



## WOMEN'S SMALL GROUP CONTENT

### FANTASY BY BETTY CHURCHILL • CHAPTER EXCERPT

Fantasy is a collection of insights from several contributing writers, about all the stuff women talk about and some they don't, but should. Sex, dating, relationships, the "m" word (not marriage, the other one), but, of course, we talk about marriage, too, as well as the beautiful people, the need to be in control and how God, Jesus and the Spirit fit into it all.

Like its male counterpart, Flesh, Fantasy is divided into three sections: small group discussion material, topical articles, and a month of daily devotionals.

Partial List of Topics: Masturbation, How Far is Too Far, The Role of Fathers, Confession-Forgiveness, Community, Filling of the Spirit, Cosmetic Surgery, Worship, Singleness, Faith, Homosexuality, Why Wait?, Body/Self Image, and Pornography.

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"Get Your Group On" ... (Trying too hard)...  
"Groupies" ... (Too retro)...  
"Groupers" ... (That's a type of fish and it's too close to  
"gropers", which is interesting, but inappropriate) so...

# Small Groups

*(how very uninspired)*

I'm going to guess that it would not be too difficult for you to gather a bunch of women to talk about men, sex, and dating on a regular basis. You may already have a group that does just that—your Bible study or roommates or sorority sisters—whatever. Why not be intentional about your discussions?

I truly believe that experiencing life as God intended it is impossible on your own. Apart from a collection of people who are committed to following Christ and living life together, we miss out on opportunities to grow and express our faith. We need each other to love, serve, encourage, speak truth, and spur one another on. These studies are intended for you to do just that with a group of friends. If you don't have a

community, this is your chance to create one. Start taking applications now. I know it may seem overwhelming to start your own small group, but as I've often said, women's small-group success is when you laugh really hard and/or somebody cries. That won't take much, I promise. My hope is that these studies give you some structure and permission to get into each others' lives while each of you falls more in love with Jesus in the process.

Now, I also realize that there are quite a few questions for each study, and women being women, you may not get to all of them in the time allowed. So I'd suggest that whoever is facilitating the group go through ahead of time and pick out the questions she wants to be sure to cover, based on the needs of your group. There are answers in the back, but due to limited time, space, and caffeine drained from thousands of glasses of iced tea, they are brief. Many answers leave quite a bit of room for further discussion and additional passages and resources. So feel free to expound upon what we've started.

These studies are loosely tied to the articles, but not all the articles are connected to a study. So be sure you don't miss any juicy little nugget of wisdom or insight offered by our oh-so-wise contributors.

Lastly, I have this thought: the Bible would be whole lot different if it had been written by women. Men in general just record the basic, straight-up facts, and we have to assume much of the other elements. If women had written the Bible, there would be much less left to the imagination and much less confusion. We'd know what color their tunics were, what things smelled like, who was there and their relationship to one another, and most importantly, the tone and demeanor and full context in which things were communicated. Granted, the Bible would be twice as long, but it would be just that much more insightful (much like this book relative to its masculine counterpart, *Flesh*).

So, my point is this: ...I don't really have one. Just that.

## Study 1: Quenched Wants and Needs

Related Articles: Why Should You, What Bride Magazine Won't Tell you

When you think about life right now, and then five, ten, or fifteen years down the road, what do you hope for and dream about? What do you want in order to be fulfilled in your life? What are the things that each of your dreams has in common? Why do you think you share those things in common?

Read John 4:3-29.

1. Why does Jesus ask her for a drink?
2. Why was it surprising that Jesus would speak with the woman?
3. The sixth hour, by the Jewish clock, is noon. Why do you think she was there at noon?
4. What is Jesus really offering her by referring to "living water"?

5. Every woman is thirsty. In context, what was this woman thirsty for, and how had she tried to meet her thirst?

6. In what way have you sought to find life in relationships? Or what other things do you rely on for satisfaction?

7. Specifically, how have they left you thirsty?

8. With at least five previous relationships, and now in a sixth, she is obviously caught in cycle. How does this cycle work? What keeps women coming back?

9. When Jesus puts His finger on the issue, the woman changes the subject. Why would a woman be uncomfortable with being confronted on this particular issue?

10. In what ways have you seen Jesus meet your thirsts?

11. In what ways are you still thirsty? What do you do with those yearnings?

12. Describe how Jesus interacted with the woman—His tone and demeanor?

13. If Jesus came into the room where you are right now, how do you think He would approach and interact with you, and you with Him?

14. Jesus offers Himself to her as the substitute for her thirst and string of men. Does your spiritual life reflect that Jesus is your substitute or a means to get the relationship you seek?

## Study 2: Sex Offenders Purity

Related Articles: I Gave My Word to Stop at Third, Adam Bomb, My Own Worst Enemy, The M Word

When it comes to the physical aspect of a dating relationship, how far is too far? What is the general consensus about this among your peers? What are some of the reasons or thinking you've heard others give for determining their standards in this area?

Read Matthew 5:27-28.

T: What is Jesus trying to communicate, exactly? Is thinking about it just as bad as doing it?

2. Reversing the gender roles and applying Jesus's teaching to women, what does lust usually look like for women? When, and/or in what situations, are you tempted to lust?

3. This passage is addressing adultery—having sex with another person's spouse. Do you think the same principle would apply to fornication—sex outside marriage?

4. What do you think is the intent behind Jesus's clarifying of the law, expanding His listeners' understanding of the definitions?

Read 1 Thessalonians 4:1-12.

5. Where are the two occurrences of the phrase "more and more" found? What does this tell you about Paul's primary purpose in writing these words?

6. Read again verses 3-5 and define the following words:

- sanctified
- sexual immorality
- passionate lust
- heathen

7. What are the specific challenges of our culture to remaining pure until marriage? Do you think we have it better, worse, or the same as others? What is the most difficult of all these factors?

8. Honoring God by controlling our bodies is a consistent theme in Paul's letters. Look up the following verses and record what they say on this issue:

- Romans 6:19
- Romans 12:1
- 1 Corinthians 6:13-20
- 1 Corinthians 9:24-27

9. What insights do these passages give you with regard to 1 Thessalonians 4:3-6?

10. Verse 6 says to not wrong your brother. How does sexual immorality wrong, or steal from, another brother (or sister)?

11. Imagine you are married and are having a discussion with your spouse concerning his sexual involvement before marriage. At what level of physical involvement will you begin to feel that someone has taken something from you?

12. How important do you feel it is to go back and apologize to people you have sexually wronged?

13. In verses 6-8, what further motivations to remain sexually pure do you see? In verse 8, why do you think Paul adds the parenthetical phrase "who gives you His Spirit"?

14. Why do you think God wants us to remain sexually pure until marriage?

15. In dating relationships, what levels of physical involvement do you think are clearly off-limits? What do you think is allowable? What are some of the gray areas?

16. How have you arrived at your standard?

17. Paul speaks about greeting other Christians with a "holy kiss" (Romans 16:16; 1 Corinthians 16:20). Some have suggested the principle of the holy kiss for dating relationships—showing physical affection with a commitment to not cause sexual arousal. It moves away from a standard of "What can I get away with?" or "How can I avoid all contact?" and asks, rather, "How can I physically express affection without sexually arousing either myself or my partner?" How do you feel about this as a guideline?

18. For you, personally, what are your reasons for pursuing sexual purity? Set aside a page in your journal and write out your guidelines, your reasons

for wanting to remain sexually pure, and a prayer of commitment.

## Study 3: Getting Back Together Forgiveness and Restoration

Related Articles: The Beauty of Forgiveness, The Place of Faith, Spirit Filled

Of all of the sins we commit, nothing makes us feel more guilty than sexual sin. Why do you think that is?

Read John 8:1-11.

1. Obviously, there were two people involved. But only the woman is exposed. Why is there consistently a double standard for women?

2. Do you think God requires more of women than of men in exercising sexual restraint?

3. The woman obviously feels shame for what she had done. Write down on a piece of paper those things that have been the greatest source of shame for you.

4. Verses 4-6 mention that the religious leaders are hoping to trap Jesus. How does this form a trap for Jesus?

5. If convicted, the woman would have been stoned. In areas of shame, there is both a fear of judgment and a desire for it. Why?

6. In verse 7 Jesus says, "If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her." What might Jesus's motivations be for phrasing this statement the way He does?

7. Jesus writes on the ground with His finger twice. What significance might there be in Jesus writing with His finger as the law of Moses is discussed?

8. Jesus says, "Neither do I condemn you." I think we all know this is true for us, and yet somehow it is difficult to feel it on the emotional level as this woman must have. What have you found helpful in emotionally processing the truth of Christ's forgiveness?

9. Jesus tells the woman to go and leave her life of sin. Why would He tell her to do so?

10. So, what happens if she does sin again? Can we leave a life and then return, and is forgiveness still there?

Read John 21:15-24.

Often, because of our past sin, we feel that God can't use us to minister to others. But we see from Peter's case that restoration is possible, no matter how we've transgressed, sexually or otherwise. Peter, the cornerstone of the church, sinned hugely. He denied Jesus outright three times, even after being warned (John 18). It doesn't get much worse than that. But Jesus still had great plans for him.

11. The most obvious question is, why does Jesus ask Peter three times, "Do you love me?" Is this a rebuke or an opportunity for confession?

12. Why does Jesus ask Peter if he loves Him "more than these"?

13. What are the essential components of confessing our sin? If we are forgiven due to Christ's death, why do we need to confess our sins?

14. What role does faith play in feeling forgiven?

15. Rationalizing, vowing to never commit the same sin again, and berating ourselves all are human attempts to feel forgiven. How?

16. How is each a betrayal of faith?

17. It takes great courage for Peter to hear the painful truth from Jesus. It has been said that courage, or the lack of it, is what keeps us from repenting, growing in holiness, and feeling forgiven. Do you agree? If so, why? What was the most painful truth you've had to hear about yourself?

18. Earlier, you wrote a list of things you were ashamed of. How has that list affected your relationship with God? Take that list and, if you haven't already done so, go through the process of confession: Talk to God and own the sin; acknowledge that it was wrong. Thank God for His forgiveness. Turn from it and let it go. Ask the Spirit to be in control of this area of your life so that you might "leave your life of sin" (verse 11). After praying through those steps, write 1 John 1:9 across the paper, then tear it up and throw it away.

## Study 4: Bride by Design Self Worth

Related Articles: M.A.C. and the Knife, Body Temple

If you could create the perfect soul mate for yourself, what would he be like and look like?

Read Colossians 1:16.

1. What do you think it means that you were created by Christ, through Him, and for Him?
2. What are the things that are uniquely you? What do you wish were different about your body or your personality and nature?
3. What difference does it make for you to know that Jesus created you exactly like you are for Himself, for His own purposes?
4. How could God use those things to glorify Himself?

5. Throughout Scripture, the metaphor of the bride is used for Israel and for the church. Isaiah speaks of God rejoicing over us in the same way that a bridegroom rejoices over his bride (Isaiah 62:5). How does a bridegroom rejoice over, or delight in, his bride?

6. How do you imagine that translates to Jesus rejoicing over you?

Read Psalm 139:13-16.

7. What does it mean that you are "fearfully and wonderfully made"?

8. How do you reconcile this verse with someone who has serious health issues or birth defects or even with things about your body that are not attractive?

9. Verse 14 says, "I know that full well" (another version says I know that "in my soul"), speaking of the fact that all God's works are wonderful. What do you think it means to know something full well, or in your soul, as opposed to just knowing it?

10. Does knowing in your soul that your body is a wonderful creation by Christ and for Him influence how you care for your body? Your eating habits? Rest? Exercise?

11. Is there any freedom or comfort or hope in the fact that all your days have been planned specifically for you before one of them came to be?

12. Take time to do exactly what verse 14 speaks of—praise God because you are fearfully and wonderfully made. In your journal, make a list of those things that are uniquely you—physically, personality, giftedness, even weaknesses and write a prayer of thanksgiving for those things. Take note of how God has used those things to build character, draw you to Himself, or help others.

## Study 5: Gripes, Complaints, and Compliments

### Worry and Distraction

Related Articles: [Waiting Room](#), [All Worship](#)

Describe your relationship with God.

Read Luke 10:38-42.

1. Why is Martha so upset and frustrated?

2. Read John 11:17-44. Combining that with the passage in Luke, describe the basic temperaments or personalities of the two women: Mary and Martha. (Notice in Luke who owns the home.)

3. Who do you identify with more: Mary or Martha? Why?

4. What are the strengths of being a “Martha” in life? What are the weaknesses?

5. Having lost her focus on the Lord, and having been consumed with worry, Martha lashes out and blames her sister when, according to Jesus, it was her own poor choice that is the problem. What are the common results you experience when you lose your focus on God? Who or what do you blame when your life becomes chaotic or doesn’t go your way?

6. When have you found yourself recently in a state of Martha-like worry? What distracts you from devotion to Christ?

7. In verse 42, how does Jesus refocus Martha’s perspective?

8. In verse 41, the passage more literally reads, “Mary has chosen the better portion.” Look up the

following verses and record what background they give concerning Jesus’s use of the word “portion.”

- Numbers 18:28-29
- Psalm 73:26
- Lamentations 3:24

9. One of the uses of “portion” is as daily food, which provides energy, focus, and motivation. What other things can become your “food source”?

10. In what way could you say that Jesus is your daily portion?

11. Briefly read through Luke 11:1-13. It is not accidental that Luke puts this story next. What things do you see in Jesus’s teaching on prayer that could help Martha regain a proper focus?

12. List some practical ways for you to deal with distractions and maintain your connection with Jesus.

## Study 6: Lies that Bind Believing Lies

Related Articles: Conflicts of Interest, God Fathers

Have you ever believed something that later on you found out was not true? Had you made decisions or acted on that false information? Describe the situation.

Read Luke 4:1-13.

1. Why does Satan choose this time to attack Jesus?
2. When are you most vulnerable to believing lies?
3. Jesus is tempted to meet His needs in a way that God had not sanctioned (verses 3-4). What area is the most difficult for you to wait on God and not provide for yourself?
4. The temptation to take a shortcut to the cross was a real one (verses 5-6). Satan never shoots blanks. Write out five lies you are most prone to believe about yourself and others.

5. Sometimes women's lies follow familiar patterns. Nancy Leigh DeMoss lists these lies as some of the most common women believe:

- God doesn't love me.
- God should fix my problems.
- I can't help the way I am.
- I should not have to live with unfulfilled longings.
- I can sin and get away with it.
- I can make it without consistent time in the Word and in prayer.
- I have to have a husband to be happy.
- If I feel something, it must be true.
- If my circumstances were different, I would be different.
- I shouldn't have to suffer.

Which of these are you most prone to believe?

6. What are some Scripture passages to combat the lies you believe?
7. Jesus audibly speaks the scriptural truth in response to Satan's lies (verse 8). Do you think there is any value in quoting Scripture and speaking the truth out loud or in a group? If so, what is it?
8. When you shared what lies you believe, why do you think it made you feel better?

9. The truth of Scripture is obviously the major way we combat lies. How else can we use truth as a defense?

10. Sometimes believing a lie is a journey that starts with small steps that move away from the truth. In what ways do you begin to migrate from the truth?

11. Jesus is tempted by Satan to ask God to prove His love and faithfulness, yet Jesus sees this as testing God (verse 9). Why?

12. One of the most common lies we believe is that God doesn't really love me as an individual. What are some legitimate ways to seek assurance of God's love for you, and what are not?

13. Spend some time journaling ways that you know that God loves you personally as well as addressing any of the other lies that you struggle with.

# Study 7:

## Group Date

### Community and Accountability

Related Articles: Love Story, part 2

Share something vulnerable about yourself that you have never shared with anyone before. Afterward, discuss: How did that feel? What were the risks involved?

We know from Mark's account that when Jesus sent the disciples out to preach, heal, and cast out demons, He sent them out in pairs (Mark 6:7). Jesus knew the wisdom of community.

Read Ecclesiastes 4:9-12.

1. According to this passage, what are the benefits of living life with close friends alongside you? What are the negative consequences of living in isolation?

2. Can you think of a time in your life when you had to fend for yourself and when having a friend come alongside you really might have helped you? Can you think of a time when a friend *did* come

alongside you during a difficult time? What did she do? How did she help you?

3. What causes people to isolate themselves? What causes you to isolate yourself from others?

4. In your experience, do media outlets (movies, music, computers, and so on) relieve isolation or increase it?

5. The opposite of isolation is accountability and community. On a scale from 1 to 10, how would you rate your experience of community? Of isolation?

6. Verse 12 says that "a cord of three strands is not quickly broken." It is thought that the three strands in the cord represent two friends plus God. What is the benefit of having Christian community, specifically? How would you define Christian community?

7. Why are we drawn toward community?

8. What does healthy community look like?

9. The twelve-step Alcoholics Anonymous program was founded on Christian principles. Most people who make it through the program cite step five as the most critical one. It states: "Admit to God, to

ourselves and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs." Step five is essentially James 5:16: "Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed." With whom can you, or do you, share the exact nature of your wrongs?

10. The term used for Christian friendships that help one another in an area of life (such as sexual purity) is *accountability*. What does *accountability* mean?

11. What sorts of things might you do to hold one another accountable?

12. It has been said that a true accountability partner models both grace and truth. What do you think this means? Who models this for you?

13. Do you tend to be more grace oriented or more truth oriented?

14. Hebrews 10:24 says, "Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds."

Who could you spur on? List three things you could do that would spur a friend on to love and good deeds.

15. Are you part of a healthy community of Christ followers? What is your part in creating and maintaining that community?

## Study 8: Love Connection Commitment

Related Articles: Love Story, part 1

How would you define love?

Read Luke 9:57-62.

1. Here are some common phrases spoken in wedding vows: "in sickness and in health," "forsaking all others," "till death do you part." What similarities do you see between these vows and this passage? What is Jesus really asking?

2. If love is measured by its duration, priority, and willingness to sacrifice, in what way do you feel that your love for Jesus is lacking and/or growing?

3. How has Jesus proven His love and commitment to us? In what ways have you personally experienced and internalized His love for you? Read John 14:21-24.

4. According to Jesus, what is evidence of your love for Him?

5. What is His promise for those who love Him?

6. It has been said that many Christians would rather date Jesus than marry Him. What do you think is meant by that?

7. The literal difference between dating and marriage is obvious. But emotionally, how do they feel different?

8. In dating, we are often trying to impress. In what ways are you still trying to perform for God?

9. When you think of a marriage that is successful, what would you say is the key ingredient?

10. Stagnancy is the death knell of a relationship. In what ways have you felt your marriage to Christ becoming stagnant? How have you tried to introduce life and passion into your relationship with Him?

11. Sometimes married couples renew their vows in the course of their relationship. Reread the passages and review the things you've learned about Jesus and His character and nature throughout this study. As you've learned more about who He is and what a marriage commitment involves, write your own vows to recommit to your relationship with Him: Sign and date it.

# LEADER'S GUIDE

## SMALL GROUP ANSWER GUIDE

### Study 1: Quenched Satisfaction

**Opening questions:** Share some of your own examples to get the group going. Our dreams share common threads because we have similar core needs and desires.

1. It seems to be an attempt to engage her in a spiritual discussion. The vulnerability of asking her for something opens a dialogue in which the conversation would have, under normal conditions, been one sided.

2. Religious leaders of the day did not address women, as they were seen as second-class citizens. Jews certainly would not have talked with a Samaritan.

3. The time to get water would have been at a cooler point in the day. Her going at this time probably hints at the fact that she is a social outcast. The Jews deemed all Samaritans to be social outcasts, so she is an outcast among outcasts.

4. He is offering a spiritual solution to her real problem, her true thirsts.

5. She is obviously thirsty to be loved and known. She has sought to meet that thirst through a succession of empty and unsuccessful relationships with men.

6. Share as a group. Be as vulnerable as you can and set the pace for the group.

7. Share as a group.

8. The cycle can vary, but unlike "living water," it's more like saltwater. The more you drink, the

thirstier you get. You come to a relationship for love, security, and acceptance, and when the relationship doesn't work out, you feel even more unloved, less secure, even rejected. You leave thirstier or needier than when you began, creating not simply a desire for another relationship but a need for one.

9. Because of the stigma attached. Nothing summarizes failure like a string of broken relationships, and nothing says "immorality" like living together.

10. You are not looking for any specific answer.

11. Share as a group.

12. Jesus is extremely honest and genuinely interested in this woman's life and well-being. He is not put off by her sin. He engages in her attempts at sidetracking the discussion.

13. Have the group share. Don't be afraid to ask "Why?" as people share their thoughts.

This is really the heart of the study, as it is meant to diagnose where people are getting their "water" and what their "water" is.

14. We all come to Jesus with our thirst. But do we treat Him as the object of our thirst or simply as the vehicle to get what we really thirst for: relationships? If it is the latter, we are no better off than the woman.

## Study 2: Sex Offenders Purity

**Opening questions:** These are just to get the group going; they are not looking for any specific answers. But the discussion should lead to a greater realization that women's standards are often far from biblical.

1. Our motives and thoughts are important. Sin occurs in the heart first.

2. You're not looking for any specific answer, and you might get several different responses ranging from "Just like men" to more relational fantasies. Be willing to share first to get the ball rolling.

3. Yes, sexual immorality is biblically defined as sexual relations outside the confines of a monogamous heterosexual marriage. The adultery principle, then, is about having sex with someone who does not belong to you. (If a man is not your spouse now, he probably will be someone else's spouse eventually.)

4. Jesus's intent is to show that sexual sin and its ramifications don't just begin at intercourse, but rather they begin with our thought life and heart attitude. By this expanded definition, Jesus makes it clear that we're all sinners.

5. "More and more" is found in verse 1 ("live to please God") and verse 10 ("Love each other"). He encourages his readers by saying that they are doing well, but he says they could excel still more. He desires to see them makes steps of continued growth.

6. *Sanctified* means "to be made holy." *Sexual immorality* is a general term referring to anything that deviates from God's design for sex. *Passionate lust* is a lust that has been cultivated and has become a large sexual appetite. It also speaks of unbridled desire. *Heathen* are the nonreligious, the godless.

7. Specific challenges might include the Internet, pornographic movies and lyrics, as well as the late age at which we tend to marry in our culture. There is no right answer for the next two questions.

8. Have the group look up the verses and summarize.

9. A key thought is that our bodies are the temples of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, we have a responsibility to keep our bodies pure from sexual immorality. Our bodies belong to God.

10. Someday a man with whom you've been intimate may get married and belong to another. Sexual immorality, from this perspective, is like robbery—taking something that doesn't belong to you.

11. Discuss. (It might be nothing more than a kiss.)

12. This is just for discussion. There are pros and cons to engaging an ex-boyfriend on this issue. It might be best left alone.

13. The phrase contains a warning and an exhortation to be holy. This imperative to be holy, coupled with Paul's reminder that God gives us His Holy Spirit, seems to be a reminder that we are to remember that the Spirit indwells our bodies,

making sexual impurity unthinkable (hopefully). Also, it is the Spirit who gives us the power to remain pure.

14. It is how God designed sex, and therefore, how it works best. Sex is a degree of intimacy best protected by the commitments of marriage. It also reflects our relationship with God, which is purity and intimacy reserved for God alone.

15. Give people the freedom to discuss this. Basically, anything that begins to cause sexual arousal is stepping over the line of lust.

16. This is for discussion, but look to see whether people have used the Scriptures to inform their standard.

17. You are hoping there might be some consensus on this, and perhaps as a group, you could make this your standard.

18. You might share something you've done or written as an example.

## Study 3: Getting Back Together Forgiveness and Restoration

**Opening question:** Part of the answer may be cultural: sexual sins bring the most condemnation. It might be physical, something about the raw and fleshly nature of the act. And last, sex involves a deep part of us. Failure in this area seems to go right to our core.

1. There is no right answer. Let the group discuss.
2. There is no biblical passage that states this—both are accountable. But there is the principle of stewardship: of her to whom has been given, much is required. If women's sexual drive were less than men's (a far from proven fact), then they might have greater responsibility. Without hard facts, it is simply an interesting issue to discuss.
3. Discuss as a group and pray for sensitivity.
4. The Law of Moses stated that a woman caught in adultery was to be stoned. If Jesus had said, "Let her go," He would be breaking the Mosaic

law. Israel was under Roman occupation, and as such the Jewish leaders were not allowed to carry out capital punishment. So, on the other hand, if Jesus said, "Stone her," He could be breaking the Roman law and making Himself subject to execution.

5. There is often a natural desire to be free, coupled with self-loathing.

6. Perhaps this is an opportunity to self-reflect and an open door for repentance.

7. The Old Testament states that the law was written by the "finger of God" (Ex. 31:18). And here we find Jesus writing in the ground with His finger. Here is the author of the law that they have come to trap by the law.

8. Have the group share. Sometimes there are creative ideas that help us to digest God's forgiveness.

9. Jesus tells her to leave her life of sin because He knows how destructive it is both for her and for others involved. He doesn't hate sin for the sake of hating it; He hates sin because it's so damaging to those He loves.

## Study 4: Bride by Design Self Worth

**Opening question:** The first question is to identify with Christ in His abilities—to be able to create a person who would connect with you and accomplish your purposes.

1. As far as being created by Him and through Him, there is evidence through this and other passages that Jesus's primary role in Creation was to carry out the plans and direction of the Father (John 1:3; 1 Corinthians 8:6; Hebrews 1:12). As far as being for Him, the sole reason for our existence is to glorify Christ (in other words, it's not about you; it's all about Him).

2. We all have things that we like about ourselves and things we wish we could change. Go around and share one of each. Be careful to distinguish between things that are physical characteristics, personality, gifts, and so on, and things that really are sin issues. For example, someone may wish she wasn't so critical all the time. Really, that's not so much a personality thing as a sin habit. It may actually be that she has the gift of prophecy or discernment but she has not learned to use that gift in the power of the Spirit.

10. There is clearly a time when we come to Christ and leave our old life behind. This does not mean we never fall back into such sins. But the trajectory of our new life as a whole moves in a different direction.

11. Jesus repeats the question three times because Peter denied him three times. This is an opportunity for confession, to repeat "I love you" for every time he had denied it. It is important to see that Jesus is helping Peter to feel forgiven and restored, not rubbing salt in a wound.

12. Just prior to his betrayal, Peter claimed that even if all the disciples would fall away, he would not (Matt 26:33). Peter was claiming a greater level of commitment. Here, Jesus is reminding him that his true failure was not the denial but the pride that precipitated it.

13. The essential components include acknowledging that we have sinned, acknowledging that Jesus's death has paid for our sin and that all is forgiven, and then turning from sin to God in repentance. While sin does not hinder our relationship with God, just as in a family, it hinders fellowship.

14. We can confess our sin, but if we don't trust in God's Word and His incredible mercy, we will still feel that He is angry with us. We must believe that what the Bible says is true.

15. All are human ways to aid us in feeling forgiven: trusting in our ability to obey in the future; minimizing the sin so it will be easier for God to forgive; or berating ourselves to help pay for the sin.

16. These are alternatives to faith, which chooses to believe that we are forgiven because of Christ no matter what we've done.

17. A major reason we do not grow in holiness is because we don't have the courage to hear painful truth about ourselves from God, our conscience, or others. When we filter out hurtful truth, we spare ourselves pain. But that pain is the needed fuel of repentance. Repentance, in turn, leads to growth. True repentance also helps us to feel forgiven.

18. Have the group follow the exercise. Say that this is one way to help yourself metabolize the forgiveness that's yours. Some additional passages about forgiveness and restoration include Psalm 32, Psalm 103:12, Isaiah 38:17, and Romans 8:1.

3. Discuss. There are no right answers.

4. Maybe a person tends to be loud and gregarious. She could use that to gather people to help build community. Maybe a person has bad acne scars or some other imperfection. Those are the types of things that God allows so that He can meet you in your personal pain, to connect with Him more intimately and He can be more manifest in your character.

5. A bridegroom delights in every aspect of his bride—in her appearance, her quirkiness, her gifts and personality, her imperfections, her character. He longs to be with her, to look at her. He carries a picture with him always. He delights in showing her off. He wants to talk with her, share his life with her, and be a part of her life. He wants to know everything about her and be known by her.

6. The answers should be the same as above. Discuss whether it is easy or difficult to believe that's true.

7. "Fearfully" means "with awe and reverence." God made you with intent and purpose, and you are a wonderful creation.

8. The problem with imperfections and deformities and disease is the problem of evil in the world. Why does God allow it? He can redeem even what is the result of sin in the world and bring glory to Himself through it, perhaps by drawing people to Himself, by bringing healing at some point, or by using it to help other people.

9. It's the difference between head knowledge and heart knowledge. When you know something in your soul, you know it experientially. You know it emotionally. You are more fully convinced.

10. Discuss. This could be a good opportunity to bring up issues with food. In any group of college women, chances are strong that someone in the group struggles with an eating disorder.

11. Discuss. There's no specific answer. But it should come out that it gives you a sense of purpose in life. You and your life have been intentionally planned (Ephesians 2:10).

12. Do on your own. But if the group is comfortable, they could share some of their praises and ways God has used those things to glorify Himself.

## Study 5 : Gripes, Complaints and Compliments Worry and Distractions

**Opening question:** Let the group discuss. If people are having a hard time describing their relationship, suggest using only three or four adjectives to describe it.

1. She's upset that Mary is not helping her, that Mary gets to be spending time with Jesus, and perhaps that she is not getting done all she had hoped to.

2. Mary is reserved, more passive, and perhaps quiet. Martha seems more extroverted, has a take-charge personality, and is bold—a leader.

3. Discuss.

4. As in the story of Lazarus, Martha does not settle for the status quo. She initiates and gets things done. Marthas accomplish a lot. The negatives can be having a lack of sensitivity and being prone to become too busy and driven.

5. There are no right answers. You're simply looking for people to identify when and how they experience stress and worry.

6. Discuss.

7. The emphasis upon many things is in contrast to the one thing she has failed to do: spend time with Jesus. Jesus plainly tells her she has focused on the wrong thing.

8. "Portion" can refer to a tithe, which in context speaks of giving to the Lord the first part of our time. "Portion" can also refer to food: Jesus is our sustenance, our power source, our energy and motivation.

9. Busyness, cell phones, activities, coffee, to-do lists, e-mail, music—all these provide energy, a buzz of life. But we run ahead, over commit, run out of energy, and then, like Martha, we start looking for someone to blame—why aren't other people doing their jobs or working hard enough?

10. Discuss.

11. If Martha were to show the same persistence in prayer as in other effort, much more might happen. Reliance upon God to provide our needs. Expectancy that God will intervene and act on our behalf. As we pray in these ways, we go about the work of the kingdom in the right way, not running ahead and trying to do stuff for God, but walking with Him, reliantly, expectantly, persevering in prayer as much as in daily effort.

12. Have the group share what they've written down.

## Study 6: Lies that Bind Believing Lies

**Opening questions:** Discuss as a group.

1. Jesus is hungry and physically needy and therefore vulnerable. Satan makes use of our physical, emotional, and mental vulnerability.

2. Discuss as a group.

3. You are not looking for a right answer, but in asking the question, you are clarifying that a component of temptation is meeting our needs in a way that is outside God's plan.

4. Have people share with the group.

5. Discuss. You might ask follow-up questions: In what ways do these lies affect you? On a scale from 1 to 10, how powerfully do you feel them?

6. Have the group share. (You might spend some time before the study writing down some passages to common lies.)

7. You aren't looking for a "correct" answer. It might be a new idea for some that may be of

benefit. There also may be some biblical support in that “faith comes through hearing the word of God” and that many times the Scriptures encourage the public reading of Scripture. (Romans 10:17)

8. An application of truth is bringing falsehood out of the darkness and into the light. In essence, that’s what took place. Lies lose power when they are exposed.

9. Speak truthfully. Don’t manipulate. Be honest about our lives and feelings. Confess our sins to others. Avoid falsehood of any kind.

10. Have everyone share.

11. It is an attempt to manipulate God, using love as the leverage to get what is wanted. It dictates to God the means by which He is to show His love. Testing God involves satisfying a doubt about His love, not affirming our faith in His love.

12. Discuss.

13. You might read a page from your journal as an example to the group.

## Study 7: Group Date Community and Accountability

**Opening questions:** as the leader be prepared to share first and create a comfortable environment for vulnerability. They can share funny things or more serious things. Think of some questions to prompt their thinking.

1. Benefits of friends: We are more productive when working with a friend (verse 9). Friends pick us up when we fall, physically, emotionally, or spiritually (verse 10). Friends keep us “warm” (verse 11). Friends can help defend us from attack (verse 12). Negative consequences of isolation: There’s no one there to pick us up when we fall (verse 10). We won’t be able to keep “warm” (verse 11). We might be overpowered when we are attacked (verse 12).

2. Discuss.

3. Among other things, people have hurt us in the past, relationships take effort, and people can become annoying. To get the group talking, share your own reasons for why you isolate yourself.

4. The media make us momentarily less conscious of our isolation and boredom, but ultimately, they increase both.

5. This is just for discussion.

6. Among other things, other Christians can point us to the truth of God and are able to pray for us. Christian community is a place where we are encouraged to walk with God and where we are known by others. It is also a place where we get and give encouragement and learn about God.

7. This is just an exercise. People might end up saying all kinds of ridiculous things, which is quite all right. It still serves the point that there is enjoyment and life in being known.

8. Among other things, it involves biblical teaching, encouragement, honesty, and prayer.

9. The focus of 1 John 1:9 is confessing to God and *being cleansed*. The focus of James 5:16 is confessing to *others* and *getting better*.

10. All of us will have to give an account someday before God. Relationships of accountability are ones where we've chosen to "give account to," to agree to disclose our lives in total honesty. These relationships provide strength, prayer, help, and encouragement and ultimately enable us to give a good account before God.

11. E-mail or IM one another at night to keep each other accountable while on the computer. Meet regularly to discuss sexual struggles. Decide together on certain practices and standards to guard purity.

12. Grace is expressing unconditional forgiveness. Truth means we ask difficult question, such as "What will you do differently so that this doesn't happen again?" Truth is upholding standards, while grace grants forgiveness if standards are violated.

13. People will tend more to one side or the other.

14. Have the group share what they've listed.

15. Discuss.

## Study 8: Love Connection Commitment

**Opening question:** Start your discussion with defining love, both as the world defines it and as God defines it. You could add to the discussion by asking, how do you know someone loves you?

1. Wedding vows are a commitment to persevere through all circumstances, to prioritize that relationship above all others, and to commit for life. Jesus tested this person's commitment level similarly. To follow Him may mean having no home—no place to lay one's head. It means prioritizing the gospel over everything else, and it means committing to follow Him for the long haul, without looking back. It's not just a seasonal commitment.

2. Discuss and share.

3. The obvious answer is the cross. Jesus gave His own life in exchange for ours. As marriage is for the long haul, so His commitment to us is an eternal commitment. Once we become a Christ follower, we are sealed with the Holy Spirit and cannot be lost (John 10:28-29). He chose us. He can only act in our best interests. He gives good gifts. Read Ephesians 1 and make a list of all that He's done on our behalf. Have people share how they've experienced these things personally in their lives.

4. Keeping His word, His commandments—basically, obedience.

5. He and the Father will make their home with you and He will disclose Himself to you and the Father will love you. I don't think that's implying a conditional love on the Father's part; I think it's more about our experience of the Father's love. In an experiential sense, the more we take steps of obedience out of love for the Father and Jesus, the more we understand their character and heart and the more we recognize their involvement in our lives. God does make Himself known to us more and more.

6. Often people want to find a religion or something that meets their need and makes them feel good about themselves more than they want to find truth. As in dating, they want to keep their options open in case something better comes along. There is little or no commitment involved. Marriage, on the other hand, is a commitment based on love for the spouse. It is not about having needs met as much as it is about giving your life to another person.

7. Dating is much more tentative and uncertain. There is a fear that the other person will leave you or fail you or hurt you. It feels more performance driven. You have to earn the other's love and admiration. It's an emotional roller coaster based on circumstances. Dating tends to be self-focused - is this right for me. Marriage is about sacrifice, giving yourself to another. A healthy marriage is secure. There's freedom to completely be yourself. There will be hurts and disappointment, but not with fear of abandonment. You know that you will work things out. Marriage is more stable and consistent in spite of circumstances.

8. Discuss and share.

9. Discuss and share, but trust is probably a foundational answer.

10. Discuss and share. Suggestions: Take a day with the Lord—just go somewhere with your Bible, pen, and journal and spend an extended period of time praying, worshiping, reading the Word, studying, journaling, and so on. Add variety to your daily time with the Lord: one day, write your own psalm; another, spend time meditating on a passage and journaling about how it applies to your life; another, go on a prayer walk. Have someone that you consistently talk to about your relationship with the Lord. If you are not doing so already, start praying for some specific things and keep track of how God answers. Share your ideas.

11. This is a culmination of this study. I hope that through these articles and study times you have fallen more in love with Jesus and want to love Him by honoring Him with every area of your life, especially the areas of sexual purity and dating relationships. Hopefully, you've built enough community in your group that you each feel the freedom to share your vows with each other. You may want to come up with vows as a group and sign them together.