

Discussion Guide

Dear Healing Woman,

I know that I've tackled a lot of difficult issues in these pages. My prayer is that by the time you read this, God has begun to heal those broken places (maybe even ones you didn't know you had) in your heart and mind. As we well know, healing is a journey.

In order to help you process what you've been reading and learning, I'm including this Discussion Guide. You can certainly go through these questions by yourself. But here's the thing: *I don't want you to be alone anymore.* For that reason, I highly encourage you to go through these questions in a small group. *Maybe you could even choose just one friend and go through the book and this Guide together.* Remember that God uses community as part of our healing. It was and is a huge part of mine. It's written so that you can work through the book together in six weeks/sessions, although you can combine chapters if you'd like to work through it in a shorter time frame. You'll find a "Survival Kit" on my website that includes a prayer journal, Scripture verse printable and a playlist of songs for encouragement during difficult times (melindameans.com/survival-kit). These are designed to enhance your personal and group time with God.

You'll find questions and a verse to memorize for each session. Because I found it so difficult to pray at times during my journey, I'm including a prayer at the end of each session. I also found it helpful to read the Psalms and use those as my prayers. You'll notice I haven't given you any "Action Steps" to take each week. Instead, I simply encourage you to ask for and follow the Holy Spirit's leading. He never fails.

Your wounds are *not* invisible to God, my friend. I pray this book and this guide will lead you closer to the Hope that Heals.

Love, Melinda

Chapter One: The Pain That No One Sees

Hope that Heals:

I have cared for you since you were born. Yes, I carried you before you were born. I will be your God throughout your lifetime—until your hair is white with age. I made you, and I will care for you.

*I will carry you along and save you. **Isaiah 46:3-4***

Read Dear Hurting Woman, Foreword and Chapter One

1. We all have hidden pain—hurts so deep and raw that we don't feel safe to express them. When you look in the mirror, what do you see? How do you think God sees you?
2. What are some reasons that you haven't shared your hurts, disappointments and doubts about God with others?
3. What are some ways hiding your pain has cost you?
4. In this chapter, I write, "When our joy, freedom and hope rest on an outcome, instead of a Person, we will ultimately be disappointed." Even when we receive the outcome we've longed for, it can disappoint us. Why do you think that's the case? Give an example of an outcome you received that didn't give you the payoff you imagined it would.
5. "Do not be afraid, for I have ransomed you. I have called you by name; you are mine. When you go through deep waters, I will be with you. When you go through rivers of difficulty, you will not drown. When you walk through the fire of oppression, you will not be burned up; the flames will not consume you. For I am the Lord, your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior." (Isaiah 43:1-3) As you read this verse, what does it mean to you to know that God has called you by name, that you are His?
6. Looking back, think of a specific example of how God was walking through the "fire of oppression" or the "rivers of difficulty" with you, even though you may not have recognized it at the time.
7. In Rachel's story, she talked about how she was a slave to her cravings for alcohol. What cravings have you in bondage? How are you using those things to replace a hunger only God can fill?

Dear Father, Help me to see myself as You see me—valuable, loved and beautiful. I want to believe that You see me in my suffering. Make Yourself real to me. Help me to recognize Your presence and activity in the midst of my pain and doubts. Amen.

Chapter Two: Is God Really Good?

Hope that Heals:

Taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the one who takes refuge in him. Psalm 34:8 (NIV)

Read Chapter Two and Lindsey's Story

1. What circumstances or events in your life (either past or present) have caused you to question God's goodness?
2. As you read this book, did God reveal any lies that you believe about Him? What are they? Ask Him to help you replace them with Truth.
3. "His delay (in ending suffering) is because He is merciful, not because He is callous or indifferent." What do you think about that statement? How does it change your perspective about God's goodness?
4. Our American culture tells us that we "deserve" to be happy, that we should always have what we want. How have you bought into that mindset? How has it affected your relationship or attitude toward God? After reading this chapter, has your view of the fairness of suffering changed? How?
5. God made the choice to send His only Son to die for us. Jesus came to earth to endure unimaginable suffering so we could have eternal life in heaven. They didn't have to do this. It was motivated by their great love for us. Yet, it's often so difficult for us to trust God's love and goodness. What specifically makes it difficult for you to trust God's love and that He's working for your good?
6. Share or think about a time that God met you powerfully and sweetly in your suffering. Thank Him for that right now.
7. In Lindsey's story, she shares how she was so focused on her pain and loss, she couldn't fully enjoy the blessings right in front of her. Can you relate? If so, how? Ask God to show you to recognize and appreciate His gifts more fully.

Dear Father, You are good. You are worthy of all my trust. That truth is not changed by my fears and doubts. You are bigger than all the barriers that I have put up in my heart that keep me from intimate relationship with You. Reveal the lies that I have been believing about You. Help me to trust You more. Amen.

Chapter Three: The Hard Road That Leads To Hope

Hope that Heals:

Don't be afraid, for I am with you. Don't be discouraged, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you. I will hold you up with my victorious right hand. Isaiah 41:10

Read Chapter Three and Barb's Story

1. We often feel guilty or disrespectful when we are angry with God. We hesitate to share our true thoughts with Him, even though He already knows every one! How might it help your healing to be able to go to God with your anger and frustration?
2. Prayer is often the most difficult when we need it the most. Remember, even saying the name "Jesus!" in the midst of our despair is a prayer! There is so much power in just saying His name. Why do you think it's so hard to pray when we're feeling the most vulnerable and in need of His strength? Who is one person you could ask to pray for you when you feel overwhelmed and unable to pray for yourself?
3. Unending pain and uncertain circumstances cause us to fear for the future. How has fear held you back from healing and depending on God?
4. We all like to feel in control. Even when we're certain we are, we're deceived. Control is an illusion. How have you been like Jacob—trying to heal your pain and/or solve your problems on your own strength?
5. Feeling like we need to "perform" is a battle for so many of us! Why do we feel like we need to perform? What is at the root of that for you? If you're not sure, ask God to reveal it to you.
6. Think of a time when you were especially aware of God's power in your life and circumstances. 2 Corinthians 12:9 says, "My grace is enough for you. When you are weak, my power is made perfect in you." (NCV) What can you do to be more conscious of tapping into His power and presence moment by moment?

7. In Barb's story, she shares transparently about her feelings of rejection and betrayal. Who has rejected or betrayed you that you feel bitterness toward? How do you think this is a barrier to your healing process?

Dear Father, My human nature wants comfort. I don't want to take the hard road. Yet I know that is where You want to meet me most sweetly. You are trustworthy. You are my only hope. Give me Your power to let go of trying to control my circumstances and trust You to give me what I need. I can't do it on my own. Amen.

Chapter Four: The God Who Sees Me

Hope that Heals:

Answer me, Lord, out of the goodness of your love; in your great mercy turn to me. Psalm 69:16

Read Chapter Four and Grace's Story

1. How does it make you feel to know that God sees every part of us—every hurt, thought and desire? Is it comforting, scary, overwhelming?
2. Hagar felt hopeless and forgotten as she wandered in the wilderness. Share a time that you felt forgotten by God. How did He reassure you of His presence and activity in your circumstances?
3. The angel of the Lord called Gideon "mighty warrior" before He fought a single battle! Isaiah 40:29 tells us: "He gives power to the weak and strength to the powerless." What thoughts and attitudes keep you from being the warrior God wants to make you? Identify at least one Scripture verse that can help you combat those lies. If you don't know where to start, look to the verses at the end of this guide.
4. The woman with the issue of bleeding thought her biggest need was healing of her physical ailment. In fact, she most needed healing from her shame. She needed a Savior that could heal the deepest wounds in her. What is your deepest need? Do not feel pressured to share this in a group if you don't feel comfortable or ready. God knows, my friend.
5. Have you ever believed that God was completely absent when you needed Him the most desperately? Maybe that time is right now. Sometimes when we're in pain our perspective is clouded. God often uses other people to help us see His activity in our lives when we can't. If you feel comfortable, share with the group. If not, who is one person you can be vulnerable with who could help you recognize ways that God *is* present in your situation.
6. Look back at Grace's story. Discuss the ways that God was present in Grace's broken life and circumstances even as she couldn't see or feel Him.

Dear Father, I'm so often like Hagar. I want to run from my circumstances. I want to run from You. I sometimes think You have forgotten me. Please help me to recognize Your love and presence even in the midst of circumstances I wouldn't have chosen. Help me to cling to the truth that You do see me. Amen.

Chapter Five: Embracing the Race We've Been Given

Hope that Heals:

We can make our plans, but the Lord determines our steps. Proverbs 16:9

Read Chapter Five and Hannah's Story

1. When we're in pain, we tend to want someone else's life or circumstances. How has comparison and complaining affected your attitude toward your life and toward God?
2. Dr. Benjamin T. Mast has a powerful quote in his book, *Second Forgetting*, (referenced in this chapter). Discuss the concept of grumbling vs. groaning. How does it affect your mindset to know that God welcomes groaning?
3. Even Jesus—fully God and fully human—wanted deliverance from His pain. Yet He wanted God's will and plan *more*. For that reason, He walked a difficult path willingly. Where are you right now on the journey of acceptance of God's current plan for your life?
4. In 2 Corinthians 12:7, Paul had a "thorn" that God did not remove. We often see our "thorns" as handicaps. In what ways do you think Paul's ministry was *enhanced* because of this thorn?
5. As we walk difficult paths, the way ahead seems foggy. Often, we can't see the next step in front of us. We're afraid to move forward. What next step in your journey are you *afraid* to take? Who can pray for you?
6. In Hannah's story, she talks about how she had her whole life planned out. Slowly, one by one, her plans were shattered. She says she began to choose to do those things that would help her as she navigated this new, uncertain future (Bible study, engaging with community, etc.). What is at least one healthy step you can commit to taking this week? It may be simply having coffee with a friend.

Dear Father, You tell us in Your Word that Your plans are always good. Honestly, Your plans don't always seem good. I struggle at times to understand why You won't deliver me from this difficult race I'm running. Help me to trust You. Give me the power and courage to take the next

*step in my journey, even when I don't think I can. Remind me that You are already ahead of me.
Amen.*

Chapters Six and Seven: Beauty in Our Brokenness & The Power of Telling Our Stories

Hope that Heals:

What joy for those whose strength comes from the Lord ... When they walk through the Valley of Weeping, it will become a place of refreshing springs. The autumn rains will clothe it with blessings. Psalm 84:5-6

Read Chapters Six & Seven and Hope and Katie's Stories

1. God wants to us our pain. He wants so much to bring beauty from our broken stories. Share a time where you saw God bring something unexpectedly beautiful from your pain.
2. Do you believe that pain can lead us to our destinies—to roles, jobs or ministries that we would never have considered or been equipped for without it? How have you seen this to be true in your own life?
3. God gave Joseph wonderful dreams about his future. But Joseph wasn't ready. God had to prepare him. Little did Joseph know that preparation would involve complete separation from his family, slavery and prison. Yet all those things prepared him for those dreams God gave him. In what ways can you see God using your pain to shape your character like He did Joseph's?
4. How have your struggles made you more grateful? What things or people are you more grateful for because of the difficulties you've faced?
5. Shame and fear of rejection often keep us quiet in our pain and struggles. What has or is keeping your from sharing your story with others?
6. Galatians 6:2 says, "Share each other's burdens, and in this way obey the law of Christ." Think of someone you know who is struggling. How can you reach out to that person this week?
7. Jesus had a trusted inner circle. Do you? Who is someone you know that exhibits the qualities of safe people outlined in this chapter? If God leads, what step can you take to share with or get to know that person better? If you can't think of anyone, pray that God would bring someone into your life with whom you can share safely.

8. Hope's Story is incredibly heartbreaking. Yet she is a beautiful, joyful woman. She still has significant struggles, but she knows that God has never left her. Discuss the ways that you can see God's intervention in the midst of Hope's tragedy.

9. When Katie began to share her secret, freedom and healing began. What secrets are making you sick? Like Katie, you may find that counseling is a necessary part of your journey before you are able to share those dark places with others. Take some time this week to consider if that is part of *your* healing journey. If you don't know of a Christian counselor in your area, visit the American Association of Christian Counselors website (aacc.net). Under the "Resources" tab, you can search for Christian counselors near you. Pray that God will lead you.

Dear Father, I love that You can bring beauty out of all the broken pieces of my life. I pray You will help me see how You are using my struggles to shape me. I know You want me to share my story with others as You lead me—for my good and for others.' Help me know who to share it with it, as well as when and how. Amen.

Hope that Heals

More Verses For When You're Hurting

A beautiful team of healing women helped me get out the message of *Invisible Wounds*. Most of the verses below are ones that they suggested I share with you in this section of the book. These Scriptures are ones they cling to in their darkest moments. These words are what encourage their weary hearts when they feel they can't take another step on their painful, often uncertain paths. I hope they encourage yours as well.

Psalm 16:8

I know the Lord is always with me. I will not be shaken, for he is right beside me.

Lamentations 3:22-24

The faithful love of the Lord never ends! His mercies never cease. Great is his faithfulness; his mercies begin afresh each morning. I say to myself, "The Lord is my inheritance; therefore, I will hope in him!"

Psalm 103:2-5

Let all that I am praise the Lord; may I never forget the good things he does for me. He forgives all my sins and heals all my diseases. He redeems me from death and crowns me with love and tender mercies. He fills my life with good things. My youth is renewed like the eagle's!

Isaiah 40:29

He gives power to the weak and strength to the powerless.

Philippians 4:13

For I can do everything through Christ, who gives me strength.

Psalm 46:1

God is our refuge and strength, always ready to help in times of trouble.

2 Corinthians 12:9

My grace is all you need. My power works best in weakness.

Isaiah 43:19

For I am about to do something new. See, I have already begun! Do you not see it? I will make a pathway through the wilderness. I will create rivers in the dry wasteland.

Psalm 73:26

My health may fail, and my spirit may grow weak, but God remains the strength of my heart; he is mine forever.

Romans 5:3-5

We can rejoice, too, when we run into problems and trials, for we know that they help us develop endurance. And endurance develops strength of character, and character strengthens our

confident hope of salvation. And this hope will not lead to disappointment. For we know how dearly God loves us, because he has given us the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts with his love.

Psalm 27:13-14

Yet I am confident I will see the Lord's goodness while I am here in the land of the living. Wait patiently for the Lord. Be brave and courageous. Yes, wait patiently for the Lord.

Proverbs 3:5-6

Trust in the Lord with all your heart; do not depend on your own understanding. Seek his will in all you do, and he will show you which path to take.

Psalm 147:3

He heals the brokenhearted and bandages their wounds.

1 Peter 5:8-10

Stay alert! Watch out for your great enemy, the devil. He prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour. Stand firm against him, and be strong in your faith. Remember that your family of believers all over the world is going through the same kind of suffering you are. In his kindness God called you to share in his eternal glory by means of Christ Jesus. So after you have suffered a little while, he will restore, support, and strengthen you, and he will place you on a firm foundation.

Isaiah 26:3

You will keep in perfect peace all who trust in you, all whose thoughts are fixed on you!

Deuteronomy 31:6

So be strong and courageous! Do not be afraid and do not panic before them. For the Lord your God will personally go ahead of you. He will neither fail you nor abandon you.

2 Corinthians 4:16-18

Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.