



G R O U P   E X P E R I E N C E

leader's  
guide



# B R A V E   E N O U G H

*Getting over our fears, flaws, and failures to live BOLD and FREE*



N I C O L E   U N I C E



# Leader's Guide

Whether you've been leading Bible studies for years or this is your first step into leadership, welcome! You are about to embark on a journey that has the potential to deeply impact your life—your life in Christ and your life with people.

In 2 Corinthians 5:11-21, Paul explains the amazing mission of our lives once we've become new creations in Christ. He says that God has given us the ministry of reconciliation, so our job is to bring that reconciliation to people. Notice he doesn't say that it's our job only if we are pastors, Bible geeks, or great communicators. This mission is for *all* of us—when we are in Christ, we are God's chosen instrument for bringing people to himself.

When you commit to lead a book club or a Bible study that's about bringing women closer to Christ, you become a minister of reconciliation. You are “in ministry.” How does that sound to you? Overwhelming? That's actually a good thing! Feeling like this role is beyond you or beyond your capacity is the very best way to seek God with your whole heart and to ask him to be present with you. So don't worry about being underqualified—because it's Christ who qualifies you!

In this leader's guide, we'll start with an overview of the curriculum, followed by a discussion about your group and how you can lead it well. We'll also consider a few FAQs about situations you may encounter as you lead.

The *Brave Enough DVD Group Experience* includes eight sessions. Using the participant's guide, group members will work through the following elements in each session:

**PREPARE:** Before each session, members will be told which chapters in *Brave Enough* to read.

**LISTEN (20 TO 25 MINUTES):** In this video clip, I share a short teaching that's designed to dig deeper into some of the concepts from *Brave Enough*. Most sessions also include an interview designed to spark your own group to share honestly about the way God is calling them to be brave enough.

**EXPERIENCE (5 TO 25 MINUTES):** This exercise or reflection will help your group take the truth from the study and apply it to their own lives.

**RESPOND (20 TO 25 MINUTES):** You'll be given time to talk together in your group and encourage one another as you explore your own brave-enough lives. Usually, but not always, this will be the last part of your session.

As the leader, please add to, subtract, or edit any portion of the study—the more you make it your own, the more natural and engaging the X will feel. But don't be afraid to come out of your comfort zone: God shows us his creativity and desire for us to change throughout Scripture. He has perfectly equipped you to lead the group you have, and he will use you when you commit your leadership to him.

## **WHO IS YOUR GROUP?**

Just as each individual has a personality, so a group is an aggregate of personalities. A crucial question to ask yourself and then to reflect and pray about throughout your study is this: *What is the personality of our group?* Noticing the vibe of the group early on is important so you can adjust to their needs. Some questions you can think through as you consider your group's personality include:

- Are group members familiar with one another or are they strangers?
- Is the group made up of longtime believers or new seekers?
- Do the people in the group know you, or were they “assigned” to your group?
- In your (church) culture, what is the purpose of groups? Do they tend to be knowledge based (heavy Bible study) or heart based (heavy “relational” or “life” groups)?
- Do the stage of life and commitment level of the women in this group allow them time for homework?
- How open are the women in this group? How honest are they about their own struggles?

It might take a few weeks to understand the dynamics of your group. During your first session, you might also want to spend some time allowing the women to share their goals and expectations for the group.

## **NOW . . . WHO ARE YOU?**

I once went to speak to a small group of women who were using one of my Bible studies. I met with the leader before the group began. As is often the case, she felt ill-equipped and unsure about her qualifications for the role. I told her something that I've continued to encourage women with since: “Always lead the group that you would want to attend.” What I mean by that is *you* are the one God has brought to this role, so lead in the way that reflects the experience you would enjoy being in! Sounds simple—yet we often hear many competing voices in our heads telling us “how to be a good leader.” I would encourage you: Don't pretend to be someone you're not. If you don't like home-baked goodies, buy them at the store. If you prefer a more organized group, then lead your group with structure. *Be the leader you would want to follow.*

With that in mind, we can talk about three traits I think every leader needs to cultivate in order to facilitate a group well. These three traits are receptivity, vulnerability, and authority.

## ***Receptivity***

A receptive leader is one who exhibits warmth and openness. An attitude of receptivity is one that says, “You are welcome in this group. I consider your opinion and thoughts valuable and worthy.” This openness and warmth tells the women in your group, “I think of you as important.”

A receptive leader receives others’ comments and thoughts with an open mind. Rather than considering herself the “keeper” of information, responsible for solving problems, or having all the answers, a receptive leader is a “holder” of information. A receptive leader creates a space where people feel safe expressing their honest feelings, longings, and disappointments. A receptive leader creates a space where it’s okay to have questions and it’s okay not to have (or provide) answers.

A receptive leader is a good listener who desires to fully understand one person before moving on to the next. A receptive leader will ask questions and clarify thoughts in order to ensure that everyone in the group feels heard. Before offering suggestions or input, a receptive leader wants to make sure that she is “on the same page” with people in her group. This process often means less is accomplished in the form of action steps or plans, but more is done to provide a space where everyone is present with one another.

## ***Vulnerability***

In the context of leading a small group, your vulnerability is very important. Most people are highly aware of the “acceptable” level of disclosure in a group. If you lead off a week with something superficial or light, you can expect your group to follow. If you decide to be more open with your own heart, most of the time, you can expect the same out of your group. There are exceptions to this rule. In some cultures, people normally don’t share on a deeper level. Also certain group dynamics lead to a lack of trust between members (see the next section for help on that). In such situations, getting members to open up might be slow going. But that doesn’t mean you should give up.

Consider Jesus’ example. At the Last Supper, Jesus first served his disciples by washing their feet. Next he shared his troubled heart with them about his future betrayal. Then he invited them to the garden, where he wrestled deeply in prayer because of his trouble. To be a leader doesn’t mean you never share your own heart. Christ’s example of servant leadership is a powerful demonstration of both confidence and vulnerability.

What can we learn from this? As leaders, we must serve others, being warm and receptive to listen to their hurts and struggles. But we also have to put ourselves out there. We have to reveal our own struggles, deep longings, and dreams. To do so is to follow the example of Christ and to provide a model for our group members.

## ***Authority***

Consider this statement: The women in your group are looking for some authority. Do you agree? Most people don’t admit they like authority, but we operate best under it.

That may fly in the face of what you’ve experienced, but unless you are meeting with a group of your best friends, people feel hesitant about opening up—about personal things and particularly about spiritual things—when they aren’t sure if anyone is “in charge.” We are all terribly insecure little creatures, and nothing brings that out like getting vulnerable—and then feeling like no one listened,

or worse, feeling judged, feeling like someone's "project," or feeling as if members are gossiping about others outside of the group. You can't control all of this, but you can at least provide a sense of values for your group. The best groups I've been in have two values: clear goals and clear guidelines.

**CLEAR GOALS.** A clear goal may be spoken or unspoken. A goal might be connection, knowledge, or application. A goal might simply be to complete the study together—being faithful to one another for the eight-week time period. A goal might be an increase in openness, ability to pray, or honest questioning. A goal might be to finish the homework, or a goal might be just to show up. Goals can be clarified early on by asking your group what they want and expect out of your time together. Everyone's goals may be slightly different, and some will always go unsaid. Your job as the leader is to keep pointing your group toward the goal.

**CLEAR GUIDELINES.** Your authority simply means that it is your responsibility to provide a place of safety for a group. A safe group is one where a leader determines *what is acceptable and what is not*.

Here's an example: You are leading a group that includes a runaway gossip. Whenever you ask a question, she tends to talk about her sister's problems instead of her own, and the group clearly feels uncomfortable. What you do, whether you choose to act or not to act, is a decision of authority.

If you choose to act, your actions say to your group, "Talking about others this way is unacceptable. If you choose to gossip, I will redirect you." If you choose not to act, your actions say to your group, "I am not going to manage what people say. People are free to say whatever they want."

The latter choice erodes the "safety" aspect of your group. Over time, people are less likely to speak up because they don't know if it's safe to open up. The former choice is certainly harder but likely to benefit the group as a whole.

## **BEST FOR LAST**

Obviously, none of us will lead our groups perfectly. But as I said before, feeling ill-equipped is not necessarily a bad thing. It means you've arrived in a place of dependence on the Holy Spirit to guide you. Hebrews 12:1 says, "Let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us."<sup>1</sup> One of my mentors used to say, "Ninety-five percent of your job is to just show up." If you don't feel equipped, you can ask God to help you. If you don't feel "worthy" or "prepared," then you can ask God to use your pitiful offering for his glory. I assure you, friend, deep dependence on God is a good place to be.

So I've saved the best for last. If you do nothing else, if you prepare no snacks, forget to e-mail your group in advance, if you don't do the homework, you still haven't missed the most important thing:

***The most important thing you can do to impact the effectiveness of this study is to pray.***

**PRAY, PRAY, PRAY.** Pray for the people in your group by name. Talk to God about what you hope will happen in your group. Tell him specifically and watch him act. Perhaps your prayer will be something like this:

*Lord, because of your love and faithfulness for your people, I am asking you to move in the hearts of this group. Would you give me strength and courage to lead them with openness and vulnerability? Please give me love and compassion for [names], and give me the discernment to know how and when to lead the conversation.*

Bring these women before God's throne of grace! Come with confidence, believing that he is ready and willing to do a great work in them—and in you! One of the best ways to learn how to pray deeply is to go to Scripture to inform your prayers. You can start a conversation with God using his own words. I think you'll find it will get you in touch with God's heart for the women in your group.

Here's a short list of Scriptures I often use to pray for someone:

- 2 Corinthians 1:3-4

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God.

*Lord, please give me the ability to comfort [name] with the comfort I've received from you.*

- Philippians 1:6

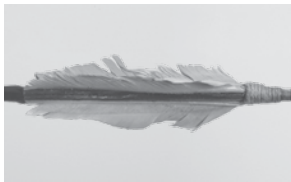
Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

*Lord, you've begun a good work in [name]. I pray that you will fulfill your promise to carry it through, and that I will have confidence to believe in this promise for [name] and for me.*

- Ephesians 3:17-19

I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

*Lord, please root and establish [name] in love. Help her to grasp your love and to feel it beyond any earthly knowledge.*



## FAQs

### ***How long is the Brave Enough study?***

Your DVD comes with eight sessions. If your group is new, you might want to take the first week as an intro time before beginning the study. You could meet over a meal and spend some time getting to know one another, which might make it easier to dive into the content.

### ***How do I get the participant's guide?***

The participant's guide is a free download at <http://GetBraveEnough.com> or <http://nicoleunice.com>. You can instruct your group to go to the website, where they can download and print the guide. The participant's guide has the discussion questions and exercises for each week, as well as notes to help them follow along as they watch the teaching sessions.

### ***Do we need the book to do the study?***

The study is based on and designed as a companion for *Brave Enough*, so every participant will need the book for the study.

### ***I've never led anything before, but I want to begin a group to work through Brave Enough.***

#### ***How do I start?***

The best groups usually begin with a simple commonality. You might want to invite your friends, neighbors, or a group from your kids' school, your work, etc. You can send out an e-mail or text message about what you want to do and see who's interested. You can send your friends to [NicoleUnice.com](http://NicoleUnice.com) or major online booksellers to review a sample chapter from *Brave Enough*. This book is a great starting point for a new leader because the teaching and questions are already provided for you. All you have to do is invite women and make space for the group to happen!

### ***Help! Someone in my group dominates the conversation. What do I do?***

This is a very common problem. Usually the dominator doesn't mean to monopolize the conversation and might not even be aware that she's doing it. But as the leader, your job is to make space for everyone, as uncomfortable as that might be for you! Next time she's talking, make sure you are actively listening. Give some verbal cues (*mm-hmmm, yeah*) while she's talking so you are "in" the conversation. When she takes a breath, you can gently put your hand out and say, "Susie, thanks so much for sharing. I'm going to take a pause here and see if anyone else in the group has an answer to the question. That might end up encouraging you too." Follow up after the group with a call or e-mail to Susie that lets her know that you care about her situation. You might say something like "Sounds like you have a lot going on. I wish we could have gotten to all of it tonight. If you want to talk or meet individually, I'd love to do that. I'll be praying for you!" (And then really pray for her.)



***We had our first group and it felt so awkward to me. What am I doing wrong?***

If your group is new to one another, it can take a while to gel. But this doesn't mean you are doing something wrong—it's just group dynamics! It might be that you have some expectations for the group that need to be refined. Many women "seem" like they've been following Jesus for years but are actually very young in their faith. If your group members are not opening up, take a step back next week and ask some "get to know you" questions. Make room for everyone to speak so that you've broken the ice. You may want to think about making some time each week for one woman to share her story a little more deeply. This is the way the women will begin to know one another and open up more over time.

***We finished the study but want to keep meeting. What do we do next?***

There are so many amazing studies out there. You may want to have a celebration night to share what you've learned from *Brave Enough* and then preview some options for next steps. Consider mixing up your group by reading a book together without a teaching video or going deeper into God's Word with a straight Bible study. There are so many ways to keep growing together in Christ—and you will empower your group when you invite them to make that decision with one another!

***How does our group get in touch with you?***

I'd love to hear from you! Send a tweet or status update about your group to #GetBraveEnough. Send your own brave-enough story from your group to [Nicole@takeheartministry.com](mailto:Nicole@takeheartministry.com). We'll be featuring selected stories on my blog. Remember, being brave enough often isn't about a big, huge event but the little, powerful ways God is working in your life and in the life of your group. If you have other questions about leading a small group, I'll do my best to answer those on the blog as well. Send your questions to the e-mail address above!



So that's it! You might not feel ready—but you are. When you are in Christ, you live in his power and in his courage. You are brave enough for this!

In closing, I'll share with you my arrow prayer . . . the reason behind the arrow symbol on the *Brave Enough* cover. You are God's "polished arrow" (Isaiah 49:2) when you are in Christ. You are his chosen instrument for piercing hearts with the truth of his grace and the power of his Word. So in the words of Charles Wesley, here is my prayer for each of you:

*I want a true regard,  
A single, steady aim,  
Unmoved by threatening or reward,  
To Thee and Thy great name.<sup>2</sup>*

To God be the glory—*Amen!*



## ENDNOTES

1. Here and following, Scriptures are taken from the Holy Bible, *New International Version*,<sup>®</sup> *NIV*.<sup>®</sup> Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.<sup>®</sup> Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.
2. Charles Wesley, “My God, My Strength, My Hope,” <http://www.hymntime.com/tch/htm/m/y/g/mygodmys.htm>.