

Be Restored Study ~ Leaders' Guide

WHY DO BE RESTORED?

Few women take the time, or think they have the time, to stop and think deeply and ask the questions that will align them with God and his thinking. We are told we have the mind of Christ. We, as believers in Jesus, have access through the Holy Spirit to the way God thinks. What an incredible privilege. It is a privilege that comes with responsibility. Throughout the Bible we see examples of God's people being given the choice of whether they will believe God and put seeking him first, or pursue the world and all that would draw us from him.

Recently I was led to read John 12:37-50. It begins, "But despite all the miraculous signs Jesus had done, most of the people did not believe in him." Jesus declares that he had come into the world to bring light to the darkness. The truth acts as light, to illuminate and drive back the darkness in our minds. The Father sent Jesus so we no longer would need to live in the dark. In verse 12:48 Jesus reveals that although he came into the world to save us, "But all who reject me and my message will be judged on the day of judgment by the truth I have spoken." In other words, it's our responsibility to seek the truth and choose to believe it. God has done everything to make that possible. This 7-session study will give ladies the opportunity to begin that process and equip them with tools to continue.

NOTE: Every group will be different and have different time constraints and needs. This guide is designed to give you helpful tips and suggestions that have worked in other groups. Please, feel free to adapt it to your group as you stay true to the biblical truths and principles. We bless you to be you!

BEFORE YOU BEGIN.

1. Determine the day and time you will have available for each meeting.
2. Secure a safe, quiet place to meet. Avoid doing the study in a restaurant or coffee shop, if possible.
3. If you will be getting the Be Restored books for the group, if possible, distribute them a week or two prior to the first meeting. Encourage them to start reading.
4. Alert the participants as to what materials they need to bring. Be sure they all have a Bible to use.
5. Familiarize yourself with the Be Restored study. If possible, do it first on your own or in a small group.
6. Think about the group's maturity level, ability to read, experience with the Bible. How will that impact your planning?
7. Be aware of the needs of your group as a whole and individually. How is the Holy Spirit asking you and your group to respond to those?
8. If there will be more than three participants, you may want to ask one of the ladies to be your co-leader to help as you may need it.
9. When dealing with very needy participants, always have a co-leader for support.

10. Respect the group's time. Start and end on time. If they know you will start on time, they will make an effort to be there.
11. Time is always a challenge. Go over the lesson and determine the time you want to spend on each section.
12. Advise the group that you will have to keep moving in order to cover all of the material in the time you have allotted. You may want to ask someone to let you know when you are half way through, or have 10 minutes left, so you can wrap up in prayer.

Helpful tip: There is a difference between leading secular and biblical studies.

When leading secular studies: You master the material and use it as a tool to accomplish your goals.

When leading biblical studies: You allow God's truths and principles to master you and trust God to use you as a tool to accomplish his goals.

THE IMPORTANCE OF PRAYER.

1. Teaching the ladies how to pray and listen to God is fundamental to Be Restored. Let prayer saturate every aspect of the study.
2. Satan hates the truths taught in this study. Do not be surprised at the opposition you and your group may experience.
3. Alert the group to spiritual opposition to the truth you will be talking about and encourage them to have a friend pray for them.
4. Prayer cover: Ask others to commit to pray and give them the names of the group and specific requests.
5. Open and close each meeting with prayer and make it clear that you are completely depending on the Lord.
6. (Optional) If you are looking for an easy opening prayer to pray aloud together, here is what we use before talks at our retreats and conferences. Holy Spirit, open my eyes to see and my ears to hear, cause my mind to understand and fill my heart to overflowing with the Father's love. Amen.
7. (Optional: A Prayer of Release may be done by co-leaders for the group before your first meeting. If your group is mature, you might choose to do it with them.)
8. Celebrate answers to prayer.
9. A quick and easy way to pray for each other in the group is to have small sheets of paper on their chairs when they arrive for personal prayer requests for the week. Once written, place them in a bowl or basket and have everyone take another's request to pray for that week. Be sure names are on the requests.

A PERSONAL NOTE: As you prepare for your first session, know that God is pleased with you and loves you personally. He wants you to grow deeper in understanding of who he is and who you are to him. As you approach each lesson with an open heart and mind to learn more, your excitement in learning will transfer to those you are leading. Expect God to bless you and be thankful that he

trusts you and has chosen you to partner with him. We bless you with joy in this journey!

AS YOUR GROUP COMES TOGETHER.

1. Help them get to know each other. Name tags may be needed.
2. You may want to prepare a sheet with names and information of each participant.
3. Make sure they know how to contact you and when a good time would be.
4. Be sure all have the Be Restored book, a Bible and any other materials needed. They will need extra paper to write on, pen and folder or binder.
5. Ask for volunteers to help with things you will need as support. (Set up chairs, clean up, etc.)
6. Explain general use of time together. How much time will be used for each section. Give them a way to continue conversation outside of the group, perhaps email, if they feel they need more time.
7. Go over the expectations for the study:
 - Calendar – how to advise you if she will miss a session.
 - Stress that each session is necessary and builds on the previous ones, so to get the most from the study, a commitment should be made to attend every session. If one is missed, it is that person's responsibility to find out what was covered and to keep up.
 - How you will advise them of changes or cancellations.
 - If they are to read ahead or do follow up study at home.
 - Confidentiality is very important. Stress that unless given permission all personal sharing is to remain within the group.
 - Explain why you will not be speaking negatively of any person, group or church. If mentioning something is relevant, the name should be left out.
 - Will you be sharing drinks or snacks?
 - Answer questions.
8. Stress the fact they we are all created wonderfully different and that God likes us that way. We will all receive different things from this study, so try not to compare yourself with others. Trust that God has a plan for you individually.
9. Growing is a process. It takes time and so we must be patient with ourselves when we know we are giving God our best effort.
10. Establish a safe environment. Let it be clear that no one will be judged. If disagreements arise, turn to the Holy Spirit for clarity. Stop and pray. Assign someone to find the answer in God's word and bring what she finds next time. The "right" answer is always, "What does God say in his word?" or "What would the Lord want us to see, understand or do?"
11. As you become familiar with the study, you will begin to see that Be Restored is more than a Bible study. There are many elements that provide opportunities for ministry, prayer and the support of community, all of which are needed to grow and be restored.

12. Know the desired outcome of the study. If this group will continue as a small group, you may want to take more time in each lesson and allow for more personal sharing. However, if the group only has the 6 meeting times, be ruthless in keeping them focused and moving forward.
13. You may need more time for each lesson, as the topics get deeper. See if the group would like to add a seventh session to finish and share at the end.

OPTIONAL ~ Memorizing Scripture.

We are told to hide God's word in our hearts. Depending on the group you lead and the time they are willing to spend, encouraging memorizing and meditating on a special verse each week can be very valuable. One way to do that is to pass out a 3X5 card and have them all copy the same verse. Ask someone to recite it the next time. Or you may let each choose the verse that is important to her. The next week ask them to recite their memory verses what they learned from them. It will surprise some how God will use that opportunity to give them fresh personal revelation.

Session One ~ Who Am I?

Session One should cause us to stop and ask, "What do I believe? Why? Who should I believe? I have a lot of information in my mind, but how do I know what I really believe?" Knowing and really believing God's truth about ourselves and him is crucial to fulfilling the purpose for which we were born.

Things that may block us from knowing and believing God's truth:

1. Do I believe what the Bible says? Would I be willing to believe it?
2. What lies do I believe about God and myself?
3. What I feel is true may not be true. Would I be willing to stop to examine it?

MAIN PRINCIPLES:

1. We behave based on who we believe we are. What we believe is usually not true.
2. Only God and his Word can be trusted to tell us the truth of our identities.
3. We know lots of truth in our minds, but only the truth in our hearts, that is that which we feel is true, has the power to change us.
4. "Static", lies that we believe, block the truth from reaching our hearts.
5. We must be intentional in getting the truth to our hearts and responding to it by faith in order to make it our own.
6. Knowing and believing the truth of who we are as new creations (2 Cor.5:17) in Christ is fundamental to our growing in spiritual maturity and to our having a real relationship with God.

Helpful hints:

1. The core material of this lesson may be completed in one hour. However, you will probably want to add a song and/or personal sharing and prayer.

2. Begin by asking each to introduce herself and share a personal fact that you decide. (Example: Favorite food or way to relax; what she spends most of her time doing on a normal day, etc.) Train them to be brief by saying something like, “Please, give your name and in ONE SENTENCE..... (or less than three)..”
3. In What does the Bible say?
 - It is important that the ladies learn they can find truth for themselves in the Bible and that it always agrees with itself.
 - There are 6 sets of verses to look up and ponder. It is helpful if they have done that before they come.
 - However, if not, chose 3 or 4 of them to read and discuss in depth and assign the others to be done on their own, or paraphrase what is in them.
 - It is helpful to ask them to summarize what all of the verses said, so they can see that all those verses are in agreement: God knows us. We can trust what he says about us. He knew us before we were born and his plan for us was set at our creation as his masterpieces.
4. The Who I Am list needs to be introduced. It would help if you share a story of what it means to you. Help them understand that the first time they hear these truths it will be hard to believe. However, as we trust God and commit to allow the Holy Spirit to cause them to take root in our hearts, these truths can change their lives and the way they see themselves and God.

What does the Bible say?

You may want to just choose 3 or 4 verse3s to concentrate on together.

1. Psalm 139 NLT
 - 0 Lord, you have examined my heart and know everything about me.
 - 2 You know when I sit down or stand up.
You know my thoughts even when I’m far away.
 - 3 You see me when I travel and when I rest at home.
You know everything I do.
 - 4 You know what I am going to say
even before I say it, Lord.
 - 5 You go before me and follow me.
You place your hand of blessing on my head.
 - 6 Such knowledge is too wonderful for me,
too great for me to understand!
 - 7 I can never escape from your Spirit!
I can never get away from your presence!
 - 8 If I go up to heaven, you are there;
if I go down to the grave, you are there.
 - 9 If I ride the wings of the morning, if I dwell by the farthest oceans,
10 even there your hand will guide me,
and your strength will support me.
 - 11 I could ask the darkness to hide me
and the light around me to become night—
12 but even in darkness I cannot hide from you.

To you the night shines as bright as day.
 Darkness and light are the same to you.
 13 You made all the delicate, inner parts of my body
 and knit me together in my mother's womb.
 14 Thank you for making me so wonderfully complex! Your
 workmanship is marvelous—how well I know it.
 15 You watched me as I was being formed in utter seclusion,
 as I was woven together in the dark of the womb.
 16 You saw me before I was born.
 Every day of my life was recorded in your book.
 Every moment was laid out
 before a single day had passed.
 17 How precious are your thoughts about me, O God.
 They cannot be numbered!
 18 I can't even count them;
 they outnumber the grains of sand!
 And when I wake up,
 you are still with me!
 19 O God, if only you would destroy the wicked!
 Get out of my life, you murderers!
 20 They blaspheme you;
 your enemies misuse your name.
 21 O Lord, shouldn't I hate those who hate you?
 Shouldn't I despise those who oppose you?
 22 Yes, I hate them with total hatred,
 for your enemies are my enemies.
 23 Search me, O God, and know my heart;
 test me and know my anxious thoughts.
 24 Point out anything in me that offends you, and lead me along the path
 of everlasting life.

2. 1 Corinthians 13:11-12 NLT - 11 When I was a child, I spoke and
 thought and reasoned as a child. But when I grew up, I put away childish
 things. 12 Now we see things imperfectly, like puzzling reflections in a mirror,
 but then we will see everything with perfect clarity. All that I know now is
 partial and incomplete, but then I will know everything completely, just as
 God now knows me completely.

3. Ephesians 2:10 NLT - For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us
 anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.

4. Jeremiah 1:5 NLT - I knew you before I formed you in your mother's
 womb. Before you were born I set you apart and appointed you as my prophet
 to the nations.

5. Jeremiah 29:11-14a NLT - 11 For I know the plans I have for you," says
 the Lord. "They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future
 and a hope. 12 In those days when you pray, I will listen. 13 If you look for me
 wholeheartedly, you will find me. 14 I will be found by you," says the Lord. "I

will end your captivity and restore your fortunes.

6. Romans 8:28-30 NLT - 28 And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them. 29 For God knew his people in advance, and he chose them to become like his Son, so that his Son would be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. 30 And having chosen them, he called them to come to him. And having called them, he gave them right standing with himself. And having given them right standing, he gave them his glory.

READ: Who I Am in Christ after prayer in Choose to Respond. Then STOP and LISTEN. Help your group know that God wants to help them believe these truths, so they should expect to feel or hear something for themselves if they will be open.

WHO I AM ~ OUR TRUE IDENTITY IN CHRIST

Knowing and believing the truth of who we are as new creations (2 Cor.5:17) in Christ is fundamental to our growing in spiritual maturity and in our relationship with God. Some of the ladies in your group may know a lot about the Bible. The question is, do they believe it? We test what we really believe by whether it feels true and if we act as though it were true. Sometimes it takes time and is a process of working what we know from our minds to our hearts and into our actions. That is why it is essential that we encourage the participants to read the Who I Am sheet aloud daily and intentionally pray that the Holy Spirit make it real to their hearts.

Note: renouncing means we no longer believe and turn from that belief. (Prov.28:13 NIV)

Ways to encourage them:

1. Read the Who I Am sheet (or part of it – ex: first 3 or last 2 of each section) together when you meet as a group.
2. Ask which one is most real or most important to you this week.
3. Share changes they have experienced as a result of beginning to believe who they are in Christ.
4. This is not positive thinking. We don't train our minds to believe it to be true. It is true; therefore, we make every effort to believe it.
5. Believing the truth does not make God love us more. He already loves us and because of that he wants us to believe the truth that will enable us to receive his love and all that he has for us.

OPTIONAL ~ Prayer of Release. Print a copy for each so they may read it aloud together. When you come to the blank fill it in with each woman's name. *We suggest you have your entire group pray this for themselves the first meeting.*

Holy Creator God, we come to you acknowledging that you alone are the one true God. You are all-powerful, all-knowing, and the source of all true wisdom. We submit ourselves to you, proclaiming our trust in your word. Thank you that by grace we belong to you through the finished work of Jesus Christ and are covered in his righteousness.

Father God, we commit ourselves, our time, and our resources to you. Please hide us and protect us, our families, ministries, possessions, and those praying for us. Send your holy angels to minister to us and to guard our bodies, souls and spirits from all sickness, harm or danger and to prevent any retaliation or retribution from the enemy.

We stand in the authority given to us in Jesus, the true Christ, who has all authority in Heaven and on earth, and command Satan and all evil spirits to release _____ (names) in order that we can be free to know and to do the will of God. As children of God seated with Christ in the heavenly realms, we agree that every enemy of the Lord Jesus Christ be bound to silence while we meet and study. We declare that Satan may not distract or disrupt us, harm us, or in any way prevent God's perfect will from being accomplished in our lives.

Heavenly Father, release in us your love for Jesus, his truth and for each other. We ask for teachable spirits and the desire to joyfully respond in obedience to all that you may ask us to do. Lord, thank you for all that you will be doing in the weeks ahead. We worship you as the God who saves us and sets us free.

We pray in the strong and merciful name of Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

Session Two ~ God's Plan

A tip: Our time together is so valuable. It helps to train your group to copy the memory verse and do their prayer request sheets as they come in and are waiting for others to arrive, if you are doing those.

Part 1. Allow 12-15 minutes.

BEGIN WITH A RECAP FROM LAST WEEK. It is helpful for everyone to remember the main truths from last week. It is especially helpful for someone who may have missed.

Main principles from Session One:

1. Only God, his word the Bible, can be trusted to tell us the truth of who we are.
2. We may know lots of information and facts in our minds, but only the truth that is in our hearts (what feels true) has the power to change our lives.
3. It is our responsibility (job) to seek the truth: to hear it, to know it in our minds, to believe it in our hearts and to respond to it. We test what we believe by how we act.
4. We need the Holy Spirit to reveal the lies that may be blocking the truth from reaching our hearts. When we hear the truth, we choose to believe it and reject the lie.

OPTIONAL WARM-UP: If you challenged the ladies to memorize 2 Corinthians 5:17 last week, ask who can recite it. Ask if anyone would like to recite it. Recite it all together aloud. Then ask (3-4) what they learned by pondering the meaning

for themselves. Expect a personal application. If they give a general meaning, you might ask, “What did that mean for you last week?”

Have them read out loud the memory verse for next week. Hebrews 10:23 *Let us hold tightly without wavering to the hope we affirm, for God can be trusted to keep his promise.*

Lead into reading Who I am: What does the “new” you look like? (2 Corinthians 5:17)

READ ALOUD the Who I Am sheet (p.8). After reading it aloud all week, do these truths about us sound more real? If your group is not memorizing scripture or if you have the time, stop and ask which of these verses is most important today and why.

OPTIONAL WORSHIP AND OPENING PRAYER. Here is a good place to praise God for our new life. Sing or listen to a song. Praise and thank God and ask for help and guidance for this session.

Part 2.

You might explain that this study gives us an overview of foundational truths. If we had time we might take a week on each one. Hopefully, we will go back and study each one in more depth as we are led and take the time. However, this time just trust the Holy Spirit will teach you what you need to know and remember. Our job is to just be available by making the time and allowing God’s word to penetrate our hearts and soak deep into our lives. (John 15:3,7; 17:19)

KNOW THE OBJECTIVES BEFORE YOU BEGIN.

It makes our decisions on how to use our limited time easier if we know the main truths that need to be presented. It even helps if you share these with your group at the start, so they will hear them three times during the session: before, as it is discussed and at the review.

MAIN PRINCIPLES:

1. The plan God revealed at creation is the same plan he has for us today. He has not changed his mind.
2. The motive for the existence of life – of your life – is the love and pleasure of our Father God.
3. Two Questions are planted in our hearts to guide us to discovering that plan: Who am I? Who is God?
4. The Cross, Jesus’ completed work on the cross for us, leads us first to salvation and then to our continuing restoration of all things stolen, lost or broken as a result of sin entering the world.

Start here. (5-8 minutes) Make sure everyone has a chance to share as they are willing.

Think about this. (20-25 minutes)

The good news in studying Genesis 1 and 3 is that most will be familiar with the story. However, that can also make it harder. Ask your ladies to set aside any

preconceptions and ask the Holy Spirit to give you fresh revelation and deeper understanding. “Are you willing to learn something new? Would like what you know in your mind to become true beliefs that can change your life?”

Does God change his mind? If your group has read ahead, ask one person each what Malachi 3:6, Hebrews 13:8 says. If not, read the verse and ask one to summarize.

God’s Original Plan. Genesis 1. You will want to briefly summarize the six days of creation. Importance is noticing God brought order and life out of chaos. He was creating the perfect environment for humankind to live and thrive.

Together READ Genesis 1:26-31 aloud. Ask: “What can we learn from these?” Use the booklet to summarize with points 1-3.

You might also ask: Why is it important to you that humanity was made in God’s image and likeness? How else are we different from the animals? (created to rule) (See: Ps.8:4-6)

Genesis 3. Why are we not still living in the Garden of Eden with God?

READ Genesis 3:1-8 together aloud. (If have time read more.) Summarize the rest. (Note: we see physical death in 3:19 and spiritual death, separation from God in 3:23. Even though humanity could no longer sense God’s presence with them, he was there.)

Use #4 and #5 from Genesis 1:26-31 (p.12) and the five lessons from Genesis 3 (p.13) to summarize what we learn. Ask: “What was most important in these lessons for you?”

Part 3.

The Cross - (p.14) (8-10 minutes)

Best if you summarize or have someone else in the group summarize this. You might tell her the week ahead that you will ask her to do that. The two questions act as a compass to align us with God’s plan and our purpose. Stress the need to keep asking them. Give an example: when going through a difficult situation or seeing an answer to prayer.

READ: Jeremiah 29:11-14 aloud. “How does God use the two questions, Who am I? and Who is God?”

The Cross of Salvation (10-12 minutes)

READ: Ephesians 2:1-10.

Might divide: verses 1-3, stop and discuss. “How did we used to live?”

Verses 4-9: 2:4 “But God...” intervened. We are saved by grace, not merit or works.

Verse 2:10: What does this say we are? How should it make us feel?

PRAYER. Remind them that we know many things in our minds, but are not really believing them in our hearts. Would we like to believe this in our hearts and be sure we do? Would they be willing to pray...? do not force anyone.

The Great Exchange at the Cross. (5-10 minutes)

Explain that many have been taught that what Jesus accomplished and finished for us on the Cross is just for salvation. Would you like to stay the same way you were when you trusted Jesus for your eternity? God made a way to keep claiming all that we are and all that is already ours because of Jesus' completed work for us. Let's read some of them. **READ SLOWLY AND PAUSE AFTER EACH ONE.**

We will have the opportunity to grow and claim some of these in our time together. God wants us to keep growing.

PRAYER. STOP AND LISTEN.

Here is a good place to repeat the three main principles again.

If staying in same group, go to one or more Grow Deeper questions now, then go to blessing. If breaking into smaller groups, bless them then have them do some of the questions together.

BLESSING. (You may want to have the ladies bless each other when they are ready. To do that, form partners.)

Remind them of memory verse and any other reminder. **NEXT WEEK'S LESSON:** The Father's Love is a very special one. They will not want to miss it. They will be encouraged and strengthened by it.

OPTIONAL PRAYER ~ Garden of the Heart.

Depending on the time you have available to meet, you may want to lead the group through The Garden of the Heart Prayer. For most people prayer refers to what we tell God. Many do not believe they can "hear" God. We all need to grow in our trust that God desires to and will talk to us. It is the ground on which our personal relationship with God is built. This exercise provides an opportunity to receive a word from God in a new, personal way. Allow time afterward to share with someone what was heard.

OPTIONAL: ISAIAH 55 gives a wonderful overview of God's plan and invitation for discipleship. As time allows you may want to read it and ponder what it says to you. For example, verse 55:3 "Come to me with ears wide open and you will find life." Also, 55:8,9 describes how different God's thoughts and ways are from ours. We will need to let go of our human thinking and seek how God thinks in order to align ourselves with his truth. Also, verse 55:11 promises that God's word, that you will be studying, always accomplishes the purpose for which it is sent forth. Verse 55:12 reveals the desired outcome of living in God's joy and peace for his honor and glory. (13)

Session Three ~ The Father's Love

A tip: Since each of us is different, be sensitive to how each person may relate to God. Encourage them to join you in growing in a personal relationship, rather than just know about God. All of us still believe things that are not true of God in

our hearts, whether we are conscious of it or not. Trust the Holy Spirit to reveal those things as you are willing to receive it. Celebrate every new understanding, and refrain from dwelling on the misunderstandings of who he is.

Part 1. (12-15 minutes)

BEGIN WITH A RECAP FROM LAST WEEK. It is helpful for everyone to remember the main truths from last week. It is especially helpful for someone who may have missed.

Main principles from Session Two:

1. The plan God revealed at creation is the same plan he has for us today. He has not changed his mind.
2. Two Questions are planted in our hearts to guide us to discovering that plan: Who am I? Who is God?
3. The Cross, Jesus' completed work on the cross for us, leads us first to salvation and then to our continuing restoration of all things stolen, lost or broken as a result of sin entering the world.

OPTIONAL WARM-UP: If last week you challenged the ladies to memorize Hebrews 10:23 NLT: For he raised us from the dead along with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms because we are united with Christ Jesus.

Ask who can recite it. Recite it all together aloud. Then ask (3-4) what they learned by pondering the meaning for themselves. Expect a personal application. If they give a general meaning, you might ask, "What did that mean for you last week?"

All read out loud the memory verse (p.21) Hebrews 11:6 NLT for next week. (Fill out 3X5 card?)

Lead into **READING ALOUD Who I Am** sheet (p.8): Are these beginning to sound more real? If you have the time, stop and ask which of these verses is most important today and why. To save time, only read first or last 5 verses under each of the three.

OPTIONAL WORSHIP AND OPENING PRAYER. Choose a song(s) that speak of who God is. Thank God for wanting us to know him and ask for help and guidance for this session. In prayer may want to go around and each thank him for a characteristic (kindness, faithfulness, patience, etc.)

Part 2.

MAIN PRINCIPLES:

1. Father God is not like our earthly father or mother.
2. We have the assurance that the Father loves us and wants to talk with us because he sent Jesus, as Colossians 1:19 says, in whom all the fullness of the Father lived to reveal the Father's love to us. Jesus became one of us so that through his sacrifice we might become one again with God.

3. Since we are created to know God and have a relationship with him as we rule the earth with him, we must take responsibility to seek him in his word and through the revelation of the Holy Spirit.
4. All of us have picked up lies and misconceptions about the Father that prevent us from knowing him and receiving his love. The Holy Spirit will lead us to the truth that will free us, so that we can be filled with the Father's love and pour it out onto a broken and thirsty world.

Start here. (6-10 minutes) These questions are very important in helping us get in touch with what we really believe.

Think about this. (10-12 minutes)

What is the difference between knowing about someone and really knowing the person? What would I have to do to know a person? This same process applies to God. What would prevent you from taking the necessary steps to know the Father?

What does the Bible say? (15-20 minutes) Help your friend(s) see how these verses apply personally to them. Example: You/I have been chosen to know God, believe in him and understand that he alone is God. How should that make us feel?

What prevents us from believing the truth about Father God? (12-20 minutes)

You may want to stop and let the women ponder this a few moments on their own. Encourage them to write down what they discovered. Make sure they are ready to hear the truth in their hearts.

A.W. Tozer wrote in The Knowledge of the Holy, (a book we recommend) "What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us."

READ ALOUD: THE TRUTHS ABOUT GOD AS FATHER. *Be sure to read slowly, challenging the group to hear and believe it with their hearts.* "Which ones sound like your earthly father?" They may want to look up a few verses of those that seemed hardest to believe. If you have time, share which truth is most important to them and why.

OPTIONAL ENDING: Receive a new name from the Father.

(15 - 20 minutes) Everyone wants to hear from God. That is what we are created for. We have seen God use this simple exercise many times in small groups and conferences to build faith and encourage his daughters. The name may be a confirmation of what they already sense or know. It may be prophetic, a word they will need for the future. The important take away is that God knows us and speaks to us individually.

To prepare: Pray and ask the Holy Spirit for names for your group. Don't think too hard, just trust in him to give you the ones that he wants. Choose one extra beyond the number of participants in your group. Find white stones from the

craft store and write the names on the stones. Place in a box or basket with a cloth to cover them, so when reaching in the ladies do not see the names.

Explain that Revelation 2:17 says: “*And I will give to each one a white stone, and on the stone will be engraved a new name that no one understands except the one who receives it.*” Ask them if they would be willing to believe that Father God loves them and wants to encourage them by giving them a new name. Pray and ask the Holy Spirit to guide the hands to find the name that he has chosen. Play soft music and let the participants sit and talk to God about the name he gave them. They may share the name and what it means to them or not, as they are comfortable. Remind them to write it down in their journals.

Examples of names: precious, beautiful, chosen, forgiven, free, lovely, friend, partner, faithful, good, kind, merciful, beloved/loved, trusted, mine, accepted, valued, my friend, my treasure, my pearl. (Use biblical names or concepts.) Ask the Holy Spirit which you should use.

The Father’s Heart Blessing is a very important one. Be sure you read it over them slowly, letting each word sink into their hearts.

Grow Deeper has some really good suggestions. Read them before you meet and choose the ones that will help your group most and encourage them to do them. For example, #3: encourage them to read the Truths about God as Father aloud this week. #5: To record what we are thankful for from God each day causes us to realize that he is very active in our lives and draws us to believe he really cares.

OPTIONAL READING:

The Father’s Outrageous Love

Have you ever asked, “Who am I? And why am I here?”

Genesis 1 and 3 give us important clues as to the reason Father God created humankind. Genesis 1:26-27 NLT says, “Then God said, ‘Let us make human beings in our image, to be like ourselves. They will reign over the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, the livestock, all the wild animals that scurry along the ground. So God created human beings in his own image. In the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.’” This suggests that Creator God wanted men and women to be like him, so they would be able to know him and enjoy him, and have a relationship with him.

In Genesis 3:8 Adam and Eve heard the Lord walking around the Garden of Eden in the cool breezes of the evening, suggesting that he was accustomed to doing that. Eve and Adam enjoyed a personal relationship with the Creator. Can you imagine the conversations they shared at the end of the day as they walked together?

However, by the end of Genesis 3 we see Adam and Eve being cast out of the Garden because of disobedience. They would be physically and spiritually separated from the Lord. Human beings would not see him or walk with him until God’s plan to restore them to himself was complete. We know God had a

plan to restore humankind to relationship with him. It is the story of the Bible. The Father sent Jesus, his Son, to make that possible.

Why would God want to restore them? Why would he send his precious Son to die to take the penalty of their sin so they could come home to the Father? I had a hint of the reason when our little granddaughter was born. I had never felt such sudden overwhelming love as in the moment I saw her. She had done nothing to deserve it, still I would have done anything for her. That love has only continued to grow. Could it be that Father God feels the same way about us?

The familiar verse, John 3:16 NLT, tells us, “For God loved the world so much that he gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him would not perish but have eternal life.” “For” means “because”. Because God loved us, he sent Jesus to die for us. 1 John 4:10 says, “This is real love – not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins.” He loved us first, then sent his Son, so we might love the Father and receive his love. 1 John 4:16 says, “We know how much God loves us, and we have put our trust in his love. God is love and all who live in love live in God, and God lives in them.”

Paul wrote in Romans 5:5, “We know how dearly God loves us, because he has given us the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts with his love.” Romans 5:11 says, “So now we can rejoice in our wonderful new relationship with God because our Lord Jesus Christ has made us friends of God.”

In John 15:19 we find Jesus saying, “I have loved you even as the Father loved me. Now remain in my love.” In John 17:22 Jesus makes the amazing declaration that the Father loves us as much as he loves Jesus. How can that be? This new relationship is not one of master and servant, or of king and slave, but one of Father and child. We are his adopted children and Jesus tells us we have always belonged to the Father. (John 17:6) Parents sacrifice for the well-being of their children. Good parents only do what is best for their child. Our heavenly Father is the perfect parent and he loves us perfectly. His love is sufficient to meet all of our real needs, even when we do not understand.

Paul explains in Romans 8:38, “I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from God’s love.” That must include the fall of our ancestors Adam and Eve, too. Loving us so much, God the Father set about to bring us home again. Romans 8:39 proclaims, “..nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Is love the only attribute of God? By no means. He remains holy, all-powerful, all-knowing, ever-present, sovereign, the source of all knowledge and wisdom, and infinitely more. He is the just judge. He is the Law Giver who brought order to the universe and placed spiritual and physical laws in place. He respected those laws so much, that he chose to send Jesus to save us, rather than to set them aside. Therefore, though he is love, only some who have accepted his love and returned to him will be with him eternally. We are saved by grace; it is a gift we cannot earn through our own works or merit. We are only saved by choosing to listen to God, to believe in Jesus and trust in his lordship. Those who refuse to believe and receive the Father’s love will be eternally cast into hell.

In the parable of the prodigal or lost son found in Luke 15:20, we get a picture of our heavenly Father. “So, he (younger son) returned home to his father. And while he was still a long way off, his father saw him coming. Filled with love and compassion, he ran to his son, embraced him, and kissed him.” Because he loved him so much, he had been waiting and watching for his return. It did not matter what he had done. He was lost, but now is found.

As we ponder these truths, might we extrapolate the following?

1. We were not created primarily to share in God’s authority, power, wisdom, purity, etc. We were created to share and receive our heavenly Father’s love in a close personal relationship.
2. Until we are able to accept and be filled with the love of the Father, we will feel empty, restless and unsatisfied. Nothing will satisfy us but the love of God. Nothing can fill the hole left by its loss, but the love for which we were born. (Ps.90:14)
3. Jesus Christ came to restore to us that which was lost and broken. Therefore, Jesus came to restore the relationship for which we were created, so that we could receive and enjoy the Father’s love.
4. The world needs the Father’s love. Unless God’s people are filled with his love and willing to be conduits of it as we serve the hurting and the lost and draw them to God, the fullness of the Kingdom will not come to earth.
5. Unless our motive to serve is love, God’s love in us, our reason for being a Christian will be distorted and people will not see the real Kingdom in us.
6. If we begin by knowing we are loved by God the Father and by being filled with the love we crave and need, we can accomplish the purpose for which we are created and become the women God designed us to be. We get there by seeking earnestly to know God and who he says we are in Christ.
7. Can it be that the foundation of the Church is a people who know and believe that they are loved, accepted and belong to Father God through Jesus his Son and are compelled to share that Good News with others?

Are you willing to receive the Father’s love? Ask him to fill you to overflowing with his love daily. Sit quietly and receive it and trust that the Lord Jesus will use you to establish his Kingdom of love on earth.

Session Four ~ Embracing God’s Reality

MAIN PRINCIPLES:

1. God and his Word, the Bible, are the only true arbiters of reality. Therefore, to know what is real, we learn to see our world as God does.
2. All humankind is born separated from God, therefore are spiritually blind, unable to know the truth until the Holy Spirit opens their eyes and gives them understanding.
3. We are born into a spiritual war. The battle is for our minds, that is, for control of our thinking.

4. Once we ask Jesus to be Lord of our lives, we begin to perceive things differently and must choose what is real and good, and how we will respond. Our free will is one of the most powerful things in the universe, as God will not make us do anything and Satan cannot force us.
5. Jesus has been given all authority in heaven and on earth, and as his representatives we have authority over all the powers of darkness on this earth.

Tips: The battle in this lesson is to believe that the unseen world is more real and impacts all we do, rather than what we can see and touch in the physical realm. You may remind them that God is real and unseen and is sovereign over everything in the universe.

Also, you may have a woman in your group who does not believe that Satan is real. If that is the case, you will want to spend extra time on number 3 of Grow Deeper on page 36 that gives Scripture on Satan. We do not demand everyone believe what she studies today, but to be willing to believe it and to allow the Holy Spirit to keep teaching her.

The spiritual opposition may be stronger in this lesson, so be sure to warn your prayer partners what you will be studying and ask for extra prayer.

OPTIONAL: (6-8 minutes) You may want to have your group list the characteristics of our culture and environment. After accumulating a representative list (materialistic, tech-centered, all about me, driven by busyness, confusion, noise, no time taken to think deeply, action (doing)- oriented, relying on government to take care of us, etc.)

Compare that with what the Bible tells us. Usually what God says is opposite of what the world does. We have the Holy Spirit who aligns our thinking with God's if we ask and allow him. Why it is hard: Isaiah 55:8,9 – God's thoughts and ways are not like ours, but are "higher".

Then define "worldview": the system of beliefs and assumptions through which we interpret and organize our surroundings. If we "stand" on earth without God in our picture, our world looks very different than if we "stand" in Heaven with God and interpret life through the truth in the Bible.

Some helpful extra verses if you choose to do this: (5 minutes) 1 Corinthians 3:19,20 (the wisdom of the world is foolishness to God); 2 Corinthians 4:4 (Satan, the god of this world, blinds the minds of those who do not believe God); Galatians 1:10 (we are not trying to please people, but God.); James 1:3-8 (v.6 But when you ask for wisdom be sure your faith is only in God./ v.8 - divided loyalty leads to being "unstable in everything they do."); Galatians 5:16, 25 (let the Holy Spirit guide every part of your lives)

Start here. (6-7 minutes) Numbers 2 and 3 most important.

Number 2 helps us to begin to recall that we are different people now that we believe and realize that we feel and think differently about our surroundings.

Number 3 may be the first time someone realized that we live in a spiritual world, not just a physical one.

OPTIONAL MEMORY VERSE. Romans 12:2 is a good verse to ponder in that it points our choice of letting God transform our thinking. We often ask God

what we should do (his will). When we have his thinking, it is easier to know what is best.

Think about this. (14-18 minutes) Slowly go through each paragraph and allow discussion or questions as needed.

Be sure to spend time on the box on page 31, Satan's tactics. Ask your group for examples how he deceives, distracts, destroys. Note there are different types of fear. God-given fear causes us to flee from danger to God, and the kind Satan loves drives us from God and to trust in ourselves or something else for protection. Fear becomes a form of worship of the thing causing fear. We begin to trust that it can do us more harm than God is able to help and protect us. Knowing who God really is helps with this.

What does the Bible say? (18-20 minutes)

It is important to understand the biblical evidence that we fight “strategies”, “false arguments” (lies and deception), not people. God has given us the strategy to defeat Satan. Jesus already won the war for us and gave us authority to defeat the lies, distractions, fear, etc.

Encourage your ladies to practice putting on their spiritual armor, (pp.38, 39) even if it is just every day during the coming week. Be sure to check on how they did and if they noticed any difference. We have witnessed repeatedly that once women start to experience the difference it makes, they will make the effort to pray it on regularly. It is not magic. Basically, it renews our thinking and begins our day with God's perspective.

OPTIONAL PRAYER: Colossians 3:3 tells us that we are hidden in Christ in God. In John 14:21 Jesus says that he is in us and we are in him. A very helpful prayer to teach is, placing your hand on your chest: “Christ lives in me. I live in Christ. Together we are hidden in the Father.” Repeat it thinking where you are. There is no safer place to be. This is useful whenever you feel fear begin to overtake you. Just stop and pray it silently. That is our reality.

Our strategy for victory and our authority. (p.34) (5-6 minutes)

Read through each strategy and give or ask for an example.

Knowing we have authority is extremely important in standing firm where the Lord puts us. Explain the difference between power and authority. President of the United States does not have the power in himself to win a war, but he has the authority to release the power of the military. In the same way, a police officer cannot stop a speeding car, but by putting up his hand has the authority to do it. All the power of the police force stands behind him. In the same way, when we speak, the devil must obey, just as if Jesus were speaking.

We suggest that you and your ladies stand up and choose to physically and symbolically step into your spiritual authority, proclaiming, “I step into my authority in Christ. (step) I receive it and choose to use it.”

Choose to respond. (5 -8 minutes)

The **Declaration of Freedom** should be done slowly. Make sure everyone is prepared to engage and own it. Stress that we are not just repeating a poem, but standing in our God-given authority to reclaim territory the enemy has stolen from us. Repeat a sentence if you feel it needs to be.

When you get to the end, ask the Holy Spirit to come and fill you. Receive the infilling. You might ask everyone to remain standing after stepping into authority. Read the declaration while standing. Then, standing, tell each to put her right hand on the back of the woman standing to her right as you ask the Holy Spirit to fill you and her.

Then stop and listen. (You might play an appropriate song.)

Blessing. (1-3 minutes) Since they now know their authority, you might have the ladies form partners and look into the other's eyes and bless her. Then switch, and have the one just blessed bless her.

Session Five ~ Embracing True Womanhood

MAIN PRINCIPLES:

1. God created men and women to rule the earth together. Eve was to be Adam's co-worker and strong warrior, not slave or servant.
2. God designed men and women to be different, and to need and complement each other. Each has characteristics that reflect the nature of God.
3. As a result of the Fall, God placed a curse on Eve that caused men to rule over women. Jesus has taken every curse on the Cross, so with Jesus women are being restored to their original status.
4. Jesus loves women. He honors them, includes them and calls them to come to him.
5. Satan hates women. He is out to destroy all humankind, but knows that by destroying women he destroys the family, the culture and the nations.
6. As women take responsibility to know and believe the truth about how God designed them, they will be set free from bondage and fear, and be able to set their children free from cultural hatred of women.

Tip: A good discussion leader does not need to know the answers, but where to find them. She helps her group by asking good questions. As you go through the session before meeting, it helps to jot down a few questions that will get the ladies thinking and help them to discover the truth in the passage.

The next two sessions are very important so you might remind those praying to pray and what you will cover.

Since there is only one more session to go, this may be a good time to ask the group what, if anything, they plan to do next. Would they like to stay together and keep studying? You might suggest some resources for them.

This session could lead to some very important discussion. If your group is in no hurry, you could go more slowly and allow for more time on each section.

Worship before beginning will be especially helpful with this session. Invite the presence of the Holy Spirit and declare your dependence on Jesus and his work on the Cross.

Suggestion: Read the Who I Am sheet (p.8) today. If time is short choose to read only half the truths in the three lists. This will be a good way to start with the truth before hearing the list of untruths in the common messages.

Common messages. (p.42), (4-5 minutes) Stress that these are commonly heard, but not biblical, therefore not true. Read through together slowly as you allow them to think about each.

Think about this.

What does God tell us about women? (10-12 minutes)

Read the verses. Genesis 1:26-31 – Both men and women are created in God’s image. God blessed them both and both are to rule together.

Genesis 2:18 – God says that it is not good for man to be alone. He created us to need what the other has. “Ezer”, translated as helpmate, means strong help, or warrior.

Genesis 3:8-10 – Both the man and the woman suffered the consequences of sin: shame, fear, blame, hiding from God. It was not just the woman who was punished, since Adam, too, had disobeyed. The curse and separation from God was not in God’s original plan. The spiritual laws were in place before the rebellion came in. In Jesus, through his sacrifice for us, the Father is restoring us.

Genesis 3:16 – Jesus has broken the curse. Man no longer has the right to rule or abuse women.

Jesus loves women. (8-10 minutes) (Through You Are Never Too Much)

Some helpful questions to use: 1) What false ideas do women have about how Jesus sees them? 2) What do these passages tell us about Jesus? How does that make you feel? 3) If you believe this, are you able to trust him more now? 4) Which one of these was most meaningful to you? Why?

God created us to be different: Be sensitive that many churches and some church leadership may have hurt your women. It is very important that they understand that Jesus is not the church. They will have the opportunity to forgive and be set free from anger and bitterness next week.

When approaching the list of differences between men and women on p. 46, stress that BOTH men and women can have these qualities. What the list tells us is the usually, we find that women are more relational, intuitive, etc.

Why is it important to understand that God intentionally designed men differently from women? God also designed the family, to be one man, with a certain role to play, and one woman, who was created to bear the children and nurture them in their earliest years. A father was given the role of calling out his children from dependence on mother when they are old enough and blessing the positive characteristics that God has placed in each one. Both roles are needed in a healthy family. Healthy families are needed to raise healthy, independent, respectful children. Without them, a culture decays and nations fall.

Satan hates women. (8 minutes)

We are like fish swimming in a culture permeated with violence, hatred of women, selfishness, etc. To follow Jesus and be his ambassadors, we must separate ourselves from the deception and fear of the Prince of this world. (Satan) When we come into agreement with those things, we open the door to

being controlled and manipulated by them. Our security and peace depend on us identifying those lies and turning from them to Jesus.

You might have your ladies take turns reading slowly through the list. (p.47)
Pause a moment to let the Holy Spirit tell them if this is true of them.

Optional questions: How would believing these statements change how we act and respond to men? To God?

The truth prepares the ladies to respond.

Choose to respond. (20 minutes)

Allow time for the ladies to read silently through the prayers. Then give them the choice. “If you are willing, let’s read this together out loud, thinking what it means.” Don’t be afraid to stop and repeat as you sense that is necessary, or just stop and let a particular truth sink in. They are not just **READING**, but invite them to **BELIEVE** that God is restoring them and will continue to restore all that has been lost or stolen as a result of living in a culture that devalued how God created women.

Stop and listen. (2 minutes)

Blessing. (1 minute) May be better today if you bless them, but doing it in partners is also good.

Grow deeper. Stress doing these today will be very helpful, especially #3 and #4.

Session Six ~ Understanding Forgiveness

MAIN PRINCIPLES:

1. To forgive: we must choose to release the person who hurt us to Jesus and trust him with all the consequences and the feelings it caused.
2. Jesus came to make a way for us to be forgiven and to teach us how to forgive.
3. We cannot truly love God, others or ourselves until we choose to acknowledge our sin and receive God’s forgiveness and cleansing.
4. God commands us to forgive others because he knows it sets us free.
5. We get better at forgiving as we grow in our understanding of who we are to Father God and who he truly is as our loving Father, compassionate, merciful, and desiring what is best for us.

This is the most important lesson of the study. However, each of the previous are needed in order to receive the truth and blessings from flow from learning to forgive. So, remind your prayer partners to pray and be specific. You may have to agree to meet at a different time so you do not have to rush through the session. You will need time to worship, prepare your hearts, and listen. At the end, you may want to set another time to discuss what the group may want to do next.

Start here. (6-8 minutes)

1. Important that each one grasps what letting go, releasing, means. We no longer have control, and are trusting it is gone. We need to choose to do it and choose not to take it back.
2. We are preparing our hearts in this one. We all need our Father's forgiveness.
3. As we think generically about what blocks forgiveness, we may realize we are doing the same thing.

Think about this. (10-12 minutes)

You may want to paraphrase the story in Matthew 18:21-35 and only read the most important verses to save time.

Word to clarify: repentance: Literally means a change of mind. We come into agreement with God that what we did was wrong; turn from beliefs causing the sin and turn to God and his truth. We need a repentant heart before we are able to receive forgiveness. Proof will be gradually coming into alignment with God's rules. A test of our repentance is the compassion we begin to show others when they sin. This is the reason the servant had no compassion for his fellow servant who owed him.

The important points: The servant would not receive the Master's forgiveness because he had not received the truth that his Master had forgiven his debt, one so huge that he would never be able to pay. We can never pay the penalty for our sin. We first need to accept God's forgiveness before we are set free and can forgive others.

Forgiveness is so important to God that it was one of the reasons he sent his Son Jesus to become one of us. We learn from Jesus that Father God loves us so much that he created the way to be forgiven and to return to him, canceling the debt of disobedience that prevented us from receiving his love. Jesus also set the example of how to forgive, even the unforgivable. Forgiveness never feels "fair".

What does the Bible say? (8-10 minutes)

1. Nahum 1:3 NLT – "The Lord is slow to get angry, but his power is great, and he never lets the guilty go unpunished." Reminds us of our own need for forgiveness in Christ, and reassures us that those we release to Jesus who hurt us will be held accountable.
2. Galatians 3:13 NLT- But Christ has rescued us from the curse pronounced by the law. When he was hung on the cross, he took upon himself the curse for our wrongdoing. For it is written in the Scriptures, "Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree."
3. 1 John 1:9 NLT - "But if we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all wickedness." Important to accept that we are not only forgiven but also cleansed. No more stain of guilt.
4. Matthew 6:14 NLT - "If you forgive those who sin against you, your heavenly Father will forgive you. (15) But if you refuse to forgive others, your Father will not forgive your sins."
5. John 14:27 NLT - "I am leaving you with a gift—peace of mind and heart. And the peace I give is a gift the world cannot give. So, don't be troubled or afraid." Jesus was going to suffer on the Cross in order to give us that gift.

When we choose not to receive our forgiveness or to forgive others, we will needlessly be troubled and afraid.

6. Psalm 103:3, 12, 13 NLT – “He forgives all my sins
7. and heals all my diseases.” “He has removed our sins as far from us
8. as the east is from the west. The Lord is like a father to his children,
9. tender and compassionate to those who fear him.” Will we choose to believe and receive these promises? It is through God’s grace. We don’t deserve it, but it is ours.

What forgiveness is NOT and what it IS: (8-10 minutes)

Suggestion: Take turns reading each one and allow for questions and discussion.

1. Remind your group that God’s thoughts and ways are not like ours. (Isa.55:8,9)
2. Stress forgiveness is a choice. God does not make us forgive.
3. Another thing to stress is the concept of “releasing” the person, the consequences of what he/she did to Jesus and trusting him with all of it.
4. One of the concepts most left out of our common understanding of forgiveness is the “forgiving from our hearts” (Matt.18:35). We must be willing to feel what we felt when we were hurt. As we do, then release those feelings to Jesus, we can access his peace promised in John 14:27. The chain binding us to the pain is broken.
5. You might share that we are most like Jesus when we forgive.
6. Remind them that the people we are closest to have the most opportunity to hurt us and usually do. Forgiving parents is the best way to honor them.

Choose to respond. (30-40 minutes)

Options and suggestions:

1. Location is very important for this ministry session. If at all possible meet in a private, spiritually safe place where there is room to spread out.
2. Some ladies will not have enough time to forgive everyone on their list. So, before you begin, stress that this is just to teach us how to forgive. Encourage them to set aside time regularly to practice forgiving in this way so that it become a natural response when they are hurt.
3. Bring extra paper for the group to write on. At the end, you may want to symbolically destroy or get rid of it. For example, burn or tear it up or put it through a shredding machine. By doing that we say it is gone. We are not taking it back.
4. Invite the ladies to spread out so they can quietly read the releases without being overheard. Playing soft instrumental music helps with that.
5. Come back together at the end to read prayer out loud. Thank God for his forgiveness. Proclaim your receiving of it and release of those who have hurt you.
6. You may want to fill each other with the Holy Spirit as we did in Session 3: stand in a circle and each place her right hand on the person to her right’s back. Ask the Holy Spirit to fill every empty place with his peace, love and joy.

7. If you feel comfortable, sharing communion is also a great way to end. You will need to check with your ladies to be sure they would like to do that as some denominations limit serving communion to ordained pastors and elders.
8. A song is a great way to confirm what God has done and wrap up this emotional session.

STOP AND LISTEN. This is where God may really want to speak, so be sure to leave time for this. Encourage your friends to write down what they hear.

BLESSING. If there is an even number, you may have pairs bless each other. Be sure everyone gets a hug before leaving.

Session Seven ~ Thrive! Growing into the beautiful woman God designed

MAIN PRINCIPLES:

1. In order to live the life God desires for you now, begin by focusing on your final destination, Heaven. We are citizens of Heaven.
2. Just as you care daily for your body, learn to daily take care of your spirit. Exercising our spiritual muscles enables us to persevere and grow into the beautiful women God designed.
3. A simple way to keep connected with God is to daily: Stop, Look and Listen. Then respond to what God tells us by faith.
4. God will help you reach your goal of spiritual maturity as you make room for the Holy Spirit in your life and rely on his guidance and power at work in and through you to accomplish what you cannot do on your own.
5. You will grow faster if you learn to release the obstacles, the old expectations and lies, so that you can know, understand, love and trust God more deeply.
6. By daily keeping Jesus in the center of your life, mind and heart you more easily align with all God's good plans and purposes and are able to live in more peace and joy.
7. Why settle for just surviving as a Christian woman, when you can thrive?

This session was designed to answer the question, "What's next?" Sessions One through Six lay the foundations for our life of faith. Once we have the basic truths upon which to build, how do we live from those truths in a way that pleases and glorifies our heavenly Father? *Stress that each will find her own way to do this. There is no magic formula.*

Depending on your group, you may want to assign the reading of the session before your group meets, as usual, then decide whether you want to summarize the

content and ask questions as you go, or whether you want to divide the session in two and stop as your group desires to chew and go deeper on those areas that are of particular interest.

DEFINE SPIRITUAL GROWTH. Since this is the object of our life of faith, what is it? Father God designs each of us uniquely and has a specific plan that only each of us as individuals can fulfill. We need to believe God when he tells us who we are, how he designed us, then learn by spiritual habits how to follow his will for us each day. *In short, the goal of spiritual growth is to learn to align more and more with God's desires and purposes for our life.*

The first way we do that is by understanding where we will be in eternity. This life is short and is only the training ground for Heaven. Once we understand our destiny, we begin to live out of that truth. We live as citizens of Heaven. So, discuss what that means. How do we live IN the world, but not let it control us? How do we follow Jesus in a culture that is increasingly hostile to that lifestyle? Every tactic of the devil is to cause us to stop growing, to stop believing and to give up and sink into the worldview of our culture.

SPIRITUAL CARE. We learn to take care of our spirits, just as we have learned to care for our physical bodies. Discuss how to do that. One practical way is given on **page 68, Stop, look and listen.** *Take time to do this exercise at the end of your time together.*

SPIRITUAL FOCUS. What we spend our time looking at, we become. We are to intentionally refocus daily on Jesus. Preach the Gospel to ourselves. Remember who he is and why he came to earth. Memorize scripture that describes a characteristic you want to develop in yourself.

SPIRITUAL HOUSECLEANING. It is impossible to fill an already full vessel. To grow spiritually, we must learn to intentionally, regularly empty ourselves of fear, lies and other things that block us from knowing God and receiving his love. **GO TO THE CROSS** for the exchange that was discussed in Session Two. Learn to lay down your burdens and trust your Savior with them. Trust you can hear his voice when he speaks to you.

THE SECRET OF OUR SPIRITUAL GROWTH IS THE PRESENCE OF GOD. The Father calls us to come to him (Hebrews 4:16) We are changed more and more into the woman God created us to be each time we soak in God's presence in worship, prayer and meditation. It's our responsibility to find the ways that best suit us, then do it.

Learn to discern and cooperate with the Holy Spirit, God in us. Who is he? What does he do? How do we recognize him?

SPEND TIME TOGETHER SHARING SPIRITUAL HABITS.

We learn and are challenged and encouraged as we share with others what we have learned that helps us grow closer to God. After sharing, challenge the members of your group to choose one to practice and incorporate into their daily or weekly schedule.

What does the Bible say? (Pages 73-75. Allow 10-12 minutes)

After going through each one, with 2-4 sharing on each one, challenge your group to choose one verse to meditate on this week.

Choose to Respond. (Allow 10-12 minutes)

A useful way to keep our focus on Jesus is to remind ourselves where he should be. He is the King of our lives and should rule over our lives by occupying the center of our attention, and every area of our lives. Be sure to remind them that this is an exercise they should repeat regularly during the year, especially when their spiritual energy is low.

BLESSING.

End your time together by blessing them yourself, or having them break into groups of 2-3 to bless each other.

Before finishing the study, you may want to plan a time to re-unite, the following week or the following month, to do a follow up and share what changes they are seeing in their lives and to celebrate and pray for each other. This would be a great time for a pitch-in breakfast, lunch or dinner!

Allow your group to discuss what they would like to do together to encourage each other to keep growing.