

FREEDOM
to
FLOURISH

Leader's Guide

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WELCOME!

Welcome to the Leader's Guide for *Freedom to Flourish*!

When I sat down to write *Freedom to Flourish*, I had a lot of women in mind. Women like myself who had struggled under the weight of what it looks like to be a godly woman. Women who longed to be who God created them to be but didn't really know what that meant. Women who felt bowed down by shame, comparison, and misunderstandings. I longed to bring to their lives the hope of God's plan for us to bear his image because it's a truth that has, quite literally, changed my life. In many ways, I wrote *Freedom to Flourish* speaking to my own heart, hoping that in doing so, these words would speak to other women's hearts as well.

But when I sat down to write this leader's guide, you were the woman I had in mind. Maybe you're the frazzled small-group leader who wants to prepare but is being pulled in a million other directions. Or the new leader who longs to encourage and equip her group but isn't quite sure how to do it. Or the leader who just wants a few extra ideas to have in her pocket in case she needs them. Wherever you are and whatever the format of your small group is, I pray this guide will be a help and encouragement to you.

Freedom to Flourish is already laid out specifically to be a resource for small groups and Bible studies. Each chapter walks through a few verses from Genesis 1–3 and gives additional Scripture passages and discussion questions at the end. There are also footnotes and resources in the bibliography that provide additional reading material should you want to dig in more. This leader's guide is not meant to replace that but is instead meant to expand and enhance it for you.

Each section is designed to complement each chapter of the book and contains a brief overview of the main point, ideas for opening questions and activities, and insight into the additional Scripture references in case you want to expand the scope of your study. You may wish to use these passages in your group, or you may simply find they are helpful as you prepare. You'll also find a brief note from me about each chapter, giving you a heads-up about potential pitfalls or areas of discussion that may need special care.

I know how amazing small group gatherings can be and how much they can bless the women who attend. I hope and pray that this book and this leader's guide will leave you excited and equipped to take this material to the women in your church or community. Be encouraged to know that leading this group, no matter how messy or wonderful it is, is an act of image-bearing!

I'm praying for you as you reflect God's image to your world.

Blessings,
Elizabeth

HOW TO LEAD A SMALL GROUP

Talking about how to lead a small group is tricky because there are as many ways to lead a small group as there are leaders! Everyone has her own way of doing things; her own schedule, her own tone, and even her own goal for the group. And that's good. In fact, it's another way we, as uniquely created individuals, image God!

So, while there is no one way to lead a small group, I *can* share with you how I typically lead mine.

THE GOAL

When I lead a small group or a Bible study I always have two main goals: (1) to *interact with the material* and (2) to *encourage the women* in the group.

For me, interacting with the material involves leading the group to think deeply about what we're studying. This means I actively avoid teaching or even talking too much. I'll give a brief overview to recap past discussions and ask directing questions when needed, but for the most part I open the floor for a group-led time. I want everyone to feel free to ask, share, discuss, and dig in.

I also want each woman to leave feeling more encouraged than when she arrived. I want her to feel wanted, seen, and valued. To do this, I make a point of welcoming all the women personally, following up on previous prayer requests, asking their opinions (hopefully without putting them on the spot!), and really listening when they are sharing.

THE PLAN

A consistent structure is important for helping the women in your group to feel comfortable; most people really like knowing what to expect. This means that having a plan for your time is really important!

While I try not to be too strict with my schedule at small group, I do make a point of starting and ending on time; it's a way of showing respect for the women who attend. I also keep to a general order of events so everyone knows, at least in theory, how our time will unfold. That plan normally goes as follows:

Welcome and Greet Each Person as She Arrives

This is a casual time. I almost always have a cup of coffee and encourage everyone to grab a drink and a seat while we all get settled.

Icebreaker or Activity

Keep this lightheaded and embarrassment free. There should be no wrong answers. In my opinion, the best icebreakers are the kind that leave you feeling good, relaxed, and knowing the women around you better.

Read the Bible Passage Aloud

Allow people in your group the opportunity to read the Bible aloud, but don't force anyone to do so who is uncomfortable. Letting others read saves me from doing all the talking and gives them an opportunity to interact more.

Pray for Our Time

I ask if anyone would like to pray for our time. Again, this allows for more group involvement. If no one volunteers, I am happy to pray instead.

General Observations or Questions

I always begin by asking if anything in the chapter really stood out for people and if they have any questions or important thoughts about the material they want to share. Sometimes we spend our whole study time discussing what came up from the material. If the conversation needs direction, and most of the time it does, I move on to more structured discussion questions or look for ways to apply to the material the topics that they've brought up.

Discussion Questions

I like to choose very open-ended questions from the Discussion Questions in the book (I've provided a few extras in this guide). While fill-in-the-blank questions are nice (some women will feel more comfortable answering a question that has a "right" answer), they don't often spark discussion. I prefer questions that force the group to really think about the material or consider application of it in their lives.

Prayer Request

Prayer requests are so important but can be so tricky! Model for your group what it looks like to as for pray without gossiping or monopolizing the time. One way to focus the time is to have everyone write down their prayer requests on index cards, choose one to share with the group during your meeting, and give the cards to you so that you can email them all out to everyone later that day or week.

Closing Prayer

My preference is to open up a time of prayer for anyone who would like to pray aloud; then I close us at the end. However, it's important to always make sure everyone knows that there is no pressure to pray aloud. Not only are some people unused to this practice, but others may simply be too shy, and that is totally fine. Praying aloud is not required, nor is it expected. If we are short on time at this point, I close in prayer and encourage everyone to remember each other in prayer throughout the week.

TIPS FOR NEW LEADERS

Listen

There are few ways to communicate your care for someone more than simply listening when she speaks. Unfortunately, it's also one of the hardest things to do as a leader! It's tempting to be planning your response, thinking about what you need to do next, or worrying about the time remaining, but try your best to let that go and focus on the woman sharing. It's always better to take a moment to regroup after she is done speaking than to risk ignoring her while she is.

It's OK to Not Know the Answer

No matter how prepared we are or how much study we've done, we won't know all the answers. And that's totally fine. It's good, even! If you don't know the answer to a question someone asks, see if anyone else does. Or, if that's not the best option for your group, affirm her question and tell her you'll get back to

her with an answer next time. It's good for us, and it's good for your group, to be reminded that we are all still learning together.

Silence Is Not a Bad Thing

Give women *way* more time to think before trying to fill the silence. Introverts in particular often need many moments of silence before they will speak. So, if you ask a question and no one answers, count to five (at least!) before rewording it and waiting a bit longer.

Be Gracious with Yourself

We all have rough days (or weeks . . . or months!), and you won't be your best every time your group gathers. That's OK. You're human, and the Lord uses even our weakest moments. Trust him to work through the time your group has, and know that you might never see the fruits of your labor. Give yourself grace and rest, knowing that you are deeply loved. This job isn't about being perfect, and it isn't about us.

THE LOVE OF GOD

MAIN IDEA

God didn't create us to do something for him—he created us out of his abundant, overflowing love.

NOTE TO LEADERS

We live in a very transactional world. Not only do we have to purchase everything we need (food, clothes, shelter, and so on) but some societies even look down on those who need or ask for help. Often favors need to be paid back, help needs to be returned, even love needs to be deserved.

Chapter 1 shows that God's love for us is foundationally different. While this is amazingly good news, it's also radically different from what many of us have experienced. It may be hard for some to truly grasp. That's OK! The depth of God's unconditional love (which we do not need to earn at all) can and should be brought up throughout the remainder of your weeks together as a group.

As the leader, keep in mind that some women in your group will not have previously experienced anything but transactional relationships; they may need special care or sensitivity on your part. Any time we talk about God as a good Father, it may bring to mind difficult experiences with earthly fathers who were and are not good. Keep in mind that past hurts can impact current discussions.

ICEBREAKERS

1. How many blankets are on your bed right now? How many pillows? (I opened this chapter with a story that took place while tucking my daughter into bed. This is a lighthearted question to help the people in your group to get to know each other better.)
2. Thinking back to elementary, middle, or high school, what kind of things did you see people do to try to earn their way into a certain social group, clique, or club?

SCRIPTURE TO READ ALOUD

Genesis 1:1–26

ADDITIONAL PASSAGES TO CONSIDER

Deuteronomy 32:10–11

- The word *hovering* in Deuteronomy 32:11 is the same word used in Genesis 1:2. This is a great passage to turn to if your group would like to look into God's loving presence in creation.
- How does the description of God in Deuteronomy 32:10–11 shed light on Genesis 1:2? What does it teach us about God's heart toward his creation?

Psalm 33

- This is a beautiful psalm that depicts God's actions in creation. It also looks forward to God's creative actions in filling the earth and having dominion over it, things we'll talk about in later chapters.
- What does this psalm teach us about God's creation of the world? What does it tell us about God's love?

Ephesians 3:14–19

- In this passage, Paul prays that we would know and understand how deeply loved we are by God.
- Why is it significant that Paul prays for this? Why do you think it's so easy for us to miss the depth of God's love for us?

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION FROM THE BOOK

1. Describe a time when you felt like you could earn more of God's love. What are some things that you have done or seen other people do to earn his favor?
2. Describe a time you worried that you could lose God's love. How did that affect the way you interacted with him?
3. God's presence is an aspect of creation that will grow increasingly important as we move forward. Read Deuteronomy 32:10–11. How does the picture presented here, combined with what we saw in Genesis 1:2, illustrate the presence of God? What does it tell us about his disposition toward his creation?
4. Write a list of words or ideas that come to mind when you think about the love of God.
5. God didn't need to create us, but he wanted to; he was motivated by love. How does this understanding of his love change the way we relate to him? How would your life change right now if you truly believed that you couldn't earn more or lose any of God's love?

THE IMAGE WE BEAR

MAIN IDEA

We were created in the image and likeness of God. To be his image is our purpose; it's not about what we do, it's what we already are.

NOTE TO LEADERS

Of all the chapters in *Freedom to Flourish*, this one probably contains the most information and facts. Some readers might love that, but others may have struggled to get through it all, and that's OK too. With that in mind, it may be worthwhile to take the time in your small group to briefly go over the meaning of each of the three important words from Genesis 1:26: *image*, *likeness*, and *man*.

There are three things to keep an eye out for:

- *The idea of the image of God being in part a visible/physical thing may be new and even uncomfortable to some women.* That's understandable, especially since there are many in the church today who draw a distinction between the physical body and the spiritual or internal parts of ourselves. For some, the body is viewed as less important. For some, the body is inherently shameful. Wherever the women in your group are coming from, there is hope and freedom in understanding that God values all of us: body and soul. If you would like to do more reading on the subject, the footnotes on page 36–37 include the names of a number of excellent resources to look into.
- *As the discussion in Freedom to Flourish shifts to focus on what it looks like to be imitators of God, it will be easy for people to slip back into a transactional mindset in which our actions are a form of payment for what God has done or a means of earning more love.* For example, talking about drawing near to God can easily become another checkbox on our to-do lists to keep God happy. Keep your eye out for this type of language to reinforce what was presented in chapter 1—we weren't created because God needed us to do things; rather, we were created out of his abundant love. Our purpose is not about what we do—it's about who we already are.
- *It's not uncommon for people to love God primarily for what he can do or has done for us.* What we often forget, however, is that this is actually another form of transactional relationship in which *we* are the ones expecting the other party to earn *our* love. This isn't something that anyone should be called out on, though, or made to feel embarrassed about. Instead, as the leader, try to model what it looks like to love God for who he is instead.

ICEBREAKERS

1. Play a few rounds of the game Telephone. Talk about how distorted the message became the farther it went from the one who gave the message. The closer we are to the original message, the more naturally we imitate it.

2. What is your favorite accent? The one you think is particularly fun or beautiful to listen to?
3. Have you ever traveled outside your country? Where did you go, and what was one thing about the people there that you loved?

SCRIPTURE TO READ ALOUD

Genesis 1:1–26

ADDITIONAL PASSAGES TO CONSIDER

Genesis 5:3

- This verse describes Seth as being born in Adam’s likeness and image.
- We often describe kids as looking like their parents. How does this verse add to our understanding of what it means to be made in God’s image?

Matthew 22:15–22

- This passage describes a time when the Sadducees asked Jesus about paying taxes. While it’s often used to talk about taxes specifically, it’s more important to note that Christ points out that the thing that belonged to Caesar (the coin) was marked with his image—the image signified authority and ownership. He draws a parallel between the object that has Caesar’s image belonging to Caesar and the thing that has God’s image belonging to God.
- What does the parallel Jesus makes in verse 21 teach us about our bearing God’s image? Why do you think the Sadducees “marveled” at this teaching?

Colossians 1:15–20

- Talking about Jesus, this passage makes the point that he is the firstborn of all creation and the very image of God. As God incarnate, Jesus is the fullness of the image of God and the standard for what we were created to be. This means we can look to him to see the perfect example of what it looks like to live as the image of God. It also means that sanctification—being made more and more like Christ—is also the process by which the image of God in us is being restored.
- For more detailed information about this, check the footnotes on page 37.
- What does this passage teach us about Jesus? What does it tell us about ourselves as image-bearers?

Hebrews 1:3

- This is another important passage that teaches that Christ is the image of God.
- How does understanding Jesus to be the perfect image of God impact the way we understand him and his time on earth?

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION FROM THE BOOK

1. Describe a time in your life when you started to act like the people you were around. What was it like? How did it make you feel? How have you seen this happen in the people around you?

2. Before reading this chapter, what would you have said your purpose in life was? How did that impact the choices you've made or the things you've done? As humans, we're very good at coming up with purposes for ourselves. What are some things you have seen other people make their purpose?
3. The words image and likeness teach that our whole selves matter: our bodies, minds, hearts, emotions . . . everything. Is that something you've struggled with in the past? It's easy to rate the parts of ourselves in order of importance. Take a moment to write out a list of how you have rated the parts of you in the past. Does this understanding of image and likeness change your list?
4. Image bearing is about reflecting God to the world around us. Doing that, however, requires that we draw near to him so that what we're imitating is the one we were created to imitate in the first place. What does it look like for a person to draw near to God? What does it look like in your life?
5. Jesus Christ is the fullness of the image of God. How does seeing ourselves as patterned after him impact the way you think about his life and death on earth? Does it change the way you see him? Yourself?

THE CALL TO CREATE

MAIN IDEA

God's call to be fruitful and multiply is a beautiful invitation to use the gifts and talents he has given to us to imitate his creative nature and to fill the world around us.

NOTE TO LEADERS

Any time the discussion turns to pregnancy and childbirth, there is a strong possibility that the conversation may become painful for women in your group. Infertility, infant loss, miscarriage, singleness, and even the stress of motherhood are all topics that you should be aware of and sensitive to for the sake of the women in your group. In addition, know that the call to be fruitful and multiply has been used by some in a harmful way to teach that motherhood is a woman's entire purpose, leaving some women feeling wounded or unwanted. Take care as a leader to address these issues gently and with compassion, being aware that even the message of freedom presented in this chapter may bring up painful memories or past hurts. Consider checking in with each woman individually to care for her or to help her process this week's lesson.

ICEBREAKERS

1. Before your group meets, ask each member to bring a picture or copy of a favorite piece of art to share with the group. This can be anything! A picture of a famous painting, a recording of a song or performance they love, even a handmade work of art—there are no wrong answers. Ask each woman to share her choice with the group and to talk about what she loves about it.
2. If you have access to Legos, bring a box to your group meeting. Have your members play a few rounds of Pictionary—only instead of drawing their answers, have them use the Legos to build it.
3. If someone gave you \$1,000 that you could only use to start a new hobby (something you've never tried before), what would you use the money for?

SCRIPTURE TO READ ALOUD

Genesis 1:1–28

ADDITIONAL PASSAGES TO CONSIDER

Psalm 71

- This psalm is a prayer for rescue. In the midst of crying out, however, the psalmist says in verse 8, "My mouth is filled with your praise." Then, in verse 15, he says, "My mouth will tell of your righteous acts, of your deeds of salvation all the day." Filling, as we saw in this chapter, includes

both filling the world and filling within. We fill hearts and minds when we point others back to the Lord or remind them of his character and his deeds. The psalmist does this throughout the psalm!

- How does this psalm demonstrate filling hearts and minds with the truth of who God is? How can we apply that to our own lives?

Matthew 28:19–20

- This is the Great Commission: Jesus’s call for us, as his followers, to go into the whole world and make disciples.
- How does the Great Commission reflect and further the spiritual aspects of the call to be fruitful and multiply?

Colossians 1:15–20

- Once again, this is a passage that presents Christ as the fullness of the image of God.
- This about Jesus’s life as we see it in the gospels. How do we see Jesus multiplying and filling the earth (feeding the 5,000, teaching the people, and so on)? How does that help us to understand what it looks like to multiply and fill the earth in our lives today?

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION FROM THE BOOK

1. What has been your experience regarding the command in Genesis 1:28 to be fruitful and multiply? How did you feel when you saw that it was the focus of this chapter?
2. The belief that the call to be fruitful and multiply is one referring to physical babies is extremely common. How have you seen this played out in your life? How has it made you feel? In your experiences, does it feel like there is a hierarchy among women in the church? How does this bigger view of filling confront that?
3. Read Genesis 1:1–26 and write a list of ways you see God filling the earth.
4. Take a moment to think about the things you love to do and things you think you’re good at. Do you enjoy singing? Reading? Cooking? Teaching? Being with friends? Whatever it is, write it down. Now, look to see how any of these things reflect the character of God. How is he already using the gifts and passions he’s given you to reflect himself to the world? How is he inviting you to use your gifts more?
5. In the Questions for Reflection for chapter 2, you looked at Colossians 1:15, which says that Jesus was the firstborn of all creation. It also says that he is the “image of the invisible God.” As the image of God, Jesus fulfilled the cultural mandate perfectly even though he was never a father himself. Think about his life. How did he fill the earth, and what does that mean for us?

THE CALL TO RESTORE

MAIN IDEA

God's call to subdue the earth and have dominion over it is an amazing invitation to imitate him by loving people well, caring for them, and cultivating places of peace for the flourishing of others.

NOTE TO LEADERS

As with the last chapter, the teachings around what it means to subdue the earth and have dominion over it may require a shift in thinking for the members of your group. For those who have been raised with it as simply a command to work hard, this may be very new and take some working through. For that reason, you may find it helpful to spend time talking as a group about the ways God demonstrates care and brings order to his creation and then looking at ways we can do the same in our lives. It is also important to be aware that discussions that center around authority or dominion may be especially difficult for those who have experienced ungodly authority or even abuse. Even conversations about the ways dominion is supposed to be lived out may bring up disappointment, hurts, and unmet longings. If you know that any of the women in your group have had difficult experiences along these lines, you may want to reach out in advance or check in with them afterward.

It's also worth noting that there are people in the church today who support the idea that part of having dominion is the freedom to treat the earth in any way we see fit, denying any need to care for the planet and instead believing that God will remake everything eventually, so we can take what we want now. In many ways, this is a matter of eschatology (end-times theology), and we don't have the space to get into it now. However, God demonstrates what it looks like to care for the earth, and we are to follow his lead. Nothing in Scripture supports the idea that we are free to dominate the earth rather than care for it. If this comes up, you can gently point your group back to the Lord's example in creation as our pattern to follow.

ICEBREAKERS

1. Challenge your group to organize themselves in various ways (in order from oldest to youngest, in groups based on state in which they were born or the color of their hair, and so on) as quickly as possible.
2. Bring a box of crayons to your meeting (64-count works great for this activity). Challenge your group to work together to put the crayons in color order as quickly as possible. Or, depending on the size of your group, bring a few boxes and have groups or partners race to see who can organize them the fastest.
3. Do you or have you ever had a pet? Tell us about it!

SCRIPTURE TO READ ALOUD

Genesis 1:1–28

ADDITIONAL PASSAGES TO CONSIDER

Psalm 111

- Psalm 111 is a psalm of praise. In it, the psalmist lists multiple things that the Lord has done for this people and ways he is worthy of our worship. In making this list, the psalmist also shows God's care and provision for his people.
- In what ways do you see God's provision and his care (his dominion) for his people in this psalm?

Hebrews 1:3

- This is a passage we looked at with chapter 2 as well. Here, the writer of Hebrews makes it clear that Jesus is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature—he is the fullness of the image of God.
- Jesus is the fullness of the image of God. How do we see him subduing and having dominion? How is this different than what we normally picture subduing and having dominion looking like? How are we called to imitate him?

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION FROM THE BOOK

1. How have you experienced the command to subdue and have dominion over the earth? How has this affected your view of God? Your view of your purpose?
2. Read Genesis 1:1–26 and make a list of all the ways you see God subduing and having dominion.
3. Take a moment to think about your life and the spaces you inhabit (home, work, community, and so on). Where and how do you see chaos or disorder creeping in? Now think about the ways God might be calling you to help to bring order and peace to those places. What would it look like for you to use your unique gifts and skills to reflect him there? How can you care for the places in your life?
4. Think about the people around you. Where and how do you see chaos creeping into your relationships? Is there tension, hurt feelings, uncertainty, fear, and so on? Now think about ways God might be calling you to help to bring order and peace there. What would it look like for you to push against the darkness and image him in your relationships? How can you care for the people in your life?
5. Read Hebrews 1:3. Here, the writers of Hebrews calls Jesus the image of God, the exact imprint of his nature. Take a moment to think about the life of Christ that we see in the gospels. How did he subdue the earth and have dominion over it? What does his life teach us about how we can reflect God's image in ours?

THE CALL TO RESCUE

MAIN IDEA

As women, we were created as *ezer*s—imitators of the life-saving, aid-bringing character of God.

NOTE TO LEADERS

The idea of Eve as a “helper” is an idea that tends to illicit a strong response. You may find that some women in your group have grown to hate the term, feeling belittled and restrained by it. Others, however, may not have problem with it at all and may even be confused why other women would. The truth is, being an *ezer* is an amazing freeing thing for all women, no matter what their experiences have been. The footnotes for this chapter have multiple resources that can help you should you want to dig into this topic more.

ICEBREAKERS

1. Bring a pile of old magazines, scissors, and some glue sticks. As a group or as individuals, work together to piece together a picture of the “perfect Good Christian Woman.” Make this as silly as you want! Take some time to talk about what you included and why. Then take the time to go through and counter those images with the truth of what it means to be the image of God instead.
2. Share about a time when someone (anyone—this can be friend, neighbor, family member . . . whoever!) was there for you. What did they do to support you? How did it make you feel?

SCRIPTURE TO READ ALOUD

Genesis 2:4–25

ADDITIONAL PASSAGES TO CONSIDER

Each of these passages demonstrates ways the Lord is an *ezer* for his people. How does reading about his actions as *ezer* help to inform our understanding of the term? What can that look like in our lives?

- Deuteronomy 33:7, 26
- Psalm 20:2
- Psalm 33:20, 29
- Psalm 70:5
- Psalm 121

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION FROM THE BOOK

1. What has been your experience with Genesis 2:18? Misunderstanding the order of events in the creation of Adam and Eve and the reason God created Eve in the first place can have huge implications for us. Describe ways in which this confusion has impacted you. How has it affected the way you see God? The way you see yourself?
2. How does an understanding of the word ezer change the way you understand Eve? How does it impact the way you view yourself? The women around you?
3. It wasn't Adam's loneliness that necessitated Eve; it was his calling. Does this focus on living out the image of God together change the way you see your role? What are some ways in which you join with the people around you to carry out the cultural mandate? What are some ways you think God is calling you to do so?
4. Take a moment to think about the community you are a part of. Who are the vulnerable, the hurting, and the struggling? Where are the image bearers who need someone to come alongside them? What would it look like for you to care for them or bring them aid?
5. Read Psalm 70 and Psalm 121. In what ways do you see God bringing aid to his people? These are just a couple passages in which God is described as an ezer. What do these passages communicate about God as an ezer? What does that mean for us?

THE PROMISE HE MADE

MAIN IDEA

Sin entered the world and damaged the image of God we bear, as well as our ability to live as image-bearers in the world. But God cursed Satan and, in doing so, promised to make all things new and restore his children to himself.

NOTE TO LEADERS

On the surface, this chapter is all about sin—however, the bigger point of the chapter is God’s *response* to sin. It’s about his promise to restore his people. It’s about grace! As you go through this chapter as a group, remember that many people view God as an authoritarian ruler who wields his wrath like a weapon or a judge’s gavel. For some women, this may be a hard shift to make. For all of us, however, there is so much hope and freedom in seeing the deep love that God demonstrated in those moments. It may be worthwhile to briefly review what you talked about in chapter 1, God’s love, to form a basis for this chapter’s discussion. When talking about sin, it’s also important to remember that every person you encounter has been both a perpetrator and a victim of sin—no matter who the women in your group are, what they have done, or what was done to them, God’s love is for them.

ICEBREAKERS

1. Before your group meets, print off pictures of famous celebrities. Then cut out one key feature (smile, eyes, nose, and so on) from their picture. Have your group work together to guess who that feature belongs to. As they guess, you can put the piece back into the picture to restore it to its original form. Use this as a conversation starter about God promising to restore his image in us.
2. What is your favorite fairy tale of all time? Or what was your favorite when you were younger?

SCRIPTURE TO READ ALOUD

Genesis 3:1–15

ADDITIONAL PASSAGES TO CONSIDER

Genesis 9:6

- This passage is God’s command to Noah after the fall. In it, he reaffirms that humans are made in his image. It’s important to note that while only the term *image* is used here, the full meanings of both *image* and *likeness* are implied. This should not be taken to indicate that we are any less of God’s image. Indeed, after the initial use of both *image* and *likeness* in Genesis 1, it’s common for the terms to be used interchangeably.

Romans 1:18; 3:10–12, 21–26; 5:21; 6:6–14

- These passages provide an in-depth discussion of sin. Before reading this chapter, how would you have defined sin? What do these passages from Romans teach about sin, and how is that different from your previous answer?

Ephesians 1:3–14

- Christ came as the fulfillment of what God promised in the garden. This passage is a fantastic list of what he accomplished for us.
- What blessings does Paul say we have in Christ? How does this relate to God's promise in Genesis 3?

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION FROM THE BOOK

1. Make a list of words that come to mind when you think of the fall. What evidence of the fall do you see in your everyday life? How does that make you feel?
2. Describe a time in your life when you doubted God's love. You're not alone in that—we've all been there! What happened when you felt that way? What happened to change that feeling? How does seeing God's response to Adam and Eve impact the way you can relate to him in your own doubts and fear?
3. Based on what you read in this chapter, write out a definition of sin. What does the rejection of God's authority look like in your life? How have you seen it impact the lives of others? How have you experienced God's grace?
4. God promised in Genesis 3:15 that he would send a rescuer. It was a promise to defeat sin and death and make a way to bring his people home and, in doing so, restore in them the image they bore. How does that make you feel? How does this promise affect your life today?
5. Read Ephesians 1:3–14. Write a list of all the things Paul says Christ has done for us, and then take some time to thank God for the ways he is working in you to make you more like him.

THE SNARE OF COMPARISON

MAIN IDEA

Understanding who God created us to be and what it means to be unique, necessary image-bearers sets us free from comparison. Through him, relationships can be restored.

NOTE TO LEADERS

Comparison is something that we all know something about, and it always hurts. Be sensitive to the fact that there has probably been quite a bit of comparison within your group already, and it probably has affected the way your group has been interacting. As you discuss the chapter, look for ways to gently bring that into the open and consider sharing your own struggles, even (appropriately and in general terms) ways you have compared yourself to the women there. Modeling vulnerability is not easy but is often a very powerful way to help others feel accepted, welcomed, and safe.

ICEBREAKERS

1. Bring a ball of string or yarn to the group. Have your group stand or sit in a circle. Hand one member the end of the string and ask her to tell the group something about herself (where she is from, something she enjoys doing, and so on . . . it can be anything—feel free to keep it lighthearted). Have her continue to hold onto the end of the string but pass the ball to any woman who could say the same thing about herself. Continue sharing and passing the string until everyone in your group is “connected.” Talk about how there are many ways we are different from each other but also many ways in which we are the same.
2. Have you ever seen a movie and then read the book it was based on? Share with the group which you liked better and why.

SCRIPTURE TO READ ALOUD

Genesis 3:7–20

ADDITIONAL PASSAGES TO CONSIDER

1 Corinthians 12:12–27

- Here, Paul describes what it means and looks like to be the body of Christ. Note, however, that unity does not mean uniformity!
- How does this relate to living as a unique image-bearer of God?

Ephesians 2:11–22

- This passage deals with living in unity as the body of Christ; he has united us all together in himself and reconciled us to God.
- What does this passage teach us about Christ's work in uniting us to himself? How does this relate to God's promise to Adam and Eve in the garden?

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION FROM THE BOOK

1. Describe a time when you were caught in the snare of comparison. How did it make you feel? How did it affect your relationships with the people around you?
2. We saw in this chapter that one of the first effects of sin in the garden was the deterioration of relationships. What does that look like when it happens? How have you seen relationships deteriorate in your own life? How have you seen them deteriorate in the lives of the people around you? Do you see God working to restore those relationships?
3. When we don't understand our purpose to live as God's image, we easily compare ourselves to others in order to figure out what our purpose should be instead. We come up with lists, sometimes without even realizing it, of what women ought to do, be, or say. What are some things you have heard or believed about what it looks like to be a woman of God that is rooted in comparison rather than image bearing?
4. How does comparison affect relationships? How does a deeper understanding of our purpose as image bearers free us from the snare of comparison?
5. Do you believe that comparison is a struggle in your own life? If your answer is yes, know that God, in his grace, is calling you out of that trap. What would it look like for you to rest in his plan for us as his unique image bearer? What would it look like for you to join God in working to restore the relationships and communities you are a part of?

THE SHAME THAT BINDS

MAIN IDEA

Shame convinces us that we aren't worth saving, loving, or forgiving, but God pulls us out of our shame and restores us to a place of honor as his children.

NOTE TO LEADERS

Few of us escape this life without experiencing shame either for things we've done or things that were done to us. That makes this topic particularly important and particularly difficult. Be aware that shame brings with it deep hurts, and it takes a lot of courage and vulnerability to share that with others. No one in any group owes us their story, and they are not required to share their experiences with us. It is a privilege and a responsibility when someone does open up with us! Some groups may be able to "go deep" with this lesson, others may need to keep things impersonal and light; both are totally OK! Let the women you're with dictate how personal the conversation goes, gently encouraging interaction with the material where you can.

ICEBREAKER

Before meeting, make a list of things that someone might have in their purse (for example, credit cards, lipstick, hair ties, dental floss, spoons . . . be sure to include some totally random things too, just for fun!). At your meeting, read through the list and have people dig through their purse/bag to find as many things as possible. Consider having a small prize for the person with the most items off your list. Use this as a fun way to move to the topic of hiding and shame. Adam and Eve hid in their shame, and God pursued them and brought them out.

SCRIPTURE TO READ ALOUD

Genesis 3:7–21

ADDITIONAL PASSAGES TO CONSIDER

Psalm 136

- Psalm 136 is a psalm of praise for God's steadfast love.
- How do we see God's steadfast love in his response to Eve in the garden?

Isaiah 61:10

- This passage is a description of God clothing us in garments of righteousness.

- How does this relate to God's actions in Genesis 3:21? What does this teach us about God and his disposition towards his children?

Genesis 37:3; Exodus 28:39–40, 29:8; 2 Samuel 13:18; Song of Solomon 5:3

- In these passages, the same word for *garment* is used.
- How do these passages shed light on the use of the word in Genesis 3:21? What do they teach us about the significance of clothing in regards to identity?

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION FROM THE BOOK

1. Shame can be extremely hard to think about, let alone talk about with others. If you're able, describe a time when you experienced shame. How did it make you feel? What, if anything, helped to pull you out?
2. Based on what you read in this chapter, write a definition for shame. How is it different from embarrassment or guilt?
3. What lies does shame tell us about ourselves and others? How does the love that God showed Eve and the grace he demonstrated with his gift combat those lies?
4. Before reading this chapter, what were your thoughts about the gift of clothing God gave to Adam and Eve? How does the gift of tunics impact the way you view this passage? The way you view God? And the way you view yourself?
5. Eve was bound by her shame, but God rescued her and restored her to her place as his child. Read Genesis 3:7–21 and make a list of all the ways God demonstrated his love for Adam and Eve. How does he demonstrate his love for us in the same ways? What does his response to their sin and their shame tell us about his response to ours?

THE FREEDOM TO LIVE

MAIN IDEA

God has rescued us from our sin so that we might live in freedom as his images and bring flourishing to the world around us.

NOTE TO LEADERS

One of the hardest parts of writing this book was the constant tension of communicating that our purpose is not about what we do while knowing that we all want and need direction and application! That was especially true for this chapter. In finishing out the book, I wanted to give women direction in how to move forward with the truths presented but also wanted to make sure that there was no point at which those actions became our purpose, a means of earning God's love, or just another box to be checked. It is very possible that you will feel that tension too as your group finishes up *Freedom to Flourish*. To combat that, keep directing the focus back to the Lord. Knowing him is always the goal and is, in fact, the mean by which we live as the images we were created to be.

ICEBREAKERS

1. Before your group meets, print off a few very simple pictures or graphics such as a tree, a rainbow, or a butterfly. Give every member of your group a piece of paper and a marker. Without telling them what they will be drawing, describe the picture so that they can draw along with you. For example, if you were having them draw a rainbow you might say, "Draw an upside-down U. Now draw four more underneath that. Draw squiggly circles on either side." Instruct them not to look at other people's drawings! At the end, have everyone share their interpretation of what you described. Talk about how difficult it is to do things when you don't really know what you're supposed to be doing. Relate it to God's plan for Adam and Eve as they left the garden—unlike your group drawing the picture, they knew what God was calling them to do!
2. Parents sometimes end up needing to make random and even weird rules for their kids (no one is allowed to lick the counter; do not tie balloons to the dog to see if he will fly; and so on). What is the weirdest one you've heard of, made, or had made for you? What was the circumstance that made that rule necessary?

SCRIPTURE TO READ ALOUD

Genesis 3:7–24

ADDITIONAL PASSAGES TO CONSIDER

Romans 6:4–11; Ephesians 4:20–32; Colossians 3:1–17

- These passages look at sanctification as God restoring his image in us.
- What do these verses teach us about living as God's image in the world? What do they show us about God's restoration in our lives?

Hebrews 1:1–3

- This is a passage we looked at earlier in this book. It describes Jesus as the exact imprint of God's nature. After making your way through the rest of Genesis 1–3, what observations do you have about Christ as the image of God and the imprint of his nature? How does knowing this about Christ impact the way you view him? Does it change the way you view yourself?

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION FROM THE BOOK

1. Describe a time in your life when you felt lost. What happened? How did you feel?
2. Adam and Eve walked out of the garden with confidence, knowing who they were and what God had called them to do. Is that a confidence you've experienced before? How does seeing their response to his calling impact the way you see your own?
3. Think about the four things we, as image bearers, need to know in order to live as the image of God: God, Christ, ourselves, and others. How well do you think you know each? How could you know them better?
4. Take some time to think and pray about all we've talked about in this book. In what areas are God stirring you up to reflect him? What unique gifts and talents can you use to reflect him and bring flourishing to others?
5. Do you feel like you are experiencing the freedom to live as God's image, as he purposed, or do you feel like misunderstandings have tangled you up? How is he working in your heart to set you free? What would it look like for you to live in freedom as his image?