

Shawna Songer Gaines

WILDERNESS

participant's guide

breathe series



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Welcome

Thank you for joining us on this journey through *Breathe: Wilderness*, by Shawna Songer Gaines. If you haven't gone through a *Breathe* study before, we are delighted to welcome you to your first one. If you are a *Breathe* Bible study veteran, then we are pleased to welcome you back!

We'd like to start by explaining the concepts of biblical theology and hermeneutics, upon which the *Breathe* studies are based.

Biblical theology is a lens for reading Scripture that is set to look for the big story God is telling throughout history. Biblical theology places scripture in conversation with scripture and assumes that every book tells a different perspective of the same story—a story the church is still telling today.

As we study Scripture through the lens of biblical theology, we use another tool, hermeneutics. Hermeneutics is simply a way to explain or interpret Scripture. The three hermeneutical questions we will ask in each lesson are:

1. What do you learn about the character of God?
2. What do you learn about what God is up to in the world (and especially the world of Scripture)?
3. How do you see this God at work in the world still today?

These three questions help us reflect on each passage of Scripture. The questions we ask reveal the lens through which we see God and read Scripture. These questions assume at least three things:

1. God is the primary character in all of Scripture.
2. God's actions are consistent with God's character.
3. God's character never changes, so we can look for God to be at work today with the same goals we see in Scripture.

As we study Scripture, we must also understand its inspiration. We believe Scripture is the inspired word of God. In fact, we believe it is God-breathed. While it is important that we study and dig into Scripture to learn more about who God is and what God is up to, it is just as important that we always approach Scripture in the power of the Spirit. That is why this participant's guide includes prompts for prayer and allows space to write. These practices help open us up to the Spirit who breathed into the biblical writers and who breathes inspiration and revelation into God's people of every generation.

Finally, we need to understand the echoes from scripture to scripture. Because Scripture is breathed by the Holy Spirit, there are echoes of themes that reveal God's character. Even though there is an incredible variety of biblical genres and authors, and even though the Bible was written over a span of roughly 1,500 years, the same images of God's character ring throughout the pages from Genesis to Revelation. The wilderness motif echoes across Scripture because it reveals something of God's character that is vital to our relationship with our Creator.

As you work through this study, you may want to refer to this introduction from time to time, to help you recall the tools of biblical theology and hermeneutics.



How to Use This Participant's Guide

This guide is intended for you to use on your own time, between group sessions. In order for each group meeting to generate maximum discussion and learning potential, the idea is for you to complete each chapter of this study before its corresponding group meeting. Each chapter has been written in such a way that is intended to prepare you for your next group meeting without spoiling the content.

You may complete all or part of each chapter as you feel comfortable, and in whatever time frame works best for you. Please do not feel pressured to complete a full chapter all at once, or to answer every single question in every chapter. Some of the questions, especially surrounding the scriptures, may require some background awareness or foreknowledge of biblical stories; others won't. Some questions may make more sense after their corresponding group sessions. Or your group discussions and some of the things Shawna says in the videos may give you new insight into some of the questions asked here. That's okay. Work through it at your own pace.

This guide is designed to meet you wherever you are in your faith journey. It's not a test, and you won't be graded. In fact, nobody has to know the measure of your contributions to this guide at all unless

you choose to share. The one thing we would recommend as you work through this participant's guide is that, at the very least, you read the introduction paragraphs before your group sessions because those will directly lead and tie into the content you will receive from the videos in your group meetings.

You may choose to bring your participant's guide with you to your group gatherings in order to make notes as you watch the videos or discuss some of your thoughts and ideas with the other participants. Or you may choose to leave it at home during your meetings. Either way, it's entirely up to you.

Blessings to you, and may God do a great work in you as you study *Breathe: Wilderness*.

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Abram: The Promise

∞ INTRODUCTION

In the beginning of the book of Genesis, we read about how God creates the world and how good the creation is. Things are calm, peaceful, serene. Even after God creates Adam and Eve, there remains a comfortableness between God and God's creation. Until one day there isn't.

After the fall, things start to unravel pretty quickly in God's created world. Envy, murder, hatred, and idolatry spring up all over what used to be God's good creation, and God gets fed up and floods the world with the intent of starting almost from scratch. God decides to keep around a few prototypes of everything that's already been created—including humans. And so, what we might call the inevitable, or at least the predictable, happens again.

The one constant in God's created world is that sin becomes an obstacle to the relationship between God and humankind again and again and again.

Enter Abram. God has a plan to redeem and restore God's good creation, and Abram is the vessel by which God will carry out this new plan. God says to Abram, *I will bless you to bless the world*. God is going to use Abram, and Abram's descendants, to bring God's plan of redemption to completion in the world.



{ **Genesis 12; Genesis 15**

What do you learn about the character of God?

What do you learn about what God is up to in the world (and especially the world of Scripture)?

How do you see this God at work in the world still today?



∞ BREATHE IN THE WORD

Genesis 12:1-3. Why do you think God chooses to enact a redemption plan through Abram? Why not just declare the world redeemed?

Genesis 12:10-20. How does this story feel familiar to you? How is this scenario an echo of another story in Scripture? What characters, places, and circumstances are similar?

Genesis 15:13-14. What is the importance of the “but” that begins verse 14? What do these two verses say about who God is and how God works?



Genesis 15:17. In all the times you have imagined God and what God would look like if standing right next to you, has this image ever come to mind? A smoking firepot and a blazing torch? What does this representation of God say to you about who God is?

∞ PRAYER

God of promise, you have revealed yourself throughout time to many people in many ways. You have never broken a promise or taken a promise back, because that's not who you are. I've been through some wildernesses in my life, and I know there are probably more yet to come. Help me remember your promise in my wilderness. If I need to hear it again, speak it to me clearly so that I can walk through my wilderness with confidence that you will see me through.



∞ MEDITATE

Depending on how old you are, it's possible you've never been worried about your car running out of gas. These days, in fact, it would be almost difficult to run out of gas. Most cars have those helpful (or annoying, depending on your personality) dashboard lights that alert you when your tank is nearing empty. Interstate travel has become the norm, with an exit every couple of miles, and usually a plethora of gas stations to choose from at each exit.

And, even if you somehow did get stuck on a two-lane country highway with no civilization in sight and your needle on E, you'd likely have your cell phone with you and be able to call for help. And that is probably a great reassurance to you. Before cell phones were around, people made sure to check the gas tank level on their cars before pulling out of the driveway. Now, the only time many of us look at that indicator is when it's dinging at us.

This doesn't mean we *want* to get stranded. It doesn't mean we would search out a people-free road on a low gas tank just because we have a cell phone. But it does mean that we worry less because we're confident we'll be able to get help if we do get stuck somewhere.

Sometimes we feel like God leads us into the wilderness. Other times, we end up in the wilderness as a result of our own choices. Reflect on how this ties in to the idea that God is a God of promise.

