

STUDY GUIDE
GROUPS / INDIVIDUALS

SIX SESSIONS



THE COMEBACK

LOUIE GIGLIO

IT'S NOT TOO LATE AND YOU'RE NEVER TOO FAR //



SESSION 1

A DEEPER KIND OF COMEBACK STORY

*What we're celebrating here is
the God of all the comeback stories.*

Louie Giglio

Orientation

Have you ever watched parents try to get their children to apologize to each other when it is clear neither of those children want to? It is truly painful to watch. The parents know they are doing the right thing by steering their children toward forgiveness and reconciliation, yet as the kids resist, it becomes clear the whole affair is going nowhere. Why? Because the kids are just not open to it. Sure, the parents may succeed in getting the two of them to say, “I’m sorry,” but everyone knows they’re just going through the motions. And true reconciliation is not possible unless both parties are willing to open up.

God is the God of the comeback. There is no dream of yours that’s been dashed, mistake you have made, or tragedy you can encounter that God cannot redeem, restore, and make new. It’s what God does and who he is. But even more than that, it is what God *wants* to do in your life right now. God would like nothing more than to offer you a great comeback where you need it most. But you have a part to play. Just like those kids who need to apologize to each other, you have to be open to God’s work in your life.

This is often easier said than done, because when life knocks you around, it can be easy to put up barriers. Maybe you have done something foolish you are ashamed of, or maybe you made good choices but the bottom fell out on you, or maybe life just threw you a curveball and you are not sure how a good God fits into the tragedy you have suffered. These kinds of experiences can leave you feeling distant from God and unsure of what to do about it. The longer this persists, the more you can put up walls and defenses until—like the

two kids being forced to apologize—you stop being open to God’s best and settle for something lesser.

But here’s the good news: *it doesn’t have to be this way*. That is what the first session of *The Comeback* is all about. God wants to ignite a massive comeback in your life—and he is already open to doing it. The question is, *are you?* What would it take for you to be open to the comeback God wants to orchestrate? Is anything blocking your heart? If so, it’s okay; just head into the session asking yourself, *What if things could really change? What if things could really be different for me tomorrow?*

God already has an answer for this question. Do you?

Welcome and Checking In

Go around the group and invite the members to introduce themselves, and then answer the following questions:

- If you had one whole day to yourself, where would you go and what would you do?
- If you could describe your hopes for this study in one word, that word would be: _____.
Why did you answer the way you did?

Hearing the Word

Read aloud in the group the following passages from Exodus 2:11–15 and 3:1–12. Invite everyone to listen for a fresh insight during the reading.

^{2:11} One day, after Moses had grown up, he went out to where his own people were and watched them at their hard labor. He saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his own people. ¹² Looking this way and that and seeing no one, he killed the Egyptian and hid him in the sand. ¹³ The next day he went out and saw two Hebrews fighting. He asked the one in the wrong, “Why are you hitting your fellow Hebrew?”

¹⁴ The man said, “Who made you ruler and judge over us? Are you thinking of killing me as you killed the Egyptian?” Then Moses was afraid and thought, “What I did must have become known.”

¹⁵ When Pharaoh heard of this, he tried to kill Moses, but Moses fled from Pharaoh and went to live in Midian . . .

^{3:1} Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian, and he led the flock to the far side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. ² There the angel of the LORD appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush. Moses saw that though the bush was on fire it did not burn up. ³ So Moses thought, “I will go over and see this strange sight—why the bush does not burn up.”

⁴ When the LORD saw that he had gone over to look, God called to him from within the bush, “Moses! Moses!”

And Moses said, “Here I am.”

⁵ “Do not come any closer,” God said. “Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground.” ⁶ Then he said, “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob.” At this, Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God.

⁷ The LORD said, “I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. ⁸ So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and

honey—the home of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites. ⁹ And now the cry of the Israelites has reached me, and I have seen the way the Egyptians are oppressing them. ¹⁰ So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt.”

¹¹ But Moses said to God, “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?”

¹² And God said, “I will be with you. And this will be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God on this mountain.”

In groups of two or three, share your answers to the following questions:

What was one thing that stood out to you from the Scripture?

In what ways did that represent a new insight?

Do you think this part of the book of Exodus casts Moses in a good or bad light? Why did you answer the way you did?

Watch the Video

Play the video segment for Session 1. As you watch, use the following outline to record any thoughts or concepts that stand out to you.

Notes

All of us know what it means to be in that moment when we need God to come through for us, and all of us love to celebrate those great comeback stories when they occur.

The greatest comeback occurred when Jesus was raised up out of the grave into everlasting life. Now, we can celebrate the power of God that can bring us back even from the brink of death.

Moses was in his eighties and on the back side of nowhere, tending to his father-in-law's flocks, when he received his comeback in life.

At a time when many would be thinking about their last chapters on this earth, God spoke to Moses out of a burning bush and called him into a position of leadership.

God was able to use Moses because he submitted his life to God's plans and purposes and allowed the Lord to unfold his comeback story.

Like Moses, we may feel that we are on the back side of nowhere, or that we've done too much wrong and there is no way back. But Moses' story shows us that God sees us where we are and will find us there. He is the God who can restart the story.

Our part in this is to believe that wherever we are, God is with us and is present in our lives.

Scripture says that God "gives songs in the night" (Job 35:10). When the cloud comes, we can praise God and have a song in our heart—and he will lead us back to the land of the living.

Group Discussion

Take a few minutes with your group members to discuss what you just watched and explore these concepts in Scripture.

First Impressions

1. Before everyone shares in the large group, turn to one or two people next to you and finish this sentence: “After watching the video, one question I now have is . . .”

Community Reflection

2. Even if you have felt like you’ve done too much, gone too far, or God has lost track of you, the truth is God has not forgotten you. God sees you right where you are. In what ways do you agree or disagree with this statement?

3. Does this idea sound too good to be true? Why or why not?

4. Have you ever seen God restart someone's story? If so, when?

5. God can "reach into our lives and make music play." What does the "music" playing in your life sound like right now? What would God's song sound like?

6. In the video, Louie says he wished he could say his story ended with everything getting better quickly and easily . . . but it didn't. It took time. Do you find this comforting or discouraging? Why did you answer the way you did?

7. Can you think of a place in your life where you need a comeback? If so, are you willing to share with the group what that is?

Opening Up to the Comeback

For this activity, each participant will need a blank piece of paper, a pen, and an envelope.

In this session, you have explored what it means that “God is the God of the comeback.” Such comebacks are dependent on the power of God to make them a reality—and all you have to do, as Louie says, is be open to them. This prayer exercise is

designed to help you take steps toward becoming more open to the work God wants to do in your life.

Take a few minutes to pray, and then answer the following question on the blank piece of paper you have been given: *If God could change one thing in my life right now, what would I want that to be?* Be as honest as you can. This will go into a sealed envelope, and no one will ever see it but you.

Once you have written your answer, flip the paper over. Then, as a sign of being open to God's movement in this area of your life, write one word: "help."

Take a few minutes to pray and then fold up your paper, put it inside your envelope, seal it, and write your name on the front. Hand your envelope to your group leader, who will hold it (unopened) until the last session. Make this act of handing it over a symbolic act that reflects your desire to entrust your comeback to God.

Closing Prayer

Close the session by praying together for a couple of minutes. First, offer a one-word prayer for the concern you wrote down on your paper. Next, pray that the person on your left will be open to the power of God working in his or her life to bring about a comeback. Finally, pray that the person on your right will be able to hear God's song playing in his or her life this week.



BETWEEN-SESSIONS PERSONAL STUDY

You are invited to further explore the good news of *The Comeback* by engaging in any or all of the following between-sessions activities. Remember, this is part of *The Comeback* experience, not about following rules or doing your homework—these activities (categorized as *Action*, *Contemplation*, and *Reflection*) are designed to give you opportunity to be open to God working out a comeback in your life. *Be sure to read the reflection questions after each activity and make a few notes in your guide about the experience.* There will be a time for you to share these reflections at the beginning of the next session.

Action: Sing!

In the video this week, Louie shares about how he found a way to connect with God during some of his darkest hours by singing to him. When he would sing, the cloud of anxiety and oppression over him would lift, prompting him to say, “God, I can’t see you, but I’m going to praise you.” Picking up on this

promise, you are invited to do something risky and radical: engage the worry and anxiety of your life with a song. There are two paths to choose for this exercise:

1. **Actual Singing:** Write a song to God, or choose a simple one you know by heart (this could be an old hymn, a new worship song, or even something as simple as “Jesus Loves Me” from your childhood). Whenever you feel the cloud of gloom, stress, or anxiety overshadow you, begin to sing your song. You can sing it as loudly or as quietly as you like—it is up to you. Just sing it out, and see what God does next.
2. **Metaphorical Singing:** During the video, Louie mentioned that God gave him “songs in the night” (Job 35:10) that led him back into “the land of the living” (Psalm 27:13). If you are not a singer, or if you find yourself in a place where singing would not be appropriate, use Psalm 27 as your song this week. Whenever you feel the cloud of gloom, stress, or anxiety darken your path, say a portion or all of Psalm 27 out loud and see what God does next.

Make a few notes about your experience to share with the group next week.

The good news is that the life Jesus calls us all to enter is a life of comeback . . . It may be the kind of comeback where we overcome obstacles by God's power . . . [or] it may be a deeper sort of comeback, where Jesus redeems the worst of circumstances for his glory and our best.

—The Comeback, page 6

Contemplation: Pay Attention

For this week's contemplation, review this story of Moses and the burning bush told in Exodus 3:1–6:

¹ Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian, and he led the flock to the far side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. ² There the angel of the LORD appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush. Moses saw that though the bush was on fire it did not burn up. ³ So Moses thought, "I will go over and see this strange sight—why the bush does not burn up."

⁴ When the LORD saw that he had gone over to look, God called to him from within the bush, "Moses! Moses!"

And Moses said, "Here I am."

⁵ "Do not come any closer," God said. "Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground." ⁶ Then he said, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob." At this, Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God.

There are few stories from the Bible as famous as this one. The story of Moses and the burning bush has been depicted in film, animation, oil paintings, stained glass, and statuary. It resonates with us on a deep, almost primal level. However, if we are not careful, our familiarity with the story can cause us to

assume we already know what it has to say and gloss over some of its most powerful insights. We stop paying attention, and we miss some deeper truths.

Paying attention, in fact, might be one of the main points of this text. Some of the oldest interpretations of the encounter suggest that Moses and the burning bush is not a story about a miracle but about a *test*.¹ What kind of test? Good question.

Exodus 3:2 says, “Moses saw that though the bush was on fire it did not burn up.” How did Moses know *that*? He could tell easily the bush was on fire, but how long did it take before he realized the fire was not consuming the bush? Well, how long would it take you? One minute? Five minutes? Ten minutes?

The point is that Moses noticed because he was paying attention. He was awake and alert enough to notice not only that the bush was on fire but also that it was not being consumed. That is where the miracle was, and that is when he heard God speak!

On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being slow and 10 being fast, how fast is your pace of life?

What makes it hard to notice the places that God is active around you?

What is one concrete action you could take to slow down this week in order to better notice the sacredness of the everyday?

Moses had a great comeback story over his anger and failed opportunities. But he also had a speech impediment and lousy self-confidence. He didn't think he could do anything useful for God, but along with his brother, Aaron, he went to Pharaoh and told him to let God's people go. Eventually Pharaoh did that, and the whole nation had a comeback story.

—The Comeback, page 9

Reflection: A Deeper Kind of Comeback Story

Read the Overture and Chapter 1 in *The Comeback* and reflect on the following questions:

- What was a storm in your life that you thought was insurmountable? How did you see God come through and change *your* plans into *his* plans?
- What is your favorite comeback story of an underdog who, against all odds, succeeded beyond his or her dreams? What is your favorite comeback story of a champion who slipped from success but then returned to the top?

- Why do such stories give us hope? Recall times in your life when you needed hope. In what area of your life do you need a comeback right now?
- What did you learn in this session (and in the book) about the *deeper* kind of comeback that God offers? Which comeback stories from the Bible stand out to you?
- Why do comebacks begin with praising God? How does God respond to our needs when we lift our hands to him in praise?

Use the space below to write any key points or questions you want to bring to the next group meeting.

Note

1. Lawrence Kushner, *God Was in This Place, and I, I Did Not Know* (Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing, 1991), p. 5.