words we speak.
- If we preach that we should love others yet do not love others well ourselves, we are seen as hypocrites.
- It's important that we are seen to be 'practising what we preach', as this shows the Spirit of God living within us.
- Our good deeds give glory to God and point others towards Him.
- The way we endure suffering and pain with Christian hope sets us apart from the rest of the world and gives others a reason to explore Christianity.

3

Q. Laura shares with us how her heart's desire and prayer as a mother was to see her children emulate Christ. On page 93, she says, "His life was unfolding as an answer to every prayer my heart as a mother had ever uttered for my child". The Lord was using the trial of cancer in Zach's life to answer Laura's prayers, albeit in a very unexpected way. When has the Lord unexpectedly used something tough to answer your prayers?

TALKING POINTS

Answers may vary and could include;

- A mental or physical health crisis/ terminal illness/ burnout.
- Death of a loved one.
- Loss of a job or income.
- Relationship breakdown within a family or friendships.
- Unplanned pregnancy.
- Trials and testing of our faith.

4

Q. On page 94, Zach says, "Physical pain is a joke. It's just Satan's way of messing with you and trying to get you to feel sorry for yourself... Mental and spiritual pain are different. That's the real battle where faith and prayer come in". Do you agree? How has physical, mental and spiritual pain differed in your life?

TALKING POINTS

We all experience pain differently. As Christians, we are not exempt from physical, emotional and spiritual pain, but we hold onto our Christian hope, knowing when we are fully restored in heaven, we will no longer experience any pain – every tear and trauma will be wiped away.

You might like to ask each woman if they are comfortable to share about a painful experience (whether it be physical, emotional or mental) and ask her which type of pain has been hardest for her personally. It is likely that each woman will have a different answer.

Some examples could include;

- Physical pain; chronic illness or childbirth
- Emotional pain; betrayal, death of a loved one, mental health issues.
- Spiritual pain; disappointment or anger at God, loss of faith or faith crisis.

5

Q. Throughout the book, Laura shares openly about how her marriage struggled to survive the cancer journey. There are many challenges we may face which can impact our marriages negatively; if you feel comfortable, share a struggle your marriage has endured.

TALKING POINTS

Answers may vary and could include;

- Chronic illness or death in the family.
- Mental health issues.
- Job loss or redundancy, other financial stresses, and burdens.
- Caring for elderly or disabled family.
- Faith crisis or declaration of unbelief.
- Dishonesty, infidelity, pornography addictions.
- Addictions; drugs, alcohol, prescription medication.

6

Q. Rob tells Laura that he feels angry at God because, "so many people who don't live faithful lives have it much better than we do" (p117). Can you relate to how he was feeling?

TALKING POINTS

Matthew 5:45 says, "For he gives his sunlight to both the evil and the good, and he sends rain on the just and the unjust alike". It can be incredibly difficult not to become disheartened when seeing faithful Christians enduring horrible trials and pain, while those who do not love or honour God seem to be living blessed lives. We must remember a few things;

- God does not owe us anything, yet He graciously gives us life and breath each and every day.
- The biggest gift we can receive from the Lord is not our health, wealth, or happiness, but our Salvation and the ability to recognise Jesus as our Saviour.
- If every good thing was to be taken from us, as Christian's, we would still have the BEST thing – which is Jesus himself, who cannot be taken from us.

7

Q. Laura says on page 69, "Daisy [the dog] was good at making dark things lighter through humour, and this would become especially true in the days to come". God's creation provides us with peace and wonder – share a memory of a pet that has impacted your life.

TALKING POINTS

Answers may vary and could include;

- A childhood pet.
- A family pet you now own.
- For those who haven't had pets, they may like to share a peaceful spot in God's creation that provides them with comfort and joy (for example, the beach, forest, walking tracks, a nice sunset).

8

Q. On page 57, Laura shares some rules on "What Not to Say" to people who are enduring a crisis. Often we can say things to people with good intentions, which end up making them feel worse. How did this chapter of the book help you to understand how to better support others?

TALKING POINTS

Laura's rules of "What Not To Say" (p57);

- If the sentence you are about to say starts with the phrase "have you" or "you should", don't say it.
- Unless you have had a child with the same disease and you've been through the exact same thing, don't offer advice.
- Don't tell me about everyone you have ever known who has either battled cancer or died from cancer.
- Don't tell me to be grateful.

9

Q. On page 35, Laura says, "While I had chosen to trust God, to hope rather than despair, fear still reared up inside me. The practical part of trusting God is hard and takes practice". What are some things we can do to allow ourselves to trust in the Lord during crises and reduce our fear?

TALKING POINTS

One of the most practical ways to tackle fear and trials is to fill ourselves with God's Word and truth. Some helpful scriptures to meditate on, declare, and write out are;

- Scriptures for courage and trials; Romans 5:3-5, John 16:33, 2 Corinthians 4:17-18, James 1:2-4, 1 Peter 4:12-13.
- Scriptures to tackle fear; Isaiah 41:10, Philippians 4:6-7, Proverbs 3:5-6, Psalm 23:4, Jeremiah 29:11, Psalm 27:1, 2 Timothy 1:7, Deuteronomy 31:8, Romans 8:28, John 14:27.

In Sheila Walsh's book, "It's Okay not to be Okay", she creates an acronym for F.E.A.R (p91), providing us with some practical support to tackle fear;

F - FALL on your face before Him

E - EARNESTLY seek Him

A - ASK for peace

R - REST in His presence

10

Q. On page 351, Laura says, "Big feelings happen when a child is battling a deadly disease and dies. Marriages are strained, siblings feel overlooked and overshadowed, and everyone feels alone in their grief. It is a messy thing to get through, but it doesn't take a superhuman to do it. It takes faith, hope, love, extraordinary grace and a supportive and understanding community." Did reading this memoir encourage you to trust God more? To rely on Him during trials and suffering or give you a new perspective and hope?

TALKING POINTS

Answers may vary and could include;

- I can see God working even through the most devastating circumstances.
- I've made the decision to trust God even though I do not understand.
- I believe that the Lord truly is working all things together for the good of those who love Him.

Allow time for the women in your group to open up and share a new perspective on something they may be struggling with. Add it to your prayer points for the closure of the session.



Disclaimer: Thanks for supporting this essential ministry impacting the lives of women the world over! We pray that our Heavenly Father blesses both you and the women you lead. This Leader's Guide has been prepared by Blossoming through Books and is protected by copyright law. Please seek express permission from Blossoming through Books before making copies by contacting blossomingthroughbooks@gmail.com. Please share your experience and feedback with us! This BTB Book Club Kit was edited by team member Colette Plaska.