

Ben's story study guide

Boot Camp

Ben's story
Iraq War veteran
Benjamin Peters
reflects on war,
peace and the call
to follow Jesus.
Taped at
Mennonite Church
USA Convention,
July 2015.

Opening exercise*

Invite class members to stand, make a fist with one of their hands and thrust it into the air while shouting "kill, kill, kill" for 15 seconds.

Discuss the experience. How did it feel while doing it? Did some students not participate or only participate half-heartedly? Invite them to explain why. Ask each student to say whether or not they can imagine any circumstance under which they could kill someone.

View the video clip, "[Boot Camp](#)" (7:38)

Questions for reflection

- Invite students to react to the video clip. What do they wonder about? What do they want to remember?
- Invite students to talk about what have been the primary influences in their lives. What experiences have shaped their values and beliefs? Ask them to compare their life-shaping experiences with the reshaping described by Ben Peters in "Boot Camp." How do they think they would react to boot camp?
- In the video clip, Ben makes a distinction between the image of God and the image of the Marine Corps. Invite students to reflect on how these two are different or similar. Are they compatible?
- Ask students to think about media portrayals of U.S. enemies. Does the media dehumanize the enemy? What examples can they cite? How does the media influence our own perceptions of people who live in "enemy nations?"

Biblical reflection

Read Matthew 5:1-12. Compare the Beatitudes with the training that Ben describes in "Boot Camp." Is it possible to be in the armed forces and practice the Beatitudes at the same time? Why/why not?

Additional resources

"On killing II: The psychological cost of learning to kill," by David Grossman. See: grossmanontruth.com

"Soldiers of conscience: The war within those trained to kill," by Kaitlin Barker See: sojo.net/articles/soldiers-conscience-war-within-those-trained-kill

Interview with Lt. Col. Pete Kilner. See: archive.pov.org/soldiersofconscience/interview-pete-kilner/

Through All the Plain, by Benjamin John Peters, Cascade Books, 2014

**This exercise may not be appropriate with all groups. If you know, or are concerned that one or more of your students has experienced deep personal trauma from violence, it may be best to try an alternative exercise, such as inviting them to describe what they have heard about basic training. What is its purpose? What is its impact?*