



GATHER A GROUP
for

PONDER



GATHER A GROUP



PONDER

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

GATHER A GROUP

by take up and read



PONDER

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WEEK ONE



***JOYFUL
MYSTERIES***



PONDER
GATHER A GROUP

THE ANNUNCIATION

Mary learns that she has been chosen to be the mother of Jesus.

What are some examples of how you have said yes to God?

Was it a joyful or challenging yes?

Like Mary, let us treasure everything that God has provided. What graces has God provided to enable your yes?

THE VISITATION

Mary visits Elizabeth

The first thing Mary did after giving her fiat was to go serve someone else. How is God asking you to do the same?

Elizabeth was filled with such joy upon receiving her cousin that her child leapt within the womb. Do we receive charity from others with equal joy and humility? If not, why?

THE NATIVITY

Jesus is born in a stable in Bethlehem.

Identify a human attachment that's a current struggle for you. How is God leading you to surrender that attachment?

What one action can you take today to make more room in your heart for Jesus?

THE PRESENTATION

Mary and Joseph take the infant Jesus to the Temple to present Him to God.

What is distracting your heart from being fixed on the Father?

How does your work, your family, or your community show you the love of God?

What steps can you take to prepare yourself to receive the Lord in the Eucharist with the same joy that Simeon received Him in the temple?

THE FINDING OF JESUS IN THE TEMPLE

Jesus is found in the Temple discussing His faith with the teachers.

How have you felt Christ's presence today? Make time today to visit our Lord in the tabernacle, asking Him to enter your heart, remembering that our Father's house is your true home.

WEEK TWO



***MYSTERIES
OF LIGHT***



PONDER
GATHER A GROUP

THE BAPTISM OF JESUS IN THE RIVER JORDAN

God proclaims that Jesus is His beloved Son.

Do you know how pleased God is with you, right now in this moment? Do you know how much you are loved?

Are you able to freely receive this love? If not, why?

THE WEDDING FEAST AT CANA

At Mary's request, Jesus performs His first miracle.

How can we respond as Mary did at Cana to those in need around us?

As women, we have been given unique talents to serve those around us. What unique gifts and talents have you been given, and how can you use them to connect others to Jesus?

THE PROCLAMATION OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

Jesus calls all to conversion and service to the kingdom.

Jesus is constantly calling us to conversion of the heart. What hard thing stands in the way of your conversion?

Which Beatitude can best assist in that conversion? Take some quiet time today to pray and meditate on that beatitude, asking God into the hardship.

THE TRANSFIGURATION OF JESUS

Jesus is revealed in glory to Peter, James, and John.

Are you open to receiving whatever the Lord has in store for your life?

Take some time to sit in the quiet and empty your heart of the noise and chaos of your day. Jesus speaks to us in the silence. Allow yourself the opportunity to listen to His voice.

THE INSTITUTION OF THE EUCHARIST

Jesus offers His Body and Blood at the Last Supper.

Have you ever been in awe at receiving our Lord in the Eucharist?

If the answer is yes, how did you prepare yourself for that encounter?

If the answer is no, what is standing in your way?

WEEK THREE



SORROWFUL MYSTERIES



PONDER
GATHER A GROUP

THE AGONY IN THE GARDEN

Jesus prays in the Garden of Gethsemane on the night before He dies.

In order to truly live, we must die to self. What choice can you make today to die to self?

Jesus said in the Garden: “Father, Not my will, but Your will be done.” What do you need to surrender to His will today?

THE SCOURGING AT THE PILLAR

Jesus is lashed with whips.

Are you living a life of your own design? Are you consumed by worldly comforts and values?

Is there a habitual sin that ensnares you? In order to walk in true freedom, we must receive the love and mercy shown by our Lord Jesus at the scourging at the pillar. He bore our sins with meekness and humility. Let us seek Him with the same.

THE CROWNING WITH THORNS

Jesus is mocked and crowned with thorns.

Are you ashamed to be a follower of Christ? Do you justify your actions by the world’s standards and not the Lord’s?

What steps can you take to better conform your heart to His will?

THE CARRYING OF THE CROSS

Jesus carries the cross that will be used to crucify him.

Carrying our cross is never easy. In what ways has your relationship with the Lord assisted and encouraged you to bear the weight of your cross?

How are you able to walk alongside those who are suffering with compassion? How do you encourage them in their walk?

THE CRUCIFIXION

Jesus is nailed to the cross and dies.

How has the suffering that has occurred in your own life drawn you closer to Christ? How has that suffering changed you?

WEEK FOUR



GLORIOUS MYSTERIES



PONDER
GATHER A GROUP

THE RESURRECTION

God the Father raised Jesus from the dead.

How has your faith in the risen Christ stretched your heart?

What mountain has God moved in your life? How has your faith been strengthened by God's action?

THE ASCENSION

Jesus returns to His Father in heaven.

Place yourself on the mountain with the Apostles as you watch Jesus ascend to heaven. How do you feel? Are you filled with doubt and fear or assurance and strong faith?

If you feel more doubt and fear, then ask our Lady into that doubt and fear as you ponder this Glorious mystery.

If you feel more assurance and faith, then ask yourself how you are called to spread the Good News as the Apostles did?

THE COMING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

The Holy Spirit comes to bring new life to the disciples.

What has God filled you with an abundance of that you can pour into another person's lacking?

Are there holes in your life that community would fill?

We are each called to community to pray, teach, have fellowship, and to celebrate the Eucharist. How can you help build your community?

THE ASSUMPTION OF MARY

At the end of her life on earth, Mary is taken body and soul into heaven.

How are you preparing for the Bridegroom?

Today, take time to reflect on your relationship with Jesus--specifically, that He delights in you. Have you ever thought about this before? How does the fact that Jesus loves you and delights in you change or affect your relationship with Him?

THE CORONATION OF MARY

Mary is crowned as Queen of Heaven and Earth.

Have you accepted the role that God has given you with grace and trust as our Lady did?

Are you struggling with how other people see you? As you ponder this glorious mystery, how is our Lady speaking to your struggle?

GATHER A GROUP
by take up and read



PONDER
RECIPES

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PONDER RECIPES

IRISH TEA BREAD

1 cup of cold Irish breakfast tea
2 ½ cups dried fruit in any combination: raisins (golden or regular), cherries, cranberries...whatever you like
Butter or cooking spray, for greasing the loaf pan
½ cup + 1 tbsp packed light brown sugar *
1 large egg, lightly beaten
2 cups all-purpose flour
2 teaspoons baking powder
2 teaspoons ground allspice, cinnamon, or ginger

- Brew tea and let cool.
- Place the dried fruit in a mixing bowl, cover with the cold tea, and let sit for three to four hours.
- When the fruit mixture is ready, preheat the oven to 350 degrees and grease a 5x9" loaf pan with butter or cooking spray.
- In another mixing bowl, beat the sugar and egg together until light and foamy. Sift in the flour, baking powder, and spices. Mix together.
- Add the fruit mixture to the sugar/egg and flour mixture and mix together well. (This step is best done by hand, as opposed to in a stand mixer.)
- Place batter in the prepared pan and bake for 1 hour. Remove loaf from pan and cool on a wire rack.

*You can also substitute ¾ c. splenda brown sugar for the brown sugar.

Makes one loaf



PONDER RECIPES

STRAWBERRY TEA CAKE

8 ounces cream cheese
1 stick butter
 $\frac{3}{4}$ cup sugar
1 cup milk
2 beaten eggs
1 teaspoon vanilla
2 cups all purpose flour
1 teaspoon baking powder
 $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon baking soda
 $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon salt
18 ounces strawberry preserves
1 tablespoon lemon juice
 $\frac{1}{4}$ cup brown sugar
 $\frac{1}{2}$ cup chopped pecans

- Combine cream cheese, butter, and sugar
- Stir the milk, eggs, and vanilla into the cream cheese mixture.
- Sift together flour, baking powder, baking soda, and salt
- Add sifted dry ingredients to cream cheese mixture.
- Pour $\frac{1}{2}$ of cream cheese batter into 13 X 9 X 2 casserole dish
- Stir the strawberry preserves and lemon juice together.
- Spread the strawberry preserve mixture over the batter, dabbing small spoonfuls over the batter and gently spreading--do not stir)
- Add the remainder of the cream cheese batter on top of the preserves.
- Sprinkle the top with brown sugar and pecans
- Bake at 350 for 40 minutes.



PONDER RECIPES

PARTY SPREAD

6 slices bacon
1 cup finely grated cheddar cheese
1 cup Parmesan cheese
1 cup mayonnaise
¼ cup very finely chopped onion
1 finely minced garlic clove
Small bag slivered almonds
Sturdy crackers or rye party bread.

- Fry the bacon until crisp, and then crumble and cool.
- Mix bacon and all remaining ingredients.
- Keep refrigerated until serving time.
- Spread the dip on crackers or bread.

HOT CRAB AND SPINACH DIP

1 can fresh crab meat
1 8-ounce package cream cheese
½ cup grated parmesan cheese
1 package chopped frozen spinach, thawed and squeezed dry
2 tablespoons mayonnaise
1 tablespoon Worcestershire
½ small onion finely chopped
1 finely minced clove of garlic
Grated parmesan cheese for the top

- Mix all ingredients except Parmesan for the top.
- Place in a shallow baking dish and top with Parmesan cheese
- Bake at 350 degrees for 30 minutes.

Serve with a sliced baguette or crackers.



PONDER **RECIPES**

PARTY ICED TEA

4 lemon tea bags *
4 raspberry or cherry tea bags *
4 cups apple juice

- Place the eight tea bags in a large pitcher and cover with four cups of boiling water.
- Let brew for 10 minutes.
- Remove the tea bags and add apple juice.
- Refrigerate until ready to serve.

(You can also make this with just plain water--just double the amount of tea bags!)

Makes 8 cups

*Celestial seasonings lemon zinger and any of the other zinger series tea bags work great for this.