

PARTICIPANT'S GUIDE

HOW JESUS IS FOR YOU
WHEN EVERYTHING SEEMS
AGAINST YOU

GOD IS ON YOUR SIDE



JOSHUA RYAN BUTLER



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IS ON
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Joshua Ryan Butler



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HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

This study guide is designed to help you dive more deeply into the concepts at the heart of *God Is on Your Side*: to reflect on them and make them your own, to creatively explore their significance from fresh angles, to discuss those concepts with others or journal on their implications for your life, and to integrate and apply God's heart and vision for you.

This guide can be used individually or as part of a larger group (for example, a book club, a discussion gathering, or another kind of small group). Either way, you may want to grab some paper or a journal to record your thoughts as you work through the sessions. When you use this guide alongside the book, it will help you get as much out of the content as possible.

SESSION FORMAT

This guide is divided into seven sessions, with sessions typically covering two chapters (called mini-sessions) from *God*

Is on Your Side. Each mini-session contains four key components: Prepare Your Heart, Unpack It, Use Your Imagination, and Reflect on It. More on these components below.

Although this guide is structured in seven sessions, go at your own pace. If you're reading the book in a group setting, then it might work best as a seven-week study with participants reading and reflecting on two chapters each week. Or your group may decide to stretch it out to a fourteen-week study. Do what works best for your schedule and timeline.

READING SCHEDULE

If you haven't already read the book *God Is on Your Side*, do so as you work your way through these sessions:

- Session 1 Introduction and Chapter 1
- Session 2 Chapters 2–3
- Session 3 Chapters 4–5
- Session 4 Chapters 6–7
- Session 5 Chapters 8–9
- Session 6 Chapters 10–11
- Session 7 Chapters 12–13 and Conclusion

To follow is a summary of the four components you'll find in each mini-session.

1. Prepare Your Heart

This section will help you prepare your heart for the theme of the chapter. Use this space to reflect on an experience from your life that this chapter addresses.

2. Unpack It

Here you'll encounter questions designed to help you recap, unpack, and cement key insights from each chapter. Consider completing this section immediately after reading the chapter to record important takeaways and make them your own so you can return to them later for easy reference.

3. Use Your Imagination

These creative exercises are designed to help you reflect, using your imagination in unexpected ways, on a big idea from the chapter. These work best when you don't rush through them, so set aside ten to fifteen minutes, ideally, for each exercise. Allow your imagination to explore the exercise, and journal your reflections.

4. Reflect on It

These questions are intended to guide you in group discussion (or they can be used as journal prompts for personal reflection) about the significance of the chapter's central ideas for your own life and what it might look like to live out the big, beautiful realities you're exploring in the book.

As you walk through these discussion questions, you'll notice that I often ask multiple questions on the same topic. Don't worry about answering all of them (unless you want to). Feel free to home in on those that stand out to you.

GROUP LEADERS

If you're completing this study in a group setting and you're the facilitator of your group, here are some simple guidelines that can help make this seven-session journey more reward-

ing. Each session has enough content for sixty to ninety minutes of group time, depending on how long you desire to spend discussing each topic.

If you're part of an established small group going through *God Is on Your Side*, your group is probably familiar with how to review content in studies similar to this one. It may not be necessary to prescribe every detail of the meetings, though this brief refresher may help you prepare for the discussion.

Read and Pray

Before meeting with the group, read the chapters of *God Is on Your Side* associated with the upcoming session (see the reading schedule on page XX) and complete the mini-sessions. Then pray for each person in your group and for your upcoming time together.

Group Members

Encourage every group member to read the assigned chapters of *God Is on Your Side* and complete the mini-sessions before they arrive at each meeting.

Getting Started

Once your group members have arrived, settle into a place free of distractions, where you can sit comfortably for the next hour or so. Then, when you're ready to get started, ask a group member to read the questions, one at a time, from the Reflect on It section. Encourage discussion of these questions and remember to take your time. (You can also allow participants to share reflections that stood out to them from the Unpack It and Use Your Imagination sections, de-

pending on how much time you have and how many people are in your group.)

As you lead your group through this guide, keep these pro tips in mind:

- *Make time for each person to share.* The goal is to get everyone talking so every voice is heard and included in the discussion. This doesn't mean everybody needs to share on each question, but be wary of a few people dominating the discussion.
- *Don't make everyone share.* This book gets into some sensitive topics. Some people might not be comfortable sharing their thoughts or experiences, or they might be in process and not ready to share yet. Respect that. Don't pressure people to contribute who aren't ready or don't want to.

* * *

My hope is, by the end of the book and this guide, you'll have a bigger, more captivating vision of God and how he wants to encounter you in your life. I know I've been affected tremendously by reflecting on the concepts at the heart of the book. I hope you are too.

In Christ,
Josh



SESSION I

INTRODUCTION

On Your Side

Is God on my side? Is he really for me? It's easy to answer "Yes!" when life is going well. When your body's healthy, your bank account's full, and your best friends are by your side. It's harder to believe when life takes a turn for the worse. In the wake of disappointment and loss, you can find yourself wondering, *Is my Maker for me? Does my Savior have my back? Is God committed to my good?*

Where do you go when you wrestle with such questions?

PREPARE YOUR HEART

What drew you to pick up this book? Is there a question, circumstance, or need in your life that you're hoping the pages ahead will address?

Describe a season of life when you found it difficult to believe God was on your side. Perhaps it was a season of loss, hurt or betrayal in a relationship, an unexpected health con-

dition, fear for your financial future, or questions about faith. Perhaps it was something else. Perhaps you're in that season today. In your response, focus on how your view of God was affected by this experience—whether your convictions deepened or changed and so on.

When I say God is on your side, do you have any suspicions, questions, or concerns? That's okay! List those here. Later you can return and see if they are adequately addressed as you work through the book.

UNPACK IT

In It with You, Fighting for You, Working Through You

In John 1, how do each of these three key images speak to God being on our side?

- the Word made flesh
- the Lamb of God
- the Ladder with angels

On God's Side

God being on your side doesn't mean he *picks* sides.

- What did the angelic commander of God's armies tell Joshua in Joshua 5? How is this a good corrective to those who try to make God seem like he *takes* sides?
- Jesus came "full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). Why are both of these important in understanding his posture toward us?
- In what contexts might people say "God is on my side"

when it isn't true to reality?

USE YOUR IMAGINATION

Just as people sat across from artist Marina Abramović and were moved by the experience of seeing and being seen, imagine yourself sitting across from Christ. Ask the Holy Spirit to open the eyes of your heart to encounter Christ. Close your eyes and contemplate his heart toward you. What parts of your story do you hope he sees? What aspects of his heart do you long to know more fully? Take some time with this; then jot down any observations you want to remember.

Why do you think it's so powerful to be seen by someone—not just looked at, but truly seen? What might this suggest about our deepest longings and the experience we were made for with God?

How might this frame a reason to read Scripture and pray—not to try to perform for God and earn his affection, but rather to encounter the God who pursues us in Christ, who is on our side, who sees us, knows us, and desires to transform us into his image?

REFLECT ON IT

1. What are your hopes for this book group? Is there a question, circumstance, or need in your life that you're hoping the pages ahead will address?
2. To the extent you're comfortable, describe a season of life when you found it difficult to believe God was on

your side. Perhaps it was a season of loss, hurt or betrayal in a relationship, an unexpected health condition, fear for your financial future, or questions about faith. What was your perception of God like in that experience?

3. Which of these three images stands out most to you? Why?
 - a. the Word made flesh (*the Creator entering our side of creation*)
 - b. the Lamb of God (*the Innocent One stepping onto our side on the cross*)
 - c. the Ladder with angels (*the Risen One bringing heaven to our side of earth*)
4. Which message do you most need to hear today: that God is in it with you, fights for you, or wants to work through you? Why? Describe what it might look like to live into this reality more fully.
5. Close with a prayer giving Christ thanks for his incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension, for specific ways he's worked in the story of your life, and for his heart toward you in being on your side.