

GATHER A GROUP &



take up & READ

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GATHER A GROUP
by take up and read

WELCOME

"I've always wanted to do a Bible study with a group of young moms," she said, looking up at an older woman who was long past the stage of juggling journals and juice cups. "But I'm new to the area and I only know two women who might join me."

"Then you have a group," said the older woman firmly, with a triumphant smile. "Absolutely. That's a group."

And it is. Where even two women are gathered, He is there, delighted to be invited and eager to bless. Whether you are gathering with one friend in a dorm room at 10:00 every Wednesday night or you're gathering ten women and thirty children at the park on Friday mornings, He's there.

And He's so glad you asked. (Matthew 18:20)

TIPS FOR CREATING A GROUP:

Keep it simple. Begin and end the gathering with the same prayer/scripture reading so that no matter who is hosting the gathering, the format remains simple and clear.

Have an established leader for your gathering time. It can be a different individual each meeting, but it helps to have one person to lead the study session.

Set a beginning/ending time for the gathering. Encourage promptness in arrival so that you can utilize the full amount of time you may have to gather. Start on time, even if you have stragglers. They can join in when they arrive. Always be respectful of the hostesses time.

When it comes to personal sharing, having an egg timer set is a huge help. It may sound rather silly, but when you have a specific amount of time to gather, you want to be respectful of each person present and to not have one voice override the rest.

Send out a reminder 48 and 24 hours in advance, especially if the group is filled with young mothers who are at times easily overwhelmed with the details of daily life and need a little encouragement to leave the house and spend time filling their own hearts and minds with the Word and good fellowship. You may also want to try and get a headcount 24 hours before to assist the hostess for the evening to be properly prepared.

Have someone in the group bring the dessert/snack so that the hostess is simply preparing her home and providing drinks. It makes it easier all the way around to divide up the tasks so no one person carries the full burden.

Remember that people are coming to share in prayer and community, not to judge the state of tidiness in your home. Don't let the clutter stop you from hosting. Simplicity is your friend. You have a spot for sitting and having a productive conversation. If there is a basket of laundry next to the sofa, don't stress. The women gathering are there for you, not your home.

Treat this gathering like a vault. What is shared in small group, stays in small group. This is a place of trust among your spiritual sisters. You must treat the struggles shared and prayers asked for with the utmost respect and discretion.

Keep your eye on the numbers. With a larger gathering (more than five) you will need to break up into smaller groups to discuss the scripture so everyone has an opportunity to share how God is working in their life.

Always try to remain positive in your small group responses. Life is difficult and sometimes one (or more) in your small group may be experiencing a crisis. Remember to listen with your heart and hold judgement, especially in a group setting. If there is something the Holy Spirit has placed on your heart to share with this individual, make time after small group to share it privately. You always want to lift up and encourage each other.

If at first you don't succeed, try, try again. Bible studies and small groups take time to cultivate. It's OK if there is fluctuation in attendance. We must strive to meet each other right where we are in life. God is pleased that you are making the effort to know Him better, so just keep going friends.

Praying with you,

The Take Up and Read Team

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GATHER A GROUP

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GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

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GATHER A GROUP

GROUP DISCUSSION : WEEK ONE

QUESTION 1

How do you cultivate a habit of daily Bible study? Do you have a favorite place? A favorite pen? A favorite Bible? When it works, what makes it work? What things hold you back or keep you from making it a daily practice?

QUESTION 2

It's safe to say that God allows sorrow and pain and challenge into every life. In this week's readings, we see a glimpse into the pain that comes with cancer, traumatic childbirth, war, and mental illness. Admittedly, these are all extreme examples. Sometimes, pain isn't quite so life-altering. Still, it hurts. Can you see how suffering is the path to sanctification in each of those cases? More importantly, can you see how it can be your path?

QUESTION 3

After each season of suffering there are lessons learned and wisdom gained from the experience. Share a lesson or piece of wisdom you have gleaned from a time of suffering.

For some of us, it's very difficult to admit our weaknesses and reach out for help. Share the times when you've blessed someone by meeting a need or you've been a blessing to someone when you've allowed them to meet your needs.

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GROUP DISCUSSION : WEEK TWO

QUESTION 1

What is the difference between lamenting as in this week's verses and the murmuring and complaining, which is frowned upon in Philippians 2:14?

QUESTION 2

What do we do to be helpful in those awkward moments when we are called to sit with someone in their lament?

QUESTION 3

Recall a time when someone sat with you in your lament and suffering. What did they do that assisted you in recognizing the presence of God in that moment? How can you duplicate this for others?

QUESTION 4

"Suffering produces endurance." Have you noticed that with each season of suffering you are stronger/more prepared or more confused/less prepared to greet the next season of suffering? What made you stronger? What made you more confused? How can you take this piece of self-knowledge and prepare in advance for the next challenge?

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GATHER A GROUP

GROUP DISCUSSION : WEEK THREE

QUESTION 1

Are you able to share the “first clause” of your pain with one another? Share a struggle and allow your gathered group to help you find the “but God” clause that brings gospel hope to your pain.

QUESTION 2

How have you been able to embrace a trial or suffering in a new way, recognizing that it may be God’s personal invitation to come closer to Him?

QUESTION 3

What are your best tips for getting enough rest?

QUESTION 4

How do we find true strength when we allow ourselves to be weak and relinquish our illusion of control?

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GATHER A GROUP

GROUP DISCUSSION : WEEK FOUR

QUESTION 1

Can you speak the words of Ephesians 1:3-14 into the lives of each other? We often push God away. One way that we do that is by pushing away the people He puts in our path to be His hands and feet. Are you alone in pain? Can you invite someone to the top of your hill?

QUESTION 2

How have we allowed our “striving” to overtake our peace in Christ? Why are we so afraid to become little before the Lord?

QUESTION 3

Challenge one another to invite someone into the messes, both figuratively and literally. This week, can you extend an invitation without worrying first about the state of your house or your clothes or your kids? Can you open your heart without worrying about being judged? Also, can you be the woman who steps into someone else’s mess graciously?

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GROUP DISCUSSION : WEEK FIVE

QUESTION 1

Both Allison and Elizabeth share cancer experiences. Allison writes, “I live differently now. Instead of chasing what it seems I should do and demanding perfection, I pursue what makes me feel alive, even when it means risking failure. I’ve loosened my grip on the plans I have for my life, because I trust that God’s plans are greater and that He wants only good for me.” That is the freedom that can come with facing down our worst fears (like illness and death). Have you experienced the freedom that is on the other side of fear?

QUESTION 2

Do you revisit fear, despite having navigated a really hard time? Have repeated crises and disappointments made you anxious and weary? How does the message of the gospel offer hope?

QUESTION 3

The Internet can get inside our heads. How does time online open us to a new world of anxiety or sadness, or both? How can we help each other use it as a tool for good, rather than a distraction opens doors of defeat and discouragement?

QUESTION 4

Where do you find peace and respite? What rejuvenates your soul? How can you bring more joy into your daily walk with God that will allow you to fill your well with goodness and grace?

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GATHER A GROUP

GROUP DISCUSSION : WEEK SIX

QUESTION 1

What is your greatest fear? How has this fear controlled you in the past? Have you been able to lay this fear down at the cross and not pick it up again?

QUESTION 2

As we finish up, how do we take the words of consolation we've studied and journaled here and bring them into our lives? How do we remember them when times get hard?

QUESTION 3

What has been your favorite scripture learned during this study?

QUESTION 4

How has committing to this group and this study changed you?

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GATHER A GROUP

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GATHER A GROUP : RECIPES

FRESH BERRY PIE

INGREDIENTS

Baked Pie Shell

1 quart fresh strawberries or blueberries

1/2 cup sugar

1/2 cup water (plus some extra for the cornstarch)

3 Tbsp cornstarch

1 Tbsp lemon juice

whipped cream

DIRECTIONS

- For strawberry pie, fill pie shell with 3 cups strawberries. (I slice them in half.)
- Crush 1 cup berries in pot. Add sugar and water and bring to a boil. Remove from heat.
- Mix cornstarch with a little cold water and whisk slowly into berry mixture. Cook until clear and thickened.
- Remove from heat. Add lemon juice.
- For strawberry pie, pour glaze over filled pie shell. For blueberry pie, pour 3 cups blueberries into glaze and stir until coated, then pour into pie shell.
- Chill and serve with whipped cream.



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GATHER A GROUP : RECIPES

TOFFEE BROWNIES

INGREDIENTS

2 (17.6-ounce) package brownie mix with walnuts
Vegetable oil cooking spray
3 (6-ounce) candy bars with almonds and toffee chips (recommended: Symphony brand)

DIRECTIONS

Prepare the brownie mix according to package directions.

Line a 13 by 9-inch cake pan with aluminum foil and spray with vegetable oil cooking spray. Spoon in half of the brownie batter and smooth with a spatula or the back of a spoon. Place the candy bars side by side on top of the batter. Cover with the remaining batter.

Bake according to package directions. Let cool completely, then lift from the pan using the edges of the foil. This makes it easy to cut the brownies into squares.



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GATHER A GROUP : RECIPES

CHARCUTERIE BOARD



BUILD A CHARCUTERIE BOARD

While a charcuterie board looks exceptionally pretty and sometimes even a little (or a lot) fancy, it's actually a very easy hostess trick. Combine a variety of textures and flavors, let yourself enjoy the act of "designing" the tray (play with your food), and know that nothing is against the rules.

HOW MUCH TO SERVE?

For ladies, you can figure about two ounces of meat per person and maybe two ounces of cheese, too. It's not intended to be a meal unless you've decided you're serving it as meal, so you're planning just a little something. Let yourself play with fruits and nuts to garnish and to provide for those who aren't eating meats or cheeses or both. Serve it with bread and maybe a gluten-free alternative to bread like rice crackers.

IT'S ALL ABOUT VARIED TEXTURES AND FLAVORS:

Hard salami pairs well with a rich, earthy red pepper hummus. Serve a hard cheese like Manchego and something soft like a ripe Brie. Pair bleu cheese with fresh figs or blueberries or dried apricots. Use crisp red grapes to break the scene visually and to cleanse the palate between salty prosciutto and fresh mozzarella. Or roll the prosciutto around the mozzarella. Remember, there are no rules and creating the tray should be fun.

A little bowl of grainy mustard is a nice touch, as are fat, stuffed olives scattered around. If you want something hot, consider stuffing dates with bleu cheese or goat cheese and wrapping them in bacon and baking until the bacon is crisp. Roasted red peppers (from a jar) that have been simply marinated in olive oil, garlic, and salt and pepper are welcome color and they offer something to those looking for lighter fare.

When it comes to slicing meats, consider buying them pre-sliced to save you time and aggravation. While you're there, check your deli section (and places like Costco) for fun things to inspire you, like meats already wrapped around cheeses, and little jars of mustard or special jam or spiced nuts. If you slice the meat yourself, be sure the meat is cold to slice. Slice as thinly as you can. When you lay it on the tray, consider rolling or folding to add depth to the presentation. Then, serve it at room temperature.

A charcuterie board is art; it's different every time and everyone brings her own touch to it. Yours will be just right for your guests.

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GATHER A GROUP : RECIPES

BASIL LEMONADE

INGREDIENTS

1 cup of fresh basil leaves
1 cup of sugar
1 cup fresh lemon juice
8 cups water

DIRECTIONS

To make 8 servings:

In a 2 quart bowl, combine 1 cup of fresh, torn basil leaves and 1 cup of sugar. Using a wooden spoon, crush the basil leaves into the sugar in order to bruise the leaves. Add 8 cups water and 1 cup fresh lemon juice. Stir until the sugar dissolves. Pour through a strainer into a pitcher for serving. Garnish with more fresh basil.



[[To keep it super simple: Buy Simply Lemonade. Open the bottle and pour out just about a half cup. Push a cup of basil leaves into the bottle, put the lid on, and shake well. Let steep in your refrigerator for about an hour. Strain into a serving pitcher and garnish with more basil.]]

VARIATIONS ARE ENDLESS

Add watermelon cubes or strawberries or blueberries.
Use Thai basil to make it spicier.
Use purple basil to make a pinkish lemonade.
Cut the lemonade with seltzer water to make it sparkling and not as sweet.

Cheers!