

GROUP STUDY LEADER'S GUIDE

A Note for the Group Leader:

Leading this group for the next ten weeks does not need to be intimidating or overwhelming. From the beginning of the first meeting, you should make it clear what is expected from other group members so that each woman will get the most she can out of this study and so that your job will be made easier. If every woman comes prepared, discussion should flow easily. I have included questions for each meeting, but another option that can be used is to have each woman choose a day to summarize and then read a scripture and pose a question.

The questions listed for each day are just ideas from which to choose. Answering all of them in a group of four or five women would probably lead to a two-hour meeting, so you may want to be selective. I have found it helpful to sometimes print out the questions we will be answering so everyone can follow along.

Obviously it is a great practice to begin each meeting with prayer and to end with prayer. Depending on your location and group, you may want to begin with a song or two. It is helpful to end with everyone choosing a clear goal for the next week and to begin the following meeting having a time of accountability and discussing how these goals went. You could assign someone the job of emailing out a prayer list each week as well.

One final comment should be made about inviting non-Christians or friends outside of our own fellowship. This is an intensive study, and it may be difficult for those who are not used to having daily quiet times to keep up with this pace. It may also be uncomfortable for some to answer personal questions with the level of vulnerability asked for at times. Keep these things in mind when planning each meeting, and consider ways to make each woman feel comfortable. By answering questions on note cards first, often women feel more prepared to jump into the conversation. By assigning each woman a day to summarize, you may help those who are quiet have a chance to share and those who tend to dominate conversation a chance to listen. At any point in these ten weeks, feel free to change the format and ground rules! The dynamic of each group is different, so be open to feedback and suggestions.

First meeting:

Ask the women who have decided to participate in this group to read only the Introduction before coming to this first meeting. Discuss the following questions as a group.

- What do you want to get out of these discussions? How are you hoping to grow?
- Why do you need to read this book? [Everyone answer on note cards and then share answers]
- When and where will you have your quiet times as you read this book? What will help you to stay focused, keep up with the schedule, and put forth your full effort? [Discuss individual practical ideas and give advice to one another]

Write the answers to the following questions on a large pad of paper or dry erase board:

- What do you love about God? [list on board]
- Think about a friend, family member, or your spouse. What do you love about this person? [list on board]
- Which list was easier? Why?

Divide the Psalms evenly among the women in the group. Have each woman scan through her section of Psalms and write out or underline all the statements that begin with “I will” (from the point of view of the psalmist, not God). Go around the room and read these statements aloud. Discuss how we can have the same heart as the psalmists in their determination to love God.

Introduction:

- How does the following quotation (found on the Table of Contents page) relate to the theme of the book? "If you want to build a ship don't herd people together to collect wood and don't assign them tasks and work, but rather teach them to long for the endless immensity of the sea."
- From the “What I ask of you” section: How well do you usually do with sticking with a book?
- Discuss the following questions from the intro: When did you fall in love with God? Why do you love God? What is He like? Which aspects of Him do you love most?

Week One Discussion:

- Pass out note cards. Have each person write down two things: 1.) The biggest thing they learned this week 2.) One question or concern about the material or a concept they are still struggling over.
- The note cards will be used at the end of the discussion.
- On a large writing pad or dry erase board make two columns. In the first column have the women share “Pros” of being a Christian. Once they’ve completed this, have them list “Cons” for the second column.
- Spend some time discussing how we could view the “cons” as “pros.” To help them think of this, ask how Paul might view each of these things judging by what we’ve read from him this week.

Day One:

- How can you allow yourself to be a “fool for Christ” this week? Have women share their answers along with anything else they realized about themselves from this section. If they have not yet completed the goal they’ve written down, discuss how they can do so this week. Have someone record a prayer list based on these goals and ask if they will email this to the group.

Day Two:

- What have you done in the past in order to sin? Do you go to the same lengths in order to serve God now?

Day Three:

- Discuss the idea of a “spiritual growth budget” from Day Three. How can you decide how much of your finances to devote to this?
- Divide into small groups and discuss the following. In Day One we learned that we should not be concerned with how others view us. In Day Three we read 1 Corinthians 10:33 which says that Paul is “try[ing] to please everybody in every way.” How can these two seemingly contradictory ideas be reconciled? Come back as the full group to discuss what the small groups came up with.

Day Four:

- Have a few women bring songbooks. Partner up and choose a song. Write out your thoughts on each line of the song as we did in Day Four.
- Discuss the answers from the following questions in Day Four: What are some reasons you do not feel refreshed after helping others? What can you do to change this outcome in the future?
- Have the women share the Scriptures they wrote down at the end of Day Four. If time allows, write these out on colorful notecards, make bookmarks, or have someone record them all and email them to the group later.

Day Five:

- On the second page of Day Five, it says, “We don’t hang on to the old dirty diapers; we hang on to the things that remind us of the momentous occasions where our children were growing into the wonderful people that they have become. Likewise, we have no reason to treasure the ‘dung’ of worldly achievements, sinful pleasures, and pride-building

honors but instead should hold dear those moments, both painful and joyous, that have helped us to know our Lord more fully.” Have the women take a few minutes to write down (on the same note card from the beginning) some of those moments from their lives. Either break into small groups or remain in the larger group to share some of these.

- Read Colossians 3:1-4 together. Have everyone respond to the following: Do you feel that Christ is your life right now? If not, how do you think this book can help that to become the case?
- Have everyone look at the note card they filled out at the beginning. Go around and share anything from this that has not already come up in the discussion.

Week Two Discussion:

Have each woman share which topic this week she relates to most. No specific details need to be shared at this point. The group leader can use this information to know which questions to focus on in today's discussion.

Days One and Two:

- Whether you are married, single, divorced, or widowed these two sections can apply. What are the greatest desires of your heart? [Have women write these on note cards.] How are you trying to fulfill them with earthly things or people? [Write answers.] How can God fulfill them? [Write answers.] Have each woman pick one desire to share about.
- In what ways could you be a better friend to those with whom you already have relationships?
- Discuss the following question from the chapter: Have you "replaced" parts of your relationship with God (or even with your husband) with your children? Or with anyone else? Think of the time when you felt closest to God. How were your relationships with others? (Answers will probably vary greatly. For some people when they are at peace in their relationships, they are better able to spend time with God. For others, when they have an abundance of close friends, they forget their need for God.) How can you ensure that you can have both great relationships with others and with God?
- For those who are married or have children, think of one way that being a wife or mother has helped you to better understand God. For single women without children, think of one way that you can desire to have a husband or children in order to better understand and glorify God, rather than just to fulfill your own wants or needs.

Day Three:

- Do you struggle more with being materialistic, overly frugal, or discontent in either circumstance?
- Share your modern-day versions of a minor prophet's warning against misuse of money.

Day Four:

- Which reason for not confessing sin do you relate to most? Have each woman share. Pair women up with an opposite strength and weakness in this area (for example, one woman has no problem being vulnerable but doesn't see the need, the other sees that it's necessary and commanded by God but fears being vulnerable) and have them share their convictions with each other.
- For groups of women in which this would be appropriate: With these partners, confess your sins from the past week to each other and take five minutes or so to pray for each others.

Day Five:

- Have each woman share one thing she related to in this section.
- In what ways would you like to be bearing more fruit? How can you rid yourself of distractions in order to allow God to bear fruit through you in this area?

Week 3 Discussion:

Day One:

- What is the difference between being down-hearted and brokenhearted, according to the Scriptures discussed?
- How do you relate to Matthew 21:43-44?
- How do you tend to respond to painful events in your life?
- Of the list in the first question on p. 49, which do you tend toward?

Day Two:

- Of the choices on p. 53, what stops you from encouraging others? Are there any other additional reasons?
- Place the names of all the women present in a bowl. Have each woman pick one and take a couple minutes to write down a way in which this woman can be an inspiration to others and fully use her gifts and talents for God. Take turns sharing.

Day Three:

- Which do you need to work on most: being kindhearted, tenderhearted or willing-hearted? How can you change this in your character?

Day Four:

- What do you think of when you hear “simple hearted”?
- Which is more likely to lead you astray: being stubborn or rebellious, bitterness, sin or laziness?

Day Five:

- Which person from this day’s study inspires you the most? Why?

Week 4 Discussion:

Day One:

- Which view of the soul do you most relate to: your only possession, a seed, your seat, breath? How does this affect your relationship with God?
- Choose someone to read Psalm 42. Have the women share what they wrote for their conversation with their soul.

Day Two:

- Choose someone to read Jude 20. What do you think it means to “pray in the Holy Spirit”?
- What keeps you from connecting to God at the level of your soul? It seems that most people can most easily have an intellectual (mind-only) connection with God, then at the heart level, then at the level of the soul. Do you find this to be true?
- What do you need to wrestle with God about right now?

Day Three:

- What Scripture did you choose to do a 5 minute meditation on? How did it go?
- Which longer meditation did you choose (on service, forgiveness or a song or psalm)? How did it go?
- How can you incorporate biblical meditation more into your relationship with God?

Day Four:

- What is one aspect of your character you would like to see transformed but lack faith about?
- Assign each of the following verses to a woman. Give one reason why you should have faith about the weakness you wrote down above based on this Scripture:
- Romans 8:11, John 3:34, Philippians 2:12, Galatians 2:20, Ephesians 2:10

Day Five:

- Looking at the Scriptures you circled from the list, which three most convicted you? In what ways are you not allowing the bond of the Spirit to create the types of relationships God desires? How can you change?

Week 5 Discussion:

In addition to the questions below, have each woman choose a day and come up with one discussion question. Start the discussion of each day with this question and supplement with the questions below.

Day One:

- What does it mean to you to be “one-souled”?
- Do you (or have you in the past) have any fears about being one-souled?

Day Two:

- Divide the group in two. Have one side discuss how we should be imitating children (or even babies) in our relationship with God. Have the other side discuss how we need to be spiritually mature and how humility is a sign of maturity. Have the two sides debate.

Day Three:

- How can you personally give God glory as a woman, mother, wife, or whatever other role God has given you?
- How have you been more concerned with your own glory than with God's in the past?

Day Four:

- Have each woman share their personal definition of worship.
- What is defiling your worship?

Day Five:

- Have the women share their Heaven No-Shows.
- Have them share what they crave about Heaven.
- Is Heaven a comfort to you, a longing, wishful thinking, or something you rarely think about?

Week 6 Discussion:

Days One and Two:

- Assign each woman an adjective from Philippians 4:8-9: true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent, praiseworthy. Have her summarize the meaning and practical applications of this way of thinking.
- After this have each woman choose one adjective she most struggles with and share an example of this.
- Discuss: Why do our thoughts about others relate to our love for God?

Day Three:

- Our weaknesses often have a positive counterpart. For instance, discussed in this day was the strength of discernment coupled with the sin of judgment. Have each woman discuss one strength in her way of thinking (wisdom, confidence, faith, etc.) and the sinful counterpart she also struggles with (cynicism, pride, discouragement, etc.).
- After looking at your thoughts for the day, what is one action you can take to repent or guard against these thoughts in the future?

Day Four:

- Divide the group into 3 smaller groups and assign each one of the following: lack of flexibility, resentment, negativity. Have them summarize why this attitude is not glorifying to God and choose one question to ask the rest of the group.
- ... OR ...
- Write the following adjectives on a large piece of paper or dry erase board: inflexible, rigid, unyielding, strict, fixed, uncompromising, stubborn, firm, embittered, sulky, cheated, angry, cynical, indignant, disgruntled, discontented, dissatisfied, displeased, unhappy, irritated, annoyed, peeved, put out, exasperated, aggravated, vexed, disturbed, inconvenienced, negative, pessimistic, unenthusiastic, disapproving, insecure.
 - Have each woman choose two or three adjectives that most describe her. If a Scripture in today's study convicted her, have her share it. If there is a different Scripture that helps her with this, have her share that. Otherwise, have the rest of the women in the group help her come up with a Scripture to study out or memorize.

Day Five:

- Discuss how disciplined each of you have been so far in this study.
- Have each woman share the conviction she studied out from the list of questions (Why do you believe in God? etc...).

Final summary:

- Ending on a positive note, have each woman share one strategy that works for her in controlling her mind. For the leader, share how your thoughts have changed since becoming a Christian. Open it up for other women to share on this topic.

Week 7 Discussion:

Day One:

- Share answers from the Ephesians 4:17-32 chart. Have each woman discuss one way in which she has successfully filled herself with the opposite of a previous struggle (loving thoughts instead of hateful, etc.) and one way in which she has given up (or is struggling to give up) a past sin but has not been fully transformed. Spend time giving one another advice on how to do this.
- Share one answer each from the list of why we have daily quiet times.

Day Two:

Discuss the answers to the following questions: How does lack of self-control in your thoughts affect each of the following:

- your relationships (distrust, bitterness, paranoia?)
 - your speech (“overflow of the heart,” gossip, negativity)
 - your marriage (distrust, jealousy)
 - your ministry or church? (discouragement, faithlessness, criticalness)
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- What are your common distractions? How do you handle these?
 - Discuss the importance of praying with others. Partner up all the women so that they have someone to pray with at some point in the next week.

Day Three:

- What sort of false peace have you allowed yourself to have: ignorance of truth, lack of conflict, etc.?
- Discuss the difference between self-righteous/sinful judging and biblical/righteous judging.

Day Four:

- Of the areas discussed in this day (security in how God views us over how others view us, contentment, righteousness, acceptance of God’s discipline), which one do you find most gives you peace and in which area do you struggle to find peace?
- Have each woman share the aspect of God’s character she chose to study out and the five Scriptures she found.

Day Five:

- Discuss the meanings of “conformed” and “transformed.” Why should these different meanings in Romans 12 be an encouragement to us?
- Discuss the meanings of “justification” and “sanctification.”
- If you didn’t already do this last week, discuss how each of you have been transformed by God.

Week 8 Discussion:

Before beginning discussion, have each woman choose one day from this week that she related to most. Each woman will summarize the main message from this day and pose one discussion question (either taken directly from the book or a question that covers the overall theme). Use the questions below to supplement this.

Day One:

- Have you ever had an experience in which you wore yourself out to no avail only to realize you hadn't ever truly included God? Ask for volunteers to share an experience. If there are few specific situations given, ask for signs that someone is relying on self instead of God. (Some examples: lack of prayer, working independently, lack of openness, neglecting to seek answers from the Bible)

Day Two:

- Have a volunteer read the definition of "rely." Give the women a couple minutes to write down everything they rely on. Share answers with the group. (You could also write these down on a dry erase board or large sheet of paper.) Select a few common answers and discuss the pros and cons of relying on these things.
- Of the three examples given (the unfaithful or unspiritual, legalism, leaders or authorities), which does each woman relate to the most? Have each woman share why this reliance can give "false strength" rather than real strength.

Day Three:

- In today's study the following Scriptures were listed: John 6:56, John 14:17, 1 John 3:17, 1 John 3:24, 1 John 4:12-16. Divide these among the women and have them share their answer to the question: how does this Scripture tell us to "abide in" (or rely on) Jesus?
- What is the difference between seeing God as a watering trough versus a mountain spring (according to John Piper)? Which analogy describes your relationship with God?
- Divide the following Scriptures among the women and have them share their answers to the question: What does this Scripture tell us that God does through us (by His strength, not ours)? Psalm 51:10-12, Matthew 10:19-20, Mark 9:24, Philippians 2:13, Colossians 1:28-29
- Have a volunteer read 2 Corinthians 1:8-11. Read the following section from p. 175: "Paul describes a few more situations in which God has forced him to rely on Him. Specifically Paul learns to rely on the power of God working through the prayers of others. Try the following this week. Make a prayer request to a friend or to the group of women with whom you are doing this study. Choose to have faith in God's answer to this prayer of your friend and vow not to worry or even pray about it yourself for the next week. Trust that God will work – and not through you." Share your prayer requests with each other.

Day Four:

- Of the reasons given as to why we may find ourselves low on the strength needed to serve God (people-pleasing, absence of boundaries, neglect of godly priorities, lack of delegation), which do you most relate to? Give an example. Allow the women in your group to give you advice on how to change this.

Day Five:

- Have the women share their answers to the following questions: “Spiritually speaking, how have you set your life up in the past or present so that your path is uneven, unpredictable, chaotic, or difficult to navigate? How can you set up your life so that your path is smooth?”
- When are you tempted to feel burdened? What do you think God’s reply might be to this complaint?

Week Nine Discussion:

Day One:

- Discuss the parable at the beginning of this day. How does each scenario (including the ideal scenario at the end) serve as an analogy for the possibility of how our lives as Christians could go?
 - Have each woman share an aspect of the parable she related to and a Scripture that relates to this.

Day Two:

- Have each woman share an example of an answered prayer that took longer to be fulfilled than she hoped or expected.
- Also share prayers listed on p. 180 that require perseverance.
- Discuss: What makes us stop persevering in the areas of personal righteousness of loving others?
- Discuss: How can you recognize a Christian who has stopped persevering?

Day Three:

- What type of non-physical persecution is described in the Bible?
- How have you handled persecution in the past? What are you currently facing?

Day Four:

- Answer the question: How can we maintain the attitude of faithful expectation and fearful caution?

Day Five:

- Go over the answers from the chart on p. 191.
- Sing the song "I will Speak" together before closing in prayer.

Week Ten Discussion:

Day One:

- Are you currently making every effort to love and obey God?
- Discuss the final question on p. 196: What do you think Lewis means by “God is easy to please, but hard to satisfy”?

Day Two:

- Share the lists from p.198.
- How is evangelism an act of love toward God and others? How are you doing at loving God and others in this way?
- Who is someone you can show greater mercy or concern toward this week?

Day Three:

- Share one of the 3 dilemmas you are facing from p. 207 and the answers you gained from reading the Sermon on the Mount.

Day Four:

- Choose different women to read 1 Timothy 3:11, Titus 2:4-5, and 1 Timothy 4:12 aloud. Have each woman in the group share a characteristic from these lists that she would like to try to emulate more. Have her explain how focusing on loving God with all her heart, soul, mind and strength can enable her to do so.

Day Five:

- Have each woman share one or two ideas from these lists she would like to try in the future.
- Celebrate your completion of the book! Have a potluck or go somewhere special for one last meeting together.