

Book Study

Leader's Guide

By Joanna Weaver



I'm honored you have chosen *Having a Mary Spirit* as your ladies Bible study. There is nothing more fulfilling and life-changing than coming together as women around the Word of God.

I've received letters from seasoned women's ministry directors who have used my books as well as neighborhood Bible study leaders teaching for the very first time. All have pointed to the heart-to-heart interaction they experienced with their ladies as one of the most valuable parts of this study. Perhaps that's why I don't feel compelled to provide a chapter-by-chapter outline for teaching this book. Instead, I hope you'll find practical suggestions to help you start and lead a Bible study – and a good dose of encouragement as well!

For I believe as you are open to the leading of the Lord, He will equip you far better than any leader's guide, giving you both the creativity and the wisdom you need to mentor women in their walk of faith.

You don't have to have any special qualifications to lead this Bible study – just a heart that's hungry to know God, a desire to see women grow in grace, and a willingness to step out and see what God might want to do through you.

You can do this! For whom God appoints, He anoints. I believe in you, sweet sister, and I'm praying this will be as meaningful a time in your life as it is in the lives of your ladies.

So let's begin!

Promotion

After securing permission from your church (if needed), decide on a time and a place to hold the Bible study and then start getting the word out. If the study is held in a church, get your dates on the church calendar early. This study is designed to be fourteen weeks long, but because many churches run on a quarterly system, it is possible to combine several weeks to bring it down to twelve. [See Sidebar]

Next, reserve your room or rooms (depending on how many small groups you will have). This study tends to draw women of all ages. So try to provide childcare if possible and consider handicap accessibility needs. I've heard of groups ranging in age from 18 to 80 – isn't that great!

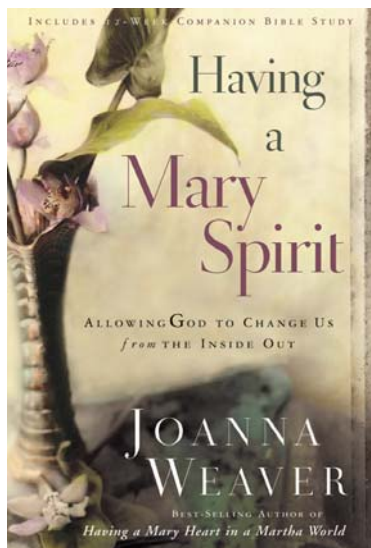
If you are unsure how many women might attend, it's a good idea to pass around a signup sheet. This will help determine how many books to order. Because you will want to have the books

Using This Study in a 12-Week Format

Due to the number of chapters and amount of material covered, I encourage group studies to use the fourteen-week format. But if you must distill fourteen weeks down to twelve, you will have to assign two chapters a week several times.

I suggest covering chapters 6 and 7 ("Dying to Live" and "A Willing Spirit") in week five, and chapters 8 and 9 ("Mind Control" and "Guarding the Wellspring") on week six. When combining weeks, choose one "Discussion and Reflection" question from each chapter and three from each "Going Deeper" section. Be sure to assign the questions the week before the chapters are to be discussed so the homework doesn't feel quite so daunting.

on hand at your introductory meeting, be sure to confirm the shipping time needed with your local Christian bookstore or an online dealer like www.christianbooks.com.



Start promoting the study at least a month before you plan to start. Ask to have an announcement placed on the church website and in the bulletin during the weeks prior to beginning. A postcard or letter inviting women a month before the study is a great personal touch, but be sure to use bulletin inserts and posters to build anticipation as well.

Many local newspapers and radio stations offer free public service announcements. Remember to include the what, when, and where aspects of the study as well as any pertinent information such as cost,

babysitting availability, and contact number for more information.

For those of you hosting a study in your home, a personal phone call or letter is a great way to invite women to attend. If you have room and feel comfortable expanding your study, encourage the women to bring a friend. This is a wonderful opportunity to minister to non-believers or those uncomfortable in a church setting.

Organizing Your Bible Study

There is no right or wrong way to format this study. Find the way that works best for your group of women.

Many studies start with a short devotional or teaching based on the lesson before breaking into small groups. This teaching responsibility may belong to one person or be shared between members of your leadership team. But other groups skip the teaching time, choosing to center their study around the nine questions in the back of the book.

Whether you lead the study in your living room or in a larger setting, I suggest keeping the actual discussion groups to 12 or less. This creates an intimate feel and ensures that everyone has a chance to share if she wishes. Each small group will need a facilitator – someone who can direct the flow of the discussion as well as draw quieter individuals into conversation. Having two co-facilitators is ideal – if one is absent the other can take her

place. But it also ensures that at least two people in the group are prepared to discuss that week's lesson.

Provide each leader a three-ring binder with an attendance sheet to take roll and another sheet listing attendees' names, phone numbers, addresses and birthdays. Include a copy of this guide in the back and tuck a few stamped postcards or pretty notes in the pocket so she can send a quick encouragement to absent or ill members. Name tags, especially in the early weeks, will help the entire group connect and get to know each other by name.

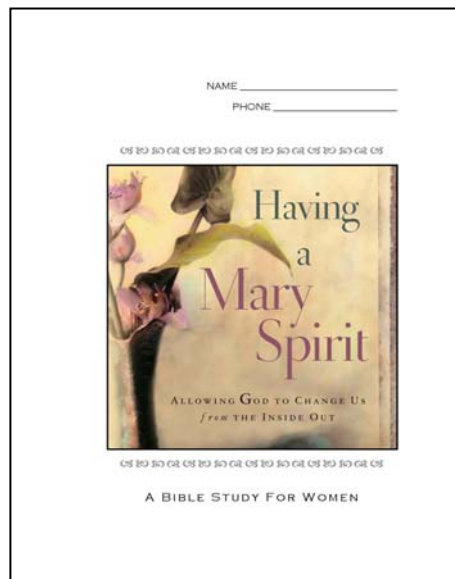
You may have a teaching situation such as a Sunday school class where dividing into small groups isn't an option. I would still encourage you to shape the class around discussion using the techniques I describe below to involve as many people as possible. Consider breaking up into small circles occasionally so members can get to know one another better.

Using This Study

Each week the women are assigned a chapter (or chapters) in the book to read. Then they are asked to answer eight questions from Appendix A in the book. Check out the downloadable workbook available on this website. It not only lists the questions, but also provides lines on which to write the answers.

This reproducible workbook can be copied, hole-punched and placed in a binder for each woman at a minimal cost. (I like buying binders at discount warehouses and slipping the decorative cover shown here in the see-through pocket.) Rather than shuffling between the book and a separate notebook, the ladies can keep everything in one place as well as any teaching notes you might provide.

The first two study questions are for "Discussion or Reflection." They are simple and easy to answer, designed to put everyone at ease and generate conversation. Though these



two questions probe a bit deeper as the study goes on, they provide women non-threatening opportunities to open their lives to one another and build community. Best of all, everyone can participate, even those who were unable to complete the entire study.

The next section is designed for “Going Deeper.” Its primary purpose is to get women into the Word of God for themselves. While I’m glad they are reading my book, I want them to fall in love with “The Book”!

Bible study may be new to many of your ladies. Though I’ve tried to make the “Going Deeper” section accessible for everyone, they may feel a bit overwhelmed. I know I did when I first began to use formal Bible studies. I wanted so badly to answer the questions just right, and I felt silly when I didn’t understand what the writer was getting at.

It is often at this point women stop coming to studies. Encourage your small group leaders to follow up with a phone call when someone misses a week. If a woman is feeling overwhelmed by the study questions, consider pairing her with a more experienced woman who is willing to walk through the questions together for a few weeks.

My deepest desire is that no woman is left behind! Remind your ladies that we are all learners and that they have a Teacher who promises to help them – the Holy Spirit. As they sit down to their personal study time each week, encourage them to pray and ask for the wisdom and revelation that comes from the Spirit (Ephesians 1:17). They don’t need to worry about answering the questions perfectly. As they get into the Word on a consistent basis, the Word will get into them! And that’s what all of us need. Not a sheet of neatly written, carefully worded answers, but the gentle work of God bringing soul-deep life-change.

Facilitating Small Groups

Many leaders tell me this book’s study questions teach themselves. As women begin to share what the Lord has taught them during the week, they learn from each other. The conversation simply needs guiding. Though I tend to be a lecturer by nature, I’m discovering that lives are more often changed in the context of relationship.

So here are some tips I’ve found helpful in leading small groups:

Tips for Leading Small Groups

- Ask God to give you a genuine love for each woman.
- Pray for them faithfully that they will make time for the study and that the Holy Spirit will enlighten their minds as they read and study the Word.
- Guide the conversation but don't monopolize it.
- Don't be threatened by silence. Women often need time to formulate their response. If you jump in with the answers, quieter members will sit back and never interact.
- Sometimes one member is more vocal than the others, to a point of hijacking the conversation. In those instances, be kind but don't be afraid to take back the helm. Ways to do this include thanking the person for her input but then asking if anyone else has a thought or interjecting a short insight of your own. When asking the next question, suggest that someone who hasn't had a chance to share speak up.
- To draw out quieter members, you may want to make gentle eye contact to invite their involvement. After someone has answered a question, address the quiet person by name and ask what she thinks. Don't push or demand, but provide an opportunity for everyone to be heard.
- When an answer is given that doesn't quite fit the question or the scriptural context, thank the participant and then ask if someone else has an answer.
- Sometimes opinions or answers will be given that are unscriptural, and at other times conversations may devolve into gossip or gripe sessions. At moments like these, I whisper a prayer for wisdom and then gently steer the conversation back on track. It isn't always necessary to correct the issue at that moment, but look for opportunities to bring truth to these situations – even if it is the following week.
- You can gently address a sidetracked topic in closing prayer or share a scripture. But above all, avoid arguing or making anyone look foolish. Present truth and let the Holy Spirit do the rest.

All these tips are important, but there will still be times when the conversation feels stilted. Especially when very few ladies have done their lesson.

At times like these, you as a facilitator need to be prepared. I've found it helpful to mark the questions I feel are most pertinent as I do my study. That way the group is certain to cover that material. On those tough, nobody's-prepared days, I point the group to these questions and read the scripture portion aloud, asking them to respond. While they may not have done the study at home, this gives them a taste of it in class.

Perhaps the most important question in the study is the final one each week: "What spoke most to you from this chapter?" This question almost always spurs great conversation, but when it is sparse, feel free to share your high point. You may also want to mark stories or illustrations in the chapter that would be good for discussion. If the group has extra time, read the section aloud in class and ask the women what they think.

Be Creative

I've enjoyed receiving letters about the creative things women have done to make their Bible study come alive. One group leader actually made mini teeter-totters for her women in the *Having a Mary Heart in a Martha World* study, to remind them to balance work and worship. Another had her ladies write down their burdens on rocks, then prayerfully discern which ones God would have them carry. Another gave out Snicker bars as a reminder not to fill up on empty spiritual calories. All of those ideas came from stories or illustrations I'd used in my first book.

Having a Mary Spirit may prod creative ideas in you as well. Laying a feather boa at the foot of a cross depicts death to Flesh Woman. Or you could stage an actual makeover of one of your ladies as you talk about entrusting our lives to the Master's hand. Or hand out facial product samples with the verse, "They looked to Him and were radiant" (Psalm 34:5) NKJV.

Some of you might say, "Joanna, I don't have a creative bone in my body." Well, that might be, dear sister, but remember, you serve an incredibly creative God! Don't be surprised when He starts dropping ideas in your heart, but look around you as well. I'm fairly certain you have creative women in your group who would love to use their gifts and come up with ways to make the study come alive.

It doesn't have to cost a lot of money, and I don't think you should try to come up with something every week. But if there is a way to bring home a point with a visual, I hope you'll try.

Be an Encourager

No one wants to fail. As study coordinator, provide support for your small group leaders by making sure rooms are clean and ready for class and that extra Bibles, pens or pencils are available. Little touches can mean a lot. I think it is also important to meet with your leaders each week before the study. While prayer is the primary purpose, it also gives the women a chance to share the trials and triumphs they are experiencing in their particular group. Be sure to dismiss early enough to allow the leaders to greet the arriving ladies or consider creating a separate committee to do the welcoming.

As coordinator, your small group leaders are the small group you minister to. Pray for them daily, follow up with phone calls to see how they are doing. When you come across materials that will help them lead their groups, pass the information on. These are the ladies you get to love! Be sure you make time at the end of the study to appreciate all they have done with a small gift and/or a luncheon in their honor. Ask the ladies in each group to write notes of appreciation to their leaders as well.

In closing, I want to exhort both you and your small group leaders not to be disappointed by attrition. What is that? It is the normal drop in attendance that often happens in a long-term study. While I am glad many churches have reported very low attrition with these studies, the reality is that some of the women who start the book may not finish.

There will be many reasons. Some will be things that we can and should address and try to change – their fear of failure, interpersonal conflicts or frustration with lack of structure. But other reasons will be beyond our control, including family issues and schedule changes. Some of the women may not be ready for the sustained commitment a twelve to fourteen week study requires.

I used to be discouraged by having fewer women at the end of a study than we started with, but then I realized I wasn't called to "grow" a study – I was called to mentor

women. If that meant starting with forty and ending with twenty-five, twenty-five more women were growing in their faith that might not have otherwise.

Mother Teresa once said, “God has not called me to be successful. He has called me to be faithful.” Our job is to create a community in which women can come to be fed. A place that is safe, where they feel loved and accepted. That kind of intimacy doesn’t happen overnight. It happens over months and years. Just keep opening up your heart. Keep putting out the food and praying down the presence of the Lord. God will do the rest. Because He loves to change women as they gaze intently into the Word that brings freedom and life (James 1:25).

Bless you, my dear sister. You will be in my prayers. Don’t shrink back. Step forward. Don’t lead in your own strength. Go in the strength of the Lord. I believe God is going to meet your ladies in a special way. But I also believe He is going to grow you and use you in ways you never imagined.

All because you said yes to His call.

With all my love and prayers –

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Joannal Weaver". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

*“God has made us what we are. In Christ Jesus,
God made us to do good works, which God planned
in advance for us to live our lives doing.”*

Ephesians 2:10 NCV