



DESPERATE FOR
HOPE

Leader Guide

WELCOME!

Before you read any further, we want to say how thankful we are for you, the leader. Thank you for your willingness to dive into Scripture, brew the coffee, place the chairs, and set aside the time regularly to meet with other women.

We want to encourage you to use this study however it works best for you and your group. If you want to follow this leader guide to the letter, do that! If you want to do your own thing, feel free! We want to give you all the tools you might need, but we are certain God has ordained your time with your specific group in your specific setting.

We are grateful for you and praying for you as you lead this study.

WEEKLY GROUP MEETING

Each group session contains the following elements:

GATHER: This is a time to greet and welcome everyone, and then get them talking. In the first session, we've provided some icebreaker questions. In the subsequent sessions, we've provided other instructions to help set the stage for the group session.

WATCH: Each week you'll show a teaching video featuring Vaneetha Risner. You can access the video content from the card in the back of your Bible study book. Encourage participants to take notes on the Video Viewer Guide pages in their Bible study books.

DISCUSS: We've provided a list of questions to help your group discuss what they've heard on the video teaching. Feel free to adapt, skip, or add questions as needed to foster discussion.

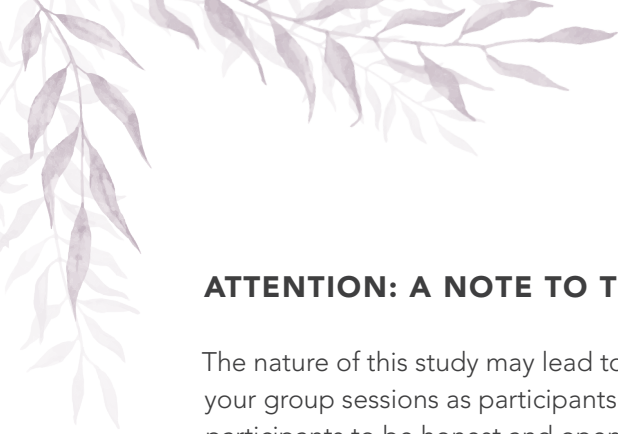
CLOSE: A brief closing idea is included in the teaching plan for each session. Feel free to expand this time as it fits the needs of your group.

PERSONAL STUDY

Each session contains five days of personal study to help participants dig into God's Word for themselves. Encourage and challenge participants to complete each day of study, while giving grace to those who may not be able to.

SCRIPTURE SHEET

This study is filled with Scripture references. To encourage study participants to read each reference, we've provided a downloadable document on the Bible study home page (lifeway.com/desperateforhope) that lists the full text of every referenced passage. Please make sure your group members are aware of this resource.



ATTENTION: A NOTE TO THE LEADER

The nature of this study may lead to some painful, difficult moments during your group sessions as participants share their struggles in suffering. Encourage participants to be honest and open as they share, but not to feel like they need to divulge every circumstance of theirs or someone else's difficult situation. Also ask your group to maintain confidentiality about what is shared in the group time. However, be aware as a leader that if something is shared in the group or to you personally that is illegal or pertains to abuse, you may have a legal responsibility to report that information to the appropriate authorities. If you're unsure what your response should be, reach out to a pastor or licensed counselor.


Also, as the leader, group members may feel the freedom to express their pain to you and seek your counsel about their situations of suffering. You definitely will want to be a good listener and prayer warrior for them, however, be aware of your limitations. Your best response in some situations may be to pledge your love, prayers, and support, then refer them to one of the pastors at your church and/or to a licensed Christian counselor.

HERE ARE A FEW TIPS TO HELP YOU PREPARE.

VIDEO TEACHING. The videos for this study are available for streaming through the digital access code in the back of each Bible study book. Each video is intended to be viewed after completing the accompanying week of personal study. We strongly recommend you use the teaching videos as a part of this study, but you can still discover truth from Scripture and grow in your walk with God by simply doing the print portion if your setting doesn't allow for video.

GET THE WORD OUT. Be sure to advertise the study early and utilize all methods for getting the word out. Post it on your church's website, send emails to potential attendees, and promote it on all forms of social media. It's best to start advertising the study four to six weeks before it begins. The study is seven sessions long, which means you will meet seven or eight times. Visit lifeway.com/desperateforhope for free promotional materials to help get the word out about your study.

SCHEDULE. Be sure to make everyone aware of the schedule ahead of time and start promptly each week to honor everyone's time. In your group time, you will discuss the video teaching. You may choose to watch the video together immediately before the discussion, or encourage participants to view the video before they come to the session.



STAY IN TOUCH. Prepare a sign-up sheet with space for names, email addresses, and phone numbers. You may also include information like birthdays, social media handles, and favorite candy so that you can foster community among group members.

GET COZY. Make an effort to create a comfortable environment for group meetings. Arrange chairs in a circle to encourage conversation. If your group is large, you may want to watch the video teaching together and then split into smaller groups for the discussion time. If you choose to do so, enlist discussion leaders for each group to keep the conversation moving and focused.

CHILDCARE. Be sure to check with participants to see if childcare is needed and organize leaders and space for the children in advance.

BIBLE STUDY BOOKS. Each participant will need a Bible study book. Make sure you leave plenty of time for all the books to be ordered and received between announcing and starting your Bible study. Consider offering a scholarship or buy-one-give-one option for those who cannot afford a study book on their own.

EARLY PREP. We strongly suggest reading through all of the leader guide before the first session. You may want to think through the different ways this study can be conducted and how it will work best for your group. If your group is watching the video together, make sure you secure the equipment needed, whether you're viewing with a DVD or using streaming access. If you don't already know, learn how to work the tech equipment needed or line up assistance to help in that area. We recommend watching the video sessions prior to your meeting, taking note of anything you may want to highlight from the teaching. Look over the discussion questions, as well, so that you are prepared to lead the conversation.

PRAYER. Most importantly, be sure to pray for the women who attend the study. And pray for yourself as you prepare to lead.

We've provided a discussion guide for each session. Remember these are simply suggestions for how to use your time together. We want to empower you as you lead to do what is best for your group!

DISCUSSION GUIDE

SESSION ONE: INTRODUCTION

GATHER

Welcome participants to the study and distribute Bible study books to each group member. Encourage discussion by asking the following questions:

- ♦ What drew you to this study?
- ♦ What do you anticipate this study will be about?
- ♦ Do you think a Bible study on suffering is needed? If so, why?
- ♦ How many of you know someone who is going through a difficult time? Without revealing people's identities or many details, what are some of the hard situations people are experiencing?
- ♦ If you had just one question to ask about suffering, what would it be?
- ♦ What do you hope is the outcome of this study for you personally?

WATCH

Play the teaching video for Session 1. Encourage participants to take notes or jot down questions on the Session 1 Video Viewer Guide page (p. 11).

DISCUSS

Use the questions and prompts found on page 11 to discuss the video teaching.

CLOSE

Remind participants about the nature of this study. Encourage them to be honest and open but to also use discretion in sharing details about their or someone else's situation of suffering. Urge them to keep things shared in the group time confidential.

Spend a few minutes perusing the book, pointing out different facets of the study, including group pages and personal study sections. Share with them about the Scripture document that contains the complete text of every passage referenced in the study that can be found at lifeway.com/desperateforhope.

Answer any remaining questions then lead the group in a closing prayer.



SESSION TWO: IF GOD LOVES ME, HOW COULD HE LET THIS HAPPEN?

GATHER

Welcome participants back to the study. Ask them to share which day of study they found most interesting and which one had the most impact on them. Then remind them of the question for this week of study: *If God loves me, how could He let this happen?* Ask if anyone has ever struggled with that question, and invite them to briefly share their experience if they feel comfortable.

WATCH

Play the teaching video for Session 2. Encourage participants to take notes or jot down questions on the Session 2 Video Viewer Guide page (p. 39).

DISCUSS

Use the following questions to discuss the video teaching. (These questions can also be found on p. 39 of the Bible study book.)

- ◆ What part of the video teaching was most significant for you? Why?
- ◆ Have you ever wondered if Jesus really cares for you? If so, why?
- ◆ Why does suffering sometimes push us away from God and sometimes push us toward Him?
- ◆ What are some ways God has shown and continually shows His love for you?
- ◆ How does knowing that Jesus also suffered help you in your suffering?
- ◆ How has your view of suffering been affected by what you've learned today?
- ◆ What's one thing you've learned this week of study that better equips you to help others who are suffering?

CLOSE

Provide time for group members to share how they have experienced the faithfulness of God over the past few days or weeks. Lead them in a prayer thanking God for His love and strength and for always keeping His promises.

SESSION THREE: HOW CAN I KNOW GOD'S PRESENCE WHEN HE FEELS SO DISTANT?

GATHER

Welcome participants back to the study. Ask them to share which day of study they found most interesting and which one had the most impact on them. Then remind them of the question for this week of study: *How can I know God's presence when He feels so distant?* Ask if anyone has ever struggled with that question, and invite them to briefly share their experience if they feel comfortable.

WATCH

Play the teaching video for Session 3. Encourage participants to take notes or jot down questions on the Session 3 Video Viewer Guide page (p. 67).

DISCUSS

Use the following questions to discuss the video teaching. (These questions can also be found on p. 67 of the Bible study book.)

- ◆ What part of the video teaching was most significant for you? Why?
- ◆ Why does God often feel distant in our suffering?
- ◆ How would you describe or define lament?
- ◆ Why is it so important for us to be able to lament in our suffering?
- ◆ How have you found comfort and help through prayer and the Scriptures in difficult times?
- ◆ How has your view of suffering been affected by what you've learned today?
- ◆ What's one thing you've learned this week of study that better equips you to help others who are suffering?

CLOSE

Provide a brief time for participants to share Scripture passages that have been meaningful to them in times of trials. Consider writing some of those on a white board or poster to display in your meeting room for the rest of the study. Lead the group in a closing prayer.

SESSION FOUR: WHAT IF THE WORST HAPPENS?

GATHER

Welcome participants back to the study. Ask them to share which day of study they found most interesting and which one had the most impact on them. Then remind them of the question for this week of study: *What if the worst happens?* Ask if anyone has ever struggled with that question, and invite them to briefly share their experience if they feel comfortable.

WATCH

Play the teaching video for Session 4. Encourage participants to take notes or jot down questions on the Session 4 Video Viewer Guide page (p. 97).

DISCUSS

Use the following questions to discuss the video teaching. (These questions can also be found on p. 97 of the Bible study book.)

- ◆ What part of the video teaching was most significant for you? Why?
- ◆ What are the things that keep you up at night? Your worst fears? What happens if you constantly focus on those things?
- ◆ Vaneetha quoted Paul Tripp: “You never just suffer the thing that you’re suffering, but you always also suffer the way that you’re suffering that thing.” What does that mean and how has it been true for you?
- ◆ How can you know God will be faithful even if the worst does happen?
- ◆ How have you seen God provide exactly what you need when you need it?
- ◆ How has your view of suffering been affected by what you’ve learned today?
- ◆ What’s one thing you’ve learned this week of study that better equips you to help others who are suffering?

CLOSE

Before the session, assign Scripture passages that deal with not being afraid to a few group members and ask them to be prepared to pray those passages over your group as you close the session. If your group is small, you may want to choose some passages and just lead this time yourself.



SESSION FIVE: WHY IS GOD LETTING ME SUFFER?

GATHER

Welcome participants back to the study. Ask them to share which day of study they found most interesting and which one had the most impact on them. Then remind them of the question for this week of study: *Why is God letting me suffer?* Ask if anyone has ever struggled with that question, and invite them to briefly share their experience if they feel comfortable.

WATCH

Play the teaching video for Session 5. Encourage participants to take notes or jot down questions on the Session 5 Video Viewer Guide page (p. 127).

DISCUSS

Use the following questions to discuss the video teaching. (These questions can also be found on p. 127 of the Bible study book.)

- ◆ What part of the video teaching was most significant for you? Why?
- ◆ Does knowing God has purpose in your suffering help you endure the difficult times? Explain.
- ◆ Vaneetha referenced the John Newton quote: “Everything which he sends is needful; nothing can be needful which he withholds.” Do you agree with this statement? Is it comforting to you? Why or why not?
- ◆ How have you seen God make something beautiful out of your heartache or the heartache of someone else?
- ◆ How has your suffering changed you? Strengthened you? What have you learned in it?
- ◆ How has your view of suffering been affected by what you’ve learned today?
- ◆ What’s one thing you’ve learned this week of study that better equips you to help others who are suffering?

CLOSE

Close with a time of prayer, giving group members the opportunity to pray aloud thanking God for having purpose in their suffering and for making something beautiful out of their pain. Or, for those who may be struggling to come to grips with what God is doing, asking Him to assure them that out of His love and faithfulness He is present and at work in their lives.

SESSION SIX: HOW CAN GOD USE MY SUFFERING WHEN I FEEL USELESS?

GATHER

Welcome participants back to the study. Ask them to share which day of study they found most interesting and which one had the most impact on them. Then remind them of the question for this week of study: *How can God use my suffering when I feel useless?* Ask if anyone has ever struggled with that question, and invite them to briefly share their experience if they feel comfortable.

WATCH

Play the teaching video for Session 6. Encourage participants to take notes or jot down questions on the Session 6 Video Viewer Guide page (p. 153).

DISCUSS

Use the following questions to discuss the video teaching. (These questions can also be found on p. 153 of the Bible study book.)

- ◆ What part of the video teaching was most significant for you? Why?
- ◆ How has your faith been strengthened by watching the way a fellow believer handles her suffering?
- ◆ In your difficult times, who has been there for you and how have they lifted you up?
- ◆ What are some things that hinder or limit your willingness to help someone who is suffering?
- ◆ What is corporate lament and how is that helpful to those who are suffering?
- ◆ How has your view of suffering been affected by what you've learned today?
- ◆ What's one thing you've learned this week of study that better equips you to help others who are suffering?

CLOSE

Lead participants in a time of corporate lament for any member of your group who is currently experiencing suffering. If that does not apply or is not appropriate at this time for your group, simply close with a time of intercessory prayer for those outside the group who are walking through difficult times.



SESSION SEVEN: WHAT IF THIS NEVER GETS BETTER?

GATHER

Welcome participants back to the study. Ask them to share which day of study they found most interesting and which one had the most impact on them. Then remind them of the question for this week of study: *What if this never gets better?* Ask if anyone has ever struggled with that question, and invite them to briefly share their experience if they feel comfortable.

WATCH

Play the teaching video for Session 7. Encourage participants to take notes or jot down questions on the Session 7 Video Viewer Guide page (p. 183).

DISCUSS

Use the following questions to discuss the video teaching. (These questions can also be found on p. 183 of the Bible study book.)

- ◆ What part of the video teaching was most significant for you? Why?
- ◆ Is it possible to have hope and joy even in the midst of chronic or terminal suffering? How?
- ◆ Why is keeping eternity in our sights so important as we suffer?
- ◆ Why do we focus so much time and energy on this life when it is so short?
- ◆ How can we live more for eternity than this temporal life?
- ◆ How has your view of suffering been affected by what you've learned today?
- ◆ What are some important takeaways from this study?
- ◆ How has this study equipped you to walk through your own suffering and to help others in their trials?

CLOSE

Briefly discuss how you can continue to pray for and encourage one another as the study comes to a close. Lead your group through a time of prayer allowing group members to express to the Lord their thankfulness for all He has shown and taught them through this study.