

God's reorienting presence

By [Chris Blumhofer](#)

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*For more commentary on this week's readings, see the [Reflections on the Lectionary](#) page, which includes Blumhofer's current Living by the Word column as well as past magazine and blog content. For full-text access to all articles, [subscribe](#) to the Century.*

[Ed's Story](#) is the title of a new series of short films documenting the life of Ed Dobson. The films capture the story of a man with a terminal illness who is coming to grips with his faith, his identity and his lack of control.

In his prime, Dobson was the senior minister of a thriving congregation in Grand Rapids, where he preached to more than a thousand people each week. Just after he turned 50, however, Ed was diagnosed with ALS (Lou Gehrig's disease). He was given two to five years to live—ten years ago. His story brings viewers into the struggle, the disorientation, and the journey toward hope that has characterized the past decade in Dobson's life.

One way of construing the texts for this week is as testimonies to the unique ways in which God becomes present to people. God often arrives in moments in which people are unstable or in transition from one way of life to another. God's arrival also has a way of disrupting what had once been stable. In both cases, God draws close at precisely the moment when we are tempted to think God is absent.

[Ed's Story](#) puts a these realities into sharp focus, as Dobson's gaunt face and frail voice narrate God's gracious presence to him through years of disappointment, struggle, and--in the midst of the challenges--discipleship.

His would be a powerful story to guide a small group or Sunday school class. His story might also prompt us to consider our lives and the lives of those in our congregations. It is in listening to stories of how God becomes present in suffering that we learn to recognize God's presence in our own hardships. Who do we know in our churches that can narrate God's presence in the midst of suffering and turmoil?