



The Dark Night of the Shed

Study Guide

Thanks for downloading this Study Guide. I'll be honest: I'm calling it a study guide because I don't know what else to call it. It's really just a load of questions which might help you explore the issues in *The Dark Night of the Shed*. And there are a lot of questions. Don't feel you have to cover them all. I just couldn't decide which ones to leave out.

Before you start...

You might want to set some ground rules for the meeting, because some of these issues need a bit of honesty and vulnerability, so it helps to know that you're in a safe space. I've suggested a form below which you can use, but please feel free to draft your own. And let me know what you come up with!

The Dark Night of the Shed: Our Commitment

We are here with one aim: to become better disciples of Jesus Christ.

Through God's grace, we will listen carefully, speak honestly, pray faithfully, act with integrity and think as deeply as we can.

We will offer encouragement, wisdom, and accountability. (We should also offer love, but we're blokes and we don't like to talk about that kind of thing.)

Everything said here is in confidence.

We believe in the possibility of change. And we're actually going to do something about it.

We believe in honesty, courage, humility, decent beer, and that everyone deserves a shed.

Anyway, I hope you find these questions helpful. Do get in touch with me and let me know how you get on. You can get in touch via the website, or on Twitter or Facebook. And if you're meeting in a shed, send me a picture!

Cheers,

Nick





Session 1: Of Men, Middle Age and Sheds

Read the Introduction and Chapter 1

Questions

- We'll start with the most important question: *Have you got a shed?*
- *In the introduction I talk of how some men sail serenely through midlife, while for others it is a 'more turbulent sea'. What's your experience of growing older?*
- *The single defining question of middle age: 'Is that it?' Have you asked this question? In what context?*
- *In my book the shed is more than a shed: it represents something I wanted or needed. What do you think that was?*
- *On page 9 I talk about Jung's theory of the two stages of life. Do you agree with this?*
- *'Our persona is not who we really are.' What are the personae – the faces or masks – which you have to wear in life? Do you feel they get in the way of people experiencing the 'real' you?*
- *On page 11 I introduce Jung's theory of individuation. How would you explain that idea to someone else?*
- *Read John 12.24. How does that apply to our lives?*

Exercise

- *Maybe here you could try Exercise #2 on page 173-174. It's about prayer. Look back at your day and give thanks for it. Put off the mask for a bit. Bring before God who you are and who you would love to be.*





Session 2: Into the Darkness

Read Chapters 2 and 3

Questions

- *This chapter is about those moments known as ‘the dark night of the soul’. Have you ever had any experience of this?*
- *In the great work of art that is Moominpappa At Sea, Tove Jansson writes, “Strange that people can be sad, and even angry because life is too easy. But that’s the way it is, I suppose. The only thing to do is to start life afresh.” Do you feel this way?*
- *On page 18, I give the executive summary of the book. How does that statement strike you?*
- *Psychotherapy really means ‘soul medicine’ or ‘soul care’. What does it mean to take care of our souls?*
- *Inside every middle-aged man is a young man struggling to grow up. In the words of Satchel Paige, ‘How old would you be if you didn’t know how old you was?’*
- *When Jacob finds himself in trouble he prays. Is that your experience?*
- *There’s a lot of stuff in here about ageing. What are the advantages of growing older? And the disadvantages?*

Exercise

- *With all this stuff, it’s easy to feel grumpy and sad and stuck. So maybe this would be a good time to try out Exercise #6 on p.190. Make something. Write something. Learn something. Try something new.*





Session 3: The Gods Who Failed

Read Chapter 4

Questions

- Consider Arthur Miller's great line: 'He had all the wrong gods.' I list several 'gods' in this chapter. Are there other gods you can think of?
- 'It is very easy to create a god. All you do is put something on a pedestal and expect miracles out of it.' What do people expect from their gods?
- 'Society is in the grip of a cult of youth.' Do you agree? Is this a bad thing?
- Do you now, or have you ever, worn Lycra? Be honest.
- 'The god of work is, for many men, a brutal deity.' Is this your experience?
- I claim that people can worship 'religion' – it can be a god. What on earth was I getting at?
- 'Wherever belief reigns, doubt lurks in the background,' wrote Jung. 'But thinking people welcome doubt, it serves them as a valuable stepping stone to better knowledge.' How does this work, then?
- 'When men become aware of the failure of their gods, they react in different ways.' What are the reactions I listed? And have I missed any?

Exercise

- How do we control our addiction to our gods? Maybe this would be a good time to try out Exercise #5 on p.185-186 which is about simplicity and self-control.
- Or, if work is your big area of idolatry, why not try Exercise #4 on pp.180? See how your workplace can be a place of service, rather than servitude.





Session 4: Wrestling

Read Chapter 5

Questions

- *The call to a new life involves a descent. How did that work out in Jacob's story?*
- *'We will never find real peace unless we accept God's invitation to fight.' Is there truth in this or am I just being a smartarse?*
- *I talk of the two questions God places before us. The first is 'Who are you?' Jacob's name summed him up: grasper, supplanter. When God asks him his name, he's really asking about Jacob's understanding of himself. But what if God asked you the same question? Does your name reflect anything of who you are? If not, what name would sum you up?*
- *The second question is, 'What are you afraid of?' That's a big question. Fancy offering anything up?*
- *Read Anthony Bloom's marvellous description of humility on p. 108. Do you find this exciting? Challenging? Comforting? Any other word ending in '-ing'?*

Exercise

- *This might be a good time to try out Exercise #1 on pp. 169-170 Spend some time in solitude and silence, thinking through these questions.*





Session 5 Embracing

Read Chapter 6

Questions

- *Pages 120-122 paint a portrait of Jesus. Is this how you see him?*
- *How do you see God? How does this affect your life. I claim that 'our view of God affects absolutely everything.' Do you agree?*
- *'Our false narratives about God spring from false narratives about ourselves.' Why might this be the case?*
- *Search for images of Epstein's 'Jacob and the Angel'. What is your reaction to this sculpture. (There's a link on www.darknightoftheshed.com)*
- *'God wrestled with Jacob because it was the only way for Jacob to turn into the person God intended him to be.' How does God wrestle with us?*
- *Read the poem on pp.142-143. Or the bit from The Velveteen Rabbit on pp.144-145. (Or both. I'm easy.) What do they tell you about God's purpose for you?*
- *'Knowing that we are loved by God gives us the strength to live our own authentic lives without worrying what other people think.' How far should we worry about what people think of us?*

Exercise

- *This might be a good point to try Exercise #3 on pp 176-177. Read a passage of the Bible. You could use the passages suggested there, or maybe reflect on the story of the 'prodigal God' in Luke 15. What picture of God does it give you? You could do this exercise together as a group.*





Session 6 Dancing

Read Chapter 7 and the Conclusion

Questions

- *How would you define 'discipleship'?*
- *And how would you define the kingdom of God?*
- *Check out the icon of 'Jesus and Abba Menas' (aka 'Jesus and his friend') on the website. What picture does it give of the relationship between Jesus and his followers?*
- *If you haven't done any of the exercises already, this would be a good time to pick one and have a go!*

Exercise

- *This is a good time to try out Exercise #7: Celebration. Why not hold a celebration at the end of your journey as a group together?*

