



SMALL GROUP STUDY GUIDE

by Sharon M. Knudson

for

Starting From Scratch When You're Single Again

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BEFORE YOU BEGIN:

Use your imagination and let God direct your thoughts in considering what kind of group you could form and how often to gather. Invite some friends— along with women you don't know very well—to join you. Help them order the book through their local bookstore or from Amazon.com, and encourage them to come prepared to discuss the first chapter (three stories).

You might like to serve one of the recipes from the book as the women gather. Then open with an ice-breaker so they can get acquainted. One that works well is to divide the group into pairs, asking them to choose a partner they don't know very well. Then have everyone share three good things about themselves (this is sometimes hard to do, but it's great for boosting self-esteem). Give them 15 minutes, and then ask everyone to introduce their new friend to the group.

When it's time for the book discussion, feel free to use the questions below and add some of your own. By the third session you'll want to be brainstorming ideas on how you can reach out to others who have found themselves suddenly single. Cover your meetings with prayer, and ask God to bless each woman.

CHAPTER ONE: STIR WITH FAITH

1. Journaling can be very helpful, and everyone journals a little differently.
 - a) What role did it play in Sharon's situation?
 - b) Years after the fact, Kendra journaled about her father's suicide. Why do you think she did that?
 - c) Jennifer started a daily blog on which she commented about the emotions surrounding her husband's death. In what ways would this help her raise their two toddlers alone?

Have you ever journaled? Talk about its benefits during unsettling times. List various types of journal entries a person could make (diary of events, random thoughts, a gratitude journal, during a crisis, etc.). Let the group share their own experiences with journaling.

2. In "Telling..." Sharon talks about the stigma of divorce and feeling a deep sense of shame. In "Who Needs God?" Kendra noticed there is a societal stigma that surrounds suicide. Why is talking to others—even friends—so hard? What are some things we should be careful *not* to say to the recently widowed or divorced?
3. Consider the popular statement, "Everything happens for a reason." The trouble with this statement is that it blames God for the terrible things that happen. Discuss the death of Jennifer's husband and the role sin and the devil played in that. Then look at Romans 8:28 and talk about what God did to bring *good* out of tragedy as Jennifer loved and trusted Him. Share your own experiences about how this has been true for you.
4. Are there other points you would like to remember from this chapter?

5. Does someone come to mind that you could help or encourage this week?

CHAPTER TWO: GATHER THE INGREDIENTS

1. Financial matters are one of the over-arching themes in these stories. How did Janet's loss of her husband of 50 years compare with that of Elizabeth and Shary, who were young and left with small children?
2. Review what each of these women did to gain better control over their finances. Have you tried any of these things? What worked for you? Are there any other financial tips you would like to share with the group?
3. Which of the Guiding Principles offered by these women meant the most to you? Which Scripture verse stands out to you?
4. Are there other points you would like to remember from this chapter?
5. Does someone come to mind that you could help or encourage this week?

CHAPTER THREE: GLAZE WITH HOPE

1. Describe a time when you were without hope. How did that feel? What happened that gradually renewed your hope? Recall some favorite verses about God's faithfulness. Give testimony about how God's faithfulness came to bear when you felt hopeless.
2. Sandra and Judy talk about feeling helpless to cope with household, automobile and financial matters after their husbands died. Discuss

the danger of relying too heavily on one's spouse. What are some stereotypical responsibilities under the husband's control, and how accurate do you find those stereotypes in the lives of women you know? What are some things every woman should be aware of and know how to do?

3. How did Joanna's friends and church reach out to help her? Did they judge her, condone her situation, or something in between? How can the church reach out to help divorcees without seemingly condoning divorce? Recount the specific steps Joanna took in order to get rid of her debt and build financial stability for herself.
4. Are there other points you would like to remember from this chapter?
5. Does someone come to mind that you could help or encourage this week?

CHAPTER FOUR: MARINATE IN MERCY

1. Lis, Hope, and Linda all had young children and their husbands offered little or no child support. What did each of them do to provide for themselves and their children?
2. If there were women living near you who fell into some of the categories listed below, what are some specific church and community resources you could suggest they investigate?
 - *Needs groceries
 - *Needs a job
 - *Wants financial help
 - *Needs financial counseling
 - *Husband is not paying child support
 - *Small children need nutritious food
 - *Might qualify for food stamps

- *Wants advice about what to do
- *Would like to go to a support group
- *Can't pay the rent
- *Has to move and has nowhere to go
- *Domestic violence issues
- *Children may have been abused

3. Lis found that the element of trust is difficult to restore once it has been violated. Having forgiven her husband years earlier, what did she do to restore their relationship? Which Bible verses talk about forgiveness? Would you have done what Lis did and given him a second chance?
4. Are there other points you would like to remember from this chapter?
5. Does someone come to mind that you could help or encourage this week?

CHAPTER FIVE: PUREE UNTIL PEACEFUL

1. Which of the following emotions do we commonly attribute to a widow? Which ones would you attribute to a divorced woman? To both?

*Fear	*Guilt
*Anxiety	*Shame
*Self-condemnation	*Weight loss or gain
*Anger	*Railing against God
*Humiliation	*Thoughts of escape
*Depression	*Blaming your spouse
*Blaming God	*Avoidance
*Isolation	*Loss of self-esteem
*Despair	*Feelings of hopelessness

2. Review the five stages of grief: 1) denial and isolation, 2) anger, 3) bargaining, 4) depression, 5) acceptance. How did each of these stages play out in Nancy's life after losing Milt? When Nancy met Bob, she noticed he was grieving in different ways than she had. How was Bob's grief manifesting itself? Janis started grieving long before her husband died. In light of these three examples, how would you define *healthy* grieving?
3. If Esther was your friend, how would you pray for her, her children, and her husband? Be very specific in your answer. If you had the opportunity to pray *with* her, would you pray any differently? What are two Scripture verses you could share to encourage her?
4. Are there other points you would like to remember from this chapter?
5. Does someone come to mind that you could help or encourage this week?

CHAPTER SIX: FLAVOR WITH LOVE

1. Amy, Sharon and Aubrey used great reserve in deciding whether or not to date again and eventually, whether or not to remarry. Briefly describe the reasons for their hesitation and how that played out. How did God make it clear to each of these women that He wanted them to marry again? Talk about how the Lord calls some women (and men) to remain single.
2. What are some of the differences between losing a husband to death as opposed to divorce? What are the similarities? Do you think society, and particularly the church, views widows and divorced women differently? In what way?

3. Which of the Guiding Principles offered by these women meant the most to you? Which Scripture verse stands out to you?
4. Are there other points you would like to remember from this chapter?
5. Does someone come to mind that you could help or encourage this week?

CHAPTER SEVEN: SPRINKLE WITH THE SPIRIT

1. People who experience sudden life change often experience a wide and conflicting range of emotions simultaneously. In other words, they might lose their emotional stability for a time and feel "lost." How do Susan, Ann and Jeanine illustrate this point?
2. Susan had grave doubts about the reality of God. Describe the long process of her coming to Christ. How did God work to draw you to Himself? Has He ever done something spectacular or miraculous to prove His existence or faithfulness to you?
3. Ann's parents wanted her to come home after Jerry's death. While it's hard for parents to see their children suffer alone, it's also hard for once-married women to have to live at home again. What are some healthy boundaries that can be put into place to safe-guard the relationship between parents and their grown children for a situation like this?
4. Are there other points you would like to remember from this chapter?
5. Does someone come to mind that you could help or encourage this week?

CHAPTER EIGHT: GARNISH WITH GRACE

1. What made Maggie, a pastor's wife who was experiencing horrific internal pain, smile and try to look spiritual rather than be honest? What makes it so hard to share life's deepest disappointments with others in the church? Do you think the church unknowingly contributes to people feeling estranged from God? If so, are there remedies for this?
2. Marie wore a mask to hide her true situation, and reverted to using drugs and alcohol. Do you know someone who is doing this? Have they expressed any intentions of committing suicide? What are some ways you can reach out to that person? Talk about what works, and what doesn't. How did God intervene and bring healing in Marie's case?
3. The decision to divorce was excruciating for Christine, yet it was necessary for reasons of safety. Talk about God's provision for rescuing Christine and her child. In what ways did God eventually use her life experiences and circumstances to help other women? List the women's shelters in your area and talk about ways your group can support them.
4. Are there other points you would like to remember from this chapter?
5. Does someone come to mind that you could help or encourage this week?

BOOK SUMMARY

One reader summarized the book's theme very well. She wrote, "As I read the stories in *Starting From Scratch When You're Single Again*, I often cried the best kind of tears! Those women made themselves vulnerable so I could feel with them and learn from their situation. That's the kind of truth I hunger for. When I was going through a terrible ordeal ten years ago, my first experience of clinging to Scripture was, 'And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast. To him be the power for ever and ever. Amen' (1 Peter 5:10-11). God is so good!"

* * *

Look around and minister to those who feel lost and are in pain.
Comfort others as you have been comforted.
Serve when and where you are called.
It is through our testimony and service
that others will see the reality and goodness of God.
God bless you!

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P.S. Be sure to visit our blog at
www.StartingFromScratchBooks.com

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