

GOD UNDERSTANDS

Introduction to Using
the *God Understands* Series

COMFORT AND HOPE FROM THE SCRIPTURES



ARMED ★ SERVICES
MINISTRY
OF AMERICAN BIBLE SOCIETY

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Dear Chaplain:

American Bible Society (ABS) has produced the *God Understands* series desiring that its words will bring healing, hope, comfort, and encouragement to all who use it. British author C.S. Lewis wrote, “We read to know we are not alone.” The *God Understands* series attempts to recognize the common human thread of our frailties, our weaknesses, our heartaches, and our sufferings as well as the hope that so many have found in prayer and Scripture.

This meaningful Scripture resource, which will positively minister to Veterans and their families, is the result of collaboration between ABS and VA chaplain consultants. We listened to VA chaplains' needs and decided that a series of booklets, each focusing on one of the eight spiritual injuries from the Spiritual Injury Scale used by VA chaplains, would be extremely helpful. Two VA chaplains were selected to write the content of the themed booklets, which provide scriptural guidance for Veterans, their families, and chaplains who minister to them. Each booklet addresses one of the following spiritual injuries: anger, grief, doubt, guilt, fear of death, a sense that life is unfair, hopelessness, and meaninglessness. The booklets can be ordered individually, or as a set.

The booklets include real life situations about Veterans, and are used to introduce the topic and various Scriptures that speak directly to the theme of the booklet. They are presented in the easy-to-understand *Good News Translation*, which is accepted by Protestants and Catholics. Within each chapter, Hebrew Scripture passages appear first, followed by New Testament passages. There are three to five chapters in each booklet. Thought-provoking questions, suggestions for exercises or activities, and a prayer appear at the end of each chapter. Each booklet includes a Reading Suggestion Scripture Card.

Chaplains have encouraged Veterans to use the *God Understands* series in multiple ways. Thousands of people have found comfort and new spiritual insight by reading the text, studying the Scriptures, praying the prayers and wrestling with the booklets' questions. Chaplains and Veterans use these and other creative ways to allow God's Spirit to speak through the resource. From their experiences, we have crafted a User Guide, that provides methods suggested by VA chaplains to expand the usefulness of the resource, which is now available in online versions as well as audio adaptations. These can be engaged at:

GodUnderstands.AmericanBible.org. For best results, we encourage you to apply these suggestions to aid Veterans in discovering new ways to reach out to God.

We at American Bible Society want to take this opportunity to thank you for the extraordinary work you do to bring healing to those who have served our nation. May you receive strength to carry on and may God's rich blessing be upon your work.

May the Lord himself, who is our source of peace, give you peace at all times and in every way.
2 Thessalonians 3.16a, GNT

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An Introduction to Using the *God Understand* series:

Use of Online Version

1. Print resource in its entirety or by section.
2. Download the online version to a computer, smartphone, tablet or other device for referencing content within spiritual assessment groups or in other group settings.
3. Share the online version with a Veteran by email, facebook, or other electronic means.
4. Suggest Veterans sign up for a SMS 7-day journey. Each booklet offers a Scripture based text message journey.
5. Suggest Veterans engage the resource directly online. It is easy to keep track of where you left off and is available anywhere there is internet connection.

Use of the Audio Version

1. Chaplains may play the audio version for a group of Veterans in a spiritual discussion group. (See the below section on Group Use which further illustrates how chaplains can use this material in a group setting.)
2. Chaplains may play a short segment of the audio version during a one-on-one counseling session to have a Veteran or family member ponder a specific short section of the audio version.
3. Veterans and others will be able to download the audio version to be played later at a time and location that is convenient for them.
4. Veterans, family members, and others are encouraged to listen to a portion of the audio version, and then journal on what spoke to you. Listening to short segments and reflecting on how these sections speak to people in their various spiritual journeys is meaningful.

Individual Use of Booklets in the Chaplain's Office

1. Chaplains may give Veterans the complete set of booklets without further direction except to give them a try.

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2. After conducting a spiritual assessment with a Veteran to identify any key spiritual injuries, the chaplain may then give the Veteran the appropriate booklet or booklets and invite the Veteran to read the text, pray the prayers, and explore the questions. Chaplains may either allow the Veteran to schedule a follow-up visit, or suggest a return appointment. If follow up is chosen, the Veteran may decide how much of a booklet should be dealt with in the next session, for example: one chapter, with appointments to follow; more than one chapter; or the entire booklet.
3. Chaplains may take the approach in number two and then explore creative ways to respond to the text, prayers, Scriptures, and questions in the booklets. Those methods may include the use of oils, paints, crayons, colored pencils, charcoal, and ink. The Veteran may be invited to show and discuss his/her response. One chaplain commenting on the creative use of the booklets wrote, "When we evaluate the drawing as to shapes, colors, and (their) story...the results have been surprisingly accurate and have touched a deep place in the veteran."
4. Chaplains may encourage Veterans to form their response to a specific booklet by taking photos to demonstrate their feelings after reading a chapter, or by creating a montage from newspapers, magazines or anything else.
5. Veterans may be encouraged to use clay, music, writing, poetry, videotaping, or any other creative art to explore their response and discuss how the booklet impacted them.
6. Chaplains may use the booklets to help them in the spiritual assessment process by presenting all the booklets to a Veteran, after some trust has been built in the relationship, and asking the Veteran to take any booklets that are of interest to him or her. The Chaplain should note which booklets are taken, and invite the Veteran to either discuss the issue then or during a return visit.
7. Chaplains may place individual copies of the booklets in the chapel or office for Veterans to pick up at their own choosing.
8. Chaplains may distribute copies of the booklets in clergy training conferences so that local clergy can read the booklets and then re-distribute them to Veterans in their congregations.
9. Chaplains may mail the booklets to families following the death of a Veteran. They can serve as bereavement mailings for three, six, nine, and twelve month follow-up contact.

10. Chaplains may find it useful to make the *God Understands* booklets available to the members of the staff of the VA medical facilities where they work.

Individual Use at the Bedside

1. Through a bedside spiritual assessment, chaplains may discover a spiritual injury of a Veteran or family member. Chaplains may then present the booklet that speaks to that issue.
2. At the bedside, chaplains may offer to read portions of booklets to Veterans and naturally fall into a discussion of the issues raised in the booklet.

Group Use

1. Chaplains may use the booklets with outpatient groups for a series on Spiritual Injury and Spiritual Growth, or on alcohol and drug treatment in settings where in-patients have longer stays. One chaplain leading such a group, wrote, "There were tears, stories, confessions, connections, and nods of agreement during Scripture and scenario readings."
2. Booklets may be read by members of the group during the group session and discussed by group members.
3. Another approach could be to assign group members to read a given section of a booklet and return to the group to share such questions as:
 - a. *What makes this topic (anger, guilt, fear of death, etc.) important to you?*
 - b. *What words stood out for you in the text?*
 - c. *How did the prayer in this chapter speak to you? What didn't you understand or like about the prayer?*
 - d. *What Scripture(s) helped you? In what way(s)?*
 - e. *What questions did the Scripture(s) raise for you?*
 - f. *What question(s) helped you discover something new and helpful?*
4. When group members read booklets on their own, they should be encouraged to respond creatively and then share responses within the group.
5. Group members can be asked to pose, as in the form of a statue, to show what guilt, anger, fear of death, etc. looks like from the way they feel it themselves. They can then be asked to show what it would look like for them to feel relief from that feeling.

Family Use

1. Chaplains understand that spiritual injury is not an isolated matter; each member of the family and close friends are impacted by the anger, guilt or despair of the Veteran. Thus the *God Understands* series can be used both as an educational and inspirational tool for family members. The items below highlight some of those means.
2. Veterans and families may read a portion of a booklet at the breakfast or dinner table, with each person reading a paragraph. Members could be encouraged to discuss what seems true for them in what they have read. The prayers, Scriptures, and questions may be approached in a similar manner.
3. Each member of the family may be given a set of the *God Understands* series. As a family, they may select which booklet they would like to read. Family members may be encouraged to share why a particular portion is important for reading, and discouraged from saying that the family should read a particular portion “because dad is always angry,” etc. That is, each family member should be encouraged to take responsibility for his or her own spiritual need. Then an open family discussion, during which each family member’s voice is heard, may be a healing intervention in itself. If the family seems well structured and has good communication skills, members may be encouraged to have a discussion and select the booklet that would best benefit the family. If communication seems difficult in the family, members may wish to ask a chaplain to help them find a process by which to select a booklet.
4. Families may be encouraged to set a specific and limited time on a given day to discuss the booklet they choose.
5. Various methods of responding to the *God Understands* series, as individuals and in groups, may be reviewed with families. For example, one family member may bring a poem, another might bring a drawing, another may bring a picture from a magazine and another may share a verbal response.
6. Families may be encouraged to create a collage together to express their feelings and responses to a booklet or a chapter of a booklet.
7. Families may be inspired to translate the booklet themes into rap sessions, songs, or dances, along with the children of Veterans and youth groups.
8. After explaining that the *God Understands* series was written around common spiritual distresses that Veterans and families often experience, chaplains may ask the family how they think they might use them as a family.

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9. Chaplains may offer to meet with the family to discuss both how the process for engaging the booklets went and what they discovered about spiritual distress and spiritual healing since their previous meeting.

We Would Like To Hear From You

We need to know if and how the *God Understands* series has been useful to you and has made a difference in the lives of Veterans and their families. Your direct feedback will help us improve future Scripture resources and allow us to report to our donors that their contributions are being used in a way that has had a positive impact on the spiritual distress experienced by those who have served our country, and the families that support them.

Please complete the online survey found at: **GodUnderstands.AmericanBible.org** so that we may gauge the effectiveness of the *God Understands* series; or you can email us at **Provisions@AmericanBible.org**. You may also access additional Scripture engagement resources at **ArmedServices.AmericanBible.org**.

Thank you for letting American Bible Society know if and how you found this resource helpful, of changes you would like to see in this series, or how you may have shared the resource with others.