

Abide

THE FINGERPRINTS OF GOD

small group leader guide

SISTER,

First of all, I want to thank you for your willingness to lead a group of women in this study. Christ sees you and He is greatly honored by your heart to serve Him through serving others. In Acts 2:42–47, we see a beautiful picture of what fellowship among believers is to look like. Verse 42 says, “And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.” Fellowship begins with worship and the Word. I pray that your small group looks like this verse: devoted to Scripture, to serving one another, and to praying in Jesus’ Name. I believe God is going to do a mighty work in your group as you meet together weekly to share what you are learning and encourage one another in the Lord.

Second, it is my goal through this leader guide to help equip you to lead your group. Coordinating a small group can be intimidating. For some of you, this is the first group you’ve led and you are nervous just thinking about it! And then others are seasoned Bible study leaders and feel comfortable in this setting. Either way, I pray we would all come to the Lord with open hands and humble hearts as we seek to pour into the women around us. Recognizing how small we are and how great God is is the best place to start.

In the following pages, you will find some practical encouragement for leading your small group, and questions to help spark conversation as you lead each week. You know your group, and I trust that you will prayerfully lead each week and be led by the Holy Spirit. This study is about knowing Christ more through Scripture, and the Word should be the main focus of your sessions each week. I pray this time would be protected and blessed in the Lord.

Before we begin, I want to pray for you:

Father, You are high and holy, yet you are also near us and always with us. The treasures you have stored up within your Word are innumerable. We want to spend our days digging for treasure and dining at your table. Thank you for the women who are going to be leading this study. Thank you for their hearts to serve you and to teach others the truth of the gospel. I pray you would first change their own hearts as they study, and in turn, that you would give them the strength to teach and lead those around them. Open their eyes to behold wondrous things from your law (Psalm 119:18). I pray Christ would be glorified in this study and in our lives. In Jesus’ mighty name, Amen.

**YOUR FRIEND,
GRETCHEN**

TIPS FOR LEADING A SMALL GROUP

- Create a space that is inviting and welcoming. If you are meeting in your home, don't feel that everything has to look perfect each week. God might use the mess to bring freedom to another woman! The way you show hospitality and welcome them in will show them the unfailing love of Christ. If you are meeting in a church or in another local area, try to find a distraction-free spot that can be a safe place for women to talk and participate in the group.
- You set the level of vulnerability for your group. What I mean is that as you share from your own heart and personal experiences, other women will open up to share. Along with this, make sure that your group is not a place to gossip. Set the standard from the start the group meetings will be confidential and that any conversation that is steering in the wrong direction will be redirected by the leader.
- Pray before and after the study. It is easy to rush through group meetings without first quieting our hearts to pray, but this is vital. Lead the group in prayer and ask other women to pray as well.
- Protect the time you meet together. It is good to have some structure and a set limit on a meeting. That way each member of the group can know the allotted time and feel comfortable leaving once the meeting time is over, even if some women decide to stay and fellowship.

Esther: The Fingerprints of God is a 6-week study walking through the book of Esther. Throughout this book, we will focus on the providence of God woven through each circumstance. We receive great comfort from this book where God is not named, knowing that even when we can't see His hand at work we can trust His heart. As you lead through this study with the women in your group, challenge them to look for God's fingerprints in the text.

ESTHER DAILY BREAKDOWN

Each week has an intro day with a summary of what will be covered in the upcoming week, five days of study, and a final recap day with prompts to fill in. If needed, the weekend can be used to catch up on any days missed during the week! Encourage your group to read the text at the top of the study before beginning their study and spend a moment in prayer, setting their focus on the Lord and coming to the Word with open, expectant hearts.

WEEK ONE

Study with Gospel Glasses

Week one is foundational to the study of Esther. Often in Bible study we skip the preparation stages for studying the book in context and, in turn, miss out on a full understanding of the author's purpose in writing. There is a chance that many women in your group won't know how to answer some of the questions or research the background of a book of the Bible. Encourage the women in your group to dig deeper and read the Bible with faith, not fear, trusting that God's Word is living, active, and applicable today.

ICEBREAKER

Depending on your group, it's great to begin with a fun get-to-know-you kind of question or two. This makes each woman talk and share something she could possibly connect with someone else over.

Here are a few potential icebreaker questions:

What did you want to be when you grew up?

Who is your favorite Disney princess?

If you could travel anywhere in the world, where would it be and why?

The icebreaker question doesn't have to be a serious question, just something that gets women talking and comfortable with one another, especially if you are meeting in a group with many women who don't yet know each other. As they go around and share answers to this question, have them share their name and any other important information. If possible, have name tags for each group session to help you call them out by name and make conversation happen easily.

DISCUSSION

Ask the group who has studied the book of Esther before. If some of them have, ask them what thoughts they have going into this study.

Challenge the entire group to read this book with a fresh perspective, knowing that we can read God's Word our entire lives and still have much to learn. It is a bottomless treasure chest of wisdom and gold to be mined.

Have someone in the group read Isaiah 55:10–11. How do these verses change your perspective on Bible study?

Turn to Day Two. Ask them what their definition of "providence" was and discuss what they learned from the Heidelberg Catechism. Take a moment to discuss God's providence and why it is important to read Scripture through the lens of His loving providence.

If possible, share an example from your own experience of following Jesus where you can look back and see God's providence at work.

WEEK ONE DISCUSSION CONT'D

This could be a way God provided miraculously, or even a circumstance that seemed unexpected, but later you could see clearly how God was moving.

In Day Three, compare everyone's answers to the "clues" section in the study.

Take time to discuss any threads, themes, and questions they wrote down in their initial read-through of the book of Esther. This will make for great conversation later on in the study that you can refer back to!

Close the group in prayer. If you take prayer requests, consider sending them out to the group that week and following up with the girls. You can also have the person next to them commit to praying for their specific request.

WEEK TWO

A King, a Queen, and an Unlikely Scene

And we're off! This week the group will study the entire first chapter of Esther and part of the second chapter. Several of the main characters of this story are introduced, and the twists and turns of the historical narrative happen quickly. Rather than approaching this book as simply a character study, we will learn from the characters but purposely be looking for God's fingerprints, and the contrast between God's Kingdom and man's earthly kingdoms.

ICEBREAKER

Have each person share about the most memorable birthday party they've had and why it was memorable. If all the women in your group are married, have each one share her favorite moment from her wedding day.

DISCUSSION

Begin the group in prayer. Ask one of the girls to pray to open up the group.

Have the girls in your group share what they learned in this week's study. Have them identify any "fingerprints of God" they noticed.

Walk through the main characters we are introduced to in this week's study and have the women share their initial observations of who they are and the role they play in the story:

King Ahasuerus
Queen Vashti
Mordecai
Esther

WEEK TWO DISCUSSION CONT'D

How does the glory of King Ahasuerus compare to the glory of God? Why does the author take so much time to describe the banquet of the king?

What do Queen Vashti's refusal and the king's response reveal about his character and the customs of the time?

In verses 18–20, what implications did Vashti's actions and the king's edict have on the entire kingdom?

As Mordecai is introduced to the story, why does the writer of the book go into detail regarding his background?

How is Esther described?

In reading through this week's text, the author of this book makes it clear that God uses unlikely people to accomplish his purposes. How does this bring hope to your heart?

Read Jeremiah 29:1–14 with the group. Day five went into detail regarding the surroundings and circumstances of Jeremiah's letter to the Israelites in their exile. How does knowing the context of this passage change the way you read Jeremiah 29:11?

Even in seasons of "exile," suffering, and trial, God's promises endure and do not change. He is unchanging in our changing circumstances. Because of His faithfulness, we can "plant gardens" and "build cities" even in hard seasons of life.

This is a good time for you to share a personal story of how God has been faithful even in challenging seasons of life where you couldn't see His hand at work. Ask if anyone has a story to share or open conversation for the girls to share what season of life they are in right now and how they can cling to the unchanging promises of God in their changing circumstances.

Close the group in prayer.

WEEK THREE

Grace, Favor, and God's Faithfulness that Doesn't Waver

This week reveals many behind-the-scenes details and moments that will be key in understanding how the entire story of Esther unfolds and how the providence of God is always at work. Encourage the girls not to skip over details that may seem peculiar or "random" at first glance. All of God's Word has been divinely inspired, and every word matters. The same is true for every moment of our lives.

WEEK THREE CONT'D

ICEBREAKER

Are you a coffee drinker or a tea drinker?

DISCUSSION

Begin the group in prayer.

What did you learn about Esther this week? How is God's grace revealed through her life? How does this grace impact our own lives today and give us hope?

In day two, we learned how Esther was chosen to be queen. Though the circumstances were not according to God's ways, he worked in spite of man. "God ultimately would work through these unrighteous circumstances for His righteous deeds to be made known through the salvation of the people of Israel." Though every detail is not laid out, it is still obvious that God's ways prevail in spite of the waywardness of man. When we follow Jesus, He shines brighter than the darkness.

Have someone read Philippians 2:15. How do we shine as stars in the darkness as followers of Christ?

In Esther 2:19–23, how is the sovereignty of God revealed in the plot of Bigthan and Teresh?

What do Mordecai's actions reveal about his character?

In your own life, how do you respond when you aren't noticed for what you do?

Ultimately, we are to live for an Audience of One in this life. This is a life of gospel-humility. Being willing to stand for what is right with no recognition reveals the true intentions of our hearts. But the cost of knowing Christ and making Him known is always worth it.

Ask the women in your group to share what it could look like to stand for Jesus.

When Mordecai refused to bow to Haman, what does Haman's response reveal about his character?

How did the casting of lots in this story reveal, yet again, that God is faithful in spite of our own plans?

Why was the king's edict such a big deal in light of all of redemptive history?

Encourage the women that no matter what happens in life, God is true to His Word and He sees the hearts, intentions, and actions of all mankind.

Close the group in prayer.

WEEK FOUR

The Rise of the Righteous and Fall of the Foolish

The circumstances of this story speed up this week with many twists and turns, but in every part of the journey, God's faithfulness is revealed despite His name not appearing on the pages.

ICEBREAKER

Have you ever gone on a road trip? What is the longest distance you have driven/ridden in the car, and where did you go?

DISCUSSION

Begin the group in prayer. Ask one of the girls to open the group in prayer.

Have one girl from the group share a summary of what happened in the story this week in her own words. This is often challenging to do, but is good practice to comprehend the story and see the threads of providence woven throughout.

In chapter four, what is revealed about Mordecai, Esther, the Jews, and the providence of God?

How does reading the context in full impact the way you view Esther's "for such a time as this" moment?

Rather than viewing "for such a time as this" as just one moment, in the life of a believer every moment matters. God is always at work, even in the mundane. As Christ-followers, we have been commissioned to make the best use of the time entrusted to us, always being prepared to preach the gospel and walk in obedience.

Why was it so important that the king held out his scepter to welcome Esther into his presence?

Unlike the king, we serve a King who welcomes us into His presence at any time because of Jesus. Have someone read Hebrews 4:16.

In this passage, there is a series of "delays." Esther doesn't come right out and tell the king of Haman's plot. Rather, she invites him to a banquet, and then another banquet. However, in spite of these "delays" God was still working.

How do you see God's timing at work in the unfolding series of circumstances?

After Haman built the gallows for Mordecai, he was humbled. How was the king's sleepless night important in Haman's humbling?

God can work His wonders even in a sleepless night.

WEEK FOUR DISCUSSION CONT'D

How does the writer of this book bring a stark contrast to Haman and Mordecai? How does this glorious reversal reveal what God loves?

Have someone in the group read the following verses and discuss the difference between a prideful and a humble heart.

Proverbs 11:2

Proverbs 18:12

Proverbs 27:2

Romans 12:16

What does it look like to have the humble “mind of Christ”? Read Philippians 2:3–7.

Discuss tangible ways we can live with humility by the help and working of the Holy Spirit in our homes, families, friendships, and workplaces.

Close the group in prayer.

WEEK FIVE

God's Will in Man's Ways

We serve a God of activity, not passivity. He fights for his people and watches over us. He is faithful even when we are faithless, and He is always working on our behalf. Nothing can ultimately stand in the way of His glory.

ICEBREAKER

What is one of your favorite childhood memories?

DISCUSSION

The fall of Haman is a quick and final. After Esther reveals his wicked plot to the king, he orders that Haman be executed immediately on the very gallows Haman had built for Mordecai.

In day one, we compared how God worked through the death of Haman for the deliverance of the Jews, just like He would complete that work through the death and resurrection of Jesus. What hope do we have in Christ's victory over sin and death on the cross?

What was the very last request Esther made to the king, and how did her approach to him in chapter eight differ from her previous entrances into his presence?

WEEK FIVE DISCUSSION CONT'D

Why is it so important that the Jewish people be saved from annihilation?

What fingerprints of God are revealed in the reversal of the king's edict?

Read Proverbs 21:1. What does this verse reveal about God's sovereignty and power over kings?

The author makes it very clear that Esther could have lost her life trying to save the Jews. However, God worked a miracle and made a way for the reversal to occur. How does this reversal seen in chapters eight and nine reveal an even bigger reversal that has taken place in our hearts as Christians? Have someone read Ephesians 2:1-10.

Ask the girls if there has ever been a time when they have had to take a stand for their faith. What was the cost in taking that stand? If no one has a story, take time to pray over Christians who are being persecuted for their faith around the world and to encourage them to be bold in the Lord when they have a chance to stand for the truth of the gospel.

Close the group in prayer.

WEEK SIX

A Feast for Generations

On this last week of your group, consider preparing a "feast" for or with your girls. You could do a potluck where each person brings a portion of the meal or you could prepare some desserts and coffee. Do something different this week to celebrate God's faithfulness like the Jews did at the Feast of Purim.

ICEBREAKER

If you could pursue one big dream in life, what would it be?

DISCUSSION

How did God change the Jews' mourning into dancing, praising, and celebrating?

Have the girls explain what they learned about the Feast of Purim in this week's study.

Take time this week to go around and ask each girl to share her own testimony of deliverance and salvation! This is a great opportunity for them to practice sharing their faith.

Why is it important to note that this story is not just about Esther?

WEEK SIX DISCUSSION CONT'D

How can we, too, live with Jesus as the main character of our lives?

Discuss how God's fingerprints can be seen in all of redemptive history and ultimately on the cross of Christ.

As you close out this week's study, encourage the girls to continue to look for God's fingerprints in Scripture and in their daily lives. He is the same God today as He was in the book of Esther.

We can live knowing He is sovereign, He is good, and He is faithful even in adversity.

Close the group in prayer.

*God is good, and He
is faithful, even in
adversity.*