

fierce love

COLLECTIVE



What To Do With the Big Emotions of Motherhood

WELCOME TO *FIERCE LOVE COLLECTIVE*!

Thank you for taking this time to walk alongside your group as a *Fierce Love* Facilitator! The following information will assist you in facilitating your group over the next few months. Every week has components that are just for you (written in this color), and aren't listed in the Participant Guide.

THE TANGIBLES

- Facilitator Guide
- Whiteboard or something to write on
- Dry erase markers
- Index cards (week 8)

PRAYER

We begin and end every meetup with prayer. Take note of prayer requests that come up during Check-ins and Check-outs. Before you begin praying, verbally acknowledge it's OK if there is anyone who has never prayed before or might feel uncomfortable. Invite them to simply close their eyes and open their minds to the possibility of the words you are saying. (Always assume there are a number of women in the group who this could apply to, even if it's not apparent.)

CHECK-INS/CHECK-OUTS

Check-ins and Check-outs are one word self-given evaluations to the Member's emotional and mental state. This could be "tired," "excited," "hopeful," etc. In the first week, describe how this works so they are not a surprise in subsequent weeks.

TOPICS TO TABLE

Questions will come up during class that cannot be immediately addressed. With your group, assign a place for these questions and come back to them when the group is ready.

Many of the questions in this course may take time to answer. Be respectful of your group's needs and record them in a place where they can be acknowledged and discussed in a timely manner.

PUT IT INTO PRACTICE

This homework is assigned at the end of each group to be completed before the next meeting. Once Check-ins and prayer are done, your group will share highlights from their homework.

.M | COLLECTIVES

[THEMOM.CO/COLLECTIVES](https://themom.co/collectives)



My Quiet Cave




TABLE OF CONTENTS

Week 1 - Introduction	1
Week 2 - Advocating & Community	13
Week 3 - Tools & Skills for Wellness	19
Week 4 - Grief & Control	25
Week 5 - Sharing Your Story	31
Week 6 - Identity	35
Week 7 - Abiding	41
Week 8 - Freedom	47
Resources for Postpartum Depression	50
Resources	53
Books	54

WEEK 1

INTRODUCTION

AGENDA



- Introductions
- Group Expectations
- Facts About Mood & Anxiety Disorders
- Expectations
- Acceptance
- Expectations Versus Delight
- Discussion Questions
- Conclusion
- Putting It Into Practice

INTRODUCTIONS

Welcome to week 1!

Begin the meeting with Check-ins and prayer. Explain to your group how each work and how each meeting will begin with Check-ins and end with Check-outs.

After prayer, it is time for introductions. Introduce yourself first by answering the questions below, then ask the other women to do the same.

- What is your name?
- Why are you here?
- What is one interesting fact about you?

WHAT CAN YOU EXPECT FROM YOUR FACILITATOR EACH WEEK?

Your group can expect you to be reliable, empathic, respectful and trustworthy. We will also try to have fun!



GROUP EXPECTATIONS

Review Group Expectations together. Ask a volunteer to read the Group Expectations aloud and discuss each one, if necessary. It is important for every Member to understand what is expected of her and to know this is a safe place for sharing.

Have each Member sign this page agreeing to abide by the expectations. If someone violates the terms of the agreement, you may address it by reviewing the Group Expectations again.

1. I will keep everything shared in this group confidential.
This is a safe place to be yourself and share your story.
2. I will not judge other women in this group.
There is no condemnation in this place.
(Romans 8)
3. I will not compare myself to other women in this group.
We are here to care for and support each other, not to compete.
4. I will respect myself and those around me.
5. I will not give advice or try to "counsel" other Members.
We are committed to offering a listening ear and a shoulder to cry on.
6. I will keep my phone turned off during group.
7. I will show my commitment to my group by attending every session and doing my homework.

Name _____

Signature _____

Date _____

FACTS ABOUT MOOD & ANXIETY DISORDERS AMONG WOMEN

Go through the following information on famous women with mood and anxiety disorders with your group. The purpose of this exercise is to normalize mental illness among women.

FAMOUS WOMEN WITH MOOD & ANXIETY DISORDERS

Brooke Shields - postpartum depression	Emma Stone - anxiety, panic disorder
Demi Lovato - bipolar disorder	Catherine Zeta Jones - bipolar disorder
Adele - anxiety	Oprah Winfrey - anxiety
Hayden Panettiere - postpartum depression	Gwyneth Paltrow - postpartum depression
Drew Barrymore - postpartum depression	Sheryl Crow - depression

INFORMATION ON MOOD & ANXIETY DISORDERS AMONG WOMEN

- Approximately 12 million women in the United States experience clinical depression each year.**
 - About one in every eight women can expect to develop clinical depression during their lifetime.**
 - Depression occurs most frequently in women ages 25 to 44.
- One in seven postpartum women suffer from postpartum depression.*
 - One in five postpartum women suffer from one or more mental health disorders, including postpartum depression, major depressive disorder, postpartum anxiety, postpartum panic, postpartum OCD, postpartum PTSD and postpartum psychosis.*
- Baby blues: 60-80% of new mothers experience brief temporary moodiness – crying spells, deep sadness, moments of despair or panic, or feelings of being overwhelmed. However, these experiences are broken up by periods of pleasure and serenity, and can usually be relieved by getting some sleep, getting out of the house or visiting with a friend.
 - Baby blues typically begins on the third to fifth postpartum day (about the same time milk production starts) and lasts for just a few hours to several days.*
 - Baby blues or postpartum mood disorders can occur after any birth (first, second, etc.) to women in satisfying marriages and supportive families with a solid mental health history. It can happen to anyone at any time!*
- Anxiety disorders are the most common mental illness in the U.S., affecting 40 million adults in the United States ages 18 and older, or 18% of the population.**
- Women are 60% more likely than men to experience an anxiety disorder in their lifetime.**

*Kleinman, K. and Raskin, V.D. (2013) *This Isn't What I Expected*. Da Capo Press, Boston, MA.

**National Institute for Mental Health: [nimh.nih.gov](https://www.nimh.nih.gov)

SCARY THOUGHTS

"Anxiety, accompanied by scary thoughts during the postpartum period, is common and can manifest as worry, rumination, thoughts, obsessions, misinterpretations, images, or impulses that feel inconsistent with who the mother is. They are very upsetting." (Kleiman, p.21)

Scary thoughts may include: "Why did I have this baby?", "I want to give the baby back," "I'd rather be dead," "My baby will not survive unless I watch him around the clock."

Most of these thoughts are anxiety driven and fairly common from time to time among postpartum women.

The important thing to consider when having these thoughts is the level of distress that accompanies the thought and how much the woman believes the thought to be true. One woman may think, "I have to watch my baby around the clock or they will die," and then quickly realizes the absurdity of it and goes back to sleep. Another woman may think the same thing, but forces herself to stay awake so she can watch her baby throughout the night and day.

Note for Facilitator: Some women hear voices or see things if they are under a great deal of stress postpartum. This is called postpartum psychosis. If you think a Member is experiencing this, encourage her to contact her doctor immediately or go to the nearest emergency room!

EXPECTATIONS

Ask your group to answer the following question in their workbooks and then discuss with the group.

*What expectations did you have of what motherhood would be like?
What expectations do you have of what motherhood should be like?*

CULTURAL EXPECTATIONS

Our culture plays a powerful role in shaping our expectations as mothers. Discuss Cultural Expectations by asking your group:

- *What expectations or myths of motherhood does our culture and media portray?*
- *What about expectations from your community? Your family?*

CHILDHOOD EXPECTATIONS

Discuss Childhood Expectations by asking your group:

- *As a child, how did you fantasize about motherhood?*
- *What kind of mom did you picture yourself being?*
- *What kind of baby did you envision having?*

ADULT EXPECTATIONS

Discuss Adult Expectations by asking your group:

- *What did you hope being a mom would change in your life?*
- *Did you expect motherhood to fill a void or make you happier?*

MOMMY WARS

This is a good time to address the latest trend of mom-shaming, which is when mothers say things like, “I am a good mom because I do things right,” or “You are a bad mom because you do things wrong.” We like to call these “mommy wars,” or “good mom vs. bad mom.” “Good mom” and “bad mom” are constructions based on insecurity.

For example, a good mom breastfeeds her baby, a bad mom gives her baby formula. A good mom stays at home with her baby, a bad mom works and puts her child in day care. A good mom has her baby on a sleeping and feeding schedule, a bad mom is co-sleeping and feeding on demand.

Remind the group that we are here to lift each other up, not tear each other down. There is more than one way to raise a child because every family is different. It is important for moms to stick together and support each other!

EXODUS 2:1-10 (NIV)

Ask for a volunteer to read the passage below:

BACKGROUND: The Israelites were slaves of the Egyptians. Because of the Israelites great numbers, Pharaoh (the Egyptian ruler) ordered that all Hebrew boys be drowned in the Nile River. Moses's mother hid her son to keep him alive, but after three months he was too hard to hide. She hid him in the Nile River where the Hebrew babies were drowned. To her surprise, Moses was found by Pharaoh's daughter.

¹Now a man of the tribe of Levi married a Levite woman, ²and she became pregnant and gave birth to a son. When she saw that he was a fine child, she hid him for three months. ³But when she could hide him no longer, she got a papyrus basket for him and coated it with tar and pitch. Then she placed the child in it and put it among the reeds along the bank of the Nile. ⁴His sister stood at a distance to see what would happen to him.

⁵ Then Pharaoh's daughter went down to the Nile to bathe, and her attendants were walking along the riverbank. She saw the basket among the reeds and sent her female

slave to get it. ⁶ She opened it and saw the baby. He was crying, and she felt sorry for him. “This is one of the Hebrew babies,” she said.

⁷ Then his sister asked Pharaoh's daughter, “Shall I go and get one of the Hebrew women to nurse the baby for you?”

⁸ “Yes, go,” she answered. So the girl went and got the baby's mother. ⁹ Pharaoh's daughter said to her, “Take this baby and nurse him for me, and I will pay you.” So the woman took the baby and nursed him. ¹⁰ When the child grew older, she took him to Pharaoh's daughter and he became her son. She named him Moses, saying, “I drew him out of the water.”

As mothers, we can become so wrapped up in worrying about what others think about us, we forget that our job is to do our best.

For Moses' mother, the best she could do was hide her baby in the reeds to prevent him from being murdered. Although her quick thinking kept her baby alive, to another mother, this may look like terrible parenting.

How have you tried your best and had it look different than the “experts”? If so, how have you seen God work in that?

You may also ask your group if they judge others' actions based on their circumstances. For example, a single mom who puts her kids in day care while she works two jobs. Or a mom who sends her kids to live with their grandparents, because she is too depressed to take care of them.

ACCEPTANCE

Ask your group to read the following quote:

"When there is a significant discrepancy between what you anticipate and what you actually experience, guilt, confusion and great unhappiness can result."
- Karen Kleinman

Expectations are a part of our daily lives. We place expectations on our spouses, friends, children and even ourselves. Ask your group: What expectations did you have that are at odds with your actual experience?

It is possible to find delight in the midst of unmet expectations! It requires the practice in acceptance. (Note: The word **practice** is intentional. Acceptance takes a lot of practice!)

Acceptance isn't agreeing with or saying it's OK, rather it's acknowledging disappointment or pain. Because when we are unwilling to do so, it actually leads to more suffering. After we accept that there is disappointment or pain because of unmet expectations, we can stop living in a "should" reality. We free ourselves to focus our energy on what is in front of us and open ourselves up to moving in directions we can find delight in.

ACCEPTANCE EXERCISE*

If time allows, you may choose to do this now or at the end of the meetup.

Tangibles needed: a piece of paper, a clipboard, a pen and two chairs facing one another

Example Script:

Facilitator: *"Let's practice with a metaphor that demonstrates what we are talking about. Would anyone be willing to volunteer to do this exercise with me?"*

Volunteer: *"Sure, I'll do it."*

Facilitator: (Hand clipboard, paper and pen to the volunteer.) *"Write down a few of the unmet expectations or difficult thoughts about motherhood that you've been struggling to let go of. Don't worry, this is for your eyes only. You will not be sharing this with anyone."*

Volunteer: (Take a few moments to jot some things down.)

Facilitator: *"OK, tightly hold the clipboard with the paper you wrote your difficult thoughts on. Go ahead and pull the clipboard up to your face, almost touching your nose."*

Volunteer: (Pulls clipboard up to her nose and holds it there.)

Facilitator: *"Now, what is it like to have a conversation with me while you're all caught up in your unmet expectations and difficult thoughts?"*

Volunteer: *"It's awkward."*

Facilitator: *"It's awkward. Do you feel connected with me?"*

Volunteer: *"No."*

Facilitator: *"Are you able to read the expressions on my face?"*

Volunteer: "No."

Facilitator: *"If your kids were doing a song and dance in front of you right now, would you be able to see them?"*

Volunteer: "No."

Facilitator: *"And what's your view of the room while you're gripping tightly to this stuff?"*

Volunteer: *"All I can see is this blurry sheet of paper."*

Facilitator: *"So, while you're completely absorbed in all this stuff, you're missing out on a lot. You're disconnected from the world around you, and you're disconnected from me. Notice that while you're holding on tightly to this stuff, you can't do the things that make your life work. Check it out – grip the clipboard as tightly as you possibly can. (The volunteer tightens her grip.) Now, if I asked you to cuddle a baby, hug a person, drive a car, cook dinner or type on a computer, could you do it?"*

Volunteer: *"No, I couldn't do any of that very well."*

Facilitator: *"While you're all caught up in this stuff, not only do you lose contact with the world around you and disconnect from your relationships, but you also become incapable of doing the things that bring you delight."*

Volunteer: "OK."

Facilitator: *"Is it OK if I pull my chair up a little closer to you?"* (Allow for permission.) *"There is one more thing I'd like to demonstrate."* (Pull your chair closer so you can reach the clipboard with your hands when the volunteer holds the clipboard out in front of her.)

Facilitator: *"What I'd like you to do is place both your hands flat on one side of the clipboard, and I'm going to put my hands on the other side. I'd like you to push the clipboard away from you. Push firmly, but don't push so hard you knock me over. (As the volunteer tries to push the clipboard away, the Facilitator pushes back.) And just keep pushing. You hate this stuff, right? You hate these thoughts and feelings. So push as hard as you can – trying very hard to push away all these painful thoughts, feelings and unmet expectations. You've been doing this for days, weeks or even years; are they going anywhere? Sure, you're keeping them at arm's length, but what's the cost to you?"*

Volunteer: *"It's tiring."*

Facilitator: *"How does it feel in your shoulders?"*

Volunteer: *"I feel stiff."*

Facilitator: *"What would it be like trying to hold your child, type on a computer, play your favorite sport or walk with a friend while continuing to push like this?"*

Volunteer: *"I couldn't do it."*

Facilitator: *"OK, let's try something else. Place the clipboard on your lap and just let it sit there. What is that like?"*

Volunteer: *"Better."*

Facilitator: *"Less effort?"*

Volunteer: *"Much less."*

Facilitator: *"How are your shoulders now?"*

Volunteer: *"Relaxed, but the unmet expectations and disappointments are still here. I don't want them."*

Facilitator: *"You are right, they are still there. And, of course, you don't want them. But do you notice they have a much reduced impact on you? Notice you are now free to invest your energy in doing something constructive. If I asked you to cook a meal, play the piano, cuddle a baby or hug somebody – could you do it now?"*

Volunteer: *"Yes."*

Facilitator: *"What's it like to have a conversation with me like this as opposed to doing this (mime pushing the clipboard away) or this (mime holding the clipboard in front of her face)?"*

Volunteer: *"It's much more natural, less effort and actually enjoyable."*

Facilitator: *"Do you feel more engaged with me? Can you read my face now?"*

Volunteer: *"Yes."*

Facilitator: *"Notice that you now have a clear view of the room around you. You can take it all in. If I, or your child, started doing a song-and-dance routine, you'd be able to see it."*

Volunteer: *"That would be nice."*

Facilitator: (Ask to take the clipboard from the volunteer at this point.) *"So, instead of doing this (picking up clipboard and holding it in front of your face) or this (pushing clipboard away), you can do this (dropping the clipboard into your lap and letting go of it). Notice, this not only allows you to be connected with the world around you and to engage in what you're doing, but it also frees you up to take action in the things that are important to you. When you're no longer struggling with this stuff, absorbed in it or holding on to it, you are free. Now you can put your energy into doing the things that you delight in – like making your baby giggle, playing tag with your toddler, snuggling with your husband, riding your bike or playing the guitar. How does that sound to you?"*

Volunteer: *"Good."*

Facilitator: Explain that this is acceptance – loosening the grip on expectations, setting them down, and looking at what is in front of you, so you are willing and able to take action in things that are important and bring you delight.

**Exercise adapted from: Harris, R. (2009) ACT Made Simple. New Harbinger Publications, Oakland, CA.*

EXPECTATIONS VERSUS DELIGHT

Ask your group, “What did you use to delight in, but now has been lost in the mire of struggling against the ‘shoulds’ and ‘could haves’? Are you willing to practice acceptance and let go so you can return to those delights?”

How can you delight in accepting your realities?

For example, instead of getting frustrated that your house is dirty after you’ve spent hours cleaning it, delight in the fact that you have children who are creative and have the freedom to play and be themselves in your home.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

KNOWN

PSALM 139 (NIV)

Ask for a volunteer to read the passage below:

BACKGROUND: Psalm 139 is a song of David and is often considered one of the most splendid psalms in the canon.

For the director of music. Of David. A psalm.

- | | |
|--|---|
| <p>¹ You have searched me, Lord,
and you know me.</p> <p>² You know when I sit and when I rise;
you perceive my thoughts from afar.</p> <p>³ You discern my going out and my lying
down; you are familiar with all my ways.</p> <p>⁴ Before a word is on my tongue you, Lord,
know it completely.</p> <p>⁵ You hem me in behind and before,
and you lay your hand upon me.</p> <p>⁶ Such knowledge is too wonderful for me,
too lofty for me to attain.</p> <p>⁷ Where can I go from your Spirit?
Where can I flee from your presence?</p> <p>⁸ If I go up to the heavens, you are there;
if I make my bed in the depths, you are there.</p> <p>⁹ If I rise on the wings of the dawn,
if I settle on the far side of the sea,</p> <p>¹⁰ even there your hand will guide me,
your right hand will hold me fast.</p> <p>¹¹ If I say, “Surely the darkness will hide me
and the light become night around me,”</p> <p>¹² even the darkness will not be dark to you;
the night will shine like the day,
for darkness is as light to you.</p> <p>¹³ For you created my inmost being;
you knit me together in my mother’s womb.</p> | <p>¹⁴ I praise you because I am fearfully and
wonderfully made; your works are wonderful,
I know that full well.</p> <p>¹⁵ My frame was not hidden from you when
I was made in the secret place, when I was
woven together in the depths of the earth.</p> <p>¹⁶ Your eyes saw my unformed body;
all the days ordained for me were written in
your book before one of them came to be.</p> <p>¹⁷ How precious to me are your thoughts, God!
How vast is the sum of them!</p> <p>¹⁸ Were I to count them,
they would outnumber the grains of sand –
when I awake, I am still with you.</p> <p>¹⁹ If only you, God, would slay the wicked!
Away from me, you who are bloodthirsty!</p> <p>²⁰ They speak of you with evil intent;
your adversaries misuse your name.</p> <p>²¹ Do I not hate those who hate you, Lord, and
abhor those who are in rebellion against
you?</p> <p>²² I have nothing but hatred for them;
I count them my enemies.</p> <p>²³ Search me, God, and know my heart;
test me and know my anxious thoughts.</p> <p>²⁴ See if there is any offensive way in me,
and lead me in the way everlasting.</p> |
|--|---|

In this psalm, David speaks of God's goodness from the very beginning of David's creation. God made every person, knitting them together in their mother's wombs. Once they are born, there is no place they can go where they are not completely known by God, including their thoughts and actions. What does it feel like to be known like this? What does it feel like to be adored by someone who knows us so well?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Knowing God cares so much and knows everything about us gives us great significance!

Let the group know that these questions are meant to spark honest conversation, and with each person's honest answer it encourages another. Remind the group that is a safe place, and if these questions don't align with their beliefs today, to consider how they might answer the questions if they did.

How does it feel to know God knows you so intimately?

Ask your group, *What does this mean to you?* We don't have to hide anything from God because he knows already! We don't have to pretend, explain or defend ourselves. God knows everything about us and loves us.

How do you need God to fight for you?

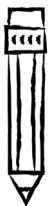
Ask your group to think about this question for a moment. You can help them process their thoughts by also asking: *What enemies do you need him to slay? Where do you need him to sit with you? Where do you need him to lead you?*

CONCLUSION

Ask your group to answer these questions in their workbooks. We will review these questions in week 8.

Where would you like to be at the end of this course?

What obstacles do you want to overcome?



PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

Practice letting go of expectations and embracing delight. Answer the following question each day:

How did I choose delight over expectation today?

End with Check-outs and prayer. Remind group when you'll have the next meetup.


DRAW / DREAM / DOODLE



WEEK 2

ADVOCATING & COMMUNITY

AGENDA



- Week 1 Reflections
- Awareness
- Being Your Own Advocate
- Advocating for Yourself as a Mom
- Community
- Building a Wellness Team
- Resources
- Putting It Into Practice

Begin with Check-ins and prayer.

WEEK 1 REFLECTIONS

Ask the group to share highlights from their homework: letting go of expectations and embracing delight.

AWARENESS

In order to advocate for ourselves, it is helpful to first take an inventory and then identify what it is we are experiencing so we know what kind of help we might need.

Cars have dashboard lights to signal there is a problem or something needs to be addressed. If mothers had dashboard lights, the “airbag” light might be a warning that you’re snapping at your toddler, or the “low tire pressure” light could mean constant fatigue or weepiness. The “seatbelt” signal could be thoughts that everyone would be better without you. The “check engine” light could indicate that there is a significant problem, but doesn’t tell us the exact problem. If we cover the dashboard lights on our car, the problem does not go away. The same applies to us. If we mask our symptoms without dealing with them, the problem does not go away.

Ask your group to pay attention to their “warning lights.” *What kind of signs are they noticing? What indicates that it needs attention?*

Ask your group to fill in their answers in their workbooks. After they’ve finished, ask for volunteers to share their answers. Write these answers on the whiteboard and address commonalities.

Warning light	Indicator

Ask the women in your group to list some of their “warning lights” when they know things are not right, and what those symptoms indicate. What is the problem they actually need to solve? For example, feeling the need to scream may indicate that you need time to yourself.

BEING YOUR OWN ADVOCATE

BACKGROUND: Before the time of Nehemiah, the Jewish people had been conquered by the Babylonians and the Assyrians. Most Jews lived in exile and those who remained lived in a small remnant in what had been Israel. Soon after, the Persians conquered the remaining area.

Nehemiah was cupbearer to Artaxerxes, king of Persia. During the 70 years of exile, the temple in Jerusalem was destroyed. Nehemiah heard about the state of the temple and asked to return to Jerusalem.

In the ancient mind, the gods shared a connection with the land in which they dwelt and the people shared that same connection. When the Jews were forced out of Jerusalem, they not only ceased to be home, they lost their identity.

Even though being sad in the king’s presence was punishable by death, Nehemiah was still sad.

NEHEMIAH 2:1-9 (NIV)

¹ In the month of Nisan in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, when wine was brought for him, I took the wine and gave it to the king. I had not been sad in his presence before, ² so the king asked me, “Why does your face look so sad when you are not ill? This can be nothing but sadness of heart.”

I was very much afraid, ³ but I said to the king, “May the king live forever! Why should my face not look sad when the city where my ancestors are buried lies in ruins, and its gates have been destroyed by fire?”

⁴ The king said to me, “What is it you want?” Then I prayed to the God of heaven, ⁵ and I answered the king, “If it pleases the king and if your servant has found favor in his sight, let him send me to the city in Judah where my ancestors are buried so that I can rebuild it.”

⁶ Then the king, with the queen sitting beside him, asked me, “How long will your journey take, and when will you get back?” It pleased the king to send me; so I set a time.

⁷ I also said to him, “If it pleases the king, may I have letters to the governors of Trans-Euphrates, so that they will provide me safe-conduct until I arrive in Judah?”

⁸ And may I have a letter to Asaph, keeper of the royal park, so he will give me timber to make beams for the gates of the citadel by the temple and for the city wall and for the residence I will occupy?” And because the gracious hand of my God was on me, the king granted my requests.

⁹ So I went to the governors of Trans-Euphrates and gave them the king’s letters. The king had also sent army officers and cavalry with me.

Ask for a volunteer to read the passage aloud and then ask for the group’s reflections.

In order to get the support we need, we must ask! Often we have people in our lives willing to help, but they do not know how to help. People also have the right to decline to help, but if we do not ask, we will not receive. Even if it feels risky, you have to give others the opportunity to say yes to your requests.

If you need to ask for something, you also need to know what to ask for.

Ask your group, *If you were asked what you need, what would you say? Is that actually what you need?*

ADVOCATING FOR YOURSELF AS A MOM

It is important to address the following: What one person thinks is helpful may not be the same for another. For example, A friend knows you are exhausted and may offer to hold your new baby while you rest, but what you really need is someone to clean your bathroom while you spend time holding your baby. Another example, your husband offers to take the kids to the park while you shop for groceries, but what you really need is for him to go shop while you spend quality time with your kids.

Remember: Do not feel guilty saying “no” to an offer for help. Instead, ask for what you need.

Ask your group to list things you need as a woman and mom. Use the whiteboard to write down their answers.

COMMUNITY

Before asking your group to answer the questions below, you may want to ask them, *“Is it OK to need support?”*

How do you receive support?

When have you felt supported?

BUILDING A WELLNESS TEAM

Your wellness team is your support system. It is important to identify your needs and a person who can help with that need. You may think of a person before you can identify what need they fill. That is OK. Go in whatever order helps you.

For example, when I need a break from my crying baby, I can call my friend to sit with him while I rest. When I need emotional support, I can call and make an appointment with my therapist.

It is important for people to also set expectations for these relationships. For example, if you know it is OK to call a friend when you need to talk, it is also important to know when and how often you can call.

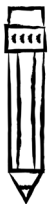
Explain to the group they do not have to complete this list today. You will be checking in on the progress of their wellness teams throughout the group sessions. Make sure that each woman has at least one professional resource (counselor, psychiatrist, family practitioner, pastor) on her team.

List your needs and support person:

Needs	Support Person

RESOURCES

At this time, allow space for the group to talk among themselves about resources or referrals they have found helpful for moms. This may include gyms with child care, local hikes, counseling centers, inexpensive spas, a local MOPS group, secondhand baby stores, meal services or upcoming events.



PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

Practice advocating for yourself. Answer the following question each day: *How did I advocate for myself today?* Be specific.

End with Check-outs and prayer. Remind group when you'll have the next meetup.


DRAW / DREAM / DOODLE



WEEK 3

TOOLS & SKILLS FOR WELLNESS

AGENDA



- Week 2 Reflections
- Discussion Questions
- Tools & Skills
- HALTS Tool
- Sleep Hygiene
- Rest
- Triggers
- Boundaries & Setting Limits
- Putting It Into Practice

Begin with Check-ins and prayer.

WEEK 2 REFLECTIONS

Ask the group for highlights from their homework assignment: a daily inventory of self-advocacy.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

How are you impacted by depression or anxiety?

What have you heard about how to get well?

Ask the group to answer these questions in their workbooks and then ask for volunteers to share. Write their answers on the whiteboard and then point out commonalities.

Many women have experienced hurt and shame. Sometimes, people will not share how they have been hurt until you do, so feel free to share first.

Write out the answers on “How to get well” on a whiteboard. After creating the list, ask the women in the group if these things are always helpful, sometimes helpful or never helpful. You can represent these with a color code: green (always helpful), yellow (sometimes helpful) and red (never helpful).

TOOLS & SKILLS

Professional Tools

Mental disorder, such as anxiety and depression, are often a combination of chemical and environmental factors. Therefore, both medication and counseling are important for wellness.

Medication

Although some women can manage depression or anxiety through supplements and lifestyle, medication may be necessary. God does not have a problem with medication! A woman who takes medication for depression does not have any less faith than a woman who takes medication for diabetes.

If someone in your group thinks she may need medication, encourage her to ask her doctor. Anything involving the brain can be very complex. A **psychiatrist** is a great resource, since they are doctors who work specifically with the brain.

Counseling

Counselors are trained to help us process the tough things in our lives. God does not have a problem with counselors and seeing one does not mean that you are not a strong woman. Counsel is depicted in the Bible as good and necessary!

DRAW / DREAM / DOODLE

HALTS TOOL

H – Hungry
A – Angry
L – Lonely
T – Tired
S – Stressed

HOW TO USE HALTS*

HALTS is a helpful diagnostic tool that helps us stop and do a self-inventory before blaming a person or a medication for our current state. If something feels off, try using HALTS to identify what can be addressed. For example, if I am hungry, I can eat and feel better. HALTS can also be used on cranky children!

Ask the group to stop and do a HALTS inventory. Have each woman in your group hold up fingers for the number of HALTS they are currently experiencing.

If someone is experiencing two or more HALTS, this can trigger issues with depression and anxiety. Three or more is a warning sign to fix the physical symptoms immediately!

*HALTS is adapted from AA

SLEEP HYGIENE

Share the following sleep facts with your group:

- Mothers with young children are the most sleep-deprived people in the U.S.
- Women need seven to nine hours of sleep per night.
- Sleep deprivation affects the body physically, mentally and emotionally.
 - Physically: weakens immune system, raises blood pressure, causes weight gain
 - Mentally: impairs cognition, memory and ability to reason, increases risk-taking behavior
 - Emotionally: increases risk of depression and anxiety, heightens irritability, unpleasant emotions and stress

Ask your group how some of their symptoms may be fueled by not getting enough sleep.

REST

Ask for volunteers to read the two passages below:

BACKGROUND: Jesus had just sent the disciples out into the world without any provisions. They brought nothing with them and they were at the mercy of the hospitality of others. They returned after preaching, healing and casting out demons, and were most likely incredibly excited and tired.

MARK 6:30-32 (NIV)

³⁰The apostles gathered around Jesus and reported to him all they had done and taught. ³¹Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, he said to them, "Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest." ³²So they went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place.

BACKGROUND: Jesus had been teaching for the majority of the day from a boat on the lake. Finally, Jesus and his disciples left the crowds and retreated to a quiet place.

MARK 4:35-41 (NIV)

³⁵ That day when evening came, he said to his disciples, "Let us go over to the other side." ³⁶ Leaving the crowd behind, they took him along, just as he was, in the boat. There were also other boats with him. ³⁷ A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped. ³⁸ Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. The disciples woke him and said to him, "Teacher, don't you care if we drown?"

³⁹ He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, "Quiet! Be still!" Then the wind died down and it was completely calm.

⁴⁰ He said to his disciples, "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?"

⁴¹ They were terrified and asked each other, "Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!"

Ask your group for their reflections.

In both of these passages, Jesus and his disciples have been in very tiring positions for some period of time. After their work, Jesus created space for rest.

In Mark 6, Jesus fed the disciples and asked them to rest. They had to get in a boat and leave to go to a separate space to rest. *Where can you go to find rest, even for a moment?*

In Mark 4, Jesus laid down in the boat on the way to the other side of the lake to rest. Even in the midst of a storm, Jesus slept to recover from the time he had spent teaching and preaching. *If Jesus believed he needed to take time to rest, what does that mean for us?*

What does rest mean for you?

Rest is not just sleep. Rest can be sharing a meal with a close friend, reading a book, going for a walk or spending time with God in silence.

Ask your group, *What is restful to you? How can you find time to rest?*

Allow space for the women to share helpful ideas on how to rest.

TRIGGERS

List some personal triggers and identify a way to minimize each one.

We often have triggers beyond HALTS. Ask your group to explore their personal triggers and fill in their answers in their workbooks.

This is a good place for discussion. Ask for volunteers to talk about their personal triggers and ideas on how to minimize them. Write their answers on the whiteboard.

For example, I am triggered by traffic, so I can avoid driving during peak times.

BOUNDARIES & SETTING LIMITS

Ask your group to read the following quote:

*"Having clear boundaries is essential to a healthy, balanced lifestyle.
A boundary is a personal property line that marks those things for which we are responsible.
In other words, boundaries define who we are and who we are not."
- Townsend and Cloud, *Boundaries**

Oftentimes, moms focus so much on loving and being unselfish that they forget their own limits. When confronted with her lack of boundaries, this is a good time to ask:

- Can I set limits and still be a loving person?
- What are legitimate boundaries?
- What if someone is upset or hurt by my boundaries?
- How do I answer someone who wants my time, love, energy or money?
- Are boundaries selfish?
- Why do I feel guilty or afraid when I consider setting boundaries?

Ask the group for suggestions on how to set boundaries and write them on the whiteboard. Examples may include:

- Set a time limit on how much you spend on the telephone or social media.
- Restrict visits from family and friends or ask guests to leave if you are tired.
- Give yourself permission to say “no” to an invitation or to back out at the last minute if you are not feeling up for it.
- Say “no” when you feel others are asking too much of you at the moment.

What boundaries do I need to set for myself?

Ask them to identify boundaries they need to set and write them down in their workbooks.

Sometimes, setting boundaries means distancing ourselves from situations or limiting our time around certain people. These types of boundaries could mean taking a break from a friend who mom-shames or even ending a toxic friendship. It could also mean limiting our time on social media.

For the next two exercises, ask your group to identify “life-giving” and “life-taking” people and things. This will help them recognize the people and situations that may be unhealthy and help them limit their time around these things or cut them permanently out of their lives.

Life-Giving People & Things: _____

Life-Taking People & Things: _____



PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

Practice using HALTS. As you feel triggers, do a HALTS inventory. *What do you notice today?*

Check on the progress of your group's Wellness Teams.

End with Check-outs and prayer. Remind group when you'll have the next meetup.


DRAW / DREAM / DOODLE



WEEK 4

GRIEF & CONTROL

AGENDA



- Week 3 Reflections
- Acknowledging & Grieving Your Losses
- Celebrating Your Scars
- Control
- Thankfulness
- Preparing to Share Your Story
- Why Share Your Story?
- Putting It Into Practice

Begin with Check-ins and prayer.

WEEK 3 REFLECTIONS

Ask the group for highlights from their homework assignment: a daily inventory of HALTS.

ACKNOWLEDGING & GRIEVING YOUR LOSSES

It is common and normal to experience loss when you become a mother. Acknowledging and grieving those losses is important in validating the pain you experience when you lose something. Admitting these losses does not mean that you do not love and appreciate your child!

All women experience loss, to some degree, with each baby. For some, it may be loss of a lifestyle or a career. For others, it may be loss of time with their spouse or other children.

What have you given up to be a mother?

Ask the women in your group what they have given up to become mothers and then write their answers on the whiteboard.

Examples may include:

- Spontaneity
- Independence
- Security
- Sleep
- Physical shape or ability
- Identity
- Sexuality or sexual passion
- Special attention of being pregnant

What have you gained by being a mother?

It is important to reflect on the positive experiences, as they are also a part of this new equation. Ask your group for positive experiences and write them on the whiteboard.

Ask your group, *“What have you discovered about yourself or your spouse by being a parent?”*

CELEBRATING OUR SCARS

Every mother bares the “scars” of motherhood. Scars are marks that an experience leaves behind. They can be physical, like stretch marks, loose skin or bags under our eyes. They can also be emotional and mental, as mothers are “stretched” in every way.

Mothers who have given birth may be insecure about their postpartum bodies. Other mothers may not be as “put together” as they were before having children.

What does it mean to celebrate your scars?

Celebrating your scars means being thankful for what they represent! Stretch marks represent the ability to get pregnant and to give birth. A messy home represents the blessing of raising a child. Instead of worrying about the changes, focus on the strengths and gains of motherhood and celebrate what those changes represent. Our bodies may be different. Our house may not be as clean or organized as it used to be. But our house and our stretch marks are the costs of bringing someone amazing into the world. It is important not to just focus on the good things, but to celebrate the scars. They represent what we have brought into the world.

CONTROL

It is common to feel a loss of control in motherhood. The desire for control can trigger depression and anxiety. It is important to be aware of areas in our lives that we cannot control and learn to accept the things we cannot change.

Ask your group to answer the following questions in their workbooks and then discuss with the group.

When do you feel a loss of control?

What do you do to regain control?

What do you have control over?

We have control over our attitudes and reactions. We may not be able to control what happens in our lives, but we can control how we react to it.

What are you trying to control that you don't need to?

It's really frustrating to try to control things that you don't have control over, but often we try. Are there things you are trying to control that you could let go of because you can't control them or it doesn't help you to try to control them?

Serenity Prayer

*"God grant me the serenity
to accept the things I cannot change,
the courage to change the things I can,
and the wisdom to know the difference."*

- Reinhold Niebuhr

LETTING GO OF CONTROL

Ask for a volunteer to read the following passage and then ask for reflections.

BACKGROUND: These verses are from the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus was teaching the crowds and his disciples about many aspects of the Law. This passage follows Jesus' teaching on praying (the Lord's Prayer), fasting and storing up treasure in heaven instead of on earth.

MATTHEW 6:25-26 (NIV)

²⁵ "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? ²⁶ Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?"

This passage can be interpreted as a command, but it is an invitation. If you are so much more valuable, how will God look after you? What can you let go of and how can you let it go?

THANKFULNESS

Thanksgiving is essential for joy! When we stop focusing on what we cannot control and give thanks to God, it becomes easier to see the blessings in our lives.

Ask for a volunteer to read the following verse and then ask for reflections.

BACKGROUND: The Philippians had sent Paul a gift while he was imprisoned in Rome. In return, Paul wrote this thank you letter to them. Keep in mind, he was not in an ideal situation, but still his letter exhorted the Philippians to rejoice always.

PHILIPPIANS 4:4-7 (NIV)

⁴ Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! ⁵ Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near.

⁶ Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

What are the things you've been feeling anxiety over? God wants to meet us in the midst of those things and take the weight of them. How can you invite God into your problems and allow him to meet you there? This is not a promise that things will be perfect instantly, but God does want you to experience his peace in the middle of the struggles.

What do you have to be thankful for?

Do not force anyone to see the "good" in her situation. Some mothers may be in a dark place and unable to see her life as a blessing. Help your group find at least one thing to be thankful for, even if it is just that they came today. Here are some suggestions:

1. What is one thing about your child that makes you smile?
2. What are you looking forward to in the future?
3. What is a quality that others say they like about you?
4. What is one way you have seen God show up in the last week/month/year?
5. What is one answer to prayer you've seen in the last year?

PREPARING TO SHARE YOUR STORY

Next week, each woman will have time to share her story with the group. Tell your group they will need to come prepared with their stories. There is an outline for sharing your story in this week's homework section.

Let your group know how long they will have to tell their story. Depending on your group size, this will be about 10 to 15 minutes for each woman. Make that clear! Point out the section where she can jot down highlights, pre and post-motherhood.

WHY SHARE YOUR STORY?

Public speaking is the number one fear among Americans! Sharing your story can be scary for most women, especially if this is the first time they have opened up in a group setting. It is important for you, the Facilitator, to talk about the power of sharing your story.

Sharing helps build trust by reducing anxiety and creating familiarity within a group. Motherhood can be isolating, especially for new moms. Silence only promotes isolation and gives no context to your struggles. Sometimes, sharing can help us accept our struggles as a part of our story, rather than letting them define us.

PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

1. Prepare to tell your story and be ready to share it.
2. Write your story. To help get started, fill in the pre-motherhood and post-motherhood boxes on the previous page.



Use the following questions to prompt you:

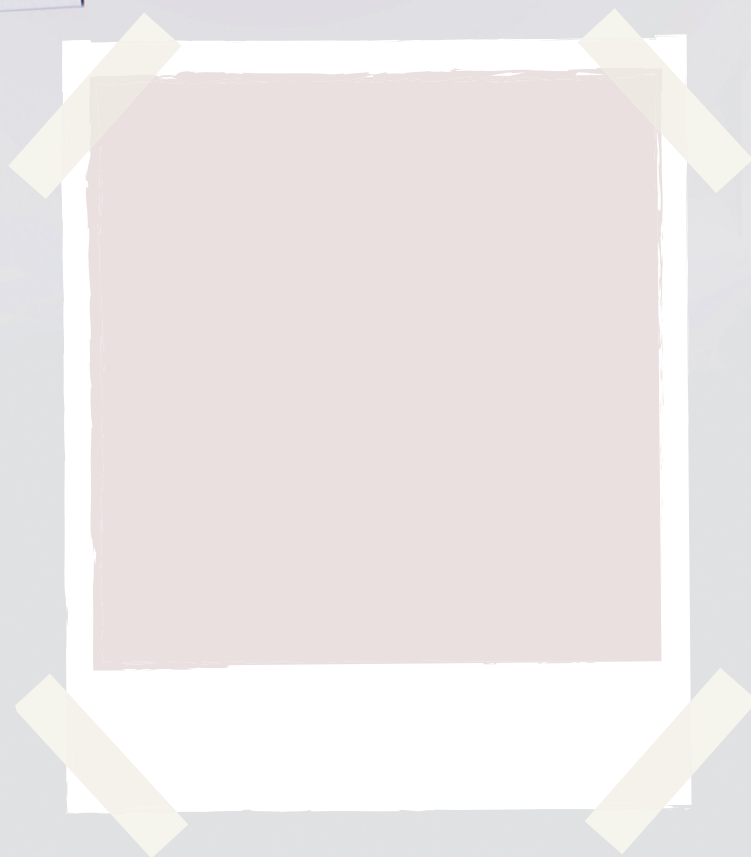
- What are the most important events?
- How do you view yourself and God?
- How did those views change due to critical events in your life?
- What did you give up to be here?

3. Practice thankfulness. Answer the following question each day: *What am I thankful for today?*

Check on the progress of your group's Wellness Teams.

End with Check-outs and prayer. Remind group when you'll have the next meetup.

DRAW / DREAM / DOODLE



WEEK 5

SHARING YOUR STORY

AGENDA



Week 4 Reflections
Sharing Your Story
Reflection Questions
Putting It Into Practice

Welcome to week 5!

Begin with Check-ins and prayer.

WEEK 4 REFLECTIONS

Ask your group for highlights from their homework assignment: practicing thankfulness. Try to limit your time since most of this meeting will be spent sharing your stories.

Sharing Your Story

This is a very personal week. Here are some key things to keep in mind while others are sharing: ensure confidentiality, respect time limit and reserve Q&A for later.

Remind your group about confidentiality and the expectations for sharing your story. Give everyone a chance to fill in the questions below in their workbooks.

INTRODUCTION QUESTIONS

What part of sharing your story most excites you?

What part of sharing your story most concerns you?

Ask for volunteers to share their answers.

Address any questions or concerns about sharing your story. Remind the group that everyone has a set amount of time to share, and let them know you will signal them when they are close to the time limit. It works well to use a timer, so each person can watch the time, too. If you use a timer, make sure you use it for everyone.

Ask your group to save questions until everyone has finished and remind everyone that there are no comments or questions while someone is sharing.

SHARE YOUR STORY

As the Facilitator, share your story first. You set the tone for what sharing a story will look like, including how much to share and what is safe to share. This space allows you to be vulnerable and to model vulnerability to the rest of the women.

After your story, ask for a volunteer to go next. If there is not a volunteer in the group, pick the woman with the nearest birthday to yours.

Thank each person genuinely for sharing and move on to the next person.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

Ask for volunteers to share their reflections by answering the questions below:

How did telling your story give your life context?

Ask your group how hearing the story of each woman helped you better understand her.

How did telling your story give validity to your struggles?

Ask your group if they felt validated by hearing another woman's story.

Has anyone ever experienced healing by hearing another person's story? Has anyone helped someone else by sharing her story?

How has telling your story broken down stigmas of shame, judgement and pain?

PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

Reflect on the experience of sharing your story and hearing the stories of the women around you. Answer the following questions:



1. *How did it feel to tell your story?*
2. *How were you received?*
3. *How did it feel to hear someone else's story?*
4. *What did you learn about the women around you?*
5. *What story resonated with you and why?*

Check on the progress of your group's Wellness Teams.
End with Check-outs and prayer. Remind group when you'll have the next meetup.


DRAW / DREAM / DOODLE



WEEK 6

IDENTITY

AGENDA



- Week 5 Reflections
- Discussion Question
- How We See Ourselves
- Identity in Motherhood
- Roles Versus Identity
- Image of God
- How God Identifies as Mother
- Putting It Into Practice

Welcome to week 6!

Begin with Check-ins and prayer.

WEEK 5 REFLECTIONS

Ask your group for highlights from their homework assignment: reflecting on the experience of sharing their story and hearing the stories of the other women.

DISCUSSION QUESTION

What labels did you give yourself while sharing your story?

Ask your group to think about the labels they gave themselves while sharing their story: defective, broken, depressed, terrible mother, awesome mother.

Ask for volunteers to share and explain why they chose those labels.

HOW WE SEE OURSELVES

Who are you?

Ask for volunteers to share and write their answers on the whiteboard.

What does your answer communicate about you?

When people ask, "Who are you?" we often talk about our jobs, hobbies or families. But these things are not *who* you are, they are only *what* you do.

It is hard to remember who we are besides being a mother, since we often wrap our identity up in our family.

Sometimes, we equate our identity with our jobs. For example, if someone says, "I am a teacher" or "I am a student," that equates identity to her work or activity.

IDENTITY IN MOTHERHOOD

Loss of identity is a place where depression can creep in! It is easy to wrap our identity up in our families or in our anxiety or depression.

It is important to remember that while our roles and circumstances may change, our identity never changes, no matter what happens in our lives!

How would you describe yourself before becoming a mother?

Ask for volunteers to share their answers.

What has changed about you since becoming a mother?

Ask for volunteers to share their answers.

ROLES VERSUS IDENTITY

Our jobs can end. Our family roles can change. Physical abilities can be taken away. If we put our identity in anything that is not permanent, we will have a crisis of identity when it changes or ends.

Being a mom is one of the most important jobs you will ever have. But it is something you get to do, not the core of who you are. It is one of your most important roles, but it is a role. Just like being a wife, having a career, being a friend or a family member.

Reflect on the answers from the previous question: What has changed about you since becoming a mother?

Are people changed due to their roles or identities?

What about you never changes?

Ask the women to write down five things about them that never changes.

Ask for volunteers to share their answers.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

IMAGE OF GOD

Ask a volunteer to read the passage below:

BACKGROUND: Genesis 1 is the beginning of the Bible and the story of how everything came into being. God created the plants, animals, sky, land and sea, and finished with the capstone of creation: human beings.

GENESIS 1:26-28 (NIV)

²⁶ Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." ²⁷ So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. ²⁸ God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground."

Ask your group what they see in this verse.

The word **image** is the same word used in Hebrew for **idol**. In the ancient world, people made idols in place of the gods they worshipped to represent those gods in their daily lives. It was a way to interact with their gods. These idols were the most valuable thing in the world because they represented the god to those who interacted with it.

Likewise, human beings are the representation of God on the planet. He made them to represent who he is. People matter immensely because, just like idols, we represent God. We are the second most valuable thing in the universe, next to the god we represent!

Being made in the image of God means being created as valuable and loved. At the beginning of creation, God invited human beings into a divine relationship. Every person is loved by God because they are all made in the image of God and were created to be a part of his family. Regardless of where you are in your own faith journey, you are valuable and worthy of love because that is how you were made.

People are made as powerful creatures. Though we often feel helpless, we were not made to be powerless. God made us to be powerful, giving us the ability to leave our fingerprints all over creation.

Part of creation was making human beings capable of changing the world around them.

God also created family as a good thing. You were made for the role you have as a mom with the child you have. That was a good part of the way God made things to be!

How would knowing you are made in the image of God impact your identity as a mother?

Explain to your group that being made in the image of God is to be God's beloved. Regardless of our beliefs or actions, we are all made in the image of God and we are all his beloved!

Have your group fill in their answers in their workbooks. Ask for volunteers to share and discuss.

Our identity in Christ is liberating! This means that no matter our life circumstances or mistakes, our identity never changes. Knowing this, we can surrender our judgments of ourselves and others.

HOW GOD IDENTIFIES AS MOTHER

Ask for a volunteer to read the passage below:

BACKGROUND: God speaks of judgment for the nation of Israel in this final chapter of Isaiah. In the context of that judgment, God speaks of comforting Israel as a mother comforts her child. Instead of choosing a male figure, God is identified as mother, one who comforts and knows what her children need.

ISAIAH 66:13 (NIV)

¹³ As a mother comforts her child, so will I comfort you; and you will be comforted over Jerusalem.

Knowing you are made in the image of God and you are infinitely valuable by virtue of being created as an image bearer, this verse shows that the role of mother is not only given by God, but is also part of God himself. What do you think of God being identified as a mother? How does that change your perception of your role as mother?



PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

As the image bearer of God, you are valuable! Answer the following question each day: *How did I feel valued today?*

Check on the progress of your group's Wellness Teams.
End with Check-outs and prayer. Remind group when you'll have the next meetup.

DRAW / DREAM / DOODLE



WEEK 7

ABIDING

AGENDA



Week 6 Reflections
Abiding
Discussion Questions
Abiding in Action
The Fruit in Our Lives
Plastic Fruit Versus Real Fruit
Putting It Into Practice

Welcome to week 7!

Begin with Check-ins and prayer.

Note for Facilitator: Abiding is how we interact with God. The word **abiding** comes from the old English meaning to **wait** or **remain**. This week, we learn how God is interacting with us and how we can interact with him.

Abiding is addressed in week 7 because it is the next step in learning to deal with anxiety and depression. This week does not suppose that Members have vibrant relationships with Christ. This week is about cultivating intimacy and letting go of the expectations that get in the way of that intimacy. It is about laying the groundwork for a great relationship with Christ, or improving the relationship the Members already have.

WEEK 6 REFLECTIONS

Ask your group for highlights from their homework assignment: sharing how they have felt valued since the last meeting.

What do you think it looks like to interact with God?

Most people believe they need to “try harder” in their relationship with Jesus in order to receive God's love. This week is designed to help transform that way of thinking.

Ask for volunteers to share their answers and write them on the whiteboard.

ABIDING

Ask for a volunteer to read the passage below:

BACKGROUND: Jesus is speaking to his disciples in the upper room. This is a portion of the last long engagement he had with the disciples on the night he was crucified.

JOHN 15:1-4 (NIV)

¹“I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. ² He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. ³ You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. ⁴ Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.”

Ask for volunteers to fill in the blanks from the passage. *Who is the vine? Who is the branch? Who is the gardener?*

VINE – JESUS
BRANCH – ME
GARDENER – THE FATHER

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Ask for volunteers to share their answers to the following questions. Make sure to address the commentary, which is provided under each question.

What does a vine do?

A vine's role is to sink deep into the soil and absorb the nutrients and water that make everything in the plant work. The vine does not grow any fruit. Instead, the vine is the life source for the branches so the fruit can grow on them.

What does a branch do?

A branch's role is to stay connected to the vine. If the branch stays connected to the vine, it produces fruit because the nutrients from the vine flow through the branch to the fruit. If the branch is not connected, it cannot produce fruit because there is nothing to nourish the fruit.

Our job is to stay connected to the vine, Jesus, and we will produce fruit.

What does a gardener do?

The gardener is in charge of maximizing a crop of the best fruit possible. He prunes the branches, lifts the branches, and arranges them to maximize the quality and amount of fruit.

Our job as the branch is simply to stay connected and allow the gardener to direct us. If we do, we can produce the fruit he is longing for.

How do we stay connected?

Abiding is about receiving and holding loosely to everything but God. To illustrate this, hold your hands open, palms up, like you would to receive a gift. In this position, you can receive because your hands are open. However, in this position, God can also take things out of your hands. Ironically, the position of receiving is also a vulnerable position. By holding your hands open, someone can put something in, but they can also take something out. When we try to hold onto things too tightly, or try to stay in control, we often miss the things that God is doing and we stop abiding.

How can you keep your hands open to receive from God?

By focusing on staying connected to the vine, we will naturally produce fruit. If you focus on producing, you may not stay connected and will not produce anything! Focus on staying connected and the fruit will be produced.

ABIDING IN ACTION

What does "abiding" mean?

In John 15:1-9, the words **abide** and **remain** are the same Greek word, **meno**.

Meno is an active verb and has aspects of resting and receiving. Abiding is something we do. It is like giving your friend a hug. You have to pursue them and open your arms, but then you can just enjoy being together and receiving love from one another. You have to give, but you also receive. In that place you give and receive, you can remain with someone.

What are you afraid of?

Ask your group what scares them about abiding. Write their answers on the whiteboard.

Why do they not abide? Is it because they do not know how? Is it because they are afraid to find out who God is?

God is the one who is always meeting us with open arms like the father of the prodigal son. There is never condemnation, just love. Huge love!

Ask for a volunteer to read the passage below:

BACKGROUND: In John 8, Jesus is speaking to a group of Jews including teachers of the Law. They had been accusing him and asking him how the things he said could be true. Then Jesus spoke to them.

JOHN 8:31-32 (ESV)

³¹ So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, ³² and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

Often this verse is quoted, "If you know the truth, the truth will set you free." However, this verse is in the context of abiding. It is not enough to know truth. How would "what you know" change if you could sit and learn truth from Jesus? How does it also change the importance of abiding?

THE FRUIT IN OUR LIVES

Ask for a volunteer to read the passage below:

BACKGROUND: This passage follows Paul's command to walk by the Spirit. The context of this passage is about listening to and following the Holy Spirit. Paul gives examples of what walking in the spirit does not look like, then spoke this passage to demonstrate what life in the Spirit does look like.

GALATIANS 5:22-26 (NIV)

²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. ²⁴ Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. ²⁵ Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. ²⁶ Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other.

Ask your group what they see in the passage.

All of these things are the fruit of the Spirit. We can try to produce them on our own, but normally that does not go well. The harder you try, the worse it goes. Producing the fruit of the Spirit is like going to sleep. If you relax, it comes naturally. Focus on abiding in the spirit and the fruit will come.

Notice that the word **fruit** is singular. All of these comprise one fruit that God is producing and bringing to fruition.

What do you expect God to do with you?

Ask your group what they expect fruit in their lives to look like. Write their answers on the whiteboard.

Many times we expect fruit to look like one thing and it is actually something different. For example, you may feel you are supposed to be a model mom. You may love people really well, be intentional with friends, or be really good at your job. But you are unable to live up to your expectations. Sometimes we feel we are not producing fruit because we expect it to look like something we don't see in our lives. Oftentimes we miss the things we do well because we focus on our weaknesses or desires.

Fruit can still be produced, even if it is not the fruit we are looking for!

PLASTIC FRUIT VERSUS REAL FRUIT

Something may look like fruit, but it is not fruit. For instance, if we try to be loving on our own, it may look loving, but it may be empty.

We can try to love people because we are supposed to, or we can love people because we see their value and we care about them. Both examples look similar from the outside, but one of them is real and the other is not.

What do you want your relationship with God to look like?



PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

Practice abiding. Answer the following question each day: *How did I connect with God today?*

Check on the progress of your group's Wellness Teams.

End with Check-outs and prayer. Remind group when you'll have the next meetup.

DRAW / DREAM / DOODLE


set free



WEEK 8

FREEDOM

AGENDA



- Week 7 Reflections
- Review Psalm 139
- Discussion Questions
- Review Expectations
- How Have You Seen Others Grow?
- Follow Up Meeting

Welcome to your final week!

Begin with Check-ins and prayer.

Note to Facilitator: Bring enough index cards for each women to write something to herself and to each group Member.

Week 7 REFLECTIONS

Ask for volunteers to share how they have practiced abiding since your last meeting. *How have they felt connected to God?*

REVIEW PSALM 139 - Ask a volunteer to read this passage.

For the director of music. Of David. A psalm.

- | | |
|--|---|
| <p>¹ You have searched me, Lord,
and you know me.</p> <p>² You know when I sit and when I rise;
you perceive my thoughts from afar.</p> <p>³ You discern my going out and my lying
down; you are familiar with all my ways.</p> <p>⁴ Before a word is on my tongue
you, Lord, know it completely.</p> <p>⁵ You hem me in behind and before,
and you lay your hand upon me.</p> <p>⁶ Such knowledge is too wonderful for me,
too lofty for me to attain.</p> <p>⁷ Where can I go from your Spirit?
Where can I flee from your presence?</p> <p>⁸ If I go up to the heavens, you are there;
if I make my bed in the depths, you are
there.</p> <p>⁹ If I rise on the wings of the dawn,
if I settle on the far side of the sea,</p> <p>¹⁰ even there your hand will guide me,
your right hand will hold me fast.</p> <p>¹¹ If I say, "Surely the darkness will hide me
and the light become night around me,"</p> <p>¹² even the darkness will not be dark to you;
the night will shine like the day,
for darkness is as light to you.</p> <p>¹³ For you created my inmost being;
you knit me together in my mother's womb.</p> | <p>¹⁴ I praise you because I am fearfully and
wonderfully made; your works are
wonderful, I know that full well.</p> <p>¹⁵ My frame was not hidden from you
when I was made in the secret place, when I
was woven together in the depths of the
earth.</p> <p>¹⁶ Your eyes saw my unformed body;
all the days ordained for me were written in
your book before one of them came to be.</p> <p>¹⁷ How precious to me are your thoughts, God!
How vast is the sum of them!</p> <p>¹⁸ Were I to count them,
they would outnumber the grains of sand –
when I awake, I am still with you.</p> <p>¹⁹ If only you, God, would slay the wicked!
Away from me, you who are bloodthirsty!</p> <p>²⁰ They speak of you with evil intent;
your adversaries misuse your name.</p> <p>²¹ Do I not hate those who hate you, Lord,
and abhor those who are in rebellion
against you?</p> <p>²² I have nothing but hatred for them;
I count them my enemies.</p> <p>²³ Search me, God, and know my heart;
test me and know my anxious thoughts.</p> <p>²⁴ See if there is any offensive way in me,
and lead me in the way everlasting.</p> |
|--|---|

Ask your group to share their new reflections of Psalm 139, before moving onto the discussion questions.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

How does God's intimate knowledge of you affect your identity?

This question is similar to the one asked in week 1. Now that your group is coming to a close, it is important to reflect on how the past weeks have changed their views of themselves and God.

How is God fighting for you?

Ask for volunteers to share their answers. Ask them, *What is God doing in your life? How has he met you in the depths? Where do you need him to continue leading you?*

REVIEW EXPECTATIONS

How would being beloved liberate you from expectations?

Our identity in Christ is liberating! It means we don't have to be super moms. In fact, when we try to do it on our own, we are saying we are gods and don't need the true God. What would happen if we surrendered the expectations to do it all and do it on our own, and invited God to shape our identity as mom? To invite his grace, forgiveness, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness and self-control into our lives.

We are free from expectations, because of who we are in Christ! By owning our identity as daughters of the King and abiding in him, we can experience immense freedom!

How have you experienced freedom during this group?

Have each person in the group share one way she has experienced freedom.

What obstacles do you still need to overcome to experience freedom?

Ask each person to write down her obstacles. Ask for volunteers to share.

What are my goals moving forward?

Have your group set new goals for themselves in their workbooks.

Exercise: How Have You Seen Others Grow?

In this exercise, your group will have the opportunity to call out goodness in one another. Ask them to think about something they want to praise in each person. This may be a way they have seen that person grow, a strength they see in her as a mother, or a word of encouragement for her moving forward. Instruct your group to also write a note to themselves, in third person.

Ask them to make notes about others in their workbook. Then pass out index cards to your group, making sure everyone has enough cards to write something to themselves and every Member. When finished, go around the room and have each woman read all of her cards, including the one she wrote to herself.

Start with a volunteer and ask each woman to read her cards aloud. Move clockwise around the circle. When all the cards have been read, have the group pass their cards out to the appropriate woman, so everyone is left holding the cards written to her.

Tell your group to keep their cards and pull them out from time to time to read the positive things said about themselves.

FOLLOW UP MEETING

Ask your group to meet again for a one-month follow-up. If possible, meet at the same time and place, or suggest a potluck at a Member's home. This may help ease the transition of the group ending.

TIME / DATE / LOCATION

CONCLUSION

Check on the progress of your group's Wellness Teams.

Thank you! As the Facilitator, take this time to thank each woman for her vulnerability and commitment to this group. Thank your group for the privilege and opportunity to walk with them!

End with Check-outs and prayer.

RESOURCES FOR POSTPARTUM DEPRESSION (PPD)*

POSTPARTUM DEPRESSION INVENTORY

It is recommended that you have a complete physical examination before you and/or a therapist decide that you have PPD. Here are common symptoms that most women suffering from PPD experience. Look over the list and check any statements that correspond to your feelings:

- I can't shake feeling depressed no matter what I do.
- I cry at least once a day.
- I feel sad most or all of the time.
- I can't concentrate.
- I don't enjoy the things I use to enjoy.
- I have no interest in making love at all, even though I am medically cleared to do so.
- I can't sleep, even when my baby sleeps.
- I feel like a failure all the time.
- I have no energy.
- I have no appetite or enjoyment of food (or I have sugar and carb cravings and am compulsively eating all the time).
- I can't remember the last time I laughed.
- Every little thing gets on my nerves. Sometimes, I am even furious at my baby. Often, I am angry at my partner.
- I feel that the future is hopeless.
- It seems I will feel this way forever.
- There are times I feel it would be better if I was dead, than to feel this way one more minute.

NOTES

- Many new mothers will relate to a couple of these statements above, but they will also have periods of good feelings and see their experience as a transition period that will get better.
- Women with PPD usually agree with many or even all of these statements, and feel this way to varying degrees every day.
- If you agreed with four or more of these statements and the symptoms have lasted for two or more weeks, you may be suffering from PPD.
- Adoptive mothers as well as new fathers can also get PPD!
- PPD typically occurs one to three months after childbirth, but can occur immediately or up to one year after birth.

COMMON FEELINGS ASSOCIATED WITH PPD OR THE BABY BLUES

- Helplessness – “I can’t _____.”
- Loss of humor – “That’s not funny.”
- Guilt – “I’m letting everyone down.”
- Self-hatred – “Everyone would be better off.”
- Anger – “I’m sick and tired of everyone around me.”

*Adapted from Kleinman, K. and Raskin, V.D. (2013) *This Isn’t What I Expected*. Da Capo Press, Boston, MA.

CAUSES OF POSTPARTUM DEPRESSION

- Genetic predisposition
- Chronic sleep deprivation
- Colicky or difficult to soothe baby
- Dramatic hormonal changes
- Medical complications of infant or mother
- Predisposition to self-criticism
- Previous PPD or other clinical depression
- Absence of support from family, partner, friends and/or isolation

IF YOU THINK YOU HAVE PPD

- Tell someone you trust who is a good listener and will support you in accessing the appropriate help.
- Ask your doctor or even the Facilitator of this group for a list of trusted therapists who specialize with postpartum depression or perinatal mood disorders.

POSTPARTUM EMERGENCIES THAT WARRANT GETTING PROFESSIONAL HELP **TODAY**

- I am afraid I might harm myself in order to escape this pain.
- I am afraid I might actually do something to hurt my baby.
- I hear sounds or voices when no one is around.
- I do not feel that my thoughts are my own or that they are totally in my control.
- I am being controlled by forces beyond myself.
- I have not slept at all in 48 hours or more.
- I do not feel loving toward my baby and can’t even go through the motions of taking care of him/her.
- I am rapidly losing weight without trying to do so.
- **Suicidal thoughts or feelings of wanting to hurt your baby warrant immediate intervention!**

*Adapted from Kleinman, K. and Raskin, V.D. (2013) *This Isn’t What I Expected*. Da Capo Press, Boston, MA.

FREE OR LOW-COST STRESS REDUCERS*

- Ask your partner to give night feedings on the weekends.
- Leave beds unmade and close bedroom door.
- Take a nap while the baby naps.
- Take a bath with scented oil.
- Get hooked on an absurd reality show.
- Wear sweatpants.
- Get a free makeover at a department store cosmetic counter.
- Take care of your physical self, including exercise and diet.
- Go for a walk with your baby to get fresh air, even if it is just around the block.
- If your doctor has cleared you to exercise, find a beginner or postnatal yoga class or exercise video on YouTube (do it in your pajamas, with your baby or while your baby naps). There are also YouTube mommy-and-me video exercises designed specifically to do with baby.
- Dance with your baby to music that lifts your spirits.
- Simplify dinner. Order in or defrost a frozen meal.
- Watch a fun movie during the day.
- Ask a family member, neighbor, friend or teen to be a mother's helper for a couple hours. (Note: this is not necessarily a babysitter, rather someone who helps run errands, brings baby to you to nurse, burps baby while you rest).
- Call an old friend you've lost touch with.
- Treat yourself to a grocery or meal delivery (many grocery stores offer first delivery for free).

STEPS TO LETTING GO OF YOUR EXPECTATIONS*

1. Identify the expectation – *"I expected breastfeeding to come naturally like it did for my best friend."*
2. Acknowledge the reality – *"Breastfeeding is painful and my baby is not getting enough milk."*
3. Identify how the discrepancy makes you feel – *"I feel inadequate and frustrated."*
4. Validate and accept your feelings – *"It makes sense that I feel inadequate and frustrated when I am in pain and my baby is upset because she is hungry."*
5. State what you have lost – *"I've lost the sense of competence in whatever I do."*
6. Reframe your new balanced perspective of the situation – *"I have a new appreciation for the differences of each baby and mom. Accepting that I need help with breastfeeding will not only make breastfeeding less painful and give my baby the nourishment she needs, but also reinforces that it is not admitting defeat to advocate for myself and my baby."*

*Adapted from Kleinman, K. and Raskin, V.D. (2013) *This Isn't What I Expected*. Da Capo Press, Boston, MA.

RESOURCES

In an emergency, go to your nearest emergency room or call 911.

NATIONAL SUICIDE PREVENTION HOTLINE AND WEBSITE

- 1-800-273-8255
- **suicidepreventionlifeline.org** Call for yourself or someone you care about. Free and confidential with a network of more than 140 crisis centers nationwide, available 24/7.

LOCAL SUPPORT

	OB-GYNs	Therapists	Psychiatrists	Support Groups
Name				
Phone Number				
Address				
Name				
Phone Number				
Address				
Name				
Phone Number				
Address				

SUPPORT GROUPS

- Postpartum Support International
Find local support groups for postpartum depression and anxiety
postpartum.net/get-help/locations/united-states or call 1-800-944-4773
- Weekly online perinatal mood support meetings
postpartum.net/psi-online-support-meetings
- Resources for Husbands and Partners
postpartum.net/get-help/resources-for-fathers

BOOKS

Becoming Us: 8 Steps to Grow a Family That Thrives

by Elly Taylor

March 2014

This Isn't What I Expected: Overcoming Postpartum Depression

by Karen R. Kleiman and Valerie Davis Raskin, MD

2nd Edition — October 2013

Nobody Told Me: My Battle With Postpartum Depression and Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder

by Wendy Isnardi

2011

The Post-Adoption Blues: Overcoming the Unforeseen Challenges of Adoption

by Karen J. Foli and John R. Thompson

August 2004

The Pregnancy and Postpartum Anxiety Workbook: Practical Skills to Help You Overcome Anxiety, Worry, Panic Attacks, Obsessions, and Compulsions

by Pamela Wiegartz

June 2009

And Baby Makes Three: The Six-Step Plan for Preserving Marital Intimacy and Rekindling Romance After Baby Arrives

by John and Julie Gottman

January 2008

Boundaries: When to Say Yes, How to Say No to Take Control of Your Life

by Henry Cloud and John Townsend

Apr 1992

grow
THROUGH WHAT
YOU GO THROUGH

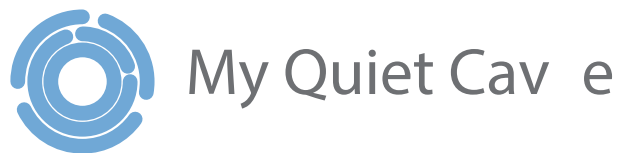
Thank you for going through *Fierce Love Collective*.

This is a cooperative effort between MOPS and My Quiet Cave.

My Quiet Cave exists to create spaces for faith and mental health. We believe people with mental health issues should be able to thrive, and participating in their faith should be an asset. We want churches to be a safe space for anyone struggling with mental illnesses or their families.

In addition to this curriculum, My Quiet Cave produces curriculum and training for people with mental illness and their families such as *Overcome: Finding Hope in the Midst of Mental Illness*.

If you would like more information about curriculum and training for your congregation, please visit **myquietcave.org**.



M | COLLECTIVES