

desperate

SMALL GROUP GUIDE

HOPE *for the* MOM

Who Needs to Breathe



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The strong, gloomy memories still live in my mind when I think about sitting in the cold darkness of my home, alone in my living room, shivering. It was not so much from cold, but from a fear that I was harming my children, that I didn't know what it meant to be a good mother. No matter how much I attempted to be patient, my frustration of having 4 full time children in my home who had constant needs and constant demands often over took me.

And then there were the personalities and the noise and the messes and the never ending sleepless nights.

Have you ever felt that way? It is what I call the battlehood of motherhood. Our role as moms is imbued with such importance from God, and yet in a culture where we are isolated in our neighborhoods, without grandmas and aunties to help, and very little relief or help, it is very easy to become overwhelmed.

It was at this point that God really showed me that I needed to build my own support system. Surely if I felt this way, and I was committed to being the best mom I could be, maybe other moms felt this way.

Over 20 years ago, I started my first mom's group—because I needed a group. I couldn't wait for other older moms to help me because I had reached out to several of them and there was no one there to help or no one had the time.

As Sarah Mae and I launch our book, *Desperate*, we want to encourage as many women as possible to start right now thinking about how you can begin to build your own network of women. I hope this guide will help you to know how you might get going. And remember, even if most of the women you ask to be a part of your group are too busy to respond, you are doing the right thing and if you keep attempting to reach out, there will be women who respond.

Gathering a Small Group

1. Start with a Planning time and select a friend or two to do this with you. It always helps me to have at least one other person who is willing to help lead a group like this. It keeps you, the leader, from feeling alone or unsupported in the group—and a community of women working on the same ministry areas adds strength. If you do not have such a friend, then pray God will show you from the group that comes together, a more mature mom who might be willing to help you. Then ask that woman to team up with you.

Put aside some time where you can think about and ponder how to organize a group. I always begin with prayer. “God, I need fellowship and friends. Would you please guide my thoughts and ideas through your Holy Spirit and bring to mind how I can bring together some like-minded women who would want to be a part of a mom’s group. In Jesus’ name, amen.”

I have found that when I focus my heart on scripture and pray and give my heart’s desire to the Lord, that ideas eventually begin to flow and He brings people to mind and ideas of how to host a group.

- Figure out a good time for yourself, as the leader-organizer, that would best fit your time preference and the time preference of your friends. I have hosted my studies once a month in the evenings because then I do not need to provide child care. I have also hosted weekly morning Bible studies in my home.
- Also, decide where this meeting will take place. I have hosted a number of Bible studies in my home where the children watched a video and did a small craft with a babysitter in my basement, while the moms met upstairs. One group in which I taught arranged a private meeting room in a local restaurant where we had dinner together early evenings and then had our Bible study.
- Some churches are willing to provide a room where you can meet and the nursery or playground for caring for children if you provide the babysitter. Moms can pitch in to help pay for a sitter—but establish that ahead of time so there everyone understands what they are expected to contribute.
- I have a large Bible study in my home and so the moms take turns bringing snacks and treats to share if I provide the house. Also, you can ask for volunteers to provide paper goods.

So plan:

- TIME,
- PLACE
- HOW OFTEN
- BOOK TITLE and WHERE TO PURCHASE
- PRACTICAL NEEDS—BABYSITTER OR CHILDCARE
- REFRESHMENTS.

There is no one way to arrange a group—just do it according to your own desires and needs.

Using Social Media is a great way for A Group Leader to connect with her Mom Group. Keeping it simple, and not getting carried away is the best way to communicate and keep in touch.

I have created and used a Facebook Page designed specifically for my Mom's Group. My friend has also created a Yahoo group and we have email sign ups every month. So either can work, depending on the moms in your group. This can be private, or open. The choice is yours. The benefits of a Facebook page for your group are:

- Creating a Community
- Announcements and Reminders
- Meeting Dates (changes or confirmations)
- Sharing great links or resources from the book or Mom Topics that will draw more discussion later in your study time
- Prayer Requests
- Chapter Topic Thoughts to ponder before each meeting

****One thing to consider with choosing whether to keep your group private or open might be this: There will be some women who cannot make it to your study, and would love to follow along on – line. A simple post updating which Chapter you are reading and a follow up with questions can facilitate more community outside of your home, but within the sphere of Mom's reading this book.*

2. Invite people

Make a list of people who you can invite. Many moms need a group even though they have not expressed it. Think of women in your neighborhood, church, play group, women at the park, music lessons or other activities. Make an invitation or send an invitation on email. Post on your facebook and ask if anyone is interested.

Be sure to remind the women of your book choice and where they can find it.

Provide the women with a link, or a resource where they can purchase their own book to bring to the study. I have found it very helpful to order extra books to keep on hand for guest moms that come with another women, or even for the mom that I meet in the grocery store. I like to gift them with a resource and connect them with my group or another Mom's group that might be close to them.

Ordering individually cuts down on the confusion, transfer of money, and responsibilities for the Group Leader. Most women are comfortable and familiar with ordering on-line.

3. Plan your time

Most women need friends and want someone to listen to them. When you have sent out your invitations and have a response, then spend the first evening getting to know each other. I always light a candle or two, put on soft music and try to create an environment where women will be welcome and be cozy.

Ask them ahead of time to come prepared to give a 1-2 minute history of their family so that everyone can get to know everyone else. Include things like how many children; where they grew up, what their interests are, some of the biggest issues in their lives, or any issues relevant that would help the group to get to know them better.

Some other ideas: List 5 adjectives that describe you and your family and explain them. Or other interest questions:

- What do you like best about your life?
- What is the hardest thing about your life?
- If you had all the money in the world, where would you travel or move with your family and what would you do?
- Use 5 adjectives to define your life right now.

The more questions or fun activities you have ready, the better people will participate. I usually have to start the group off.

4. Set the tone

Welcome each woman. Tell them a little of your story and why you started the group and your own need for like-minded friends. Remember, never talk negatively about a denomination, about political issues, about school choices, about any thing that might offend one of the moms who come for the first time. An atmosphere of love and grace always encourages people to participate and you never know who you might offend.

I usually start out:

- Refreshments and just talking to one another
- Pray to open our time together
- Show them the book and talk about reading and discussing one chapter a week, or how ever often you decide to meet.

Our book is set up so that you can watch the comments Sarah Mae and I made on each chapter, so that you can use this as a starting point if you wish to, to help start the discussion.

Pick three places you have underlined in the book that meant a lot to you and read the quotes—and ask questions that may open up discussion:

Ask, “This really ministered to me, what do you think about this quote or how does this apply to your life?”

Pick 2 or 3 scriptures from the chapter to discuss.

Use the application questions in the back of the chapters for a time of discussion.

For Variation:

Another great spin on a Book Study is to end your evening “off-topic.” At your very first meeting, I would suggest handing every mom a 3 x 5 card, asking them to write down Mom topics they would like to learn more about or discuss. For example:

- Children’s Chores
- Healthy Family Living
- Homeschooling or not?
- How to have Devotional time as a family
- Attitudes – Respect

As the group leader, you can choose a topic each month to facilitate discussion about before you close your time together. Perhaps you can prepare by having some on-hands material, resources and links for the mom’s to browse through as well. All mom’s love hands-on materials, and the discussion time will give them a great practical sense of learning to take home with them.

This has been a great success with my study group times, and there are many solid resources on the above topics and more for us to be sharing with moms.

Close in Prayer

Ask each of the moms to share a prayer request. Then ask other women in the group to pray for these requests at the end for each woman and tell them that you would like to be group of women who can pray for each other, but that no one need feel obligated to pray out loud. (I usually start, leave time for other moms to pray, and have one of my friends end the prayer time so that other moms can become used to praying together.)

As a Mom Study Group Leader:

You are:

1. There to encourage, edify, and feel the heart of each mom that comes to your group. Remembering that we are all in different seasons, and your attitude towards motherhood will set the tone for your group.
2. Leading with grace. There will be joy, tears, and great fellowship amongst your group as you continue together. Allow God to direct your words and emotions to be real and bless the mom’s in your group with your genuine spirit.
3. Helping your study run smoothly by thinking about each mom as an individual, with unique experiences and wisdom. Think ahead what each person in your group will be able to bring to your discussion times, and prompt them with a question during your time together. This will give them a chance to answer something from the chapters that they might not have normally shared.
4. Do not allow legalism or rules to define your group. Each woman is acceptable to Jesus just as she is and studying the Bible will be new to some women. Give each woman a sense that she belongs and do not allow harshness, criticism of others or arguments to prevail at the meeting. You set the tone.

5. This will tie your group together by hearing answers from someone new or other than yourself.

You are not:

1. Expected to always have the answers.
2. You are not alone. God will give you the words to speak, and the time to prepare if you commit your plans to Him.
3. To feel the need to always fill in the gaps of silence with answers. Often you will find, if you wait during what may seem to be an awkward moment of silence, someone will come forward to share. Waiting will bless you more than always answering. Let them get involved. Even the “quiet ones.”

Remember

Moms need friends who love, care and listen to them. Seek to be a friend to these moms and eventually they will respond to you.

- Love them for who they are! Ask God to help you to see their heart's needs and not to judge them on the basis of their outside appearance or on their performance as a mom. The point of this group is to help moms grow.
- Ask them questions about their lives and really listen to them.
- Send them an email or card to encourage them.
- Meet each person in your group for coffee some time or invite them with their children to meet you at a park or over for a play date.
- Plan fun activities that might generate group dynamics that help build community.
- Park days
- Mom's night out once in a while for dinner or a movie
- Seasonal activities for the groups---I have a Christmas tea where everyone brings a dish to share, either appetizers or sweets, and we all bring our own mug or tea cups and have dinner and a party time together.
- Ask an older mom, whose life you admire, to come in and speak or share her story, on occasion
- Go to a mom's retreat together yearly.
- Have a pot luck for the Dad's of the moms once a year. We do that and it is really fun and we encourage the single moms or moms without spouses to come also, and then people get to know each other's families better. We always have an odd assortment of people, but it has created more of a sense of community over the years.

I have written all of my motherhood books with scripture and questions in the back of each chapter so that all of the books may be used for small groups at home or in church.

I pray God will open wide the doors for friendship and community. Sometimes it takes a while to build friends and fellowship that meets some of your own needs, but remember that all women need friends, long for encouragement and help and that as you initiate, you will be building your own support group.

I pray God's blessings of grace, peace and love will flood your heart because you are indeed precious to Him. May you personally know His love and grace today.

Sally