

Birds

in my mustard tree
how to grow your faith

Susanne Scheppmann



Guidelines for Bible Study Discussion Groups

Encourage commitment to your group. Encourage meeting attendance and lesson completion. However, do not expect everyone to have her lessons completed. Sometimes, women just need to absorb.

Advise them, “If you have to come late, still come. We’ll save you a seat. Or if you have to leave early, just try to leave as quietly as possible so as not to disturb the group.”

Stress confidentiality within the group. What is said within each group must not go any further. Please ask them to respect family members, husbands, kids, etc. We do not want to hurt the feelings of our loved ones.

Ask for respect for each other and for differing opinions. We might have to “agree to disagree.” Remember: *“A person convinced against her will, is of the same opinion still.”*

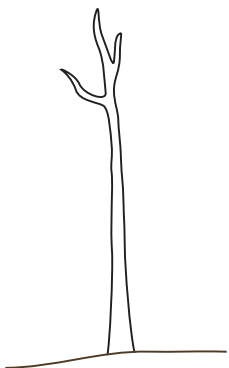
Ask them to refrain from discussing other churches and denominations.

Go over the lesson format. Ask if there are any questions. Tell them, “If I am going too fast or speaking “Christianese,” ask me to slow down or to explain the terminology. Encourage them to ask questions—someone else in the group probably has the same question.

Explain the different “versions” of the Bible, such as NIV, King James, The Message, etc. Most study guides will use the NIV version; however, whatever the women have and understand is most important.

Finally, prohibit party invitations and the promotion of home businesses, such as candle, jewelry, cosmetics, or cookware parties.





Week 1

Mustard Seed Faith

If you have snacks during your group time, bring bagels and cream cheese. They will tie in with the Faith Fun in Day 5.

Open With Prayer

Day 1—I Can't See You

Briefly review the opening paragraphs with your group, asking how they would define the term "faith."

"Just have faith, God is in control." Ask how they feel when someone suggests they must "just have faith," but they feel their world is falling apart.

Abraham moved to an unknown country. Ask if any can share a time when they moved into "unknown country" and had to trust it was the right thing to do.

God increases Abraham's faith little by little. Ask what the ultimate test of Abraham's faith was in Hebrews 11.

Faith is trusting without seeing. Ask what visual God provided to help their own faith increase?

Day 2—Wisdom or Folly

Ask the group to share briefly how they came to believe in an unseen God.

Ask if any have ever considered Christianity boring and why or why not?





Day 3—**The Value of Wisdom**

“Increase our faith?” Discuss and perhaps pray right then that the Lord Jesus will increase each one’s faith.

Ask how unforgiveness can affect a person’s faith.

Discuss the fact that faith varies from person to person and circumstance to circumstance. Ask in what areas their faith is strong or in what areas their faith may be weak.

Day 4—**More Wise Words**

Ask your group what they thought about the “stained-glass saints” concept.

Ask the group if they like or dislike the idea that God will re-teach lessons of faith.

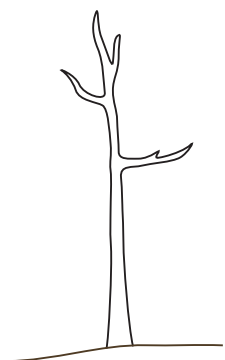
Day 5—**Glorious Wisdom**

Read the Faith Fact: “God is faithful to us because He loves us.”

Discuss God’s faithfulness and His love for us.

Encourage the group to complete next week’s lesson. Close with a prayer after asking for the various needs in their lives for which they need increased faith.





Week 2

Scared of The Dark

Approximately 3-4 days prior to the group meeting grow some sprouts under you sink to use as a display. (If you do not have time to grow them yourself, purchase some alfalfa sprouts from your local grocery store.)

Open With Prayer

Day 1—I'm Scared

Ask if anyone relates to Moses and his conversation with God in Exodus.

Discuss the Faith Fact: "The Lord will equip those He calls to act on His behalf."

Ask if God is calling anyone to something they are afraid to do.

Day 2—Fraidy-Cats

Discuss the Lord's admonition, "*Be strong and courageous.*"

Discuss the comfort of God's promise, "*I will never leave you or forsake you.*"

Day 3—Second Guessing

Read Judges 6:13-16

God considered Gideon a "mighty warrior." Discuss Gideon's questions and God's response.

Discuss the reality of why they might hesitate to ask God, "Why?" and how they feel when they do not receive an answer to their question.

Discuss how we feel when we do not receive an answer to our question.





Discuss the pros and cons of “putting out fleece” as Gideon did to determine God’s will.

Ask the group their thoughts about John the Baptist and his question to Jesus.

Day 4—**What If?**

Discuss the Faith Fiction: “If we trust God, our greatest fears will come to fruition.”

Ask if there are any volunteers who would share their fears concerning trusting God.

Discuss the transition from “Doubting Thomas to Thomas the Martyr.” What caused the enormous swing of faith and why did it happen?

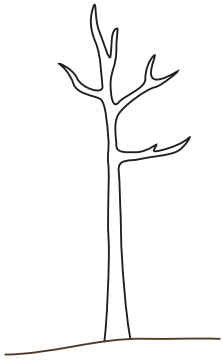
Day 5—**Sprouts Under the Sink**

Ask if anyone would briefly share when they might have acted like Nicodemus coming to Jesus in the dark of the night.

Ask if these lessons have helped ease their anxiety about having “little faith.” Ask if they find it a comfort to learn that great heroes of the Bible also doubted and why or why not?

Encourage the group to complete next week’s lesson. Close with asking God to help them overcome fear and doubt in their lives.





Week 3

Amazing Faith

Place small pieces of wrapped chocolate (for example: Hershey Kisses® or Dove Chocolates®) on each member's chair. Ask them to wait to eat it until the end of the discussion of Day Three. (At the end of Day Three invite them to listen as they unwrap the candy, then touch the soft velvet chocolate, see the delectable darkness, smell the cocoa, and finally taste the tempting treat. Ask them to describe the miracle of all those wonders of our senses.)

Open With Prayer.

Day 1—Who Is Like Our God?

Ask the group to list several things that can be a modern day idol. Is there anything that they struggle with personally?

Read Isaiah 46:9. Discuss the ramifications of this verse in a culture that states, "All paths lead to god."

Day 2—A Stroll Through Nature

Ask the group members about their favorite nature spot. How often do they have the opportunity to visit and enjoy it?

Ask when they see the glory of God in nature why should that help them to trust God.

Day 3—The Womb of Wonder

Discuss why women always seem to be dissatisfied with their bodies as God created them.

Discuss the amazing abilities of their bodies. (Eat the chocolates now, if you provided them for your group. *(Now invite them to listen as they unwrap the candy, then touch the soft velvet*



chocolate, see the delectable darkness, smell the cocoa, and finally taste the tempting treat. Ask them to describe the miracle of all those wonders of our senses.)

Ask why women doubt God's sovereignty in their physical bodies.

Discuss the truths of Psalm 139:13 and Jeremiah 1:5a. Ask how they feel about these verses.

Day 4—**Vanquished Amazement**

Discuss the Faith Fiction: "Do you sometimes think your faith would grow stronger if you saw a miracle?"

Discuss within the group the Scriptures in which people forgot the wonders and the miracles. Why do you think this happens? Could this happen to you? Why or why not?

Say, "Susanne wrote, 'Our faith must be based on Jesus and His Words of truth—whether we like them or not. We cannot allow our desire for signs and wonders to override our slow step-by-step growth of faith.'" Ask how this statement affects them.

Day 5—**Let's Amaze Him!**

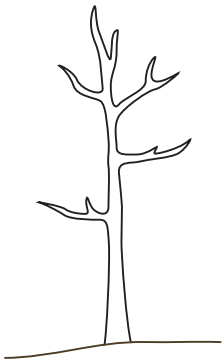
Read Luke 7:9. Ask the group members if they have ever considered the fact that they could amaze Jesus with their faith.

What small brave acts of faith could they do this week that might amaze our Lord?

Ask how they responded to the statement in today's lesson, "As I ponder the centurion and the sick woman, it seems that what pleases God is our attempt to believe in His character and ability."

Encourage the group to complete next week's lesson. Close in prayer with an emphasis on asking God's help to amaze Him with small acts of faith this upcoming week.





Week 4

Broken Wings, Shattered Branches

If possible, bring a CD or some type of recording of "Blessed Be Your Name" by Matt Redman. Play it at the beginning of this week's lesson and again at the end before the closing prayer.

Open With Prayer

Day 1—G.F.I

Ask the group to share their own GFI. from within their homes and their faith.

Read Genesis 39:20-21. Ask if they think Joseph felt God was with him in prison. Why or why not? What would they have thought if they were in his place? Have a few women share a time when they felt alone, but later knew God was with them all along.

Day 2—Bootleg Faith

Ask if anyone would like to share briefly his or her "family skeletons."

Ask the group to share a few names of those they would like to emulate in their faith walk.


Discuss the benefits of asking someone to come alongside of them in prayer.

Ask if any of them have a Naomi, a mentor for their faith journey, in their life.

Day 3—Prophets in the Pits

Briefly review Jeremiah 38:1-13. Ask the members to share if they would have taken the commander's offer for freedom in Babylon. Remind them there are no right or wrong answers. Say, "Susanne writes, 'Obedience to God doesn't always make sense. Nor are we promised a life that will only be pleasant and filled with joyful experiences.'" How do they feel about this statement? Have they found it to be true in their own lives?





Discuss Psalm 3:3. Have the group discuss the closing words, “No matter how far down the slippery slide of depression and doubt we slide, God is the shield about us and the lifter of our heads.”

Day 4—**Whispers of Why**

Ask the members what whys have they whispered to God.

Read Psalm 100:5. Discuss God’s attributes of love, goodness, and faithfulness. Ask how the knowledge of these help them when they have “whispers of why” in their lives.

Day 5—**Faith Failures**

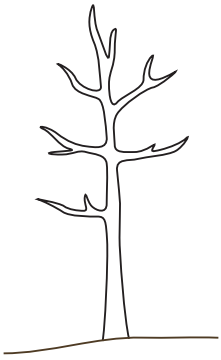
Ask if anyone would like to share a time when they were angry with God.

Discuss the Faith Fact: “God uses our worst failures to produce some of our greatest victories.”

Ask what that tells us about the Lord’s love, goodness, and faithfulness.

(Play Matt Redman’s “Blessed Be Your Name” and then close with prayer asking Christ to produce a faith in them that may be proved genuine.





Week 5

Resting in the Shade

Open With Prayer

Day 1—**Celebration of Faith**

Ask how everyone spends her Sundays.

Ask how often they are satisfied with their work. Do they think they should have done more, could have done it better?

Ask the group various ways they can implement ways to celebrate their faith.

Day 2—**A God Who Naps**

Ask how much sleep they need each night. Do they like to take naps? Why or why not?

Discuss the truth that God is always watching over them.

Day 3—**Cease Striving**

Ask who is a type A personality (busy, punctual, things to-do) and who is a type B personality (relaxed, easy going, procrastinator).

Discuss the Faith Fact: “God is not impressed with our busyness.”

Ask the group about the areas of their life in which God might be saying, “Cease striving.”





Day 4—**Wilted Faith**

Briefly discuss experiences of tumbling from spiritual mountaintops to valleys of melancholy.

Read Matthew 11:28-29.

Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. (NIV)

Ask individuals to share what this verse means to them in their current circumstances.

Day 5—**Green Pastures**

Discuss the Faith Fiction: “God restores my soul only by religious activities.”

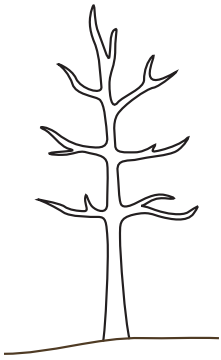
Discuss the Faith Fact: “Jesus restores our souls by giving us enjoyment in small pleasures.”

Ask the group to share some of their individual “green pastures.”

Say, “Susanne writes, ‘Knowing and accepting the enjoyment of life helps our faith to increase.’” Ask if they think this statement is true. Do they sometimes feel guilty enjoying small pleasures? If yes, why?

Encourage the group to complete next week’s lesson. Ask for brief and specific prayer needs in regards to behaviors and emotions. Close in prayer.





Week 6

Birds in My Mustard Tree

Prior to group discussion time, write down one positive attribute that stands out in each of the members. Use Galatians 5:22-23 to garner ideas. Share with the group how they have each influenced your own faith.

If possible, bring in a large sheet of paper or a grease board. It will be used to draw a tree, and then label the branches with the attributes of God such as goodness, love, faithfulness and write the “birds” scattered throughout the branches.

Day 1—Unseen Treasures of Faith

Read:

And I will give you treasures hidden in the darkness—secret riches. I will do this so you may know that I am the Lord, the God of Israel, the one who calls you by name. Isaiah 45:3 NLT

Ask how the riches of wisdom, knowledge, understanding, and revelation help them in their day-to-day lives. How do these riches help increase their faith?

Day 2—Extraordinary in the Ordinary

Discuss the thought of having *extraordinary* faith in the ordinary tasks of their lives.

Ask the group to share *ordinary* acts of faith in the average believer’s life (for example: raising children, loving their husbands, serving their community and church, etc.).





Day 3—**Harvest Time**

Discuss the delays of unanswered prayer. How do these affect their faith?

Ask individuals to briefly share times when God's timing has been hard to understand in their lives.

Discuss the Faith Fact: "God hears our prayers instantly, but answers in His own time."

Ask how the Faith Finale verse applies to their lives.

*If it seems slow, wait patiently, for it will surely take place. It will not be delayed . . .
but the righteous will live by their faith. Habakkuk 2:3-4 NLT*

Day 4—**Future Sprouts and Baby Birds**

Discuss with the group who they have the ability to influence with their faith.

Ask how they share their personal faith with others. As a group, make a list of some easy ways to share their faith.

Day 5—**Home to Roost**

Read Hebrews 11:1.

NOW FAITH is the assurance (the confirmation, the title deed) of the things [we] hope for, being the proof of things [we] do not see and the conviction of their reality [faith perceiving as real fact what is not revealed to the senses]. (AMP)

Ask the group, "After finishing this six-week study of *Birds in My Mustard Tree* what have you learned about faith?"

Ask them to describe the areas where they have been encouraged in their own faith. Where has their faith been stretched?

Say, "Susanne shared that she considered her two 'daughter-in-loves' to be birds in her mustard tree of faith." Let's list some of our birds in our mustard trees of faith. (If possible, bring in a large sheet of paper or a grease board. Draw a tree, label the branches with the attributes of God such as goodness, love, faithfulness, and write the "birds" scattered throughout the branches.)

Thank everyone for being a part of the group and for their willingness to contribute to the discussion time each week. Close in a prayer asking the Lord to bless and increase everyone's faith.

