

Shawna Songer Gaines

WILDERNESS

facilitator's guide

breathe series



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Welcome

We are excited that you and your women's group have chosen to watch and reflect on the video Bible study *Breathe: Wilderness*, by Shawna Songer Gaines. We believe that as you journey through this series together you will each experience the sacredness of Scripture and gain a better understanding of the big story the Bible tells us.

Whether your group consists of women who are new to studying the Bible, women who've studied the Scriptures for years, or something in between, *Breathe: Wilderness* is designed to meet each participant at her level and lead everyone deeper into the story of God. As participants read, listen, watch, reflect, and discuss each week, they will begin to uncover how God's story is still being written today in our world and in our lives.

Below you will find some helpful ideas and instructions to get you started.

LAYING THE GROUNDWORK

Whether the group going through the study has met together for years or is newly formed, we recommend setting aside a time for the group to gather and go over the goals and expectations. In order for this study to be most beneficial, group members must:

- Read the corresponding Bible passage(s) and complete the participant's guide chapter for the week, *prior* to each meeting.
- Attend each group meeting faithfully and consistently.
- Be willing to enter into conversation and discussion about what they have engaged in the participant's guide or learned from Shawna in the videos.
- Expect God to reveal God's self as present and active in the world today and to show each participant what God is accomplishing in her life.

(Note: This facilitator's guide covers all eight weeks of the series, but the accompanying participant's guide begins after the introductory week. So, you will instruct your group members to complete the first chapter in their guide during the week before you all reconvene to watch the first video.)

BEFORE EACH MEETING

This study is designed to cover one video each week. During your first meeting, distribute the participant's guides to each group member so they all have time to complete the first lesson of the guide before you meet again. Encourage your group members to engage with the participant's guide as much in advance of the meetings as possible in order to help foster insightful and meaningful conversations during your gatherings.

DURING EACH MEETING

Each group has its own unique personality, so pay attention to what strikes a chord with your participants and be willing to adjust as needed. We do encourage each group to incorporate four elements into their times together, however they best fit your dynamics:

- **Social.** Set aside time for group members to share what is going on in their lives. The better people know each other and feel comfortable around each other, the easier it will be for everyone to discuss the material being studied.
- **Curriculum.** Watch the video lesson.
- **Dialogue.** Discuss the questions about the material.
- **Prayer.** Be sure to allow time for group members to share their praises or prayer requests.

AFTER EACH MEETING

After each lesson, group members are encouraged to do the following in the time leading up to your next meeting:

- Read the Bible passage(s) and complete the corresponding participant's guide chapter for next week's lesson.
- Pray for the requests and offer thanks for the praises mentioned.

How to Use This Facilitator's Guide

This group study has eight different sessions that correspond to the seven videos in the *Breathe: Wilderness* Bible study. These sessions are designed to help facilitate meaningful discussion about the content of each video. (The first session is an introduction session and doesn't have a video.)

MAIN POINT

Summarizes the content of the video. Whenever possible, the group facilitator (and group members) should complete the entire corresponding chapter in the participant's guide beforehand.

ADDITIONAL KEY THOUGHTS AND IDEAS

Lists other thoughts and ideas that help inform and build on the main emphasis for the video. This section can help function as a reference while teaching the lesson. Feel free to add your own notes of things you would like to discuss as you preview the video.

RELATED PASSAGE(S)

The passages listed are those covered in the video. The facilitator may wish to reference these (and any other supporting passages considered helpful) during the lesson.



WORD DEFINITIONS

The words listed are those that are specifically defined in the video. The facilitator may need to refer to these definitions during the discussion. If no words were defined in the video, this section will not appear in the lesson.

OPENING

Provides suggestions for how you can begin your group session from week to week by proposing a question the group facilitator can ask to begin conversation. If you wish simply to begin by letting your group chat freely for a while, that's fine too.

VIDEO

States which video will be watched during each group session.

QUESTIONS FOR THE GROUP

This section includes two types of questions to help facilitate discussion about the video you're watching together. Pause Questions reiterate the specific questions Shawna asks you to pause the video to discuss. Further Discussion Questions help you go deeper into the topic, and can be incorporated throughout the video watching, in conjunction with the Pause Questions, or they can wait until the end of the video.

CLOSING

Offers a suggestion of how you can close your group session from week to week.

Introductory Session

Below is an introductory lesson outline for you to use with a group that is brand new to the *Breathe* Bible study series. If your group is familiar with *Breathe* and has already completed other studies in the series, you may want to skip this week and get right to the first lesson. Whatever you choose to do, be sure to hand out participant's guides with enough time in advance for your group members to work through the first session.

MAIN POINT:

In Genesis, God makes a promise to Abram. Throughout Scripture, even into the New Testament, we can see echoes of that promise, instances of God protecting that promise, and evidence of God fulfilling that promise. Spoiler alert: In the end, it turns out that the promise is a person—Jesus. And God has provided us, today, with everything we need to take hold of the promise and live as people who reflect God to the world—even in the wilderness.

ADDITIONAL KEY THOUGHTS AND IDEAS:

Share this section with your group.

- * Breath is essential for life. Even in the wilderness, God breathes life and provision into us to sustain us.
- * Scripture contains echoes of stories that ring throughout the whole Bible. We are embarking on an eight-week journey to uncover the theme of wilderness that is woven throughout Scripture.
- * This series is called *Breathe* because approaching the living Word of God invites us to breathe deeply of God's life-giving Spirit. We are breathing in God's Spirit and being transformed by the living Word of God, who is Jesus Christ.
- * While there are multiple ways to study the Bible, we will use biblical theology, which considers Scripture as an open conversation



that threads throughout the entire Bible. Biblical theology does its best to place scripture in conversation with scripture, and then invite our contemporary situations to join the discussion. So it follows that Genesis helps us interpret Revelation; Isaiah helps us interpret Mark; even Colossians helps us interpret John's gospel.

- * The way we interpret Scripture influences how we view God and God's work in the world.
- * We will spend the first four weeks in the Old Testament, studying the various wilderness episodes of the Israelites as they journey toward and enter the Promised Land. But the Old Testament doesn't have a monopoly on the wilderness.
- * In the New Testament, we'll experience the wilderness episodes of John the Baptist and Stephen, and even Jesus, in his noteworthy forty days in the desert with only the devil for company.
- * We will begin with a promise given to Abram, and will end with what it means to live as believers in the promise of Jesus.

For those of you who choose to use the participant's guide throughout the week, you'll want to get started before the next meeting. This participant's guide is not homework, and you won't be forced to share how much you've completed or what you've written. You will be invited to share if you wish, but the participant's guide is mainly for your personal reflection.

Each week in the participant's guide, you will be asked to apply three questions to a new Scripture passage. The scripture will change each week, but the questions will not. Each week you will be asked to reflect:

- * 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?

The questions we ask of Scripture point to who we believe God is. These questions assume first that God is the main character of Scrip-



ture, and that Scripture is God's self-revelation—that is, God showing us who God is.

Second, these questions assume that God is engaged in our world, intimately involved in our world, with a plan of redemption for our world.

Finally, these questions assume that God is steadfast and faithful yesterday, today, and tomorrow.

The God revealed to us in the stories of the Bible is still at work in our lives and in our world to redeem and restore all things.

When we approach the living Word of God, the Spirit invites us to breathe deeply of God's life and be remade by God's sacred and transforming breath. While the Bible may appear like a collection of stories with an assortment of main characters, it actually tells one big story whose main character is God. In its pages, we discover stories of people whose lives are transformed into reflections of God's story, and learn from them how our lives can similarly be shaped to echo God's story.

We are called not only to breathe in God's life-giving Spirit but to breathe it back out into the world as worship, taking part in the mission of God.

RELATED PASSAGE(S):

Since this is the introductory week, rather than explicitly discuss various scriptures, we have provided you with an overview of which books of the Bible are included in the study.

- * Genesis
- * Exodus
- * 1 Samuel
- * Jeremiah
- * Matthew
- * Acts



OPENING:

As the facilitator, begin by introducing yourself and then share why you wanted to participate in this study and what you're looking forward to learning. Ask the other members to do likewise.

Next, explain how the study is designed. Each week you'll gather together to watch the video (except this first week) and discuss the lesson as a group, with the expectation that each group member arrives at the session having already completed the chapter in the participant's guide that corresponds to that week. Throughout the lesson there will be moments to pause, reflect, and discuss what you are taking in. Tell your group to be prepared to respond to the video as if they're in a conversation.

Typically, after your opening activity, you will show the video. However, since this first week has no corresponding video, you will lead the teaching time more heavily. Share the information found in the "Additional Key Thoughts and Ideas" section. Then reflect on the discussion questions as a group.

QUESTIONS FOR THE GROUP:

- * What types of Bible studies have you been a part of in the past? How might this be similar or different?
- * Have you ever given much thought to understanding the Bible? Are there certain ways that you seek to understand Scripture?
- * How would our lives, our families, and our communities be transformed if we depended on the Spirit for every breath we drew?
- * Part of understanding the Bible is asking yourself, "What is God saying to me in this passage?" Have you ever thought of yourself as being able to understand the Bible?
- * Have you ever used the biblical theology approach to study the Bible? What do you think is gained by using this approach?
- * Have you ever considered that God is the main character of the Bible? How does this change the way you read and receive the Bible?



CLOSING:

Ask if anyone has any prayer requests or praises. After people have had a chance to share, close your gathering time in prayer.

Challenge group members to come to the next session having already worked through the first lesson in their participant's guides.

EXPLORE the ECHOES of GOD'S CHARACTER

Created, another study in the *Breathe* series, examines the echo of creation. The first chapters in Genesis are only a preface of an elaborate story of our creator God. Shawna Songer Gaines will lead your small group through 7 video-based sessions that will help you gain a perspective on how all of Scripture works together to tell God's big story.



See God at work in the world and delight in
God's creativity in both Scripture and life.

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