



group leader's guide

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This guide is to be used in conjunction with *Heartbeat of a Mother: Encouragement for the Lifelong Journey* by Jane Rubietta (Indianapolis: Wesleyan Publishing House, 2016).

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How to Use This Guide



Whether you are the neighborhood mom, a foster mother, a nursery worker who loves her babies, a birth or adoptive mom, or an “other mother,” this group is for you. Whether your child is a toddler or a teen or a towering adult, this group is for you. For anyone who knows the joys of overseeing children’s lives and the weight of that responsibility; for anyone who needs a little, or a lot, of encouragement right about now; for mothers who have failed, mothers who have succeeded, mothers who have loved well and not so well—this group is for you.

This is a place of acceptance because we have all felt the highs and lows of parenting. Nothing you say will surprise us, if we are honest. And this group is designed to be honest, to cut through the church-hype of the glories of motherhood and get straight to the heart: sometimes we love this job, sometimes we loathe it; sometimes our children love us, sometimes they don’t.

So, welcome. Bring your open heart, bring your stories, bring your triumphs, bring your feelings of failure. We are here to celebrate, rejuvenate, and resuscitate our mother hearts.

Heartbeat of a Mother contains several application tools at the end of each chapter. These are entirely useful during the group time. Sometimes, though, it helps to have additional questions and journey-deepening suggestions, both to enrich personal study and application, and to ease in leading or facilitating a small group or book club.

Each group session begins with openings that invite people into relationship, story, and memories. These flow into questions with a more in-depth look at the scriptural backbone of the readings as well as elements in the book’s chapters and application.

In this six-week study, there will be ample material to use during your meeting time. The questions below work well in combination with the Heart Check sections at the close of each chapter. During your sessions, discuss general impressions of the week’s readings. You might close each session by asking how to apply the Heart Work sections, and then reading in unison the Heart Cry and/or Heart of God sections.

To get started, each group member should have a copy of *Heartbeat of a Mother*. It is helpful but not essential that they read the current week’s selections in advance of the meeting. Group members might want to bring a journal or notebook to take notes and write personal reflections.

Note: At the beginning of each session, you might want to remind people that silence is uncomfortable but good and allows people time to process. Also, to honor confidentiality and to create a safe environment, adapt the motto, “What we say here, stays here.”

General Questions to Ask at Each Session

1. What stood out for you in these readings?
2. What Scriptures spoke to you? In what ways?
3. Where did you sense God tugging at your heart?
4. What emotional responses did you experience?
5. What will be different today? Tomorrow?

Closing

Close by reading a Heart Cry and/or Heart of God aloud, either as a group or in pairs so it is more personal for everyone. Close in prayer.

For more group ideas and resources, please visit www.JaneRubietta.com. If your group is interested in a video conference call with the author, during or toward the end of your study together, please contact her at info@JaneRubietta.com.

Week 1

Hope and the Mother Heart

Chapters 1–6



To the Facilitator

Introduce yourself and tell about the “arrows in your quiver” (see Ps. 127:4–5). How long have you been a mother? Give one word for how you feel about your mothering journey today. It doesn’t have to be a pretty word, a glory word. Just an honest one-word assessment of your soul.

Hope

1. How did you feel when you first started this mother journey? Hopeful? Terrified?
2. What’s your favorite memory of the early season of mothering? How about the current season?
3. How does the word *hope* fit your state of being right now? Your journey as a mother?
4. As a noun, *hope* in the Greek means an expectation or a trust or confidence. What is your hope considering your children? Considering your own heart and soul?
5. As a verb, *hope* in the Greek means to expect or anticipate. One form in the original language is to actively wait. What does that look like for you, as a woman, a mother?
6. Where does the psalmist put his hope (see Ps. 52:9; 131:3; 119:74; 147:110)? How does that fit your hope’s placement?
7. Mothers can feel embarrassed or ashamed or like failures. Describe such an instance from your journey. What happened for you in those moments? Read Psalm 25:3. How can you redirect your feelings and focus?
8. King David had plenty of reasons to feel hopeless. Psalm 71 recounts a bit of his agony. Read his decision in Psalm 71:14–16. (Keep reading. The rest of the chapter is a wonderful refocusing on David’s part.)
9. Read some of the functions of hope: Isaiah 40:31; Hebrews 6:19; 1 John 3:3. What are they? Where in your parenting can you apply them? How would you do that?
10. Read Ecclesiastes 9:4. How can you find hope today?
11. Close by reading Romans 12:12 and 15:13. Meditate on those throughout the coming week, and particularly during those inevitable moments when you feel hopeless.

Week 2

Rest and the Mother Heart

Chapters 7–12



To the Facilitator

Check in with one another. Who is tired? Who desires rest?

Rest

1. How often are you tired before it's actually bedtime? How often do you wake in the morning and not feel rested? What impact is the fatigue having on your heart (both physical and emotional)?
2. What sort of premium do you place upon sleep or rest? How are they different for you? How were you raised regarding work versus sleep versus mothering versus "idle hands are the Devil's tools"? Define rest without looking it up anywhere. What do you think it means?
3. Read Psalm 16:9. Here the Hebrew word for rest means to dwell, abide, live among, stay, make a home, or settle in. Sometimes rest escapes us because we do not live in a physically or emotionally safe place. When might this describe your situation? (If you are physically or emotionally in danger, please talk with someone today.)
4. Compare Psalm 16:9 with Jesus' words in John 15:1–10. *Remain* in John in Greek means to stay, live, dwell, or abide. What connections do you make to your current state and situation and what Jesus is inviting you into? What is the tie-in between the body and the heart and soul? How might you have rest in one area and not in the other?
5. Jeremiah 6:16 suggests another meaning for the word *rest*. Note the context of walking. How does God's word to Jeremiah (and us) relate rest and walking? Where have you experienced the fatigue of following the wrong path?
6. Read Psalm 3:5 and 4:8. What do you learn about sleep and lying down here?
7. In Psalm 127:2, who is granted sleep? Are you part of that group?
8. Read Matthew 11:28–30 and Mark 6:31. What burdens keep you tired? Where are you heavy laden? How can you follow Jesus' command? What happens when you do?
9. Read Deuteronomy 33:12; Psalm 46:10; 116:7; and Isaiah 30:15. Rest is used in different ways in each passage. Choose one of these verses to hold close to your heart this week. Why did you choose this verse? How does it speak to you? What will you do to apply the verse?

Week 3

Healing and the Mother Heart

Chapters 13–18



To the Facilitator

Check in with one another. How’s your heart feeling this week? What moments made your heart soar? Or sore? Answer this question without a lot of thought: What would you do if your kid needed medical help? What wouldn’t you do? Now answer this question without a lot of thought: Where do you need healing? Physical, emotional, mental, relational, etc.? And what would be a good plan given your answer?

Healing

1. This section covers multiple needs: moms with grown kids who have left home; moms whose children have died; moms who deal with other forms of grief, including the regret of not recognizing their children’s pain growing up. Which of these have you experienced?

2. The word for *healed* in Matthew 8:16 in Greek is *therapeuo*, meaning to serve, to give help, to take care of another, and also to cure. What English words do you see in the Greek word? What connection do you make to this list?

3. If Jesus was to serve you right now—which sounds haughty of us to imagine, right?—or to give help or take care of you, what might you ask him to do? Healing framed in this way cannot possibly be limited to New Testament times.

4. Exodus 15:26 uses the name for God, *Jehovah Rapha* in the Hebrew, meaning the God who heals, restores, or makes healthful. When have you experienced this attribute of God? Where would you like to? What do you or don’t you believe about this possibility?

5. The Hebrew word for *broken* (as in brokenhearted) means crushed, smashed, demolished, or shattered. The Scriptures tell us God “heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds” (Ps. 147:3) and he comes to heal the brokenhearted (Isa. 61:1). The word for *wound* means pain, sorrow, grief, or heartache. So if we were to insert all the meanings into Psalm 147:3, we would get: “God heals those whose hearts are crushed, smashed, demolished, and shattered, and binds up their pain, sorrow, grief, and heartache.” Does that sound like the God you know or want to know?

6. Talk about Ecclesiastes 3:1–4. What do you believe? When is the right time for each of those “activities”? Describe a time for them in your own life. How about scheduling time?

Week 4

Community and the Mother Heart

Chapters 19–24



To the Facilitator

Check in with one another. How is your mother journey feeling? How is it with your soul on this lifelong trip? How important is community to you? What people form your community? How do you create time for community?

Community

1. When have you been ready to jump ship in the mothering voyage? When has it been more than you bargained for?
2. What roles and situations in your life do you need support in? Do you have support? If not, where will you find it (see 1 Thess. 5:10–11)?
3. The story of Absalom, David, and Joab is found in 2 Samuel 17–19. Talk about David’s grief over his son’s death. Does his grief seem out of proportion? How about the soldiers’ reactions? Consider the community David had about him. What do you admire about them? About Joab in particular (see 19:1–8)? What do you take away from David’s response to his advisor?
4. Read Proverbs 27:6. When have you felt betrayed by a friend? How do you trust that person again, or do you? How do you know when to incorporate another’s words, and when to let them slide off your back? Do you take someone’s wounding as criticism? Why or why not? Does it lead you to shame? Why or why not?
5. Read Ecclesiastes 4:9–10. When have you experienced this? Longed for it and been disappointed? Who speaks words of encouragement into your life? For whom do you speak these words? Is there a balance in your relationships in terms of give and take?
6. Read Ephesians 5:19–20. This pretty much falls in line with a commandment instead of a suggestion. When do psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs work for you? Is music one of the ways you experience God’s presence? Do you give thanks to God for *everything* (v. 20)?
7. Consider closing the time by singing or reading together “The Servant Song” by Richard Gillard. You can change the word *brother* to *sister*. It’s a powerful promise we make to one another.

Week 5

Growth and the Mother Heart

Chapters 25–30



To the Facilitator

Check in with yourself. Take a deep breath and fill your lungs with some space here. How does that feel? Now check in with others in the group. How is their soul on this lifelong mother journey?

Growth

1. When do you feel as though you are barely hanging on? When's the last time you wanted to resign from mothering?
2. Quickly make a list of all your commitments. Everything you keep on your mental calendar that must be done by you. Now quickly make a list of your needs. Which of your commitments fulfill your needs? Do they overlap at all? How do you get your needs met? What stops you?
3. Read Proverbs 2:1–3, 5–6. What would setting your heart on a life of understanding look like for you? What would change?
4. Consider the anxious thoughts in Psalm 139:23–24. What are yours? When do you wait long enough for God to reveal them? And what is the connection between anxious thoughts and hurtful (or “offensive”) ways? Hurtful to whom? How do you wait for God's leading “in the way everlasting”? What is that way?
5. When do you say yes for the wrong reasons? Why? Talk about saying no as preventative medicine.
6. Slowly read Mark 8:1 aloud in *The Message* to your group and listen deeply. Wait with the text and the words and listen. What does God highlight? A word, a feeling, a sense, a need? Now wait a little longer and then ask, “What?” What do you want me to do with this, God? Share your word or sense with the group. Just the word, not an entire paragraph or storyline. Try this again three times in the group, sharing the word or sense after each listening time (it may change). Finally, share the what answer. You might carry this passage or word or answer with you throughout the day.

Week 6

Wonder and the Mother Heart

Chapters 31–36



To the Facilitator

Check in with one another. How's your heart? Where have you seen answers to prayer in this past week? How did reading and memorizing Mark 8:1 help you?

Wonder

1. Where have you sensed God's presence or comfort or encouragement or healing as a result of your journey with one another through *Heartbeat of a Mother*?

2. When have you really felt that God sees you as a wonderful creation, that you are part of God's "very good" in Genesis 1:31? Who in your life reminds you that you are a wonder? How can you create places where you know you are deeply loved?

3. Try making a list of places where you have seen God do something through you and your presence and gifts, something that impacted another person, something only you could do. When you feel less than a wonder, review this list. You make a difference in this world. Do not allow anyone to convince you otherwise.

4. Read Jude 1–2 in *The Message*. Note the verbs in this passage. What assurance accompanies each instruction? When do you believe this passage? Who helps you keep an open heart? Read Proverbs 4:23. How do you simultaneously keep an open heart and guard your heart? When do you need to guard your heart?

5. Consider the regrets you carry as a woman and as a mother. (Though mothering can be all-consuming, the two roles are not the same, so make a distinction between the two.) Now consider the places where God has met you, displaying his love.

6. Where do you experience God's wondrous love? Look at Luke 5:16; 6:12; and Mark 6:46. Assess your need for the consistent loving presence of God. How will you arrange for dates to build that relationship? Is there a love song you could choose to represent God's love for you? Where do you experience wonder?

7. Read Romans 5:1–5. Where are the wide-open spaces of God’s grace for you? For which parts of the journey do you want a refund? In which “gifts” listed in this passage do you currently find yourself? Discuss the possibility of God’s love being poured into your heart. How does that happen? Is it something you can control? Or is it already there? How does that increase?

8. Write out a prayer for your own heart and share it with your group. Read 1 Thessalonians 3:11–12. How could this become part of your prayer? As a group, read this passage aloud (in whatever translation you prefer) as a prayer for one another as you end this time together.