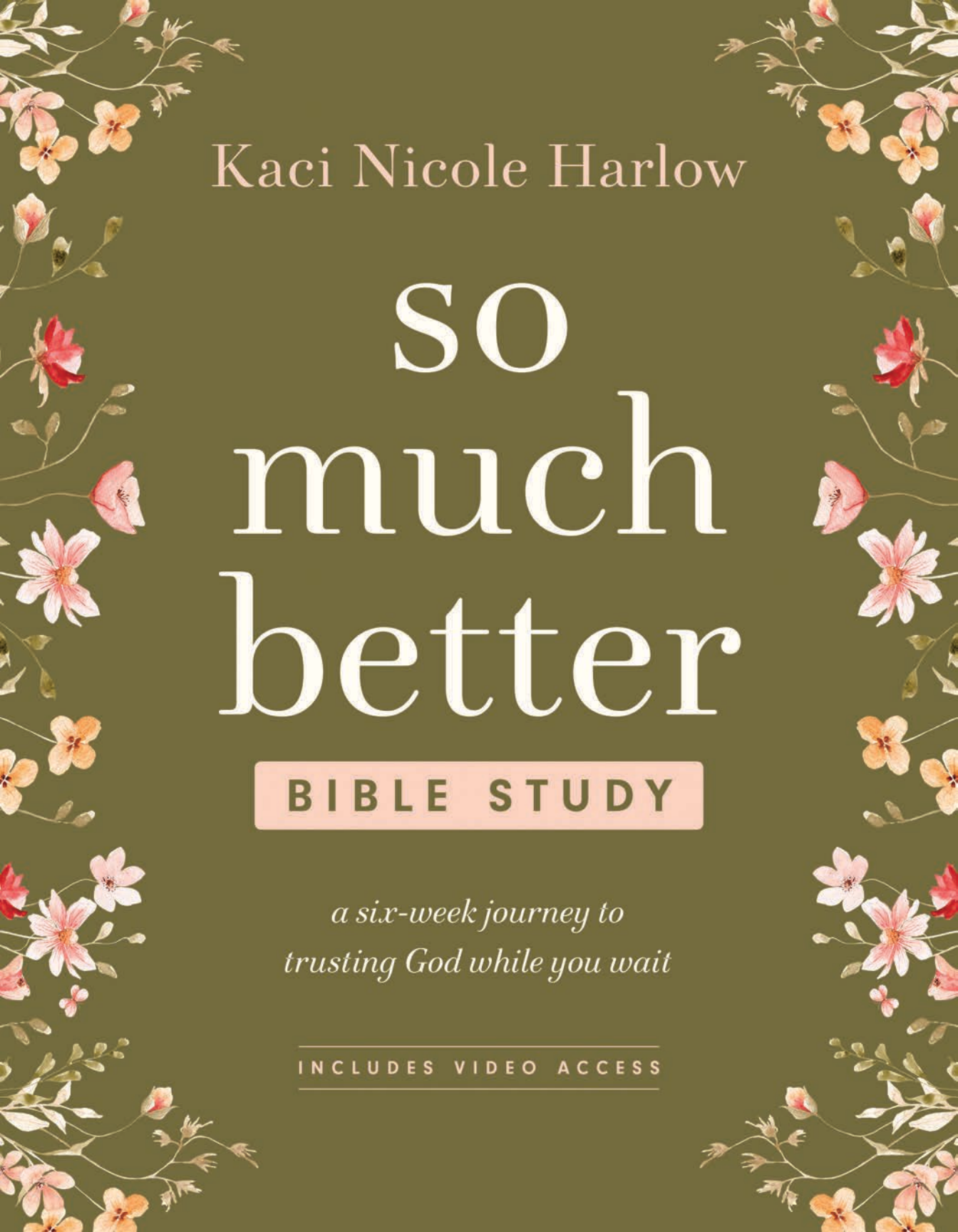




Kaci Nicole Harlow

so much better

BIBLE STUDY

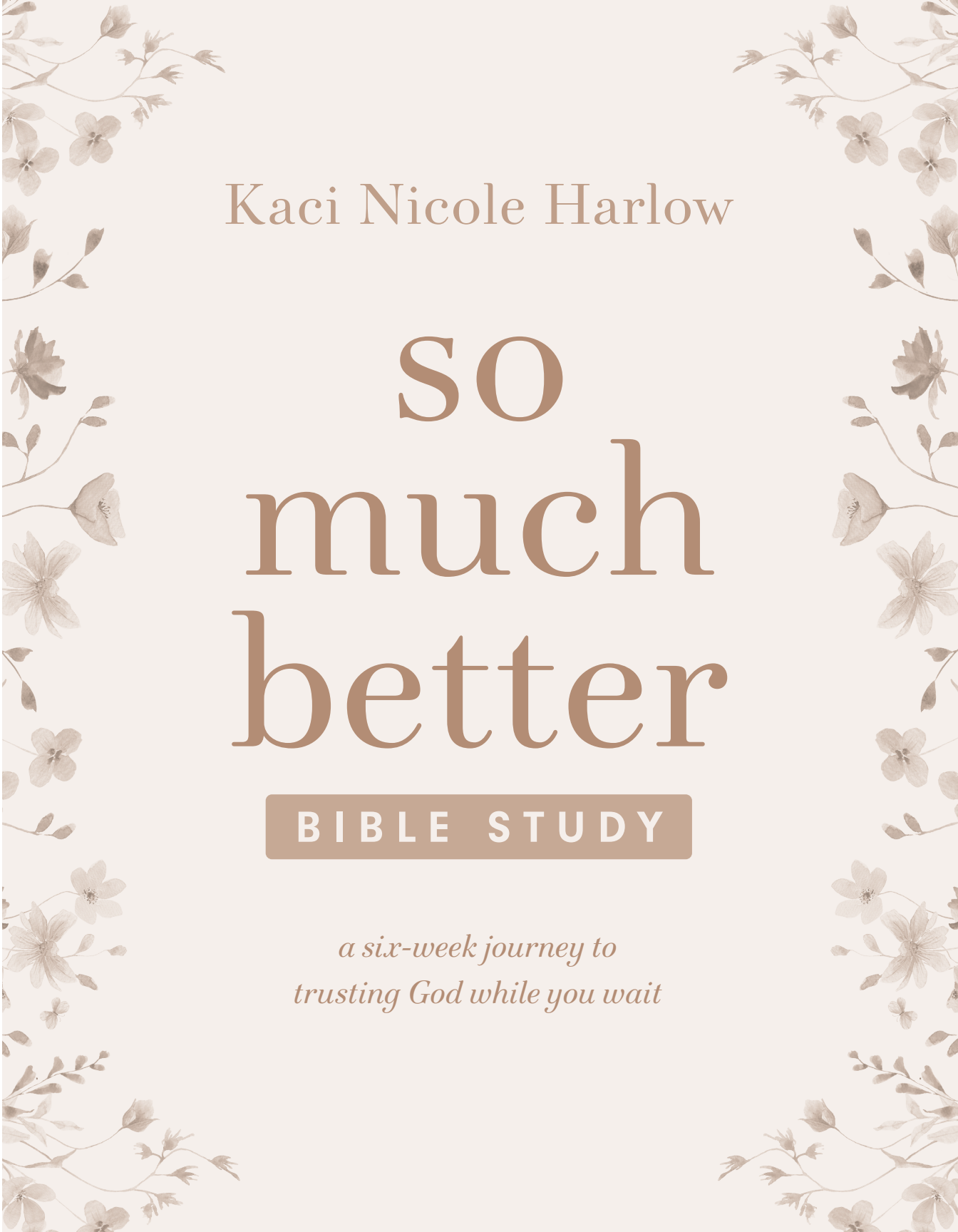
*a six-week journey to
trusting God while you wait*

INCLUDES VIDEO ACCESS

So Much Better Bible Study



A Tyndale nonfiction imprint

A delicate, light brown floral border with small flowers and leaves frames the entire cover.

Kaci Nicole Harlow

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So Much Better Bible Study: A Six-Week Journey to Trusting God While You Wait

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introduction

What is that thing for you? That thing you've been praying for and waiting on for months, years, maybe even decades? What is the circumstance that hasn't seemed to change, that makes you struggle to see how God is good to you or working in your life at all?

I don't know what that thing is for you, but I do know that each of us has (at least) one: Maybe it's marriage or motherhood, healing from a health condition or buying a home, getting out of debt or discovering God's purpose for your life. Maybe you're waiting for a prodigal child to return or a deployment to end, or maybe you want to know what's going to happen in an area of seemingly unending uncertainty.

When we're waiting on God and He seems silent, it can bring up a whole slew of questions. *I know God is good to others, but is He good to me? What am I supposed to do with these desires? Does God want me to let go of them or continue waiting? What is the purpose of this season God has me in? Why does it seem like God is closing door after door after door?*

Dear reader, I know the anguish of these heart questions, because I've asked them myself. I've wrestled through them. I asked and wrestled as I walked through most of my twenties being single, watching my best friends become brides and welcome baby after baby—all the while longing to be a wife and mama myself. And although

the things I'm waiting on now may be a little less raw, I've come to learn that all of life involves waiting of some kind. I can choose to stay focused on the thing I'm waiting for: certainty with career developments, having my baby sleep through the night, updating our home. Or I can shift my focus: What is God teaching me *through* this wait? And that's exactly what I've found in my seasons of waiting: It's often through the very circumstances we're wishing God would change that He's wanting to change *us*.

This isn't to say God doesn't care about our desires, because He does. And His purposes for each of our lives are oh-so-good. But God also cares deeply about who we are *becoming* while we wait. God often uses the things we long for in this life as a sort of leverage in the process of sanctification to draw us deeper into His heart and make us look more like Him.

The choice we face is how we will navigate our waiting. Will we become bitter and resentful in the waiting, perhaps hardening ourselves to God? Or will we accept this waiting season as an invitation to dig deeper into His heart and His Word?

how to use this study

God's Word is how we know God and grow to look more like Him. Maybe the Bible is familiar to you, or maybe this is kind of a new idea. Either way, think about how incredible this truth is: The God of the universe has given us a way to get to know Him! And He delights in revealing Himself to us so we don't have to stay stuck where we are.

I have a deep love for studying God's Word. I got a degree studying the Bible in college, and by God's grace, it's the heart of what I do for work too—on the fringe hours of my full-time and favorite job, which is being a mama. I have an online ministry where I share biblical truth and encouragement through YouTube videos and Instagram content. (Check out kacinicole.com if you want to find out more.)

My prayer is that Scripture will shape how I show up each day as a wife, a mama to littles, a friend, a daughter, and a small group leader. The reason I wrote this Bible study is because I believe God does transformational work in our lives through His Word. This study you're holding in your hands now is a companion to my book, *So Much Better*, in which I detail how God used my decade-long desire to be married to reveal things in my heart that were misaligned and to refine me more into His image. It includes my personal stories, hard-fought lessons, biblical truths, and the gold nuggets I gleaned along the way.

I encourage you to read *So Much Better* alongside this study as we journey together in getting to know God's heart more deeply and gaining confidence that He is working in significant ways, even in our waiting. I recommend either reading the main book first and following up with this study or working through the book and Bible study in tandem. I've included a note at the beginning of each session about which chapters of the book to read alongside that week's homework if you choose to go through both books together.

As you read the book, think of this study as a friend who will help you unpack the biblical truth and encouragement from each chapter and apply it to your own life. In other words, this is where we'll put it into practice—asking God what He wants us to do with what we've read and how He might be inviting us to change the way we think and live.

In this study, we'll unpack six of the specific ways God tends to work in our waiting: bringing healing to our hearts and lives, deepening our intimacy with Him, building our faith, humbling us, producing fruit in us, and transforming us more into His image. We'll dive deeper into some of the key biblical passages I touch on in *So Much Better*, allowing space for personal reflection and application.

Each session includes a supplemental video teaching that can be watched either individually or with a group at the start of the week. (You'll see that I've included a blank page at the beginning of each session where you can take notes from the video.) Next, there is individual homework to help you process the material throughout the week. Each week's homework includes the profile of a woman in waiting, a brief devotional, reflection questions, a prayer, and a Scripture passage to memorize. This section is intended to be flexible to fit your unique schedule or life stage. You can choose to do a little bit of the homework every day and tie it in with your personal devotional time, or you can dedicate one day a week to the homework and do it all in one sitting. Finally, small group lesson plans are included in the final section of this study if you choose to go through it with other people. Feel free to use what's helpful—if the first question leads to good heart conversations, don't feel like you need to cut the conversation short so you can get through all the questions. Let the Holy Spirit lead.

how to use this study

My prayer is that as we dive deeply into the Word of God, you would grow to love the God of the Word more deeply, you would come to see that His heart for you is good, and your eyes would be opened to see just how present and active He is in your life right now, even in the middle of the waiting—whether you’re waiting for something big or small. And I pray that your life would look and feel different—for the better—as a result.

Every trial along our journey is simply a tool in the hand of God, who cares about our sanctification. Not only so we can become brides or mothers or so we can thrive in the callings He has given us, but because we are the bride of Christ—and He is committed to making us blameless before Him on that day when we see Him face-to-face (see Ephesians 5:27).

What if God’s goodness isn’t only available to you on the other side of the waiting but right here in the middle of it? What if there’s something significant He wants to do in you right here and now—perhaps even more significant than whatever it is you’re waiting for?

As I’ve learned in my own journey of waiting, as well as on the pages of Scripture, that’s exactly His intent. He has good plans that aren’t just something we can live with or something we can make work. He has in mind something that’s better than we could imagine—so much better.

*Much love,
Kaci*



a note to the leader

God has specifically chosen *you* to lead this particular group of women in this exact season of life. He has a plan and a purpose for the things you'll learn together, the prayers you'll lift up together, and the life you'll walk through together over these next six weeks. He knows everything that will unfold and how He will work through it. God has called you to lead this group, and He has given you everything you need to see it through. "His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness" (2 Peter 1:3, NIV). How encouraging is that?

I know how nerve-racking and vulnerable it can feel to lead a small group. You worry: *Will it be awkward? Will people connect? Will they feel like they're getting something valuable out of this? Will they like me? Will they want to come back?*

Here's the good news, though: The results don't rest on you. The only measure of success is your obedience to God and your faithfulness in showing up each week. God is in control of the rest. The truth is, you might feel a little awkward at first. You might second-guess whether people will be glad they came. You might feel like you try to start conversations and they struggle to take off. But keep at it. In time, God will use your faithfulness to build something beautiful.

A few practical tips before you begin . . .

- Share a snack or a meal together each week. It doesn't have to be fancy or homemade—it can be store-bought and enjoyed on paper plates. You also don't need to be the one in charge of food each week. I've found that inviting others to participate in this way gives everyone a sense of ownership in the group, and it relieves some of the pressure on you as the leader. Even if it's simple, there's something about sharing food together that breaks down walls and invites more intimate fellowship. One of my favorite ways to transition from eating to the study portion is to have everyone share a high and low from the week. Sometimes people share things that are lighthearted, and it simply breaks the ice. Other times, you'll be surprised at the raw vulnerability this simple question invites. Either way, doing this gives insight into what each person is going through and offers each person an opportunity to be known and supported in those areas.
- Pray, pray, pray. On your own, pray that God would move powerfully through the group and reveal Himself to each person. Pray, as you begin your time together, that God would work in and through the conversations and that they would help each person to know Him more. And pray as you end your time together, inviting people to share their requests and recognizing that there is power in bearing one another's burdens and lifting them up to God.
- Last but certainly not least, remember (and ask God to help you remember) that there's no need to prove yourself. Take a moment and read that again. You don't have to be a Bible scholar, you don't need a ton of experience leading small groups, and you don't need the perfect home or really anything else to lead this study aside from what God has already given you fully: *Himself*. Simply offer who you are and what you have, and do your best to share honestly and ask good questions to cultivate conversation. But remember that God's Spirit dwells in you and that *He* is the one who will do the important heart work.

a note to the leader

I'm praying for you as you go through this study, that it would point you powerfully to the character of God, that it would help you know Him more, that you would draw deeper in community with those in your group, that you would be encouraged with rich biblical truths, and that you would know God is working in whatever you're walking through.

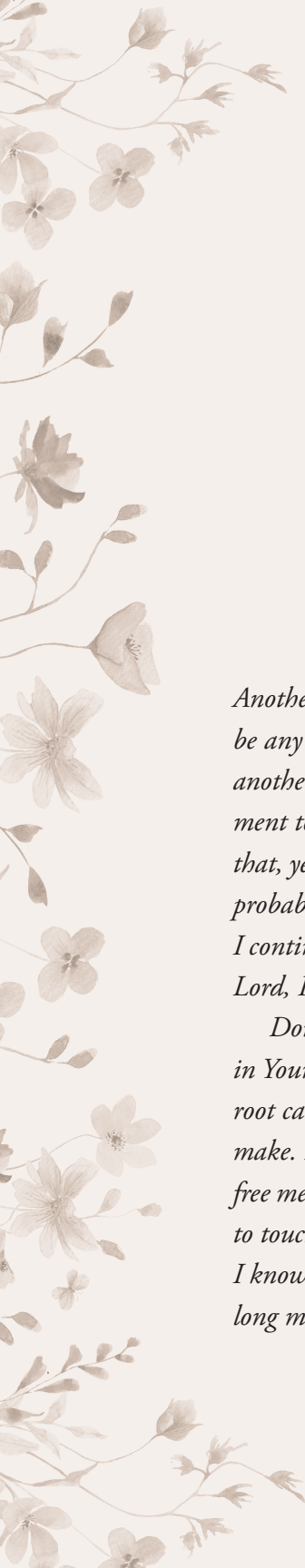
I'm cheering you on and praying you through! Now let's dig in.



VIDEO SESSION 1 NOTES

healing in the waiting

To access the video session, use the instructions in the front of your Bible study book.



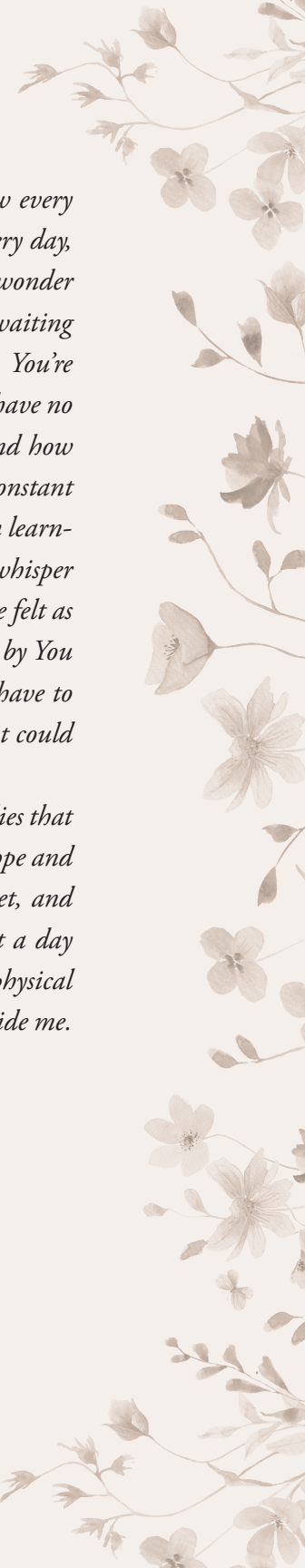
journal entry of a modern-day bleeding woman

Healing in the Waiting

Inspired by Mark 5:25-34

Another set of labs came back today: inconclusive. Why did I think it would be any different this time? It's always the same story: No clear answers, only another hypothesis to test, another food to cut from my diet, another supplement to add to my already overflowing weekly pillbox. And after I do all of that, yet again, I wait—to see if any of my efforts made a difference. But they probably won't. Not for long, anyway—that's how it always goes. Meanwhile, I continue to live day in and day out with this constant discomfort and pain. Lord, I'm Just. So. Tired.

Don't You hear my pleas? I'm asking for Your wisdom like You tell me to in Your Word. I'm begging You to direct me to a doctor who can uncover the root cause. I'm desperate for You to show me what lifestyle changes I need to make. I'll do anything. Lord, I'm asking You to do what only You can do: to free me from this ailment I've lived with for as long as I can remember. I long to touch the hem of Your garment, to be made instantly whole. I have faith. I know with everything in me that You can do it. But You're not. Why? How long must I endure?



Yet this I call to mind, and so I have hope: Your mercies are new every morning. I've lived this truth, even in the middle of my longing. Every day, You sustain me. When I wake and the pain screams at me and I wonder how I'll make it through another day, You carry me. Though I'm still waiting for physical healing, I sense You doing a deeper healing in my heart. You're uncovering things, like my bent toward self-sufficiency. Many days, I have no choice but to ask for help. You're teaching me how to let others in and how to humbly receive. You're teaching me how to rewrite the track of constant anxiety that plays in my mind. Instead of always fearing the worst, I'm learning that even in the worst, You are there with me. And with every whisper spoken over me in Your Word, with every tangible sense of comfort I've felt as I've cried out to You, You're showing me what it's like to be cared for by You as my loving Father. You're untangling lies with deep roots—that I have to handle it all on my own, that I have to be prepared for anything that could go wrong, and that it all depends on me. I know now it doesn't.

Lord, I'm seeking You. I'm pressing through the crowds of fear and lies that fight to cloud my mind to draw near to You, to get even a glimpse. I hope and I pray and I long for the day when You will turn, our eyes will meet, and You'll tell me, "Daughter, your faith has made you well." Oh, what a day that will be. But even as I wait for You to do an external work in my physical body, I thank You, Lord, for all the important work You are doing inside me.

SESSION 1

healing in the waiting



*To get the most out of this week's study,
read chapters 1–4 of So Much Better.*

Imagine you're on a hike when you notice there's a pebble in your shoe. It starts to irritate your heel, so you wiggle your foot around a bit, hoping that will solve the problem. You don't want to have to stop and interrupt your hike. But the more you press on, the more the pebble presses into *you*—and it starts to hurt. Finally, you have no choice. The pain is so intense that you're forced to sit down, take off your shoe, and remove the pebble. But when you do, you find something much more serious than a pebble. You see that, completely unrelated to the pebble, your foot is suffering from some sort of injury or infection. Suddenly, you're grateful for that annoying little pebble. No longer is it merely a nuisance that was slowing you down. You see that it alerted you to something much more urgent that needed to be addressed.

It's sort of a gross analogy, I'll admit. But I think this is a fitting picture of how God often works in our lives. We might wonder why He allows us to walk through the heartbreak or the job loss or the season of struggle that seems like it will never end. We view the waiting as a nuisance, and we wish we could wiggle it away so we

so much better Bible study

could continue on our way and get on to the good stuff. But oh, the goodness of our God. Yes, He cares about our journey. Yes, He will see us through to the end. But what we're waiting for isn't the only "good stuff." God cares about our desires, but He also cares about the deeper things that need to be healed in the here and now, and He sometimes uses the waiting to address them.

1. What currently feels like a pebble in your life—a nagging circumstance you wish God would remove?

2. Have you sat down to address the pebble and bring it before God? Or are you trying to push through and ignore it?

healing in the waiting

3. What area of your life that's in need of healing might God be revealing through the waiting? If you aren't sure, ask Him to show you!

Sometimes what needs healing is a hard thing that happened to us in our past that we may be unaware of—or maybe we *are* aware, but we've tried to press it down. Other times what's in need of healing is hurt or shame from our own sin or past mistakes. Regardless of the cause, God longs for our healing. It's easy to see our deep need for healing and feel a frantic pressure to be fully healed. But freedom doesn't rest on us. God asks for our participation, but He is our ultimate healer. The work He does in our lives takes time, but He won't stop until it's complete.

The mere fact that God has revealed an area of our hearts in need of healing is itself evidence that He is already at work and will see it through. Inevitably, this process involves God inviting us to step into the light. It can be scary to bring the parts of ourselves in need of healing before Him and others. But as we talk about in chapter 4 of *So Much Better*, healing doesn't come from hiding.

4. Read this verse slowly. What does God say is necessary in order to experience healing?

Confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed.

JAMES 5:16

A decorative floral border on the left side of the page, featuring delicate, light-colored flowers and leaves on thin, curving stems.

*God cares about
our desires, but
He also cares
about the deeper
things that need
to be healed in
the here and now.*

healing in the waiting

5. Now read this verse slowly. What does God say is necessary to experience forgiveness and cleansing?

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

1 JOHN 1:9

God brings things into the light not to expose us or shame us, but to heal and free us. Like I talk about in chapter 4, when I share the story of my childhood home being renovated, mold grows in the dark. The same is true of sin and shame. The more we try to hide those things from God, others, or even ourselves, the more they grow and compound. We can't simply pretend that sin or shame isn't there and hope it will go away on its own; we have to bring it into the light. We have to allow it to be exposed.

Being exposed is scary. Terrifying, even. It makes you feel naked and vulnerable. The enemy will whisper, *What will people think?* in an attempt to keep you hidden. But in the appropriate context, confession doesn't lead to shame—it actually *frees* us from shame. When we hide certain parts of our hearts or lives, we live in continual fear of being exposed, found out. But when we bring the hard things out of the dark and into the light, we can live in freedom, knowing we aren't defined by those things—we're defined by the blood of Christ, which washes us clean.

so much better Bible study

God promises in 1 John 1:9 that when we confess our sins, He will forgive us and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. It doesn't say that if we confess our sins, He *might* forgive us, if the offense wasn't too bad or if He's in a good mood or if we're sorry enough. It says He *will*. We don't have to guess how He'll react. He tells us plain and clear. Through confession, we can come before God in confidence, knowing we will receive His forgiveness and cleansing because of Jesus alone. How comforting is that?

6. Is there any sin in your life you have been attempting to minimize (*I don't do it that often*), defend (*I only do it because so-and-so did this*), or hide (*I'm afraid other people would view me differently if they found out*)? Write it down. Confess it to God in your heart.

7. Are there any hurts in your life God might be prompting you to talk to Him or another person about? Write them down. Bring them before God in prayer.

healing in the waiting

Now I encourage you to spend some time praying about who God might be leading you to confide in about these things. There is power in bringing them into the light in the context of confession to another person—but doing so requires discernment to know *who* to share with. Be thoughtful and prayerful about this decision. God might lead you to share with your small group, or He might lead you to share with someone you have established trust with. Pray about it, and know that God will bring the right person to mind.

Tip: If someone is willing to consistently talk to you about the sins and shortcomings of another person, they probably aren't the best person to confess yours to. You'll want to look for someone who isn't out for gossip but will be there to encourage you, hold you accountable, and point you to the truth of God's Word. You'll want to confess to someone who will help guide you away from sin, not toward it.

8. Who might God be leading you to practice confession with?

One of the keys to confessing our sins to God is recognizing the character of the One we're confessing to. If we fear He's a cruel master who delights in punishing us, we won't feel safe to be honest with Him. If we think He's nice but powerless, there's no point in confessing to Him. But if we believe He is both merciful and powerful to forgive us and free us of our sin—if we accept the true gospel—we'll be able to come before Him with confidence and raw honesty.

9. In your own words, how would you explain the gospel?

Even though I grew up in a Christian home and went to a Christian school and church, for a long time I struggled to be able to put the gospel clearly and concisely into words. But knowing how to do so is crucial, because the gospel gives us a framework to understand everything we go through in this life—even and especially the hard things and the prayers we’re waiting to be answered.

In chapter 3 of *So Much Better*, we talk about a four-part framework for understanding and articulating the gospel that has been incredibly helpful to me. Let’s review it here:

Creation: God created the heavens and the earth and everything in them. He created people to exist in perfect relationship with Himself, and He called all He created good. The earth was full of peace and human flourishing; everything was as it should be.

Turn to Genesis 1:31 and write the Scripture here:

healing in the waiting

Fall: Sin entered God's world through Satan. Adam and Eve bought into his deception that God was withholding good from them, and they rejected God's rule—and we followed in their footsteps. We rebel against God and go our own way, becoming God's enemies. The effects of sin come in the form of pain, suffering, destruction, and death—physical, relational, and spiritual.

Turn to Romans 3:23 and write the Scripture here:

Redemption: God sent Jesus, His one and only perfect Son, to die on the cross for our sins. Then God raised Him to life again so that whoever believes in Him will not die but will have everlasting life. Jesus' death and resurrection provide a way for us to be redeemed; this is the cornerstone of the gospel.

Turn to John 3:16 and write the Scripture here:

Restoration: God is taking this broken, fallen world and restoring it, ushering in His Kingdom and glory and making things right again. One day Jesus will return and defeat Satan once and for all. The Kingdom of God in its fullness will restore the fallenness of humanity, and those who have put their faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior will live with Him forever in perfect joy and peace.

Turn to Revelation 21:5 and write the Scripture here:

Understanding this framework—and particularly, where we are situated in it—is key. You and I are living between redemption and restoration, in what theologians sometimes call “the already but not yet.” Jesus has already defeated death, but we have not yet seen sin and its effects fully eradicated from our hearts and the world we live in. Jesus has already gone to the cross, but He has not yet returned to establish His eternal reign. This means that for those of us who are in Christ, God has already begun to free us from fears, heal us of hurts, strip us of sin, and make us look more like Him. But we haven’t yet experienced the completion of those things. We still wrestle with fear, wait for God to heal hurts, and need to be cleansed of our sin. Yet in Jesus, we have the assurance that we will one day experience the completion of His plan of restoration.

healing in the waiting

10. How does this gospel framework bring insight and perspective to the hard circumstance you wish God would remove from your life?

11. Look up Philippians 1:6 (ESV) and fill in the missing word. “I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to _____ at the day of Jesus Christ.”

Completion = the state of being finished.

God won't stop His work in you until it's complete.

12. How does this truth bring perspective and comfort to the areas of waiting in your life?

13. Romans 5:3-5 says, “Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.” **How do you see God using your waiting to develop your character and make you look more like Him? Spend some time thanking God for the hope you have in Him!**



Prayer

God, I acknowledge that this circumstance feels like a pebble in my shoe. I wish You would just remove it, but I understand that You may want to show me something through it. Reveal any areas of my heart that are in need of healing. Reveal any sin or lie that I need to bring before You. Show me who I should practice confession with. Thank You that You make all things new and that You will not abandon the work of Your hands. I can rest knowing You will bring the work You’re doing in my life to completion. Show me how You’re developing my character through the waiting. Make me look more like You. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Hide God's Word in Your Heart

Which key verse from this week's study stood out to you most? Highlight it and practice memorizing it this week.

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

1 JOHN 1:9

I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

PHILIPPIANS 1:6

We rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

ROMANS 5:3-5

Spend some time reflecting on what you learned in this study and what small step you can take toward applying it to your life this week.