

Facilitator's Guide



ENGAGING MOTHERHOOD

Heart Preparation for a Holy Calling



Facilitator's Guide
by Cara Johnson and Holly Mackle

to accompany

Engaging Motherhood
Heart Preparation for a Holy Calling

Dear facilitators,

Let's face it, there's a lot of pressure on mamas these days.

So naturally, evil wants to get in and have its way with this very tender, emotional, and often-trying time in a woman's life. We have found that women in this stage are begging for affirmation, but that cry is deeply covered by the scary newness of it all. As a result, many focus on figuring out the how-to's instead of seeking answers to the deep questions at the core of what they're really asking: *Am I doing a good job? What if I screw it up? If I do my best and still screw it up, what then? Is God going to get me through this?* If we could really listen, would we be able to speak light into those dark places?

When you scrape it all away, it's not about whether you sleep train, cloth diaper, give solids before a year of age, or any one of the thousands of other examples in this age of mommy-analysis. There are great moms who seek the Lord that choose to do those things, and great ones who are also seeking the Lord that don't. What matters is the heart behind those decisions, and whether or not that heart is surrendered to Jesus.

It's about your worst fear coming true—your child growing up to wreak havoc on all of creation—and you still being able to say “my identity is in Christ alone and his completed work.” Because if your worst fear does come true: *what does that say about you?* And even scarier, *what does that say about God?* Heaven forbid it, but if the worst fears were to come true, in the grief may the answers to those two questions not be based on our interpretation of circumstances, but on with what God says about us and about himself.

That's what we want this study to communicate.

In this guide you will find resources for both the lead facilitator (who serves as the familiar face), and the seasoned moms who facilitate the small groups. These pages are not intended to be a how-to or a checklist as you seek to set up this study. However, we do want to give you the ideas and instruments we have utilized before, in hopes that you feel equipped to find your own path.

We hope you find this study to be a place for moms of young children to connect and beat back the loneliness, to be reminded of truth when lies scream so loudly, and know that they are enough because He is enough.

All glory be unto King Jesus.

Holly and Cara

Lead Facilitator

The Familiar Face

Think of yourself as the glue for all the moving parts of this Bible study. You will organize and lead the seasoned moms and be the face everyone sees at the beginning of each meeting.

Weekly format (See "Seasoned Moms" section for a detailed weekly format)

Total time: an hour and a half

1. Fellowship and food (10-15 minutes).
2. Announcements and icebreaker (large or small group—10-15 minutes).
3. Introduction to topic and speaker (5 minutes).
4. Speaker (20-30 minutes).
5. Small groups (30-40 minutes).

Qualities to look for when choosing seasoned moms

- A mama who can avoid “telling.” She might know exactly the cup of water that a new mom needs, but she seeks to lead that new mom to the well so that she can be given that drink through the work of the Holy Spirit, not her seasoned mom’s abilities to fix.
- Not necessarily a “super mom.” New moms can be intimidated by women they perceive as doing it right or juggling everything perfectly.
- A transparent heart. While the question a new mom asks may look like a how-to question, what she is likely asking for is the other person to invite her into her own personal struggle or victory in what the Lord did in her. Transparency invites depth.
- A diverse group. Working moms, stay-at-home moms, moms of seven and moms of one, moms with middle schoolers and empty nesters—we believe your group will benefit from life experience across the generations and experiences.

Before the study begins

- Communicate with the seasoned moms
 - Direct them to the seasoned moms’ section of the facilitator’s guide
 - Send a schedule of each week with the chapter title (include weeks for guest speakers or Q&A time if you’d like to lengthen the study—see “Guest Speaker Recommendations” later in this section) and ask them to prayerfully sign up for which week(s) they will lead the large group time. (See “Schedule of Teaching” at the back of this section.)

During the Bible study

- Send a brief weekly email to all the seasoned moms a few days in advance with 1) a word of encouragement or perspective, 2) any areas where young moms might be sensitive or tempted to believe lies based on that week's topic, 3) a reminder of who is speaking so they can be praying, 4) a list of suggested questions to address in your small group, and 5) a heads up if there are upcoming pertinent days for groups with adoptive moms.
- Email or print a copy of the reading schedule for each participant, including guest speakers or Q&A days if you're choosing to extend the study by a few weeks (see "Sample Reading Schedule" at the back of this section).
- After week one, place people in small groups. You may want to consider limiting group sizes to 5-8 women, and it's been helpful in the past to have the same groups from week to week.
- At some point after week two when small groups have been established, email the entire Bible study a contact list so that women can connect with one another outside of the Bible study time. (See "Bible Study Contact list" at the back of this section.)
- Run the Bible study. (See the Seasoned Moms' section for a suggested outline of how to use the time.)
 - Move people from "fellowship" time to their tables
 - Share announcements
 - Lead the group in an icebreaker (see "Suggested Icebreaker" page in the facilitator's guide)
 - Give a short one-minute devotional thought or share scripture that pertained to that week
 - Introduce the speaker and pray for her
 - Move people from large group teaching time to small group time
 - End promptly
- Plan one or two social gatherings outside of the Bible study time in an effort to continue relationship building and allowing women to meet others who aren't in their small group. Suggestions include: extending childcare one week and catering lunch for a small fee, having an Easter egg hunt or Halloween dress up play time at someone's house, or doing a service project together.
- At the last meeting, omit the icebreaker at the beginning and instead ask them to think about the question: What has God done in your life through this group and study? Then, leave about 10 minutes at the end for individuals to share their answers with the group.

Guest Speaker Recommendations

If you want to make this study longer than eight weeks, here are some suggestions for additional weeks.

- Seasoned moms' panel: have young moms submit anonymous questions the week before and then have the panel answer to the large group.
- Medical doctor, psychologist, or counselor with a gospel-minded heart who can discuss postpartum depression.
- Counselor to discuss relational changes, specifically regarding marriage.
- Adoptive mother(s) to share their stories

Suggestions for after the study

- Re-send an email with contact information so women can follow up with each other and continue to connect.
- Plan one follow up social gathering that's low-key in order to reconnect before Bible studies begin again.
- Encourage seasoned moms to follow up with their small groups, checking in every now and then via text, phone call, or email.

Sample Reading Schedule

(to send participants)

WEEK	DATE	TOPIC	PAGE
1		Introduction	1
2		Role Change	6-11
3		Control	12-17
4		Perfectionism	18-23
5		Comparison	24-29
6		Loneliness	30-35
7		Expecting Emotions	36-41
8		Spiritual Life After Baby Arrives	42-47
9			
10			

Remember to add weeks if you choose to have guest speakers or a Q&A week. For example, you could add a guest speaker week once a month.

Schedule of Teaching

(to send seasoned moms)

DATE	TOPIC	LEAD TEACHER
Week One	Introduction	Lead Facilitator (suggested)
Week Two	Role Change	
Week Three	Control	
Week Four	Perfectionism	
Week Five	Comparison	
Week Six	Loneliness	
Week Seven	Expecting Emotions	
Week Eight	Spiritual Life After Baby Arrives	

Small group facilitators (seasoned moms):

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Recommendation: You may want to pair two seasoned moms for each small group so that if one is unable to attend, the group still has someone to lead.

Engaging Motherhood Study Contact List

Last name	First name	Email	Cell	Area of town (helpful for playgroups)	Children's names/ages/due dates
(Seasoned mom)					

Icebreaker Suggestions

- What would you do with a free day?
- What's one thing you're really good at?
- Who in your life would you like to have coffee with if you had time and distance wasn't an issue?
- What's something you and your spouse/best friend enjoy doing together?
- Name one thing you were involved in in high school or college.
- What's the worst job you ever had?
- When you were a child, what did you want to be when you grew up?
- Why did your parents name you what they did?
- What's one piece of modern technology that you're particularly grateful for this week?
- What's your favorite dessert?
- What's something you're afraid of?
- What book/movie have you read/seen in the last year? Did you enjoy it?
- What's one of your pet peeves?
- What's one of your favorite places on earth?

Seasoned Moms

Small group facilitators for young moms

Thank you for your willingness to come alongside younger moms this semester in the *Engaging Motherhood* Bible study. We know you may feel inadequate and intimidated; please know that younger moms are not looking for you have perfect answers or for the light of heaven to shine down on you as you say something profound. All they're looking for is a woman who loves Jesus and has walked before them in motherhood. That's it. It's not your responsibility to be inspiring or even memorable (although we imagine you will be both of those things). It's your job to spend time with Jesus, prepare, and show up, and then you get to sit back and see what God does; the pressure is off!

Detailed Weekly Format

Total time: an hour and a half

- Fellowship and food (10-15 minutes).
This allows time for mamas to put their children in childcare, go to the bathroom (alone!), and get settled before diving in.
- Announcements and ice breaker lead by lead facilitator (10-15 minutes).
- Introduction to topic and speaker (5 minutes).
Lead facilitator will give a brief (1-2 minute) thought on the day's topic, and then introduce and pray for the day's speaker.
- Speaker (20-30 minutes).
Each week, a seasoned mom will rotate in to speak on the week's topic. Your teaching time can be more of a personal story that pertains to that topic, can be deeply rooted in scripture, or can be some combination of both. Rather than teaching through each day's reading from that week, feel free to focus more on the week's topic, with the goal of drawing women back to Jesus.
- Small groups (30-40 minutes).

We recommend that the last 30 minutes or so be spent in small groups of 5-8 women and have found it helpful to keep the groups consistent from week to week. The goal here is for you to facilitate, not teach, so you can use some of the questions from the week, some of the extended questions included in the facilitator's guide, or come up with a few overarching, open-ended questions of your own. You'll have more questions than time to answer them, so encourage depth by not going day by day, question by question, but rather asking God beforehand what the right questions would be for your particular group.

Additional questions are provided for each week in the facilitator guide and move from surface-level to deep. They're there as a resource and suggestion, not a checklist, so don't feel like you have to get through them all. If good conversation comes out of one question and you stay on it the entire time, great! If your group members move through questions quickly or aren't talkative one week, you have several questions to work from.

Expectations

- Be there as often as possible for continuity and relationship-building. For those who know they'll be gone some, please let the lead facilitator know and she'll try to pair you with someone who can take your place the weeks you can't be there.
- Pray. Pray for the women in your small group, and for wisdom as you share and lead. Pray before you ever show up. Pray while you listen to your group discuss. Pray as you drive home and throughout the week. Be sensitive to the fact that some of the moms in your group may be single, infertile, depressed, adopting, struggling in their marriages, or just so sleep deprived they probably shouldn't be operating a vehicle.
- Prepare. Take time to process the material and His word; while it's written for new and young moms, many of the topics are struggles regardless of age, so we pray God will meet you in your time with Him.
- Connect and follow up with the women in your small group. Plan to follow up with each person in your group once a week through text, email, phone call, or personal visit. It doesn't have to be time-consuming or elaborate, or even particularly creative; a quick "I'm thinking of you and praying for you about ____" message can mean the world.

1

Introduction

Unlike other weeks, no one will have read the material ahead of time, so this week will look a bit different.

1. Food and fellowship (10-15 minutes)
2. Lead facilitator gives introductory talk (10-15 minutes)

The goal of this talk is two-fold:

1. To share the heart behind why this study matters. Feel free to use the facilitator and/or participant guide opening letters as a springboard.
2. To share the nuts and bolts of how the study works.
 - Written by fellow moms of a variety of ages.
 - Eight weeks long, but possible guest speakers once a month on pertinent topics, so the entire study may be 9-10 weeks long, depending on your group.
 - Two questions at the end of each day—try to take time to answer to enrich your own time with Jesus as well as time in your small group.
 - Come even if you haven't read or answered questions; you can still participate!
 - Outline of how the time will be spent each week (seasoned moms rotate teaching time and facilitate a small group, plenty of time for discussion each week).
3. Getting to know the seasoned moms (10-15 minutes)

This is an opportunity to meet the seasoned moms and hear from them briefly, helping take away the stigma that seasoned moms are “supermoms.”

Suggested questions for lead facilitator to ask seasoned moms:

- Name and how old your children are
- A funny quirk or hobby you enjoy
- What you wish you'd known/believed when you were a new/younger mom
- Briefly share a victory you've experienced as a mom
- Briefly share a defeat you've experienced as a mom
- Worst parenting advice you've ever received

4. Small group get to know you (10-15 minutes)

- Introduce yourselves—name and age of children
- What’s a funny quirk about you?
- What do you like to do when you’re not doing mommy things?
- When did you experience joy this week?
- What are you hoping to get out of this study?
- How can we go before Jesus on your behalf?

5. Mother’s Day sermon* with small group discussion (30 minutes)

*Located in the back of the Engaging Motherhood study

In an effort to move the conversation deeper and also set the groundwork for a grace-centered approach to motherhood, take time to read Matt Redmond’s “A Mother’s Day Sermon” individually at your tables. Before reading, encourage women to note any parts that stand out to them, write questions in the margin, and generally interact with the material.

When they’ve finished reading, have them jot down answers to the discussion questions individually, and then discuss them as a small group.

Recommended discussion questions for “A Mother’s Day Sermon”

- What were some things you underlined and why?
- Did any truth stand out to you freshly or for the first time?
- Did this post raise any questions for you? If so, what were they?
- Which of the “You are not condemned…” sentences resonated with you most? Why?
- Which of the “You are not condemned…” sentences was easiest for you to accept? Why?
- What reminders of God’s character and actions on our behalf does the writer encourage us to believe?
- Imagine yourself free from the one area where you consistently feel condemnation. What does that freedom feel like?

2

Role Change

1. Food and fellowship (10-15 minutes)
2. Lead facilitator gives introductory talk (10-15 minutes)
3. Icebreaker
4. Additional discussion questions (30 minutes)
 - Can you think of an example of a time when “the school of life” or “the school of hard knocks” was your teacher? Did you seek the Lord during this time in your life? If so, what did that look like? If not, do you think seeking him would have helped you get through that time period?
 - If you are leaving or have left a career—how do you feel about that? If you are returning to a career after maternity leave, how do you feel about that?
 - If you’re married, have you and your husband had an honest discussion about your fears and hesitations when adding to your family?
 - Why the mommy wars in our culture today? Specifically in relationship to working or staying at home—what do you think is the core lie that women as a gender are being tempted to believe as they walk into their decision?
 - What are some practical ways to offer grace to women who make a different choice from yours in regard to staying at home or working after baby?
 - What does it say about God that he created us to live in relationship with one another—specifically in regard to friendship or marriage?
 - What part most challenges, upsets, or scares you about the upheaval a baby will bring to your life?

3

Control

1. Food and fellowship (10-15 minutes)
2. Lead facilitator gives introductory talk (10-15 minutes)
3. Icebreaker
4. Additional discussion questions (30 minutes)
 - What might God be up to when he asks us to relinquish control to him?
 - Can you name something that terrified you at any point in your adult life? How did you respond to your fear? Did you seek the Lord? If/When you find yourself fearful in regard to your child, what differences would you like to see in your response to the fear stimulant?
 - The writer noted that fear is often the trigger for her marital arguments. Have you ever processed with your husband back through your big, memorable arguments? Do you see any strands of a theme? If so, bring them to God and ask for his merciful forgiveness and power to change you.
 - How does it make you feel that God wants you to know he is the one in control and not you?
 - Reflect on the specific lie that you hear in regard to parenting from Day 4. Now project out 5 years. What is at stake in your marriage/parenting/relationships if you go on believing that lie? What is gained if it is no longer a part of your life?
 - Can you think of a time when you felt like Jesus was asleep in your boat? As you reflect back, what circumstances did he use to help you understand he was in control all along?
 - If you could scrape it all away...would you really *really* want control of your life or are you relieved that it never was yours to control anyway?

4

Perfectionism

1. Food and fellowship (10-15 minutes)
2. Lead facilitator gives introductory talk (10-15 minutes)
3. Icebreaker
4. Additional discussion questions (30 minutes)
 - Were you brought up to be a “get it done” kind of girl? If so, how has that affected your view of yourself when you do or don’t accomplish your task list?
 - Is your “to-do” list under the authority of a loving and kind God? Is he allowed to make changes to your list?
 - How does God feel when your “to-do” list trumps his desire for you in the moment?
 - Can you think of an example of a time that God interrupted your plan and in the end you were so glad he did?
 - What are some practical ways to hold yours or your family’s future with an open hand before the Lord?
 - How must God feel about us when we do surrender to his plan?

5

Comparison

1. Food and fellowship (10-15 minutes)
2. Lead facilitator gives introductory talk (10-15 minutes)
3. Icebreaker
4. Additional discussion questions (30 minutes)
 - How do you think it makes God feel when we compare ourselves to others?
 - Are you most tempted to compare yourself to a situation that you intimately know (as in how your own mother parented you or how your best friend mothers) or a situation that you don't (as in your perception of an acquaintance of a mom from a blog)?
 - Is there such a thing as a healthy comparison when it comes to mothering? What are some examples of unhealthy comparisons in this age of mommy-analysis?
 - Where are you most tempted to find your sources of inspiration for comparison in mothering? Friends? In laws? Your own mother? Celebrities? What is the appeal of that source of inspiration to you / what do they seem to be doing so right?
 - If you compare yourself to others on any front, do you believe your children will eventually pick up on this? If yes, how does that possibility make you feel? What choices do you want to make in light of it?
 - When you compare yourself to another mother, is it possible that there's really a deeper question at play? If so, what might that deeper question be?
 - Describe what the freedom would feel like in being confident in God guiding your mothering and being released from comparing yourself to others.

6

Isolation

1. Food and fellowship (10-15 minutes)
2. Lead facilitator gives introductory talk (10-15 minutes)
3. Icebreaker
4. Additional discussion questions (30 minutes)
 - In what ways do you experience loneliness in your life right now?
 - In what ways did Jesus experience loneliness in his life on earth? (think of some specific examples)
 - What did Jesus do when he experienced loneliness? (prayed, quoted scripture, spent time with close friends who knew him well) How does our reaction to loneliness compare to His?
 - When God's plan is different from your hopes and expectations, how do you respond? What lies are you believing? What truths do you need to hear?
 - What scriptural truths can we remind ourselves of when we experience loneliness?
 - How does the idea of Christian community reflect the heart of God? If we're made in His image and we need community, then how does God demonstrate that community is at the core of who he is? (Trinity; created us, but didn't have to; our lives give him glory)
 - Is the truth that God is with you and delights in you hard to believe? Why or why not? (Seasoned moms may want to print our scripture that speaks of God's love and nearness for women to meditate on during the week or during your time together.)

7

Expecting Emotions

1. Food and fellowship (10-15 minutes)
2. Lead facilitator gives introductory talk (10-15 minutes)
3. Icebreaker
4. Additional discussion questions (30 minutes)
 - What emotions have you experienced most often this week?
 - What do you typically do with your emotions (good or bad)?
 - In what ways is God emotional?
 - Is it easy or hard for you to think of God as emotional? Why or why not?
 - Do you tend to believe emotions are usually wrong or usually right? What does scripture say?
 - Have you ever had to fight for joy? What did that look like for you?
 - Anger, fear, sorrow, and pride aren't problems, and gratitude, hope, joy, and confidence in Christ aren't solutions. They ride side-by-side, and are all ways to lead us to Jesus, as we see so often in the Psalms. When have you experienced a difficult emotion or circumstance EVEN AS you've experienced God's presence and sufficiency?
 - On day five, the author writes about our tendency toward shame and pride and how both fall away because of the work of Jesus in us. Do you tend more toward shame or pride? What would it look like for you to claim the truth of the gospel in that area—that because of Jesus, your unrighteousness is taken away and His righteousness is given to you as a GIFT and nothing you've earned?

8

Spiritual Life After Baby Arrives

1. Food and fellowship (10-15 minutes)
2. Lead facilitator gives introductory talk (10-15 minutes)
3. Icebreaker
4. Additional discussion questions (30 minutes)
 - What makes it difficult for you to spend time regularly in God's word right now? Are there practical ways to make time with him more of a priority?
 - When you're tired, worn out, exhausted, or sleep-deprived, what do you tend to look to for comfort and restoration?
 - Psalm 19:7-11 outlines what God's word is and does. Take a moment to read the passage and list all the truths about God's Word. Which description of His Word brings you the most hope today?
 - As you think about your prayer life, what kinds of things do you pray about? Are you lopsided in any area like repentance or requests? Choose one thing you're praying about now and intentionally include worship as a part of it. How can you wrap it in praise?
 - When have you experienced some of your sweetest moments of worship?
 - When did you last experience God's transforming grace in your heart (remember the image of the time-lapse flower unfurling)? Think of a concrete example if possible.
 - When you long for a checklist and God simply (or not-so-simply) asks you to COME, how do you feel? Unworthy? Too busy? Doubtful? Relieved? Free?