

How to Use This Study

In years of teaching Bible studies, my favorite question I've ever been asked is, "Can I come to your study even if I don't have a Bible?" The answer? "Yes! And, by the way, I've got an extra Bible I'd love to give you." As you begin *What's She Doing Here?* I hope you will buy a Bible, dust off a Bible, or grab your Bible off your bedside table and join us as we learn about God's character and Jesus's "messy mamas." And since many women like to travel light or use a Bible app, the scripture passages for each chapter are also printed in the back.

What's She Doing Here? is written for individual or small group use. You can watch the videos supplied by CDM (www.pcacdm.org/messy) or your local church may want a "live" teacher while using this book to prompt study beforehand and discussion after the lectures. I've found that I learn better when I learn alongside someone else. A term we will discuss in the pages ahead is *covenant*. It is shorthand in the Bible for how God relates to His people. The *covenant community* is your spiritual family. One of the ways women grow in their faith is to spend time with other women who love God. Studying God's Word with other believers not only increases your wisdom for living, but also gives your relationship density as no one can do life alone. So, identify a nearby co-worker, a new girl at school, or another mom in the neighborhood and ask her if she'd like to meet once a week to discuss this book and the Bible passages included. Or gather a group of friends in your dorm or church. Consider intentionally including women who may not be invited to many Bible studies.

Hearing the Bible taught and then discussing implications of His Word for our lives is a great way to learn. If you are leading a small group discussion, congrats on being brave! Every excuse from "I don't know my Bible well enough" to "I don't have time to prepare" keeps smart, capable, and caring women from leading other women through the Bible.

If you are leading a church or community Bible study, suggestions for doing so are in the back of the book. These tips include praying to understand the passages, sharing how those scriptures impact your daily living, and creating accountability for applying God's Word to your season of life. Also included in the back of the book is a space to keep up with prayer requests, whether they are your own or requests from your group members.

If you are part of a group or if you are studying alone, find a space to pray, asking God's Spirit to help you understand what you are reading in His Word, the Bible. Then, read a chapter, answering the questions along the way. Consider keeping a journal as you have thoughts or questions for further study. If you want to memorize Scripture as part of this study, suggested passages are included as well as downloadable pages to print on the website (www.pcacdm.org/messy).

Each chapter of this study is broken into three sections: Her Story, God's Story, and Your Story. The study is written for women who want to open their Bibles yet cannot spend hours each week on a Bible study. Working through each chapter should take no longer than two hours per week, including the video lesson or podcast (www.pcacdm.org/messy). You may take just a few minutes each day to work through one section of a chapter, or she may take on all three sections in one sitting. It is up to you! Room is provided in each chapter for journaling thoughts, jotting down questions, or just writing out prayers as God's Word moves you. If your interest is piqued and you want to learn more about God's story, check out the resources for further study in the back of the book.

Her Story. Each woman we read about was a real person. She had to find something to wear every morning, and she crashed into bed at the end of her long day. God saw her story from start to finish (Ps. 139:16), and He guided her, protected her, provided for her, and accomplished His plans for her life (Jer. 1:5). He knew how many hairs she brushed everyday (Matt. 10:30).

God's Story. Although God is intimately involved in His daughters' lives, He is also weaving their stories into His Big story. He takes all the pearls of their stories and other Bible stories and strings them together into a beautiful necklace. Some call this pearl necklace His *covenant* with His people; the plot of His Big Story is to make us His special people (1 Peter 2:9). As a God who pursues, He is also a God who orchestrates a story of salvation for many. Nothing skews His plotline, not even our stories of failure and weakness (Isa. 14:27).

God used our study's five ordinary women to accomplish an extraordinary redemption of His creation and His people. And, throughout the chapters you will see what I like to call *Bible Lagniappe*. Growing up in Mississippi, I often heard the term *lagniappe*, "a little something extra." Look out for the *Bible Lagniappe* sprinkled throughout the study to connect the dots of each woman's story to the bigger story of the Bible.

Your Story. God continues to string pearls on His beautiful necklace of redemption. Your life is one of His pearls. From stay-at-home moms to CEOs, from bus drivers to Air Force pilots, women's stories vary, and so does the way God uses their gifts, experiences, and obedience to execute His plans for our world. You may feel like your story is mundane, the same laundry day after day. Perhaps you are lonely when you see couples dine out as you eat in a booth alone. You may feel isolated among friends based on your background or even the color of your skin. You may even want to push back on the term "messy." Whether you are insecure or proud about the way you are living your life, God's story supersedes yours (Isa. 55:8-9). While this truth can be jarring in a culture that emphasizes our individuality and independence, it can also bring comfort—there is meaning in and beyond the circumstances of our stories (Rom. 8:28).

I hope you enjoy knowing the five women of Matthew 1. More importantly, I want you to know their God as your own and to learn more about God's Big Story as you study theirs. And as you do, see how their God of justice, mercy, and love meets you in the personal details of life while saving an entire world. One messy story at a time.

Let's get started.

Here is an idea of what to do, when . . .

- Pray for wisdom to understand God's Word you will be reading.
- Read a chapter of *What's She Doing Here?* and work through the questions. In the margins, jot down questions or new truths you may want to bring up to your small group.
- Watch the video or listen to the podcast (www.pcacdm.org/messy), whether individually or as a group.
- Attend your small group discussion (or flip through those questions on your own). Practice memory work if that is a personal or group goal.
- Close in individual prayer or share prayer requests with your group. Pray for those needs between small group meetings.

Beyond the Study

Covenant Community. Making friends through Bible study can present further opportunities for accountability and encouragement. Consider ways to build relationships with the women in your group outside your regular meetings.

#HerVoice. Depending on how much time you have for small group discussion, take turns asking individual women to come prepared to share a five-minute story from their lives and how it applies to what you are learning in this study. Or if that is too scary, consider asking a woman to come prepared to answer the ice breaker question that kicks off the group's discussion that day.

Be on the lookout. As leaders we must always be looking for the next woman to replace us. As you listen to discussion, be sensitive to those who exhibit potential to lead the next group, perhaps to be a teacher herself, or to organize a conference or mercy ministry for your church. I would never have started teaching if not for my teacher giving me a fifteen-minute slot to "practice teach" at my Bible study and her words of *well-done* afterwards.

End Together. Add a closing week to your Bible study schedule for all the groups to meet together to share ways this study impacted their view of other women, themselves, or God.

Throw a party! Every good thing has to end, but you can also end in a celebratory way. God's people should throw the best parties because our God made all good things. This is a great time to include women who are good at organizing events or are gifted in hospitality or who know how to set a festive table. Celebrate what you've learned as a group and the new women you have met during this season.

Think Outside the Box. This study does not have to stick to the schedule given in the table of contents. Go to our webpage (www.pcacdm.org/messy) for helpful tools and a schedule template to plan a study tailor-made to your women's schedules and needs. Be creative! Find a group of women and adapt the study schedule to work best with theirs. Perhaps your group cannot meet weekly, so you take a chapter each month and stretch it over the fall or spring. Consider asking an older woman and a friend to open their homes (and maybe an apartment complex's pool) and co-lead a group of college girls for a summer study. Or, maybe you just include this *What's SHE Doing Here?* as a book-of-the-month reading for your neighborhood book club. For women who cannot make it to a group for various reasons, offer a virtual study including options for ZOOM small groups. Check out www.pcacdm.org/messy for online resources.

Take down barriers. Ask your church to fund childcare if it is a moms' group. Consider meeting at a restaurant near your office complex so women can conveniently stop by for Bible study *and* dinner on the way home from work. If your group loves to exercise, plan a post-walk Bible study meeting in your sweatiest clothes, water bottles in tow. You can even discuss the questions as you walk!

Lesson Title	Read Chapter	Primary Bible Passages	Memory Work
The Not So Fabulous Five	1	Matt. 1:1-17 Phil. 2:6-7	2 Cor. 5:17
God's Story	2	Gen. 1-3 Rev. 21	Eph. 2:8-9
The Desperate Daughter-in-Law	3	Gen. 38	Psalm 20:7
The Career Prostitute	4	Joshua 2	John 14:6
The Ultimate Outsider	5	The Book of Ruth	Psalm 91:14
From Outsider to Ultimate Insider	6	The Book of Ruth	Psalm 62:11-12a
The Queen of Messy	7	2 Sam. 11 & 12	Psalm 51:10
The Unwed Teenage Mother	8	Luke 1:1-38	Proverbs 3:5
<i>Magnificat!</i>	9	Luke 1:46-55	Rom. 8:31-32