

**Discussion Questions on Chapter 1 of *The Preaching Life*:
“A Church in Ruins”**

1. BBT begins with a description of her experiences in Turkey and observations on the death of the church there. She continues with her life in post-Christian America. How do these fit together?
2. Like BBT, Hauerwas and Willimon, in their *Resident Aliens*, point to the American culture shift to post-Christian in the 20th century. They see this as a healthy change away from a Constantinian view of church as the chaplain of the state, to that of a minority church in exile, *in* but not *of* the society, working as a blessing (Jer 29:7) and agent of transformation (Mt 13:33).

How do you read BBT in light of this perspective?

3. Interestingly, BBT ties faith with seeing God at work in the world around us: “When all is said and done, faith may be nothing more than the assignment of holy meaning to events that others call random” (11). At the same time, Christians are sometimes caricatured for seeing God behind every bush. How do you personally draw the line, and balance credulity and wishful thinking with faith? Do you experience God as a foot away, or a mile, or a parsec?
4. Discuss what is meant by this:

Or my own life begins to spring leaks and I lie awake in the middle of the night faint with fear... Then I remember that God’s power is not a controlling but a redeeming power—the power to raise the dead, including those who are destroying themselves—and the red blood of belief begins to return to my veins. (10)

5. BBT paraphrases the Gospel as follows:

We are fickle and flawed, but we are more than that because we believe in a God who believes in us. God looks at us and sees the best: sees beloved children, sees likely allies, sees able partners in the ongoing work of creation. In faith, we set out to see the same things in ourselves and to live into them, trusting God’s vision of us more than we trust our own. This is the work of the church... (12)

How does this compare with your impression of how God sees you?

6. BBT describes the value of disillusionment for disabusing us of lies about God:

Every letdown becomes a lesson and a lure. Did God fail to come when I called? Then perhaps God is not a minion. So who is God? Did God fail to punish my adversary? Then perhaps God is not a policeman. So who is God? Did God fail to make everything turn out all right? Then perhaps God is not a fixer. So who is God? ...Every time God declines to meet my expectations, another of my idols is exposed. (9)

Is this a pattern of growth you have seen in your life?

7. BBT also says, “for those who elect to go on the best advice is to keep moving.” Are there any places in this wilderness which you find yourself returning to?