

From One Widow to Another: Conversations About the New You.

Study guide 10 Week Curriculum

Welcome to 10 weeks of learning, encouragement, and developing relationships. This guide is designed so that you can invite a small group of friends to your kitchen table, or a larger group to a room in your local library, church, or community center.

A pot of coffee or tea, the book, *From One Widow to Another: Conversations About the New You*, and this study guide are all you need.

While you will want to format your time together to meet the needs of your group, these are suggestions based on what we learned.

We planned two hour sessions. The first hour included reading the Bible texts and studying one chapter. While it is helpful for everyone to have read the chapter before time, this certainly is not a requirement. New widows especially may just make it to your group, and have had no time or emotional reserve to read any thing. The second hour we divided into small groups of 6 or 7 focusing on personal application and prayer.

If only one hour is available, the time can still be quite valuable. Divide it to meet the needs of your group for study and discussion, personal application and prayer.

Given the fast pace and demands on widows (employment, children, and needed transitions) 10 consecutive sessions may be too much. We had spring and fall sessions with breaks for Christmas and summer. Divide the study to meet your calendar. Remember, for some, your group is their lifeline.

Section I: A Widow's Vulnerabilities

Chapter 1. Our Strongest Emotion—Grief, and its Silent Partner, Depression

Bible Review: Grief | Thes 4:13 Psalm 56:8

Depression Lam 3:19-25 Psalm 118:6 Psalm 145: 14-19

Discussion: Review the facts we know about emotions. p. 18. What impact do our emotions have on our decision making?

Grief: Why is grieving so different in each of us? What should be our response to each other, considering these differences?

Depression: While you many not experience this emotion, many do.

Review the good news about depression. p. 25

Why should we not judge our friend suffering from depression?

Personal application: Remember, only you can change your personal circumstances. If you feel comfortable, share your responses to the following with your small group.

List some circumstances you wish were different.

What specific steps can you take?

Your list may be overwhelming. Select 2 to address this week.

Prayer: Psalm 17: 6 Pray for wisdom for each other and direction in decision making in emotional times.

Chapter 2. Fear: Normal in Change, but Temporary

Bible Review: Proverbs 3:26 Proverbs 27:17 Proverbs 18:24

Review the stories of courageous people who could have been paralyzed by fear. Matthew 2: 13 Esther 4:16 I Samuel 25, Romans 8:15

Discussion: What are some of the fears widows experience in their new life alone?

What is the value of creating your personal board of directors?
What does each contribute in your new circumstances?

A person with financial wisdom
A practical friend
A godly widow Proverbs
An encourager
A person with spiritual discernment & courage
A relative whose priority is YOUR well-being

Personal application: What role do each of these people play in your life today?

Do you need to remove some from your table?

What new people might you contact and seek their council in your new circumstance?

Prayer: Pray for each other for discernment of those whose advice is not spiritually sound or in YOUR best interests.

Chapter 3: Finances: Yes, we can.

Bible Review: Mark 12:38-44 II Kings 4: 1-7

Discussion Review the 3 things you need to master your finances

1. The desire to do so. (Necessity is a good motivator as well.)
2. The willingness to read and become informed.
3. Basic math skills of adding and subtracting, or a calculator.

Review the first 10 tips. (Don't think 10, think one step at a time.)

1. Don't make any major decisions for awhile.
2. Start tracking all your expenses. Basic budget forms are included in this chapter.
3. Pay your bills promptly.
4. Call Social Security to obtain survivor benefits.
5. Find out how much you have in assets and your liabilities as well.
6. Organize all financial documents.
7. Talk to other wise people about their choices, including appropriate VIP's on your board of directors, but make your own decisions.
8. Reinvest your money.
9. Maintain your budget.
10. Reallocate investments as needed.

Personal application: In your small group, identify an accountability partner. Tell them two steps you want to follow before your next meeting.

NOTE: GROUP MEMBERS SHOULD NOT REVEAL PERSONAL SPECIFIC NUMBERS OF THEIR PERSONAL FINANCIAL STATUS, BUT RATHER GOALS THEY WISH TO PURSUE.

Prayer: Pray for each other that you have the courage to change spending and living habits to match our life today.

Section II. A Widow's Strengths: The Sweet Gentle Current of Freedom Rising

Chapter 4: Our Opportunity to Change: Free Time and Flexibility

Bible Review: Psalm 118:24, Psalm 139: 13-16

Discussion

God knew this event would occur in your life. He created within you the potential to be God honoring through this time and the strength to face each new day. Think of women in the Bible that were strong in hard times. Name some of them. What examples do they set for us today?

Personal application.

What were your strengths and skills before you became a widow?

What were some of your positive personal habits before you became a widow? Were you orderly, good at gathering information, inclined to go to the Bible for help? Were you good at managing money? Writing down these personal strengths can be helpful. Use a additional piece of paper. Begin in the group, but take time this week to add to your list.

My past positive personal habits including living and health matters. . .

My past positive personal habits related to money. . .

My past positive personal habits related to communicating with others. . .

Some of our strengths and skills were either used in jobs we've had, or developed through our work and career experience. Let's examine them.

What jobs have I had in the past?

What were the skills I used on each job?

What restricted you in previous jobs? Often marital constraints of husband's schedule, geographical necessity of his job or family or other aspects are no longer factors in our new life today. This can be a positive new freedom.

Many women have developed skills through volunteer work. In marriage, volunteerism might have been as a couple or individual. List some of the volunteer work you have done and the skills you used in them. What restricted you in previous volunteer efforts? Again, sometimes time constraints or geographical constraints dictated your efforts.

Prayer: Pray for each other: 1. that you have the courage to step into new opportunities, 2. that you resist the temptation to become self focused during this season of loss.

Chapter 5: We Comfort Others, and Comfort Comes Back

Bible Review: II Corinthians 1: 3-4, 6, II Corinthians 2:7, Matthew 5:4

Discussion: Review the foundation of our comfort--the reality that God has not changed and is still there. Review the pillars of taking care of our selves and reaching out to others. What happens when these two pillars are out of balance? What are common sources of comfort in our past that we no longer have?

Review God's promises of comfort. p. 100, His promises, His law, and His love.

His promise (John 3:16) The best is yet to come.

His law (Psalm 1: 1-2) We are blessed when we delight in His law.

His love (Lamentations 3:22-24) His love is new every morning.

Personal application: What steps can you take this week for self care physically? emotionally? and spiritually?

What are simple plans you can make to comfort another person this week? Be prepared for God's amazing multiplication. When we give away comfort, it comes back multiplied in new and surprising ways.

Prayer: Pray for each other that you are able to accept God's comfort in our new circumstance.

Section III: Relationships: Never the Same

Chapter 6: Friends: Letting go and loving the real thing

Bible Review: Proverbs 17:9 (philos), 18:24 (hetairos), Proverbs 14:20 (peitho)

Discussion: If you have a white board available, draw a typical friendship mobile. In our group, we invited people to come and erase the pieces that 'disappeared' upon our husband's death. While this is a difficult exercise, it is valuable in facing reality in our new life. We gain perspective by asking ourselves these questions:

Discuss the following:

- Why were they in my mobile to begin with?
- Why should they remain from my perspective?
- Why should they remain from their perspective?
- What mutual benefit is to be gained by them in a continued friendship?
- What mutual benefit is to be gained by me in a continued friendship?

Often we realize that we will want new people in our lives to fill the void. Given our vulnerability, especially in the early months and years, picking wisely is important.

Personal application

Review the chart on p. 118 regarding becoming a good 'people picker' and avoiding fools in our lives. While this is not a gripe session, it is a time to evaluate people of influence in our lives and whether they meet God's criterion of influencing us.

Pray that you each have discernment related to the people in your life. Pray for strength to put healthy boundaries on relationships in your new life.

Chapter 7: Family: Healing after the tree shakes

Bible Review: God cares about you and your children. [Deuteronomy 10:18](#)
[Deuteronomy 24:16-18](#) [Deuteronomy 27:18-20](#) [Psalm 68:4-6](#) [Psalm 146:8-10](#)

Discussion

Draw a typical family tree on a white board. While this next step is hard, I encourage your group to do this. Our group found it to be one of the most helpful exercises in our time together and the beginning of a new understanding of changing family relationships.

Erase the branch that was your husband. This exercise helps us understand why all other relationships must change in some way to accommodate the new reality.

Review the stress list on p. 129. While these may result in conflicts within family's, God's Word has instructions for resolving conflicts.

Personal application

What positive changes might occur in your family tree given the reality of being a widow? I realize this is a tough question. Looking at my list on p. 124 of the text might help.

Are there any steps you can take to heal family wounds? While time does not heal all wounds, there are situations where time and space help. Issues MAY be addressed later when emotions are not so raw.

Note: Reviewing the chapter on friendships, fools and wise people may help you see family relationships that are/were not healthy.

Prayer: Praying for personal healing is always in God's will. Pray for God's protection and direction especially for children, but for all family members.

Section IV: The New You: The new woman in the mirror--different, and strong.

Chapter 8: Finding Yourself: "I didn't know you."

Bible Review Romans 12: 2 Isaiah 61: 3 Proverbs 24:10 Proverbs 24: 16a Ruth

Discussion: Looking at new realities on p. 146, what are some positive outcomes of these new realities? What are some dangers that can result in our lives as a result of these new realities?

What challenges did Ruth face as a new widow?
What examples did Ruth set for us as widows?

Personal application

What "God prints" have you seen in your life through the events of your husband's death and this season afterwards?

Not everyone in your group may see a "God print" yet. They will be encouraged by hearing what others report. They will also be strengthened to know that He does care for us.

Prayer

Pray that each one will in some practical personal way sense God's hand on their life this week.

Chapter 9: Finding Your Mission: a purpose worth living for. "I didn't know I could."

Bible Review: Samuel 10:7b Ecc 9:10a Exodus 4:2

Discussion

Review the possible outcomes of your willingness to find a new mission. p. 154.

Compare the risks and rewards of finding a new mission for your life.

Personal application

Most small groups are quite diverse with differences in desire and/or ability and resources to do new things. Encourage each to share what they would LIKE to see in their life 6 months from now.

What personal habits might interfere with your moving into God's best in your new life?

Prayer

Pray that each person can find meaning in each day. Pray for each that if life seems meaningless, they have the strength and courage to pursue something of meaning.

Chapter 10: A New Faith: God's answer, "I knew it all along." God moves from Good to Grand

Bible review Ecc 12:7 Luke 16:22-31, 23:43, Philippians 1:23, II Cor 5:8, Rev 6: 9-11 John 3:16
Romans 11: 33-36

Discussion While we know some facts about heaven, there is much we do not know. What DO we know about heaven? What DO we know about life and death?

Recognize that there is much we DO NOT know about heaven, life, and death. It is into this space that our faith grows.

Personal application

Write on a piece of paper your unanswered questions today. (Yes, this is a private exercise.) Only if you are comfortable talking about these questions, share them with the group.

These unknowns will be the source of your new 'muscle for life.'
Be sure to record when God answers these unknowns. Record how those challenges changed YOU. Save and review on hard days.

Prayer. Pray for each other that your faith grow so that you can have peace, whether you receive answers to your questions or not.