

Love Letters to Miscarried Moms

Small Group Book Study



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Introduction

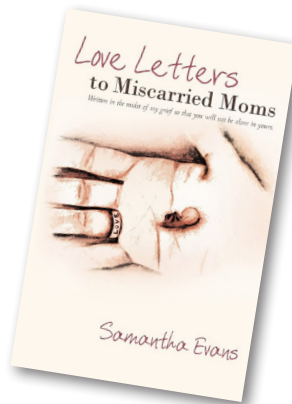
This study is not intended for single individuals. It will only be of value to gathered groups of two or more, for there He will be with you.

To the Host:

- This is a closed group, short-term study, with a specific purpose and a specific audience.
- Twelve lessons. Twelve weeks.
- Suggested group size 3-6 people in order that everyone feels safe and has opportunity to share
- If more women than that are interested, form two small groups or more and delegate a leader for each group.
- Should people be rotated from group to group? Probably not. Because of the severity of the stories that will be shared I truly believe that continuity is best. Should your groups desire to meet together at the conclusion of this study to begin a different one, that would be the time to mix up the groups a little.
- Women should be told ahead of time that a large part of the discussion time will revolve around sharing difficult details about their loss (losses). This group is, in essence, a support group for mothers that have experienced perinatal or early infant loss.
- May God bless you for your desire to bless others around you.

Supplies that members will need:

- Bible
- Love Letters to Miscarried Moms
- Journal
- Box of tissues



If for some reason copies of *Love Letters to Miscarried Moms* cannot be afforded, contact me and I will send you a copy. You can email me at loveletterstomiscarriedmoms@gmail.com or contact me via Facebook.

Weekly Readings

These are readings to be completed prior to each week's gathering. Make notations in your Bibles of things that stuck out to you with the lens of perinatal and infant loss. The reading homework is short. Please commit to reading prior to the group study.

Week One:

LLTMM p. ix-14 (Preface, Sam I Am, The Plus Sign or the Double Line)
1 Corinthians 15:50-58

Week Two:

LLTMM p.15-24 (The No Good Very Bad Most Terrible Day, The Doctor's Visit)
Psalm 102

Week Three:

LLTMM p. 25-36 (The Aftermath)
2 Samuel 12:16-31

* DISCLAIMER: God does NOT punish us as He punished the people of the Old Testament. Your loss was NOT a punishment. More on that later in your group study.

Week Four:

LLTMM p.37-42 (Our Umbilical Cord)
1 Peter 1:13-2:3

Week Five:

LLTMM p. 43-48 (Good Grief But Relief)
Isaiah 6:1-8

Week Six:

LLTMM p. 49-56 (Dear Daddy)
Luke 15:11-31

Week Seven:

LLTMM p. 57-61 (The Big Butt/ But What)
John 19:25-27

Week Eight:

LLTMM p. 62-74 (Hope Rewritten)
Lamentations 3, Zechariah 9:12

Week Nine:

Read and Journal LLTMM p. 75-82 (From Some Mothers to Another)
Psalm 46

Week Ten:

LLTMM p. 83-89 (Living a Life of Purpose)
Philippians 2:5-11

Week Eleven:

LLTMM p. 90-98 (That's Not a Wrap)
Exodus 20:18-21; 34:29-35, 2 Corinthians 3:7-18

Week Twelve:

LLTMM p. 99-102 (Youth Director Sam Comin' at You Live-ish) plus the appendices, if you wish
36 Hour Retreat

Ideas for Closing Prayer

- Popcorn—Assign one person to open and one to close. Others can “pop in” when they feel led.
- Pray for the person on your [right].
- Have one person field all the requests.
- Pray silently.
- Write prayers in a journal and keep track of how God is answering them.

Week One:

Open with prayer.

Read: Philippians 1:3-11 (This is my [Samantha Evans] heart for you.)

Host, Read the following out loud to the group:

Before we start talking about what is very possible the worst day of your lives, perhaps we should introduce ourselves. No hard questions today. There will be time for that later.

Rule #1: What's said here, stays here.

Rule #2: Be as real and transparent as you feel comfortable.

Rule #3: Proceed with humility. (No "1 up-ing")

Rule #4: Smile and relax.

Announcement: Week Twelve (eleven weeks from now) will be a 36-hour retreat. Choose a date now so that women have time to ask for time off work and find babysitters if necessary. Anyone who needs to work the day of the retreat should aim to be off work and ready to leave by 3 pm. I like the idea of a Friday night to Saturday late evening because then after you go home, if you happen to go to church together, you will see each other once more the following morning. It makes "coming down from the mountain" a little easier.

Discussion:

Make as many cycles around your group as time allows. For each rotation group members should choose one of the following questions to answer. Questions do not have to be answered in order. Nor do the same questions have to be answered by each individual, with the exception of the very first question. ;) Allow fifteen minutes or more for the last portion of today's session.

- What is your name?
- Where are some places that you have lived?
- Where are some places that you have traveled to?
- Tell us about your family.
- What was the first job you ever had?
- What was the worst job you ever had?
- How did you meet your significant other?
- What is one of the bravest things that you've ever done?
- What is one of the silliest/ craziest things you've ever done?
- What sports do you/ did you play?
- What instruments do you play?
- In what ways are you involved in your church/ community?
- What is your favorite go-to joke?
- What are your hobbies/ talents?
- If you had one day to do whatever you wanted with whomever you wanted, what and who would it be?
- What are some goals that you have for yourself?
- (Other than LLTMM) what is the last book that you read? Did you enjoy it? Why/ why not?

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Read LLTMM p. 14, the last paragraph.

Everyone in this room is separated from part of her family by Distance. How lucky we are to have loved something enough to miss it. Before we can mourn the loss of time spent with our children, we must acknowledge the reality of their lives. Let's celebrate that together today.

If possible, please share your stories of pregnancy excitement, of your significant others' reactions when you told them the news, the ways that your friends and family reacted. What were you most looking forward to? Everyone should try to share at least one small detail worth celebrating.

Read 1 Corinthians 15:50-58. What stood out to you in this passage concerning what we have been through with our children?

Closing Prayer:

Dear Father in Heaven,

Thank you for our time together today. Thank you for the women in this room that you have pulled together in order to heal together. You created beautiful babies within our bodies who were fearfully and wonderfully made, babies that by Your grace we will see again someday. Have your way in us, Lord. Carry out your good work in us to completion. We pray that over the next 12 weeks our sisters in brokenness would become our sisters in healing.

Most of all, Father, thank you for the Hope that You have granted us through Your Son, whom you allowed Yourself to be separated from You by Distance and sacrificed for our sake.

In Your Name we pray,

Amen.

On Deck:

Next week you will be sharing your stories of loss. Next week may, in fact, be the hardest week as far as sharing for you or the women in your group. Pray throughout the week for yourself and for the ladies among you.

Week Two:

Open with prayer.

Host, Read the following out loud to the group:

Today we start talking about what is very possible the worst day of your lives. Let us be so, so gentle with one another.

Rule #1: What's said here, stays here.

Rule #2: Be as real and transparent as you feel comfortable.

Rule #3: Proceed with humility. (No "1 up-ing")

Rule #4: Relax.

Read Colossians 3:12-17. This should reflect the atmosphere of the discussion today.

Discussion:

Every woman in the group should share her story/stories of loss as she is able. Why? Because as Jesus says in John 8:32, "Then you will know the truth and the truth will set you free." The Lord be with you.

Read and discuss Psalm 102.

Close in prayer.

On Deck:

Next week you'll be talking about the manner in which you coped in the days and weeks following your loss. What were things that stuck out to you? What changes did you notice in yourself, your significant other and in your relationships with God and others?

Week Three:

Open in Prayer.

Host, Read the following out loud to the group:

Today we will be talking about what happened in the days and weeks following our losses. There is no right or wrong answer. Nor will there be any judgment. Let us be so, so gentle with one another. Let us proceed with grace.

Rule #1: What's said here, stays here.

Rule #2: Be as real and transparent as you feel comfortable.

Rule #3: Proceed with humility. (No "1 up-ing")

Rule #4: Relax and smile. These women understand what you have been through.

Discussion:

1. What images stick out to you when you think of the word "aftermath"?
2. What are some things that loved ones said to you that you wish they hadn't?
3. What were the nicest gifts (not necessarily tangible) that you received at that time?
4. What were your coping mechanisms in the days following your loss?
5. What were the thoughts that dominated your brain?
6. What were the questions that you asked yourself?
7. What was your relationship with God like during the miscarriage?
8. Did the event have lasting changes on your relationship?
9. Why is it so important to talk about these things? What good will come of this?

You are about to read 2 Samuel 12:16-31. Before you even crack your Bibles, I must clarify. Your child did not die due to a specific sin that you or your husband committed. Death happens because we live in a fallen world. And you say, "Well, but David..." I interrupt. "No. No but David." There is a huge difference between us and David—the cross. God took out all of His wrath on the cross. God no longer punishes His children the way He did in the Old Testament. Capish? Capish. Ok. Now,

Read 2 Samuel 12:16-31.

1. Didn't you die with your child in some ways? I did. In the Aftermath of David's loss I count at least twelve ways in which David moved forward. Name them.
2. What is the first thing that David does?
3. What is the last?
4. Notice that David's movements transition emotionally/ spiritually/ metaphorically from death to life. Discuss the significance of David's actions prior to and following going to the house of the LORD to worship.
5. Where are you in your healing process? Have you gotten off of the floor? Have you been victorious over the Ammonites?
6. Think back and name, if possible, the victory you experienced that was a defining moment for you in your final stage of metamorphosis back to life.
7. There may be another moment for me, but the one that stands out is June 2013 when I went skydiving with my cousin. If you have not conquered the Ammonites yet, set a goal,

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choose a bucket list item and move toward it. Tell the other moms in your group what it is so that they can hold you accountable.

**It is at this point that my dad's brilliant words come back to haunt me.
"Do something, even if it's wrong!"**

Close in prayer.

On Deck:

Next week you'll be talking about the ways in which God has sustained you in the time since your loss. Focus on the ways in which you were aware of His presence.

Week Four:

Open with Prayer.

To the Host: By now you are getting a feel for the group. I'm sure you are doing a great job, so ignore the devil on your shoulder and keep up the good work. Compared to the previous two weeks, this week should be much easier emotionally. It might not be a bad idea to repeat the rules for small group discretion but it's up to you.

Read the article below. Mark both facts you already knew and facts that you are seeing for the first time.

The Umbilical Cord

The umbilical cord, which connects your baby to the placenta, contains three vessels: two arteries, which carry blood from the baby to the placenta, and one vein, which carries blood back to the baby. The blood in the arteries contains waste products, such as carbon dioxide, from the baby's metabolism. Carbon dioxide is transferred across the placenta to your bloodstream and then to your lungs, where it's breathed out. Oxygen is transported from red blood cells in your circulation, across the placenta to the baby in the umbilical vein. In addition to oxygen, the umbilical vein transports nutrients from the placenta to your baby.

The vessels in the umbilical cord have a protective coating called Wharton's jelly, and the cord is coiled like a spring so that the baby is free to move around. The coiling pattern of the cord has usually established itself by week nine and is usually in a counterclockwise direction. However, the cord can coil later, and sometimes isn't established until 20 weeks. The baby's movements seem to encourage the cord to coil.

The cord is usually attached to the center of the placenta, although sometimes it's attached near the edge. Very occasionally, it divides into its separate vessels before finally entering the placenta. The cord is usually under 1 in (1-2 cm) in diameter and 23 in (60 cm) long, which is twice the length needed to ensure that there are no problems at delivery.

After delivery, the cord vessels close by themselves. The arteries close first, helped by their thicker muscular walls. This prevents blood loss to the placenta from your baby. The umbilical vein closes slightly later (starting at 15 seconds, but only completed by 3 or 4 minutes). This allows blood to continue to return to your baby during the first few minutes of life. As a result, many feel that a slight delay before clamping the cord can be beneficial to the baby. There are no nerves within the cord, so cutting the cord after delivery is a painless procedure for your baby.

<http://pregnancy.familyeducation.com/prenatal-health-and-nutrition/fetal-growth-and-development/66161.html>

1. Regarding the umbilical cord, which facts were you already aware of?
2. What were you hearing for the first time?
3. Continuing on with the analogy, what parallels can you draw in your relationship with Christ in the days following your loss?
4. At what point do you think we are "born" out of our grief and moved into God's hands?
5. How are you supposed to sustain yourself afterward?
6. Are you getting enough spiritual nourishment?

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Read 1 Peter 1:13-2:3

1. What parallels can you draw between this passage and the grieving process?
2. What has God saved you from spiritually?
3. How has God redeemed you from your grief?
4. Which words in this passage nourish your broken heart?
5. Have you tasted, do you believe that the Lord is good?

Close in Prayer.

On Deck:

Next week you'll talk about how honest you were/ have been with yourself, God and others. Did you feel guilty—not about the miscarriage or loss itself—but about the way that you responded to it?

Week Five:

Open with Prayer.

Host, Read the following out loud to the group:

Today we will be talking about what happened in the days and weeks following our losses. There is no right or wrong answer. Nor will there be any judgment. Let us be so, so gentle with one another. Let us proceed with grace.

Rule #1: What's said here, stays here.

Rule #2: Be as real and transparent as you feel comfortable.

Rule #3: Proceed with humility. (No "1 up-ing")

Rule #4: Relax and smile. These women understand what you have been through.

Read aloud:

The phrase "guilt offering" is used in Leviticus twenty-three times. The word "guilt," three. That is a ratio of nearly 8:1. This tells me that whatever you feel guilty of in your situation, God is much more concerned about taking your guilt off of you, then He is about what it is you are guilty of. And, of the 104 Scripture references to guilt, only *three* of them are in the New Testament. This tells me that shouldering our own guilt is a sin in itself. Why? Because the Cross had the final word in that situation.

John 8:10-11 "Has no one condemned you? Then neither do I condemn you. Go now and leave your life of sin." In other words, lay up your guilt, let it go, and walk away.

Rhetorical Questions:

Were you relieved that you weren't pregnant? Did you get pregnant by someone you had no business being with in the first place? Did you say or do things in your grief that you weren't proud of?

Think now on things you feel/felt guilty of or things that you were/are guilty of even now.

John 8:32 "Then you will know the truth and the truth will set you free." Satan has power over our secrets. Christ has power over the truth.

Read James 5:16.

Confess.

Read these passages out loud to one another. Rest in their words. Psalm 32:5, 1 John 1:9, Isaiah 6:1-8

What does Christ's forgiveness mean for you today?

Sing or play on youtube "I see the LORD." And as you zoom in on the throne room of heaven, let everything else fade away. Leave this meeting with a light and peaceful heart knowing that all has been forgiven and that the God of the universe looks on you with love and pleasure. He delights in you.

Close with silent meditation.

On Deck:

It's time to talk about how the men in our lives coped with the loss. How did their reactions affect you?

Week Six:

Open with prayer.

(Pray that you would be able to see things from your significant others' perspective.)

It happened to our bodies but it was their babies, too.

Read Luke 15:11-31:

1. In what ways was God's receiving of our children parallel to the story of the prodigal son?
2. How is it different?
3. Read Luke 15:32. Well put, Jesus, right?

Discussion Questions:

1. How did your significant other respond to the news of your pregnancy?
2. How did he respond to the news of the miscarriage? Was he open about his brokenness or did you see only glimpses?
3. Are you or your significant other at one of the stages in the prodigal journey?
4. Was it a result of the losses you experienced?
5. Where would you like to be?

Host: Choose music to play during this time. Provide stationary or notebook paper.

- Write a letter to you from his perspective, either as if in the past, or what you would say now.
- Write a letter to him from you, saying everything that is/was hard to articulate.
- Read your letters (or whatever portions you choose) out loud to the group.
- If you choose, you can message your letter(s) to Love Letters to Miscarried Moms via Facebook. Your letters will then be shared as a post on either the Facebook page or the website. They can always be posted anonymously from "one of our moms".

Read aloud and rest in the words of Psalm 121.

Close with a time of prayer.

On Deck:

Next week we will talk about Mary's grief over losing Jesus. In what ways was her loss similar and in what ways was it different?

Week Seven:

To the Host: All mothers are at a different stage in life, a different stage in their grief. It's up to you to determine what is best for your group. Did all of the mothers in your study eventually have children? Did some, but not all? Read the questions ahead of time and adapt #4-7 if you feel so led.

What were some of your impressions of "hope rewritten?"

Read John 19:25-27

1. How old is Mary at the time of the crucifixion?
2. Why does Jesus choose John instead of one of his other brothers?
3. What does this new relationship do for Mary?
4. Jesus doesn't want us to be alone. Read LLTMM p. 60. Who is in your boat now?
5. Can you see how God answered prayers in unexpected ways?
6. In what ways is the grief similar for a mom who has had children on earth? In what ways is it different?
7. What would you say to encourage a mom who was never able to bear children?

Extra Credit:

In the spirit of writing Love Letters, as a group write a letter to someone who seems sad about not having children. (Maybe barren or unmarried—not necessarily miscarried) As always, you are encouraged to message them to the Facebook LLTMM site so that your words can minister to moms all over the world.

Close with a time of prayer.

On Deck:

The focus shifts from our sorrow to the hope that God provides.

Week Eight:

To the Host: (Please read this to your small group.) Today we will read Lamentations and compare our grief to the way that Jeremiah lamented over the destruction of Judah. It is *crucial to remember*, though, that one distinction must be made. Judah was being punished for its idolatry and disobedience. Our miscarriages or early losses are not a punishment for any sins we have committed. God's wrath toward our sin was satisfied when Jesus died on the cross. Whatever sins may haunt you—they have been absolutely, completely forgiven. It is humbling to realize that without Jesus' death, our lives could have looked a lot like Judah's.

Read: Lamentations 3:1-20

1. What image of grief can you relate to the most?
2. Did you feel at the time that God had "turned his hand against" you? Explain.

YET... (3:21)

Read Lamentations 3:21-33.

3. Circle "yet" in your Bibles.
4. List some of the many ways that God is described.

When I first wrote *Love Letters* I spent a great deal of time reading Lamentations 3, trying to make sure that I was quoting it correctly. In the years since, I had forgotten much of the exact wording, but one word has been indelibly stamped into my memory ever since. *Yet*.

In my mind *Yet* was a pivotal divide between how Jeremiah *feels* and who *God is*. Perception versus reality. Misery, depression, teeth and gravel, misery, misery YET God's mercies are new every morning. God's faithfulness is bigger than our feelings.

Compare and contrast Jeremiah 31:15 with Isaiah 66:7-13 and Lamentations 3:5-9 with Zechariah 9:11-12.

Jeremiah 31:15		Isaiah 66:7-13
	Yet...	

Lamentations 3:5-9		Zechariah 9:11-12
	Yet...	

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1. What are your hopes for the future?
2. Do you have any hopes about the past regarding your loss/losses?
3. Do you have a favorite hope verse?
4. It takes more effort on this side of loss to be a prisoner of hope. But what is the alternative?

Read 2 Corinthians. 10:5.

For the closing prayer tonight, pray for what you hope for.

Close with prayer.

On Deck:

The “reading” for next week is actually a time for journaling and reflection. Be sure to answer the questions before the group so that you can contribute your thoughts to next week’s discussion. Choose from the “hope” verses for reflection/ meditation each day.

Week Nine:

To the Host: No one should have to share, but encourage members to be brave in sharing and gracious in listening. Before group members arrive, create a prayerful ambiance—candles, soft instrumental music.

- Go through each question as they appear in “From Some Mothers to Another.” Ask group members to share what they wrote.

Verses on Hope

Option A:

Ask if anyone read the verses on hope. If so, what stuck out to her? Did she have a favorite verse? Why?

Option B:

Go through as many of the following passages/ questions as you choose.

Job 8:11-22

- Describe the metaphors of the hope of the godless in your own words.
- What is the difference between the hope of the godless and the hope of one who trusts in God?
- What does God promise those who trust in Him?
- Do you believe Him? Why/ why not?

Psalms 40

- Name the popular band that based a song off of verses 1-3. Just sayin’.
- Put David’s petition to God in your own words.
- In verse 6 it says “sacrifices and offerings you did not desire.” What sacrifices and offerings have you tried to offer God if only He would give you your way?
- If God does not want sacrifices, what does He want? What does that mean? What does that mean specific to what we have experienced?

Psalms 42

- In this psalm, the psalmist is praising God despite adversity. Name someone in your life that has inspired you to do this as well.
- Verses 9-10 refer to an enemy. What are the enemies of our healing toward hope? Of our ability to praise God in adversity?

Psalms 46 is a great Psalm to meditate on. Psalm 46:10 is a popular verse you may recognize. However, usually when this verse is quoted, the second half is left out. “I will be exalted among the nations. I will be exalted in the earth.” Take a second to ponder that before answering. What do you think that God means by that?

Dim the lights. Light candles. Set aside 10-15 minutes in order to reflect on and journal about what you have learned.

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“Be still and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations. I will be exalted in the earth”
(Psalm 46:10).

Close with Ephesians 1:17-20 and 2 Thessalonians 2:16-17 as your prayer.

On Deck:

Flip ahead to next week and, as a group, choose a service project that is a good fit for your church. You may have to hold your group on another evening. Yes, you will be stepping out of your comfort zone, but one of the fastest ways to heal is to serve someone else.

Week Ten

Living Life With a Purpose

The absolute fastest way to move through your grief is to stop focusing on yourself. As a group, in lieu of a book study, choose an outreach from the following list and go serve together side by side. Afterward, go out (or in) to eat somewhere and reflect on your shared experience.

To the Host: When people ask you where you're from, remember that what is said in the group stays in the group. If you tell one person that you are from a small group of women that have miscarried, then you are ousting the other members of your group. Instead, be generic. "We are from a book club," or "we are part of a small group and wanted to serve others."

Service Ideas:

- Sit in an ER to pray for and encourage people
- Work at a local soup kitchen
- Volunteer at a food shelf
- Write and donate sympathy letters to a hospital or pregnancy clinic, intended for mothers who lose their children.
- Make prayer shawls for a pregnancy clinic or hospitality.
- Write love letters in the opening pages of LLTMM and donate copies to hospitals, clinics, libraries, etc.
- Have the hospital send out invitations to families that have had a loss (they won't be able to release the names) and host a banquet for those families with a speaker/ message focused on hope.
- Host a Parents Night Out for young families in the community
- _____ (Fill in the blank with your own brilliance or local community spin for a service need)

Reflection Questions:

1. How does your heart feel?
2. Have any ideas for future service come from your time tonight?
3. What about this day's activity stood out to you the most?
4. What aspect took you most out of your comfort-zone? Were you pleasantly surprised with how it turned out?
5. Was I (Sam) right? Were you able to forget about your grief for a little while tonight?
6. Close with prayer (even if you are in a public place).

On Deck:

Next week we will talk about how God's glory shines through our brokenness. Think through the ways that He has used your tragedy to help others. What beauty has come from the ashes?

Week 11:

That's Not a Wrap

To the Host: Prior to this portion of the “studyette” it is important for you to understand the Old Law versus New Covenant significance. In Exodus 20: Moses receives the 10 commandments atop Mt. Sinai. Read Ex. 20:18-21 and Ex. 34:29-35.

Discuss details for the retreat to make sure that everything is in order.

As a group read Hebrews 6:19 and 2 Corinthians 3:7-18.

1. When people look at us, what do they see?
2. For many of us privacy and secrecy about our losses was not an option. Our hearts, our lives, our brokenness was exposed for people to see. Our healing is as well.

Read Acts 23:6. Our experiences have given us a beautiful tool to talk to others about the reality of heaven and God's love for us. We are witnesses (1 Peter 3:15). We are also on trial for the hope of the resurrection of the dead. The world is our jury.

1. What are the triggers for your grief? Pray that God will help you overcome these moments. Note the future changes in you as He begins to do so.
2. How does our brokenness amplify God's glory?
3. None of us got exactly what we wanted. How do our unfulfilled hopes point us to God?
4. Do you think that our broken hearts make us a better witness to others? Why/ why not?
5. How has God used your experience to change the life of another?

Listen to “Show Me Your Glory” by Third Day.

Close with prayer.

Week Twelve:

A 24-Hour Celebration Retreat

- Carpool with as few vehicles as possible. Try to avoid women traveling alone. The retreat always begins before you arrive at the destination. Each car will need a playlist of songs that includes the songs listed on page 99
- Meals chosen should be things that require little effort on your part, or can be completely prepped beforehand and simply brought to the retreat. This is, after all, a retreat—a long awaited, long anticipated Sabbath rest.
- If possible, try to find a pastor available to serve communion Saturday night (you can call local churches if retreating far from home) a worship leader—guitarist/pianist and vocalist, and a speaker who is not one of you.

Day 1:

5:30 pm Arrive/Get situated
6:00 Dinner
6:30 Worship and Speaker
7:30 Small group Discussion
8:30 Journal Reflection
9:00 Eat chocolate
9:00-10:30 Group games – Gestures, Spoons, Apples to Apples, etc.

Day 2:

8:00 Breakfast
8:30 Worship and Speaker
9:30 Small Group Discussion
10:00 Journal Reflection
10:30 3 Team Games
12:00 Lunch
12:30 Rest Your Way
2:30 Activity 1
3:00 Speaker
3:45 Small Group Discussion
4:30 Journal Reflection
5:00 Dinner
5:30 Worship
6:00 Activity 2
6:30 Small Group Discussion then Large Group Presentation
7:30 Communion

List of Low Maintenance Meals:

Breakfast:

- egg bakes (prepped ahead of time)
- fruit
- muffins
- bagels
- cereal

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Lunch/Dinner:

- Lasagna (prepped ahead of time)
- Any crockpot/freezer meal
- Veggie platter
- Frozen pizzas (Heat before eating)

You will need:

- A road trip playlist that includes songs listed on page 99
- Paper plates
- plastic cups
- plasticware
- four prepped meals (2 dinners, 1 breakfast, 1 lunch—not in that order)
- chocolate
- a sports bra for worship
- one hula hoop, one dozen of raw eggs and one bucket per each team of four people
- four bananas
- 400 Q-tips (100 ea. Per team in at least 2 different colors)
- straws
- a deck of cards
- 4-6 prizes that pamper (in case teams are larger)
- your journal
- your Bible
- LLTMM
- a pen
- Gestures, Apples to Apples and other group games
- Toiletries
- Pillow? Sleeping bag?

Optional Activities and Memorial Crafts:

- Christmas tree ornament
- <http://www.nobiggie.net/25-beautiful-handmade-ornaments/decorate>
- Light luminaries
- There is also a link on Love Letters Facebook page in the “Notes” section left on December 26, 2015.
- Buy a birthday cake and sing happy birthday.
- Have a birthday party where you buy what you would want to buy your child and then donate the gifts to a local charity.
- Together, shop for a flowering tree to plant at your church
- Write a letter to self to be opened on baby’s birthday
- Write letter to self
- Write a letter to you from Jesus. Allow Him to say everything that you need to hear. Jesus knows your hurts.
- Write letter to you from baby Note: our babies know no pain. They do not know that we are hurting

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Celebration Song Ideas:

- Bless the Lord, Oh, My Soul
- Blessed Be Your Name
- Better is One Day
- We will Dance
- I've got the Joy Joy Joy
- Undignified by Crowder
- Oh How He Loves by Crowder
- Oh Praise Him by Crowder
- Come as You Are by Crowder "earth has no sorrow that heaven can't heal"
- Come Ye Weary (newer version)

Activities:

Activity 1: Dare to Dance Undignified

The purpose of this activity is to *Loosen Up*. After this activity, risky things like sharing our feelings and digging deep into God's desires for our lives should feel much easier. Heh heh.

For this activity you will need:

- Dance music
- David Crowder's "Undignified"
- A Bible
- A peppy leader
- Possibly a sports bra (or two if you are abundantly "blessed" as I am)

What to do:

- Read 2 Samuel 6:20-23 out loud as a group—with spunk!
- Ask the group what David's response to Michal was. Then ask them to repeat it.
- Ask the group: What comes to mind when you think undignified?
- Ask the group, are you willing to give God a dance offering?
- Start with a well-known dance song for a warm-up and lead ladies in a Simon Says-esque dance. Start with the head, then move to the shoulders, then the arms. Have them move one body part at a time to prevent short-circuiting. Get dangerous, now, and have them twitch their hips. Make sure that ladies who are more into the activity are encouraging the ones who are not. Get everyone in on it. Don't start the warm-up until you can see the dance in everyone's smile. Move to legs, Shake out the feet. Do some reserved jumping. We're still warming up. NOW, try to put it all together....
- Ask ladies what David's response to Michal was.
- Tell them that this next song by David Crowder was based of the 2 Samuel passage that you read together.
- Sing "Undignified" by David Crowder, and dance!

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Activity 2: Thankful Wall

The purpose of this activity is to move beyond I'm thankful for my family, house, job, though likely that's how it will begin—and that's okay—and begin to change focus/realign sights to the blessings that God has given us. As ladies see what others are writing it will trigger their own, "oh, yeah," memories. You could be thankful for a person, a memory, an experience, a vacation, furniture, unexpected money, a conversation, a Starbucks frappuccino—anything. The goal is to write as many things as possible before the music stops.

For this activity you will need:

- Markers that work well
- 20 minutes of instrumental music (type "instrumental playlist" in the youtube search bar)
- 12 ft of butcher paper per eight people
- A Bible

What to do:

- Tape about 12 feet (per eight people) of butcher paper to a wall.
- Choose about 15-20 minutes of instrumental song (no words). I really enjoy celtic music, myself.
- While the music is playing, read Psalm 145 out loud as a group.
- While the music is still playing give women ten to fifteen minutes to write things that they are thankful for. Have them write one or two ideas and then move to another place. Keep writing until the music has stopped.

Game Ideas:

Egg Toss: This relay requires three people working together at the same time. Standing in a straight line, about ten feet from each teammate, the woman on the end holds a basket. The woman in the middle holds a hoola hoop. The woman on the other end has a dozen raw eggs. The woman holding the eggs must toss each egg through the hoola hoop and the woman with the basket must attempt to catch each egg without breaking it. The team with the most unbroken eggs wins!

Banana Pass: Knees and thighs only. Pass the banana up and down the line three times. The first team to finish wins. If the banana is dropped, start over.

Q-Tip War: Flip two 6-8 ft tables on their sides. These are your forts. Give each team a different color of Q-tip. Each woman should receive a straw. No Q-tips may be thrown with hands. Use the straws to blow Q-tips at the opposite team. At the end of three minutes, the team with the least amount of "enemy Q-tips" wins.

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Small Group Discussion #2

NOTE: The story below follows loosely what we know of Jesus' crucifixion, but this narrative is complete speculation. Read out loud as a large group and then divide into small groups to answer the following discussion questions.

She Was There

At the end, you remember the beginning. The air was sweet and warm with the promise of spring. The cloudless sky was a beautiful brilliant blue. Any other day, these signs would have held hope and promise. But today, the world was to be without both. Involuntarily, her hands moved to cradle her belly, but of course her baby wasn't there anymore.

A man shouldered his way past her, propelling her into someone else. His inflamed cheeks proclaimed his hatred, the spittle strafing from his lips punctuated it. His shouts were quickly swallowed up into the cacophony of the jeering crowd that swelled about her.

That reminded her of the beginning as well. Back then it had been mostly judgmental stares and seething words unsaid, but she had been sworn at and called a prostitute and belittled often enough for it to leave its mark.

Those months had been excruciating, torture that she could not bring herself to wish upon her worst enemies. But she would endure it all—every last expletive and ice-cold shoulder. She would endure it for the rest of her life, if only they would take her son down from that dirty, splintered cross.

She rubbed more tears away with the heel of her hand. Abrasions were forming where she had been dragging her rough, wool sleeve across her cheeks.

"Blessed are you among women," Elizabeth had said. "And blessed is the child you will bear!" *Blessed?* Things hadn't turned out so great for Elizabeth's son, either. Mary scoffed.

The sound drew a quick, worried glance from John, who stood resolutely beside her. Since the moment he had found her in the crowd, he had not let her out of his sight. He'd been begging her to take her away from the mayhem. And despite the fact that she was living out her worst nightmare, she would see this through. She would not forsake her son.

Her body tensed with recall. She hadn't seen the thirty-nine lashes. There were too many people between them, and the dust kicked up by the crowd had caused her eyes to burn. But she could hear just fine. The cat of nine tails slicing through the air. The thup-thup-thup of the whip ends connecting with flesh. If she hadn't known who it was, she would have known anyway. That heart-wrenching cry had come from her own baby boy. Her stomach rolled over. She stumbled and swayed. That was how John had found her.

"Aw, Mary." His gentle voice and steady hands had renewed her resolve.

Now she felt the same hand on her shoulder. He didn't waste any breath with words. Words couldn't fix this. They wouldn't bring Jesus down from the cross. They wouldn't...

A man off to her left called out, "Save yourself! You've healed others! Call upon your angels to get you down."

A dim hope alighted Mary's eyes. He could do it. He could...she forced her eyes to his bloodied face, silently pleading him to do as the man said. *Do this, Jesus. Obey your mother.* He had changed water to wine to honor her, even though he hadn't wanted to. He had never disobeyed her. If she commanded him to get down from that cross this instant before you get yourself killed, would he?

She met his eyes. Her son was looking right at her. It was ever-so-slight—the shake of his head. "Please," she mouthed, But His answer was no. This death was the reason that He'd been born. His expression filled with sadness and pity.

His sweet words sounded course. “Behold your Mother. Behold your son,” he said to them. Her body began to convulse with sobs. She dragged the wet wool across her cheeks to no avail. John’s arms encircled her but it wasn’t enough. It would never be enough. How would she ever survive her son’s death?

“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” she heard Him yell.

Her body collapsed to the ground with the weight of her grief.

The sky turned black.

The guards fumbled around in the darkness for torches. The unexpected darkness had muted the jeers into low murmurs. It had done at least that. Above the dull sound she heard a woman screaming as if someone were cutting her heart out while she was still alive. *Make it stop!* She wanted to shout. *Tell that woman to be quiet! He is my son!*

“Shhh, Mary. Shhh, I’m here,” John said. It was then that she realized the woman screaming was her.

Mary ran her hand along the wet grains of wood. She scrunched her nose at the stale sea smell thick in the wind. A loose tendril of black hair, escaped from her mitpachat, went unnoticed. Dark slime that had accumulated on the outside of the vessel made it slick to the touch. She stepped over the anchor’s dirty rope, her sandaled feet sunk into the soft sand at the shoreline and still she ran her fingers along the wood.

“Take care of him, Joseph.” She whispered. Father and son had worked on several fishing boats in their time. Mary tilted her head back, closing her eyes against the sun. Jesus’ laughter was not far behind. Joseph had dumped sawdust into his cloak. Jesus playfully retaliated with the yellow confetti flitting down into Joseph’s graying hair. That’s how she had found them. The workshop was a disaster but neither man seemed concerned. She could still smell the sweet, pungent sawdust but feared that with time her precious memories would be washed away.

A wave crashed upon the shore at her knees. Mary threaded her fingers through a net draped over the port side to keep from falling. It was then that she sensed someone behind her. She prepared her apology for being near the fisherman’s boat and turned around to face him.

It wasn’t a fisherman, though. At least not a fisher of fish. The man’s smile grew as he gauged her reaction. “Shalom, Mother,” he said.

- What do you think Jesus’ relationship with his mother was like when he was a boy?
- How would their relationship have been different after he began his ministry?
- How would it be different?
- Read John 19:25-27. What do we know to be true about Mary’s whereabouts from the time that Jesus was arrested to the time that he was crucified?
- How do you relate to what Mary must have felt the day she watched Jesus die?
- The Bible never says, but do you think that Jesus would have seen Mary following his resurrection? If so, what do you imagine that meeting would have been like?
- What reasons did Mary have for celebration?
- Read Philippians 3:7-14. What can we hope for?
- How is Jesus’ resurrection like a homecoming?
- Speculate about what it was like the moment that Jesus met our babies for the first time.
- How can these images help us to celebrate here on earth?

