



UN • DE • TERRED

[not discouraged or dissuaded]

**EMBRACING OUR PURPOSE
FACING OUR CHALLENGES**

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Foreword by Kary Oberbrunner

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STUDY GUIDE

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A NOTE FROM VICKI

I always have found myself drawn to groups that enjoy taking a deeper look at ideas and sharing insights—who enjoy having a vigorous discussion. Though I included a *Think It Through & Live It Out* section at the end of each chapter in **Un-de-tered**, my hope is that women will come together and discuss the book in conjunction with God’s Word. This study guide is a platform for such a discussion.

Proverbs 27:17 (AMP) states, “As iron sharpens iron, so one woman sharpens [and influences] another [through discussion].”

We women need to sharpen one another. Picture yourself sitting around the kitchen table with other women. You are discussing the meaning of being God’s image bearers and the challenges it entails. You nod your head as a woman shares a challenge she is facing. You understand her concern because you have faced a similar challenge.

Leaning in, you listen closely as another woman shares her own story and how God’s Word, coupled with some thoughtful strategies, helped her deal with the difficulty. You find yourself enriched by the discussion and encouraged to move forward—you have been sharpened.

My prayer is that this study guide will give you a platform to sharpen iron. Yes, you can use it individually, but think how enriching it will be if you invite another woman or women to ponder God’s Word together and to reflect on the contents of the book. I am imagining a vigorous discussion where sometimes you agree with what I wrote and other times not so much.

Each segment of the study guide begins with a short reflection and ends with questions and/or activities.

All Scripture, unless noted, is from the NIV. At times (as I did above), a female pronoun has been substituted for the male pronoun to make it more personal to women. A female pronoun was only used if it does not compromise the meaning of the Scripture.

In the *Think It Through & Live It Out* section at the end of the book’s chapters, I suggested the reader both meditate and journal. Following are explanations of why meditation and journaling can be beneficial.

MEDITATION

Meditate comes from the Hebrew word, *hagigy*, which means to murmur. It implies that someone is pondering, imagining, mourning, muttering, or even roaring. This indicates that one can meditate by either being silent and thinking on God's Word or making a noise like softly reading Scripture or singing a song.

Numerous Scriptures exhort us to meditate on God's Word. David wrote in Psalm 19:14, "May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer."

Most of us have put the idea of meditating on the back burner of our hectic lives. God asks us to meditate because it has a positive influence on us spiritually, physically, and emotionally. Below, a simple method of meditation is outlined.

Meditation steps:

Though you can vary the time, I encourage you to allow 20 minutes for the meditative process.

1. Quiet yourself by setting aside distractions (e.g. electronics), sit tall, and take a few deep breaths.
2. Ask God to quiet your heart and give you wisdom and understanding.
3. Softly read through a short passage of Scripture several times.
4. Each time you read through the passage reflect upon the meaning of the words. What words in the Scripture are speaking to you? How do these words apply to your life?
5. Vary the cadence and emphasis you place on the words as you read through the passage. Pause at different points focusing on what was just read.
6. After you have read through the Scripture 3 to 4 times, pray and ask God to continue to instruct your thoughts by the leading of the Holy Spirit.
7. Be still before God. Set aside your own thoughts and worries and listen to God, relax in His peace and grace.
8. End the meditation by taking a few deep breaths, open your eyes, and sit still for a few moments.

Caution when meditating:

- Meditating on God's Word is not about emptying or clearing your mind. It is about focusing on God's Word and God as your object of worship.
- All truth comes from God's Word. God does not give us new truths or revelations opposed to His Word.
- Meditation is not about having a mystical experience or trying to reach a higher state. It is about quieting yourself so you can have fellowship with God, based on His Word.
- If you have any medical problems, including psychological problems, check with your physician before meditating.

In chapter two of the study guide, a group meditation is suggested.

JOURNALING

A great deal of research has been conducted about the positive benefits of journaling, especially when it is used as a form of expressive writing. Psychologist, James Pennebaker, is one of the top gurus on expressive writing. He explains that journaling allows you write down the way you are thinking and feeling so that you can explore them. For example, you might write about a Scripture that you read and how it is speaking to you personally. Or you might write about an experience, whether negative or positive, and what you learned from it.

The rule of thumb for journaling is to write continuously for 15-20 minutes, 3-5 times a week. Don't worry about grammar, spelling, or editing. Just write.

The benefits of journaling include:

- Heightened ability to process information
- Change of perspective about an issue
- Clarification of thoughts and feelings
- Problem-solving
- Stimulation of creative ideas
- Improvement in physical health (e.g. improved immune system, lower blood pressure)
- Improvement in emotional health (e.g. relieving stress, decreasing negative mood)

Most experts agree the most successful way to journal is to use pen and paper. If you are someone like me, who has never liked to do cursive writing, then find another way to record your thoughts (e.g. word processing, blogging, audio recording, drawing).

A fun activity to do with a group to get the hang of journaling is to do a **three-minute write**. Remember don't worry about grammar or spelling. Give the group a prompt (a question or a statement) to write about for three minutes. They should not lift their pencil/pen off of the paper and should keep writing even if they are not for sure what to write. They want to let their thoughts and feelings spill out onto their papers. After the three-minute write, ask them if anyone would like to share what they wrote. Assure them no one has to share their thoughts and their paper will not be collected.

Lesson six has a three-minute write activity.



CHAPTER ONE: BORN TO BE A WOMAN

God created man in his own image,
in the image of God, he created him,
male and female he created them

Genesis 1:27

CASHING IN

The United States government has an official website that shows the exact replication of the Federal Reserve's seven different denominations of bank notes. These bank notes range from \$1.00 to \$100 dollar bills.

The website educates U.S. Citizens on what real currency looks like to spot counterfeit bills. Experts tell us that if we want to recognize a counterfeit, we first have to be able to identify the real thing.

Isn't the same true for us? If we want to identify who we are as women, we first need to understand what we should look like (why God created us).

Here is where my analogy about women and paper currency falls apart. A bank does not have to accept any badly soiled, dirty, defaced, or disintegrated notes that require special examination to determine its value. Thank goodness, God is not like this. From creation, He has acknowledged our value even though we come to Him grimy and dirty. Isaiah 64:6 points out that all of us are unclean and all of our righteous acts are like filthy rags. God looks beyond our dirt and grime and sees us as women of value and purpose. Ephesians 2:4-10 states that because of God's great love for us, He shows us mercy and makes us alive with Christ even though we were dead in our transgressions. We are God's workmanship, created to do good works that He prepared in advance for us to do.

Since creation, God has designed you and sees you as a person of value and purpose!

As I was writing this, a funny memory from West Africa came to mind. The companions that I was traveling with stopped at a roadside store. While there, I

pulled out a U.S. \$20.00 bill to pay for an item. In this particular country, people prefer U.S. currency. However, most of the currency in circulation is well used, dirty (and I mean grimy dirty), and has nicks and tears.

I handed the store clerk a well-worn U.S. \$20 bill. She waved the bill away and told me she wouldn't take the worn money because the bank would not accept it. I tried to tell her that I had just received this very U.S. \$20 bill from another store down the street, but she still would not take it. So, I reached into my billfold and pulled out a cleaner U.S. \$20 bill. This time, she took it. However, when she gave me back my change, she handed me back dirty, torn bills.

I looked up at her and said, "Wait a minute. You wouldn't take my worn U.S. \$20 bill. What makes you think you can give me back the type of money you wouldn't take?"

The clerk smiled, put the worn money back, reached in the drawer, and handed me cleaner bills.

My friend who was with me laughed; she told me the very same thing had happened to her when she was buying something at a roadside stand. The man would not take her worn U.S. money. However as she was leaving, he offered to take the worn money and throw it away for her! We both laughed because we knew that he had known the money was still of value even though it was grimy.

We are like those grimy U.S. \$20 bills. Our lives are grimy, with rips and nicks and tears that make others doubt our worth. But God sees the worth in each one of us. He sees us as His image bearers.

THINK IT THROUGH & LIVE IT OUT

If you are doing this book study with another person or a group, begin with a review of the chapter. You may also wish to include a discussion about the questions at the end of the chapter in the book.

Discussion:

1. Read Genesis 1:26-31; 2:15-21. Reflecting on the creation story, who are we as women? What were we created to do?
2. What does the world say about women that you believe is counterfeit to God's purpose for our lives? Why do you think it is counterfeit to God's Word?
3. Richard Pratt wrote that as God's image bearers, we are a three-dimensional representation of God—created to reflect God's love, care for others, and serve as wise steward over God's creation. What does this

three-dimensional design look like when you are living life in the 21st century?

4. Why do you think God chose two different genders (male and female) to reflect His image? What happens to a society when one of the genders is not allowed or chooses not to reflect God's image?
5. God created women as *'ezer k^enegdo*—a helper suitable. Some people think the term, a helper (*'ezer*), means “lesser than” or as a servant to another. However, this is not the meaning of this word in the Old Testament. *'Ezer* was the word that described Eve in both Genesis 2:18 and Genesis 2:20. The term *'ezer* occurs multiple times in other places in the Old Testament and 16 of those times refer to God. Read the following Scriptures, which speaks about God. Based on the Scriptures below, how would you describe someone called an *'ezer*?
 - Exodus 18:4
 - Deuteronomy 33:2
 - Psalm 10:1
 - Psalm 70:5
6. How can knowing who you are be influential in the way you live your life?
7. Has anyone ever told you that you are not valuable? Based on God's word, how would you reply?
8. What is one step that you are going to start taking that displays your role as God's image bearer? Share this with your group or another woman and ask them/her to hold you accountable.



CHAPTER TWO: FROM THE DEPTHS OF DESPAIR

If anyone is in Christ,
she is a new creation.

II Corinthians 5:17

WOULD WE BE ANY DIFFERENT?

It is important to remember when reading the Old Testament that the truth about human behavior is not sugar-coated. It points us to the need of a redeemer—for the restoration of God's original creation.

The Old Testament gives a gut-wrenching picture of how despicable humans are when we turn our back on God. Women often find themselves at the brunt of this reality.

In many places, the plight of women is not much better today. Women and children are abandoned—left with few resources as they try to survive. Fathers send their daughters out to prostitute themselves to earn money for the family. Women are often told if they want the job, they first have to provide sexual favors to the boss.

I would like to think if we women were in charge of the world we would be more considerate of men, treating them as our equals—our co-workers.

Unfortunately, when given power, our track record doesn't appear better than men's. I saw this in action when I visited one of the northeast states of India called Meghalaya. The Khasi people are an indigenous tribe who live in this area and have a matrilineal system, which means inheritance or descent goes through the female line.

The plight of a Khasi man is similar to what many women face around the world. When he marries, he takes the woman's surname and moves into the home of the matriarch, which is usually the mother-in-law's. Children born to the marriage take their mother's surname, with the women of the family having total say over the children.

The birth of a female is an occasion for a celebration while a son's birth is not. Uniquely, the youngest daughter's role is to care for her parents, eventually receiving the family inheritance.

If a Khasi man brings home a paycheck, the expectation is that he will hand it over to the matriarch of the family, because of his inferior financial skills. They are given little, if any, economic power, which includes not being allowed to own property.

Decision-making is under the purview of the family's matriarch. Before making any decisions, the man must seek permission.

Not surprisingly, Khasi men feel like second-class citizens and have started a "man's rights movement." Their complaint was they felt used and useless and deserve more rights.

Whether man or woman, when left to our own human devices, our sinful nature encourages us to place unfair rules and restrictions upon the other gender, which tarnishes the image of God.

The good news is both genders are valuable to God and play important roles as co-workers in His creation.

THINK IT THROUGH & LIVE IT OUT

If you are doing this book study with another person or a group, begin with a review of the chapter. You may also wish to include a discussion about the questions at the end of the chapter in the book.

1. As women, it is often easy to blame men for our woes, especially when it comes to the distortion of relationships. However, we also need to take a look at woman's contribution to the fall. Read Genesis 3:1-13 and discuss woman's part in the fragmenting of relationships that distorted the world.
2. Review the table comparing *Cultural Practices of Antiquity* to *Jesus' Words and Actions* found in chapter two. Imagine adding a third column to the right of the table entitled *21st Century Cultural Practices*. Read the contents of each row and then indicate if a 21st century woman's life has improved, become worse, or more complicated. Give the reason for your response.

Example:

Cultural Practices of Antiquity	Jesus' Words and Actions	21st Century Cultural Practices
Women were viewed as a commodity.	Jesus treated women as human beings—He walked and talked with them. He used them as positive examples.	In many places women's lives are better. Women often are seen as a vital part of the faith community. In other places in the world, they are still viewed as a commodity, or treated as a second-class citizen.

3. God sent Jesus to begin the restoration of His creation. However, total restoration will not occur until Jesus comes again, which means we still live in a fallen world. As a Christian woman, what is the most difficult part for you as you try to navigate through daily life?
4. Why is it important for other females (sisters, friends, daughters, mothers) to understand why God created them and how Jesus restored them?
5. How would you respond to a friend when she states, "As a 21st century woman, how can you believe in such an antiquated religion as Christianity? It, along with most other religions, treats women as second-class!"
6. As women, what ways do we hinder or discriminate against men that prevent them from living out their full potential?
7. Respond to one of the following:
 - What was the most important thing that you learned from this chapter?
 - What is one thing that stimulated your thinking?
 - What is a question raised as you read the chapter?

GROUP MEDITATION OVER II CORINTHIANS 5:17-21

(Allow a minimum of 10 minutes, preferably 20 minutes, for this meditation)

Refer back to the beginning of the study guide to find introductory steps on how to meditate.

If you are working with a group, explain that God calls us to meditate on His Word. Describe the meditative process and the cautions.

There are women who for a number of reasons are very uncomfortable with meditation. Acknowledge this and invite them to silently read the Scripture to themselves and then move into prayer. Or, give them the option to leave the room. Assure them that their reaction is not abnormal.

During meditation, people's minds often drift. If this happens, all they need to do is redirect their thoughts back on the Scripture. It is not unusual for this to happen multiple times.

The process:

1. Begin by removing distractions, such as turning off cell phones.
2. Ask members of the group to sit tall, close their eyes, and take a few deep breaths. You may wish to have some soft instrumental music in the background.
 - If someone is uncomfortable closing her eyes while meditating, ask the person to find a spot on the floor or in the room on which to focus (this helps to buffer distractions that occur).
3. Quietly remind the group that the focus of meditation is to contemplate God's Word, and God is the object of our worship.
4. Softly and slowly read through the passage of Scripture. Pause and read through the passage again 3-4 times. The second or third time you may want to pause after each verse or after a particular phrase to give participants time to reflect.
5. Ask the group to take the next ____ minutes (tell them how many minutes) to silently pray to God for understanding and insight.
6. Lastly, ask them to sit quietly and listen to God. Explain to them that in ____ minutes (tell them how many minutes), you will bring the time of listening to a close by asking them to take a few deep breaths.
7. Conclude by asking each woman to take a few deep breaths, to slowly open her eyes, and to sit still for a few moments.

End the session by giving the women, who would like to, a time to reflect upon how God ministered to them while meditating. Acknowledge that some women will have found it beneficial, while others will have found it uncomfortable and hard to stay focused on the meditation.

Being still before God takes practice. Encourage the women to find time to meditate over the next week. At your next gathering discuss how it went.



CHAPTER THREE: UNIQUELY DESIGNED

For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your words are wonderful, I know that full well.

Psalm 139:13-14

DISTINCTLY ALIKE/DISTINCTLY DIFFERENT

When you think of the human brain and our body's biochemistry, you can't help but marvel at the complexity of our design and the awesome God who created us.

Neuroscientists are trying to unravel how the human brain works. One of the questions they are asking is how do (if at all) women and men's brains differ? Even though men and women produce the same neurochemicals (e.g. hormones), each gender produces a different amount and processes them differently. These differences have a profound affect on us physiologically. Scientists may find the male and female brains are very similar, and the differences we see between the genders occur because of the amount of and the way we process neurochemicals.

With all of this said, it is also important to remember that no two women or two men are exactly alike. Who we are is influenced by our genetics, socialization, and personal experiences.

Let's play a word-association game. I will write a word and you respond if a male or female is more closely associated with the word.

The word is "**tears.**"

More than likely, you have responded to the word by associating "tears" with "female."

I recently read a book about tears, which explained why women normally cry more than men. However, as a woman who does not cry easily, when other women cry, I find myself feeling guilty for not shedding a tear and wonder *what's wrong with me?*

My lack of tears is probably due to my genetics and socialization. I don't ever remember seeing my mother or grandmother cry very much.

Even though each gender has unique characteristics, each person within a gender will vary in where s/he falls on the spectrum. Some males may be very sensitive, while some females are not. Some females do not cry easily (like me), while certain men do. The important thing to remember is even though we share our gender's common characteristics each one of us has been uniquely designed by God. So, let's avoid believing that all women or men are exactly alike and have to march in lockstep. Instead, let's celebrate our similarities and appreciate our differences.

THINK IT THROUGH & LIVE IT OUT

If you are doing this book study with another person or a group, begin with a review of the chapter. You may also wish to include a discussion about the questions at the end of the chapter in the book.

1. In chapter three, Nabal, David, and Abigail were examples of how genders react differently. Do you agree or disagree with Vicki's example? Can you think of any other examples in the Bible?
2. Discuss the unique design that God has bestowed upon the female gender. How does the design of the male gender differ from that of a female? How do our gender differences help us fully express the image of God?
3. Considering the various spheres of your life (church, community, family, work) what gender differences do you see displayed?
 - How were the strengths of women beneficial in these various spheres?
 - The strengths of men?
4. Some researchers resist the idea that there are unique gender differences. Do you think they have a point? Why or why not?
5. Read Psalm 139:1-18 and Job 10:8-12. Discuss how these Scriptures frame you as God's unique creation.
6. How does believing that God uniquely created you, change your perspective on the way you should live life?

7. Respond to one of the following:
- What was the most important thing that you learned from this chapter?
 - What is one thing that stimulated your thinking?
 - What is a question raised from reading this chapter?



CHAPTER FOUR: IN-A-ME(S)

Since, then you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on earthly things... Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature... put on the new self which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.

Colossians 3:1-2, 5, 10.

LET THE REWIRING BEGIN

When is the last time you have stopped to peer deep inside of yourself? To take a look at the “old self” that is holding on for dear life resisting the idea of being pushed aside for your Christ-like “new self.”

I call the “old self” our “*in-a-me*,” which wants to remain embedded deep within us!

In Colossians 3, Paul gives us rules on how to put away the old so we can embrace a new pattern of living. He begins with our thought life. He exhorts us to let the things of heaven fill our thoughts and not the things of the world. Why—because He knew what we think influences who we are and the behavior we display.

Neuroscience verifies this. When we repetitively think or behave in a certain way, whether good or bad, we build a strong neural pathway in our brains. When an event occurs, without consciously thinking about how we should react, our already laid neural circuitry kicks into gear.

Let me give you an example. One of my “in-a-me(s)” is impatience, and it can display itself in a number of ways. When I am in a hurry and I find myself driving behind a slow-moving vehicle, I tense up and start muttering about the other person’s driving habits. I do this without thinking because over the years this has been my response. When I catch myself doing this, I usually have a little chat with my brain telling it that this response is not helpful. If my brain were an

animated figure, it would throw up its hands and ask me what I was expecting? After all, I trained (wired) my brain to react this way.

My impatience is a reflection of my “old self.” When I act like this I am not setting my mind on Christ, but on myself. My impatience distorts God’s image and does not accurately reflect who He is.

Paul tells me I am to put my “in-a-me(s)” to death—to rid myself of them. Wow, strong words that require strong action!

How do I do this? I start rewiring my brain by first acknowledging to myself and to God that I need to stop inappropriate thought patterns or behaviors. I ask God to help me become aware of my “wired in habits” that are not acceptable to Him and to help me rewire my brain so I am Christ-like. I do this by reading Scripture, praying, being mindful of my behavior, and doing what is right even if I don’t feel like it. As I practice replacing my old behavior with Christ-like behavior, my brain begins to prune away my old habits and replaces them with neural circuitry that is pleasing to God.

I wish I could tell you that as you face your “in-a-me(s)” and work on rewiring your brain, the “old self” will just disappear. This is not usually the case; it is hard work to change habits. It takes a lot of practice, so start rewiring!

THINK IT THROUGH & LIVE IT OUT

If you are doing this book study with another person or a group, begin with a review of the chapter. You may also wish to include a discussion about the questions at the end of the chapter in the book.

1. What do you think are common “in-a-me(s)” of the 21st century woman?
2. What is at the root of every woman’s “in-a-me(s)”?
3. Sarah and Hagar are every woman. In what ways do you identify with them and the struggles they had?
4. Hagar was probably one of the slaves given to Abram by the Pharaoh in repayment for what happened to Sarai. Why is this an example of how decisions made without God’s leading can affect the future?
5. Why is there never a perfect ending when we rely on our own strength and “in-a-me(s)” to fulfill our destiny rather than allowing God’s plan to unfold in our lives?
6. Read the words of Hagar in Genesis 16:13. What can we learn about God from these words?

7. As Christians, it is important to change the habits in our lives that are not pleasing to God. What are the excuses we usually make when we don't want to change? How do we overcome those excuses?
8. Read Colossians 3:1-17. What steps does Paul direct us to take to set aside our "in-a-me(s)," in order to become more Christ-like?
9. What is one thing you would like to discuss about this chapter? Or, a story you would like to share that relates to this chapter.



CHAPTER FIVE: PRISONERS OF OUR THOUGHTS

But each one must carefully scrutinize her own work
[examining her actions, attitudes, and behavior], and then
she can have the personal satisfaction and inner joy of doing
something commendable without comparing herself to another.

Galatians 6:4 AMP

OUR PRICKLY PRIDE

I have come to the conclusion that even though women may have a biological tendency to ruminate, pride is a contributing factor. Perhaps, it is best stated pride can trigger overthinking!

You might be scratching your head and wondering, “How in the world did she come up with the idea that overthinking at times can stem from being prideful?”

Before I answer that question, let’s define pride. Dictionary.com defines pride as, “a high or inordinate opinion of one’s own dignity, importance, merit, or superiority, whether as cherished in mind or as displayed in bearing, conduct, etc.” The keywords that correlate with overthinking are “*opinions of one’s own dignity, importance...cherished in mind.*”

I have found pride activates overthinking in my life. I find myself ruminating when someone says something to me that scratches the surface of my self-importance, or makes me question the opinion of myself or something I cherish. Let share a scenario with which most of us women can relate.

Scenario

A woman has lost a few pounds and feels good about it. An acquaintance comes up to her and says, “Wow, you have lost weight. You are looking really good—have you reached your goal?”

The woman who lost the weight smiles and says thank you, but that is not the end of it. She goes into overthinking mode! “I am glad that I look better, but did I look that bad before I lost the few pounds?”

“What does she mean, I am looking really good—have I reached my goal? How much more weight does she think that I need to lose?”

“She must be thinking that in the past, I had no control over myself or my eating.”

“She probably could lose a few pounds herself! I don’t know why she made such a big deal of me losing weight.”

Instead of viewing the conversation as a positive reinforcement, a pattern of overthinking was triggered. Why—because she was sensitive about her weight. She allowed her pride to interpret the other woman’s words as offensive rather than as complimentary.

Many of us need to set aside our prickly pride and learn to reframe a situation in a more positive light.

Reframing The Scenario

An acquaintance comes up to the women and says, “Wow, you have lost weight. You are looking really good—have you reached your goal?”

Original Reaction	Reframing
The woman who lost weight smiles and says thank you.	The woman who lost weight smiles and says thank you.
“I am glad that I look better, but did I look that bad before I lost the few pounds?”	I am glad that I look better, I feel better too.
“What does she mean, I am looking really good—have I reached my goal? How much more weight does she think that I need to lose?”	I have worked hard at losing this weight. It’s nice that others are starting to notice that I have set a goal, and I am reaching it.
“She must be thinking that in the past I had no control over myself or my eating.”	As a woman, she probably understands how hard it is to lose weight.
“She probably could lose a few pounds herself! I don’t know why she made such a big deal of me losing weight.”	I appreciate her taking the time to say something to me. Her words were encouraging.

By reframing the way we think, it changes our mindset. It allows us to focus on the positive. It stops us from just thinking about self.

The next time you start to overthink, stop and ask yourself if pride is at the root of your behavior.

THINK IT THROUGH & LIVE IT OUT

If you are doing this book study with another person or a group, begin with a review of the chapter. You may also wish to include a discussion about the questions at the end of the chapter in the book.

1. Give a reason why you agree or disagree with Vicki that some of our overthinking may stem from pride.
2. Why would knowing your values (your principles and standards) be helpful in preventing overthinking?
3. Think of a time that you ruminated on an issue, and it skewed your perception of other things happening in your life. What was your thought process like? Was it beneficial or harmful?
4. Read and discuss how the following Scriptures address the problem of overthinking:
 - Proverbs 4:23
 - Proverbs 27:19
 - Isaiah 26:3
 - 2 Corinthians 10:5
 - Philippians 4:8
 - Hebrews 3:1
5. One of my younger friends shared when it comes to overthinking, Facebook and other social media at times are a huge trigger for her. When someone posts something negative on her Facebook wall in response to something she had posted, it can affect her mood for the rest of the day. She is not alone; other women feel the same way. How can social media lead you into a downward spiral of overthinking? What steps can you take to minimize its affects on your thought process?
6. Why is Philippians 4:4-8 an excellent antidote to overthinking?
7. As sisters, mothers, and friends how can we help one another diminish our tendency to overthink?
8. Of the 10 strategies listed in chapter five to stop overthinking, choose one or two that you feel will be beneficial for you to incorporate into your life. Share this with your group or a friend and ask them (her) to hold you accountable as you put the strategy(ies) into practice.



CHAPTER SIX: THE LESS THAN PRINCIPLE

For God did not give us a spirit of timidity,
but a spirit of power, of love, and of self-discipline.

II Timothy 1:7

DO IT AFRAID!

I have great admiration for strong women who set aside their timidity and strive to touch other's lives while everyone else is wringing their hands. I like to think I am that type of woman. Honestly, I can be a hand wringer at times.

One of my blessings is that I know a number of strong women who, at least on the surface, seem fearless when God calls them to do a task. And even if they are trembling in their boots, they go ahead and "do it afraid." I believe, the reason they are able to do this is because they know their strength is from the Lord.

Though I don't have space to write about all the women who I know who are like this, I would like to tell you a bit about Sylvia Reynolds who is a retired principal from Alaska. I first became acquainted with Sylvia through email correspondence. I was searching for teachers who were willing to come to a developing country to teach. Her name was given to me, and we started to correspond. I knew right away from her emails that she was an educator I wanted on the team.

I was not disappointed when she came to teach. She is an excellent educator and related well with the students. Not only did she teach on campus, she also traveled throughout the country to serve others. This is not an easy task in a developing country, and sometimes it almost seems impossible. She amazed me as I watched all the lives that she touched.

I asked her where she found the strength and confidence to move outside of her comfort zone and take on challenges. Sylvia told me when she was 29 years old she injured her back as a gymnastic coach. She herniated a disc as she reached out to prevent a gymnast from getting hurt after he had performed a move

improperly. The injury required surgery. After the surgery, the doctors told her she would not be able to return to being active.

When Sylvia and her husband adopted their first son, Mack, it was excruciating for her to lift the baby in and out of the crib. One day, as she watched her sister-in-law swing her three year old around on the front lawn, Sylvia realized she would never be able to do that with her son.

She determined that she needed to regain her quality of life so she could care for her son without pain and be active again. Her neurosurgeon and orthopedic doctors told her that the only solution was to do a spinal fusion. They warned her that this would require her to spend four months in a plaster body cast. She opted for the surgery even though her husband worked away from home, and they lived 18 miles out in the country—far away from help.

After the surgery, Sylvia worked at regaining her strength by biking and swimming. Within six months, she was able to take part in a triathlon!

She told me how blessed she felt that she was able to recover and live an active life. She vowed then and there to always live life to its fullest and to not be afraid to take on new challenges.

Sylvia doesn't believe in living by the *less than principle* because she knows that God has blessed her with *much* not *little*. How about you?

THINK IT THROUGH & LIVE IT OUT

If you are doing this book study with another person or a group, begin with a review of the chapter. You may also wish to include a discussion about the questions at the end of the chapter in the book.

1. Read the following verses and discuss the confidence we should have as Christians.
 - Joshua 1:9
 - I Corinthians 2:3-5
 - Hebrews 10:35-36
 - I John 5:14-15
2. Why is it important for us to consider that the way we are raising and treating girls may diminish their confidence level?
3. “Woman talk” can have both a positive and a negative influence on our self-confidence level. Share examples of both positive and negative speech that women often use. Why is it important that we monitor our speech so that it is uplifting for ourselves as well as others?

4. Discuss the statement; “In the long run, it may diminish a girl’s confidence level when our primary focus is on her being a good girl and getting good grades.” Explain why you agree or disagree with this statement? How can we raise our girls to be Christ-like and confident?
5. How has media influenced your confidence level?
6. Read about one or more of the following women in the bible. What risk(s) was she willing to take? What gave her the confidence to take such a risk? What did you learn about the importance of moving outside of your comfort zone?
 - Deborah and Jael (Judges 4 & 5)
 - Ruth (Ruth 1)
 - Esther (Esther 3-9)
 - The sinful woman who anointed Jesus feet (Luke 7:36-50)
7. E.E. Cummings, an American poet, wrote: “Once we believe in ourselves, we can risk curiosity, wonder, spontaneous delight, or any experience that reveals the human spirit.” How does having confidence in ourselves through Christ change who we are and how we live life?

THREE-MINUTE WRITE

(For instructions, refer back to page four, under journaling.)

Prompt: What is hindering you from taking a risk that you feel God is calling you to take? What step(s) can you take to begin to move out of your comfort zone?



CHAPTER SEVEN: HEAR ME ROAR

Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths,
but only what is helpful for building others up according
to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.

Ephesians 4:29

FEATHERS IN THE WIND

The tongue—such a small part of our body, but its power to destroy is mighty! I try to watch my words and action, but I have to admit, over my lifetime, there have been words and actions I wish I could take back. I suspect that most of us feel that way.

When I was a little girl, I heard a story (a fable) that has stuck with me to this day.

A little girl in a village was known for spreading rumors and gossiping about others. Whether true or not, she would tell the rest of the villagers what she had heard about other people.

Her grandmother explained to the little girl that once the words left her lips they could never be gathered up again. Time after time the grandmother admonished the little girl, sending her out to apologize to the people who had been victims of her rumors and gossip. The little girl apologized, but it did not stop her behavior.

One day as the little girl walked home from school, she saw her grandmother standing by the door. Her grandmother had the girl's feather tick pillow in her hand. As the girl walked closer, she noticed there was a big rip in the seam of the ticking that held in the feathers. Her grandmother started to vigorously shake the pillow ticking. The feathers fell out, flying away in the wind.

The little girl ran to her grandmother crying, "Grandmother what are you doing to my pillow. Now I will have nothing to lay my head on."

Her grandmother extended her hand. “Here is a basket. If you want a pillow to sleep on tonight, you will need to collect all the feathers to put back into the ticking.”

The little girl tearfully took the basket and started chasing after the feathers.

Two hours later she came back to the house with only a few feathers in the basket.

With tears running down her face, she told her grandmother, “I couldn’t begin to gather all the feathers. The wind has scattered them everywhere.”

“Yes,” said her grandmother. “The feathers are just like the rumors you spread about other people. It is impossible for you to gather up the feathers because the wind has blown them here and there. It is equally impossible for you to gather all the words you have wrongly said about others. Once rumors or gossip leave your mouth, they scatter everywhere like the feathers.”

The same is true about relational aggression. Once we say something negative about or act unkind toward another person, it is impossible to gather up all the damage we have caused.

Proverbs 21:23 says it aptly, “Those who guard their mouths and their tongues keeps themselves from calamity.”

THINK IT THROUGH & LIVE IT OUT

If you are doing this book study with another person or a group, begin with a review of the chapter. You may also wish to include a discussion about the questions at the end of the chapter in the book.

1. Define the term, relational aggression. If you could draw a picture of relational aggression what would it look like?
2. Think back about a time when another woman, instead of celebrating your achievement, diminished or made light of your accomplishment. How did that make you feel? What did you learn from that experience?
3. Reflecting on chapter seven’s content, as well as from your own personal experience, why do you think women have a tendency toward the practice of relational aggression?
4. Discuss the premise of the “dead-even rule” (most women subconsciously believe power and self-esteem must be equal between two women for them to have a positive relationship).

Explain why you agree or disagree this a subconscious rule most girls and women carry with them?

5. Read Ephesians 4 and make a list of the characteristics of Christian behavior. How is relational aggression the opposite of how Paul tells us to behave in Ephesians 4?
6. Below are three scenarios. Based on each scenario give a negative response that you have heard given when a woman succeeds. Next, give a positive response that we should use to edify the woman.

Scenario	Negative	Positive
<u>Example:</u> You and your girlfriend are single. She has just met a new guy and is going out on a first date.	He's probably like all the rest of the guys you have dated. He will be gone in a week.	He seems like a nice guy. I hope you enjoy one another and have a great time together.
A woman earns a big promotion at work.		
A woman's child has received a full-ride scholarship to a college.		
Even though you have worked as hard as your friend in serving your community, a local charity honors your friend instead of you.		

7. What insights have you gained from God's word? What information in chapter seven has provoked your thinking? What are changes you need to make?
8. Do you have some feathers you need to try to pick-up?



CHAPTER EIGHT: HANDCUFFED

In your anger do not sin. Do not let the sun go down
while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold.

Ephesians 4:26-27

KEEPING OUT OF DANGER

In chapter eight, I wrote that anger is one letter away from the word **d**anger and can lead to unforgiveness. There is nothing wrong with being angry; it is a normal human emotion. The problem is what we do with it. Do we deal with it and let it dissipate, or do we hold on to it and let it fester into unforgiveness?

The key is to deal with anger before it takes hold of us and causes us to have an unforgiving spirit. I believe it starts with being aware that anger can turn into an “in-a-me,” which can rewire the brain to think differently. Here are 10 suggestions for the next time you become angry.

1. Stop and take a few deep breaths. This gives you time to calm down before you respond to the situation. It is the proverbial “count to 10” before you say something.
2. Pray and ask the Holy Spirit to lead you (even if it is a quick prayer). You are an image bearer of God—you want to show others the grace God showed us.
3. Ask yourself why the situation is making you angry. Is some one truly harming you or is it a matter of pride or inconvenience?
4. Focus on the impact of the situation, not the person’s intent who made you angry. Remember, you can never know the other person’s intent. If you are able to have a conversation with the other person, don’t be accusatory but do express the impact it is having on you.
5. Determine how you have contributed to the situation and ways you can work with the other person(s) to resolve it.
6. Listen. If you want the other person to listen, you need to listen to her part of the story.
7. Look for the humorous part(s) of a situation. A good laugh helps diminish anger.

8. Remember the Golden Rule—"do unto others as you would have them do unto you." We all do things wrong and have angered other people. How do you want a person who you have made angry to treat you?
9. Distract yourself with another activity. This often helps to diminish your feelings of anger and gives you time to recognize that what you were angry about is not that big of an issue.
10. Pray God's blessings on the person who made you angry.

For a number of reasons, a person may have a problem with anger. If this is the case in your life, I urge you to seek professional counseling. Prolonged anger not only leads to unforgiveness, but also can have a negative effect on a person spiritually, emotionally, and physically.

THINK IT THROUGH & LIVE IT OUT

If you are doing this book study with another person or a group, begin with a review of the chapter. You may also wish to include a discussion about the questions at the end of the chapter in the book.

1. Read through Ephesians 4:26-27. How can anger lead to sin? Why do you think Paul warns us to not let the sun go down on our anger? How can we give the devil a foothold when we are angry and unforgiving?
2. Read through Matthew 18:21-35. What truths about forgiveness do you glean from this Scripture?
3. If forgiveness is a key part of the Christian faith, why do you think it is such a difficult process?
4. From your own experience, what happens to you (physically, emotionally, spiritually) when you carry around anger that leads to resentment and unforgiveness?
5. If you were teaching a lesson on anger and forgiveness, what words of wisdom would you share with others?
6. In *Forgive to Live*, Dr. Dick Tibbits wrote it is important to learn the difference between intent and impact.
 - Intent is when we ask why someone did what they did—assigning a motive to behavior.
 - Impact is how someone's actions affected us.
 Discuss the difference between intent and impact. Why do you agree or disagree with Tibbits' statement?
7. What information in chapter eight has provoked your thinking? How will you change your life so you can live out God's word?

8. Is there a key in your pocket that you need to use to uncuff yourself from unforgiveness? If there is, begin by asking God to forgive your attitude and to soften your heart. Ask the Holy Spirit to lead you on your journey of forgiveness. Find a trusted friend or a wise Christian to hold you accountable as you walk the journey of forgiveness.



CHAPTER NINE: SITTING, WAITING, WISHING

But they who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint.

Isaiah 40:31

HOW LONG ARE YOUR TELOMERES?

If we were honest with one another, I believe most of us would admit we don't like to wait. We become fidgety and anxious—wondering why the line is so long, why the test results haven't come, or when will I find out about the new job.

Interestingly enough, waiting may contribute to our health. As painful as it might seem, it can help us learn self-control, draw closer to God, and give us breathing room to make better decisions and adjust to life's circumstances.

On the other hand, our constant desire to have immediate answers or experience instant gratification may actually be costly. Being an impatient person can lead to increased anger and stress levels. It is a time waster; instead of living in the moment, we expend energy focusing on what is not happening. It also may have a negative effect on our physical health. According to research out of the University of Singapore, impatience may decrease our telomere length.

Are you wondering, what in the world is a telomere? Telomeres are components of DNA, which form cap-like structures at the end of our chromosomes. Scientists compare them to the plastic tips on the end of shoelaces. Just as the plastic tip keeps your shoelace from fraying, telomeres help protect your DNA—your genetic data. Longer telomeres are associated with fewer illnesses, thus a longer life. However cell division, which is a normal process of growth and repair, eventually shortens the length of the telomere. As you age your telomeres get shorter. Living a healthy lifestyle may help to delay cell aging and lengthen your telomeres. Researchers are associating behavior, such as impatience, to the shortening of telomeres.

When we constantly rail against having to wait, our telomeres may shorten.

Even though we live in a fast-paced, hi-tech world, we still have times of waiting. We can either use these periods of waiting as a time to grow, or we can allow it to affect us negatively.

Scattered throughout the Bible are examples of God calling His people to wait. One example of this is found in the Old Testament book of Habakkuk. In this three-chapter book, an interesting dialogue takes place between the prophet Habakkuk and God. Habakkuk voices his frustration in living in a corrupt world. He asks God why he and the rest of the faithful have to keep waiting for God to act against such evil?

How long, O Lord, must I call for help, but you do not listen? Or cry out to you, "Violence!" but you do not save? Why do you make me look at injustice? Why do you tolerate wrong? Destruction and violence are before me; there is strife, and conflict abounds. Therefore the law is paralyzed, and justice never prevails. The wicked hem in the righteous, so that justice is perverted. (Habakkuk 1:2-4)

The Lord responded to Habakkuk's complaint by telling him he would be amazed at what He was planning on doing. However, Habakkuk still needed to wait.

Habakkuk asked God a second question, "Why then do you tolerate the treacherous?" At the end of this second complaint, Habakkuk states:

I will climb up to my watchtower and stand at my guard post. There I will wait to see what the Lord says and how he will answer my complaint. (Habakkuk 2:1, NLT)

The words *watchtower* and *guard post* indicate a sense of waiting—of looking into the distance. God had told Habakkuk that he and the faithful would have to wait, and Habakkuk responded to those words by waiting. Like you and me, he didn't want to wait, but he understood that the wise man waits upon the perfect timing of the Lord.

In chapter three, Habakkuk acknowledges God's sovereignty over creation. The chapter closes with Habakkuk rejoicing and praising God even though he was living in a time of waiting and despair.

Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my Saviour. The Sovereign Lord is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer, he enables me to tread on the heights. (Habakkuk 3:17-19)

We can learn much from Habakkuk the next time we have to wait. Instead of becoming anxious and impatient, we need to come boldly before God expressing our feelings and concerns. Then, we need to climb up on our watchtower and expectantly wait for God's reply, rejoicing in His strength and steadfastness, knowing that God will answer us in His perfect timing. And, you know what else might happen as you wait upon the Lord? You might even help safeguard your telomeres!

THINK IT THROUGH & LIVE IT OUT

If you are doing this book study with another person or a group, begin with a review of the chapter. You may also wish to include a discussion about the questions at the end of the chapter in the book.

1. Hannah (I Samuel 1), Queen Esther (Esther 4-7), Ruth (Ruth 1-4), and Rachel (Genesis 29:18-28) had to wait. Read about one or more of these women and from their stories, discuss what you learned about waiting.
2. Which resonated the most with you, the need to practice the “art of quietude,” or the need to start “waiting in motion”? Why?
3. How has technology influenced your perception of what it means to wait?
4. Discuss the strategies listed in this chapter. What is one strategy you will work on during the next week? If you are meeting with a group, at your next meeting talk about how successful you were incorporating the strategy into your life? Did it make a difference?
5. Discuss the quote below by Andrew Murphy (1828-1917), a South African writer, teacher, and pastor.

If any are inclined to despond, because they do not have such patience, let them be of good courage. It is in the course of our feeble and very imperfect waiting that God Himself, by His hidden power, strengthens us and works out in us the patience of the great saints, the patience of Christ himself.

Give examples of how Christ was patient.

6. Share examples of when you had to wait. What did you learn? What was the hardest part?
7. Try an experiment. Each day for a week sit and be still for 15 minutes. Use this time to invite God to speak to you. Journal how you felt. More than likely you will have to push away outside thoughts as you are still before God. By the end of the week did it become easier? How did God speak to you? Caution: when listening for God’s leading, He will only speak to you in thoughts that are consistent with Scripture.

If you are doing this study with a group, report back what you experienced the next time you are together.



CHAPTER TEN: SHINY HAPPY PEOPLE

For the world offers only a craving for physical pleasure,
a craving for everything we see, and pride in our achievements and
possessions. These are not from the Father, but from this world.

I John 2:16 (NLT)

OH HAPPY DAY

The title for chapter ten comes from the 1991 R.E.M song, *Shiny Happy People*. The rumor is that the song was produced two years after the Chinese uprising in Tiananmen Square where hundreds of demonstrators were killed.

After the incident in Tiananmen Square, the Chinese government posted propaganda posters depicting its citizens looking happy as they held hands. The satirical song, *Shiny Happy People*, points out the foolishness of the Chinese government's propaganda. The reality was many of its citizens were unhappy and discontent.

Aren't we also buying into a line of propaganda by believing accumulating things is the elixir for happiness? Deep down many of us know this is not true; yet, we let our materialistic culture continue to woo us.

In 2012, a book was published called **Life at Home in the 21st Century**. The study included observing 32 Los Angeles families—families similar to ours. The primary purpose of the research was to study consumerism in the United States. Here are a few of the findings about the amount of “things” the families had accumulated:

- In the first household studied, the researchers found 2,260 visible possessions in two bedrooms and in the living room. (The researchers did not count any possessions that were in drawers or closets. To be counted, things had to be in plain sight.)
- The typical refrigerator had over 52 objects on it.
- Ninety percent of the garages did not have room for an automobile. Instead, the garage was used as a storage unit. An average of 300-650 boxes and

plastic bins were stored in the garage to hold the overflow of family possessions.

- The average household had over 100 visible dolls, plush toys, action figures, etc... Several of the homes had up to 250 visible play objects. Remember, only objects in plain sight were counted. Who knows what the number would have been if they looked inside drawers, closets, and other storage areas?

The researchers found that most women of the households felt stressed out trying to manage (clean/store) the family's possessions. This stress led to a higher rate of a depressed mood. Stressed for a different reason, the men found paying for all the possessions was a financial burden.

The families continued to accumulate more and more and felt exhausted as they dealt with caring and paying for all their "things". The very things that they thought would make them happy were draining them emotionally and financially.

Psychiatrist Peter Whybrow wrote in his book, *American Mania: When More Is Not Enough*:

Seduced by the novelty and the opportunities afforded by our wealth, we have passed beyond need and fallen into an addictive striving for more: for more money, more speed, more house, more car, more food, more choice and more power . . . here lies the nightmarish paradox of the American dream: in our striving for more, we are discovering a mismatch between the wealth of goods and the technology-rich environment we have created and the biological limits of who we are...[page 106.]

Things don't make us happy!

THINK IT THROUGH & LIVE IT OUT

If you are doing this book study with another person or a group, begin with a review of the chapter. You may also wish to include a discussion about the questions at the end of the chapter in the book.

1. What is the difference in feel-good happiness versus value-based happiness (joy)? How do you balance enjoying "the things of life," without them getting in the way of living a life of joy?
2. Why do you think materialism leads to a decrease in social intimacy, generosity, sensitivity to other's needs, and life satisfaction? How has it affected your life?
3. Read I John 2:15-16 from different Bible translations. What warning does verse 15 give? In verse 16 the NLT uses the word craving. Craving comes from the Greek word *epithumia*, which means desire, passionate

longing, or lust. What three things does the world crave or boast about? Why is it wrong to passionately long for or have pride in these things?

4. Reflect on James 1:2-3, “Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance.” How can trials be considered a joyful experience?
5. In the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:1-12), verses 3-11 open with the word blessed. Blessed comes from the Greek word, *makar*, which means happiness that comes from within. Contrast what Jesus says will make us happy with what the world tells us. Why the discrepancy? How can we find an inward happiness or joy from being poor in spirit, mourning, being hungry and thirsty, etc...”
6. Make your own list of what the consequences would be if a person were happy all the time.
7. It is time to get personal. If the researchers had come to your house, would they have found the same results as they found for the 32 families in Los Angeles?
8. When you are watching television or flipping through a magazine, count how many commercials (advertisements) that are assuring you that you will be happy if you purchase their product. If you are studying this book with a group, at your next get together be ready to describe one of the advertisements and how it appeals to our desire for happiness.



ONE LAST THOUGHT

Our power to be un·de·terred does not come from ourselves, but from God. Paul's words encourage us to press on because of what God has done for us.

[You] received God's Spirit when he adopted you as his own children. Now we call him, Abba, Father. For his Spirit joins with our spirit to affirm that we are God's children. And since we are his children, we are his heirs. In fact, together with Christ we are heirs of God's glory...

And the Holy Spirit helps us in our weaknesses...the Holy Spirit prays for us with groanings that cannot be expressed in words. And the Father who knows all hearts knows what this Spirit is saying, for the Spirit pleads for us believers in harmony with God's own will. And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them.

What shall we say about such wonderful things as these? If God is for us, who can ever be against us? Since he did not spare even his own Son but gave him up for us all, won't he also give us everything else? Who dares accuse us whom God has chosen for his own? No one—for Christ Jesus died for us and was raised to life for us, and he is sitting in the place of honor at God's right hand, pleading for us.

Can anything ever separate us from Christ's love? Does it mean he no longer loves us if we have trouble or calamity, or are persecuted, or hungry, or destitute, or in danger or threatened with death?... No, despite all of these things, overwhelming victory is ours through Christ, who loved us. And I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from God's love. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow—not even the powers of hell can separate us from God's love. No power in the sky above or in the earth below—indeed, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Romans 8: 15b-17a, 26-28, 35-39, NLT

Until we meet or rejoice together in heaven, I pray through the power of the resurrection of Christ and the leading of the Holy Spirit you will remain **un·de·terred**.

Vicki