



ADDITIONAL TIPS AND TOOLS FOR THE LEADER

A SUPPLEMENT FOR *PURSUED WITH PASSION* LEADER'S GUIDE

AUTHENTICITY

- Be willing to be appropriately vulnerable and transparent.
- Be yourself!
- If/when you don't have an answer, simply say, "I don't know" or "I don't know, but I can find out."

RESPECT

- Require respect in the way people interact with one another:
 - Using appropriate tone of voice.
 - Allowing for differences of opinion.
 - Having one conversation at a time.
- People need to be encouraged to listen—really listen—to one another.
- Respect people's time—start and end the meeting on time; emphasize the expectation that people arrive on time.
- Recognize that people are in different places—spiritually, emotionally, and in their life circumstances.
- Don't worry about wrong answers (unless the answer is completely off base!); you can always say, "That's interesting" then address the rest of the group with, "Any other opinions/thoughts?"

FEELINGS

- Feelings are real and need to be validated; this doesn't mean there must be agreement.
- Feelings are real but they need to be acted on appropriately; there is always a choice.
- All ideas and opinions should be heard.
- Be sensitive to signs that someone in the group may need more time to talk with you.

SAFETY

- Encourage women to share appropriately.
- No graphic or detailed descriptions of sin or temptation.
- The group needs to grow deep, but that needs to happen slowly and carefully.
- Begin the study with “low risk” questions and answers, and gradually ask for more vulnerability as the study continues.
- Emphasize and reemphasize the requirement of confidentiality.
- If at any time you feel someone needs professional help, guide them to the appropriate resource, which may be your pastor, a Christian counselor, or any other resource your church or parachurch organization has available.

DISAGREEMENT

- Disagreements are normal; what is important is that they are handled with mutual respect.
- If someone questions or challenges whether or not something is really wrong (for example, watching a certain TV show or indulging in certain reading material), don't argue. Simply say something like, “Many women would agree with you. But I'd like to challenge you to keep an open mind about this as we work through the book together. God has a way of revealing what's okay for us and what's not, and that's what's important.”
- If it's something blatant, like sex outside of marriage, you might say something like, “Well, the Bible does address that very situation pretty candidly, and we'll talk much more about it in chapter 5 (for example). Are you okay with waiting until then to go deeper into that issue?”

RESPONSIBILITY

ENCOURAGE EACH PERSON TO:

- Be responsible for her own learning.
- Make every attempt to do the work each week and come prepared to share thoughts and ideas.
- Be responsible for her own growth and change—it is never our responsibility to “fix” another person!

COMMON “GROUP DYNAMIC” CHALLENGES

KEEPING IT COMFORTABLE...

When asking any question (except a completely “risk free” question), do not suggest simply going from person to person around the room for answers. This can be very intimidating and uncomfortable for some people.

SOMEONE IS DOMINATING THE CONVERSATION...

Preface your next question with, “We’re hearing some great ideas, but let’s hear from someone new this time.”

SOMEONE IS NOT PARTICIPATING AT ALL...

Try breaking the group into pairs, then ask for feedback on several questions. You can then suggest the partners take turns sharing responses.

SUGGESTED CONTENT FOR YOUR FIRST MEETING

INTRODUCTIONS

Use an icebreaker as a creative way for people to introduce themselves.

REVIEW QUESTIONS THE GROUP MAY HAVE

Why are we studying this book, *The Divine Romance*?

To learn how we can trust God with our deepest longings and needs.

What will we be doing during our time together each week?

We will spend some time reviewing the highlights of the chapters we’ve read, discussing our responses to the end-of-chapter questions, and when there are exercises, going through the processes. We will share prayer requests and pray for one another. And we’ll make time to have some fun together!

What can I personally expect to get out of this?

As with any learning process, how much we take away greatly depends on our openness and responsiveness to the material and to God’s nudging. As we work through the book together, sharing insights and digging deeper, praying and asking for God’s leading, we can expect to come away with a greater understanding of how God is pursuing us with passion, and how we can completely depend on him to meet and exceed our deepest needs and longings.

How long will the study be? How much of the book will we cover each week?

Review the number of chapters to be covered each week and total number of weeks together. You can also generate some discussion about the celebration at the end of the study.

How can I get the most out of this study?

- Come prepared!
- As you read the assigned chapters, highlight things that stand out for you and make notes in the margins.
- Respond to the questions at the end of each chapter, and/or fill out the graphs and worksheets.
- Spend time with the prayer at the end of each chapter.
- Be willing to share appropriately, with openness and honesty.

- If you didn't do the work, come anyway!
- Come with an open heart, ready to share and ready to receive.

What kind of an environment will we have in our meetings?

Leader's Note: In advance, create your own list of things you believe are critical for the success of the group.

As a group, do the following exercise and compile a list of guidelines. You may contribute any items from your own list that aren't already suggested.

Exercise: Ask the group, "What guidelines do we want to establish for our group to ensure that we create a safe and comfortable learning environment, one that will enable us to grow as a group as well as deepen our relationships with one another? For example, 'always respecting the opinions of others'."

If you have more than six women in your study, divide the group into threes or fours and ask them to brainstorm a list of ideas. Then, ask each group to contribute their ideas until you have a list of items for your group guidelines. These guidelines should include:

- Confidentiality
- Respect for one another's thoughts, ideas, opinions
- Commitment in completing the weekly reading, questions, and worksheets
- Honesty in responses and in sharing
- The "right to pass" on any participation that creates discomfort—the women should be encouraged to be completely honest with their answers as they do the individual work, but remind them that they only need share what is comfortable for them to share.
- Be on time
- Commitment to pray for one another
- What else?

GROUP EXPECTATIONS?

- "What do you hope to get from this book and from our time together during this study?"
Ask women to pair up and brainstorm two expectations. Then ask each pair to share.
- If you're not covering chapter one during this session, go to Prayer Requests and Prayer, then to a social time.
- If you are covering chapter one during this session, move into your discussion of the chapter.

SUGGESTED MEETING FORMAT

Here is a template you can use for each of your meetings. If you are new as a study leader, there are also a few suggested phrases and questions you may want to use until you get the hang of things! The questions listed here are not in the book and are general enough that you can use them every week to encourage discussion. You will also find conversation starters in this document, and other information that is specific for each of the twelve chapters in the leader's guide, *Pursued with Passion*.

OPENING

OPENING PRAYER

ICEBREAKERS: QUESTIONS TO OPEN YOUR MEETING:

1. In this chapter, what grabbed your attention or stood out for you?

Give women an opportunity to flip through the book. If the group needs a nudge to begin, you might start by sharing one of your own observations. As the leader, what caught your attention? What was meaningful for you? You might say, "One thing that stood out for me was..." Then, ask the group once again what was meaningful to them.

2. What are you discovering about God, or what is he revealing about himself to you?

Do the "seven-second wait" here. If no one offers a response, you might contribute something like: "As I was reading this chapter, I couldn't help but feel that God is speaking to me about...", or "Lately I feel like God is trying to show me..."

After you have shared, ask: "Are any of you experiencing something like that? Would you like to share?"

If there are no responses, simply say: "Okay. Let's go ahead and look at the challenge section."

CHALLENGE!

Refer to and review the "Challenge!" questions in the book at the end of each chapter. See discussion suggestions for each question in the *Pursued with Passion* Leader's Guide.

WRAP UP

1. What have you learned from this chapter? How might what you've learned benefit you in your journey with the Lord?
2. Write down one thing you would like to do differently this week as it relates to what we've read and discussed.
3. How can we pray for you this week?

PRAYER TIME

NEXT WEEK

Provide a brief overview of the chapter(s) that will be studied the following week.

CLOSING AND SOCIAL TIME



CONVERSATION STARTERS BY CHAPTER



CHAPTER ONE:

“Were you as surprised as I was that many Christian women struggle in the area of temptation?”

“When you read about Dee’s story and her struggle with the ‘Beast’, was it easy for you to see how toying with thoughts and behaviors can ultimately lead to addiction?” Wait for any responses. You might add something like, “That made me stop and think about some of the little things I do or think about. I tend to ignore them as small indiscretions, but from now on I think I’ll give some thought to where they could possibly lead!” Remember to put your comments in your own authentic words.

CHAPTER TWO:

“Have you ever thought about women who lived years and years ago having some of the same struggles we have today? How do you think the Old Testament woman felt when her husband Fred brought Bambi-sha home? Or how about the young woman who found out she was marrying Gronk the goat herder?”

“How do you imagine those women tried to get their needs and dreams for love and affection met?”

“Dee shared the list of needs that came up during the Ahh...Men seminars. Can you relate to any of those needs?” Wait for a response, and if needed, share something from the list that you can relate to.

CHAPTER THREE:

“How do you think the world might look today if we weren’t living in a fallen world? How would that affect our feelings?”

“Can you think of some of the strategies you used as a child in order to ‘survive’?” Wait for a response; if none, you might say: “I remember I used to...” For example: laugh when kids made fun of me, cry and run away; whatever is a real answer for you.

“From your reading, what does it mean to ‘stand in the feelings’?” Here you can be looking for responses like: Don’t avoid feeling what you’re feeling; stop and think about what you’re feeling; get in touch with your feelings.

“What did you learn about icebergs? And how does that relate to our feelings?” Possible responses: Only a small part of the iceberg can be seen; sometimes our feelings are only the tip of the iceberg—there’s something more, and bigger, underneath.

“If you were cast in a ‘reality’ TV show, what 10 percent of your life would the camera crew have seen this past week? What is below that?” Just as Dee helped her friend probe beneath the surface, see if you can gently encourage women to see what is beneath the tip of their icebergs!

Read 1 Chronicles 28:9. “What does God see?”

CHAPTER FOUR:

“Back in chapter 2 we talked about some of the unmet needs we may sometimes have. What were some of those needs?”

“When you experience things that make you feel uncomfortable, what kinds of things do you sometimes do in order to feel good, or to avoid feeling bad?” “For example, for me it’s...” Provide a low-risk example: eating,

napping, watching TV, etc. “How about you? What are some of the things you do?” Remind women to share appropriately, and to share only what they’re comfortable sharing.

“Has this chapter caused you to stop and think about the ways you might be trying to meet your unmet needs? What have you discovered so far?”

CHAPTER FIVE:

“What if a parent doesn’t make or enforce rules? What happens to the child?”

Read Jeremiah 29:11. “How does this verse relate to what we read in this chapter?” Look for responses like, “I can trust God because he has my best in mind;” “It may not make sense to me at the moment, but God has a plan.”

Read 2 Cor. 12:9. “What does this verse tell us about our inability to do everything God’s way?” Look for responses like, “He forgives my mistakes;” “His grace is enough;” “He’ll be our strength.”

The key idea here is that rather than rely on our own self-sufficiency, we need to rely on God’s strength. And, as we admit our weakness and inability to him, we are acknowledging our need for him.

CHAPTER SIX:

“What are our three adversaries?” Satan, the world, and our flesh.

“We’re told that Satan mixes lies with the truth to make them more palatable. Can you think of some specific ways we see that done in the world?” The book *The Secret* is a good example—parts of it even sound biblical; *The DaVinci Code* is another good example. Much of it is right out of the Bible, but in the midst of it, false facts are presented as truth. The New Age movement combines truth with falsehoods as well.

“Why do you think spending quiet time with God and his Word each day is important?” We need his help every day to overcome our three adversaries. Intimacy with him increases our love and obedience. Learning and memorizing his Word arms us with truth and knowledge.

CHAPTER SEVEN:

“What kinds of things ‘set you off’?” For example: a car that won’t start, telemarketers, inconsiderate people, honking horns. Use your own examples.

“Can you think of anything you accepted as accurate when you were a child that you later realized was incorrect?” For example: if you cross your eyes too much they’ll stay that way, if you eat carrots you’ll be able to see in the dark, Santa Claus and the tooth fairy, if you kiss a frog he’ll turn into a prince and marry you and you’ll live happily ever after!

“What does this tell us about the possibility that we may still be believing untrue things?”

Read 2 Corinthians 10:5. “What does this say we should do with the things we hear, say, and think?” We need to challenge our thinking in light of God’s truth!

CHAPTER EIGHT:

“How does our disobedience give control of our lives to the enemy?”

Read Galatians 6:7–8. “Occasional disobedience, or disobedience in small things, may seem inconsequential, but what do these verses say about that?”

Read John 15:10–11. “In contrast, what do these verses tell us about obedience?”

CHAPTER NINE:

“How did you like the arm-crossing exercise? Did you find it true that you had to think about doing it differently, and that it felt awkward? How might those thoughts and feelings relate to changing a familiar habit?”

“As you read this chapter, did you discover any negative or untrue messages that you tell yourself? What were they?” Examples: I’m unlovable, I’m not pretty enough, I’m not important. “What would God say about these messages?”

“When we attempt to break an old, unproductive habit, why is it important to replace it with a new, positive one?” Key thought: an empty “hole” needs filling; if we don’t fill it with something new, the old stuff will return.

Read Matt. 12:43–45. “How does this story corroborate what we’re learning about breaking old habits?”

CHAPTER TEN:

“Could you picture yourself as the little girl, running and jumping into the king’s lap? How did that make you feel?”

“What parts of this chapter—and about how God views you—were easy for you to believe? What parts were difficult for you to believe?”

“What did you experience as you prayed (at the end of the chapter)? Are you beginning to experience God’s intense and passionate love for you? If so, what does that feel like?”

CHAPTER ELEVEN:

“In your spiritual life, are you feasting at the captain’s table or eating the brown bag lunch?”

CHAPTER TWELVE:

“What do you think about Jim Elliot’s quote? What does it mean to ‘die to self’?”

“Peter walked on water, but also sank when he took his eyes off Jesus. How does this apply to you as you move forward and resolve to trust God with all your needs?” There are two great insights here: 1) As long as Peter kept his eyes on Jesus, he was able to do the impossible, and 2) he experienced failure, as we will, anytime we take our eyes off him!

“How can you apply the HOPE acronym as you strive to internalize what you’ve learned?”



YOUR “END-OF-STUDY” CELEBRATION!



This is a time to reconvene your study group for the purpose of deepening relationships and solidifying positive decisions that have been made during the weeks of study! You and your study group can design it any way you please, but here are a few ideas just to get you started.

MAKE IT A CELEBRATION! GOD IS ROMANCING US!

FOOD

- Select a location, preferably someone’s home.
- Make it a potluck—as simple or as fancy as you like.
- Create a theme, such as “Fresh Hope,” “New Beginnings,” or “Love for a Lifetime.”

FUN

- Create a couple of simple, fun activities.

SYMBOLISM

1. Do something symbolic, to confirm the changes you are making in your lives.
2. “God, with your help I want to go in a new direction...”
3. Have each person bring an item that symbolizes her new commitment. Each person will then share what the item means to her. For example:
 - A special ring or bracelet they will start wearing as a reminder.
 - A rock to carry in their purse or pocket.
4. Have everyone write down a “trap” or habit they are choosing to discard. And then conduct a ceremony that includes throwing away or burning that paper.
5. Ask each woman to come with a “theme verse” they have gotten from the study; each person can read her verse and share what it means to her.

PRAYER AND AFFIRMATION

1. Exercise:
 - Give each person a stack of index cards, enough so they have one card for every other person in the group.
 - Instruct them to write the name of one person at the top of each card.
 - They will then write a one-sentence personal note to each person, beginning with, “I appreciate you for...”
 - Everyone will then deliver their cards to one another.

- Give them a few moments to read their cards.
- Provide an open time for sharing and for affirming one another.

2. Have a time of prayer, with focus on praising God for what he has done, and for what he will continue to do in your lives!