



Small Group Study Outline and Questions

Book: *Bittersweet: Faith Lost and Found, and the DNA Test that Brought a Baby Back to Life*
By: Christina Marie Hales and Catherine Anne Lewis (with Latasha Colander Clark)

Christi and Cat would like to thank you for selecting our book for your Small Group Study! We hope that Christi's story has impacted you in some way, and that you found takeaways to apply to your own life for healing, forgiveness and growth.

Small Group Reading Schedule

WEEK #1

Welcome Meeting. *HOST/LEADER: Distribute or order books at this meeting so everyone will be ready to read beforehand, and then discuss Week #2 chapters/questions at the next meeting. Welcome your people to your group and share this pdf with them. Go over housekeeping (start and end times, what to expect, bathrooms, drinks/snacks, parking, etc.). Ideas for your time together include: ice breakers, games and personal introductions.*

WEEK #2

Foreword, Latasha Colander Clark

Introduction, *The Gift*, Catherine Anne Lewis

Prologue, *Stillborn*

Chapter 1: **The DNA Test,** Present Day

Chapter 2: **Messes Into Miracles,** Past

Chapter 3: **Cowgirl at the Burlesque,** Past

WEEK #3

Chapter 4: **Dead Ringer,** Present Day

Chapter 5: **When the Lights Dim,** Past

Chapter 6: **A Friend of Bill's,** Past

Chapter 7: **The Dead Baby,** Present Day

Chapter 8: **My Second Birthday,** Past

WEEK #4

Chapter 9: **Life Sentence**, Past
Chapter 10: **Hitting a Brick Wall**, Present Day
Chapter 11: **Bucket List**, Past
Chapter 12: **Telling A Secret**, Past

WEEK #5

Chapter 13: **Miracles**, Past
Chapter 14: **Throwing the Baby Out With the Bathwater**, Present Day
Chapter 15: **God's Left Turn**, Past
Chapter 16: **I'll Apologize Now**, Past

WEEK #6

Chapter 17: **The Fires of Hell**, Past
Chapter 18: **Dad and the Go-Go Dancer**, Present Day
Epilogue, *Two Years Later*
Afterword, Christina Marie Hales
Next Step

WEEK #7

Wrap Up Party/Celebration. Share your general thoughts on the entire book with the group in a casual setting. Feel free to use some of the **Book Club Questions** (available on the book's webpage www.catherineannelewis/bittersweet). Ideas for your time include: hold a themed potluck, meet at a restaurant or park, play games, take communion together, watch praise music videos, host a murder mystery party...etc.

NOTE: Create a **6- or 5-Week Study** by eliminating Weeks 1 or 7, or both.

First, Two Important Things:

1. Contact Form information. Yes, we know there are some errors and word omissions in the book. We didn't have a big budget or huge publishing house behind us. This book is a grass roots effort, and we're not even crowd-sourced. We did the best we could to send a 400+-page published book to market with support from some amazing people, but mostly using our own resources and determination with God's help. To alert us to errors, please use the **form on the book's webpage** www.catherineannelewis/bittersweet. We'll do our best to have those corrected in future printings.

2. Negative Reviews are 'death' to independent authors. If you enjoyed the book, please leave a POSITIVE review at the retailer from which you purchased our book (Amazon, Xulon Press, or Barnes & Noble, etc.). That helps us incredibly and we are grateful for you taking the time to do that. If you want to leave a negative review, please DO NOT. While bestselling authors can withstand some negative reviews, independent, self-published authors like us cannot. We DO realize that this book may not be everyone's cup of tea. *How can ANY book please everyone?* So, please keep that in mind. **We appreciate your support of independent authors!**

Thank you for reading those two important things. Now, on to the discussion...

Suggested Group Meeting Schedule

Welcome!*

Opening Prayer

Praise Song (optional) – Play a music video or sing together

Group Discussion

Closing Prayer, or Popcorn Prayer (chime in as led—chose a starter and a closer)

**HOST/LEADER: Always start and end on time. Usually 1.5 to 2 hours duration. Appoint a time-keeper if needed. This makes everyone feel that their time is valued as we all have busy lives. Make sure that everyone is heard, so if the ‘talkers’ are dominating the conversation, redirect and encourage the ‘quiet’ ones to participate (i.e., “That’s great, Lara, thanks for that, say, Eva, what do you think about this subject?”). Conversations that continue beyond end time should take place outside of the meeting location to respect the host/venue as well as other members. Decide if you want to serve snacks or meals and what types of drinks to offer, and if the host will be responsible or if the members will pitch in or take turns. At the very least water should be provided. Don’t worry about covering ALL the Discussion Questions, some groups will make it through them all, and some will only hit some highlights. Let the conversation flow organically, but do include some Scripture. May your time be blessed!*

Discussion Questions

WEEK #2: Testimony

1. Christi’s DNA journey took her on a path to discover family that she never knew she had. Have you experienced similar? Have you ever had a DNA test? Were there any surprises?
2. What did you learn about storytelling? Did you learn about the value of your own story?
3. What is the difference between someone’s ‘life story’ and a ‘testimony’?
4. Do you think God speaks through us to reach others? How does that impact both the speaker and listener?
5. **Read John 4:5-39** which recounts the story of Jesus and woman at the well. Why do you think that the woman shared her experience with the townspeople who obviously scorned her because of her lifestyle? (She was at the well at an unpopular time of day; when others were not around.) Why do you think her testimony held merit for them? What does this tell you about your own testimony to what God has done in your life? If you’re new to the faith or just trying to figure out this ‘Christianity thing,’ what questions do you have about why Christians share their faith with others? (See 1 Peter 3:15-16; Matthew 4:19-20; and, Mark 16:15-16.)
6. What childhood memories popped up while reading about Christi’s? Did you have some similar or different experiences?
7. Christi has some wardrobe issues in France. Have you ever experienced embarrassment due to your choice of clothes?

NOTE:

This week and every week, pray for your group to reunite as planned. Often when groups embark on new studies, difficulties and obstacles arise, or feelings of apathy or exhaustion spread among the members. **These are the ways the enemy thwarts your journey with God.** Be on the lookout for them so they won't be a surprise and you can overcome them. Pray for yourself and group members to ignore the enemy's schemes so that you can continue to learn and grow in your faith by meeting regularly.

Let us not give up the habit of meeting together, as some are doing. Instead, let us encourage one another all the more, since you see that the Day of the Lord is coming nearer.

~Hebrews 20:25

WEEK #3: Comfort

1. Have you ever had to move from your home and not wanted to leave? What happened?
2. Addiction is a heavy cross to bear. Have you had familiarity through a family member's or friend's addiction? Or, yourself? How has that impacted you? What happened and how did the various people around you handle it?
3. Grief is hard. How have you grieved in your life? What has that looked like for you? Have you ever lost anyone very close to you?
4. How does God show up with addiction and grief? How are those two burdens similar and different?
5. **Read 2 Corinthians 1:3-11** which is the beginning of Paul's second letter to the church in Corinth, Greece. He speaks of his troubles and how those trials made his group stop trusting in themselves and start trusting in God. Why is God our ultimate comforter?
6. Christi finds herself at work with a boss who doesn't understand the ramifications of Mitch's drinking. Have you ever been in a situation where no one around you understands the deeper meaning like you do? How did you handle it? How did it make you feel?
7. When we endure sufferings, how can we be assured that God will provide us comfort? (See Philippians 4:6; Hebrews 13:5; and, John 16:33.)

WEEK #4: Strength

1. Christi receives a bad diagnosis and decides to create a Bucket List to live life to the fullest before she's in a wheelchair. Have you or anyone close to you been on the receiving end of bad medical news? How did you react? Have you ever had experience with a Bucket List?
2. **Read Ephesians 6:10-17** which is tapping into the Lord's strength and putting on the armor of God. How does God give us His strength? What is our role to play in the battle against evil?
3. Have you had to be strong in the face of adversity? How did that change the way you looked at your problem? Did you need to rely on God?
4. Christi goes blind and thinks about Paul/Saul's blindness on the road to Damascus. Ironically, it was blindness with the intention of seeing more clearly. Those three

- days gave God time to work on Paul/Saul's heart and faith so that he would stop persecuting Christians and start preaching the Gospel. Have you had a similar experience where a horrible event caused you to 'see things more clearly'?
5. What revelations had God given you (now or at any time in your life) which offered you new insights into God?
 6. Christi plans a bike trip across Cuba. Have you ever planned a major trip before? What did you do to prepare? What feelings did you experience as you planned your trip?
 7. God's Word teaches us that earth is not our home. We are in the world but not of the world. (See John 17:14-16.) What does that mean to you? How does that knowledge affect how you plan your days...your life?

WEEK #5: Forgiveness

1. Christi was able to forgive her father, not for his sake but for hers. Have you ever had to forgive someone for a large infraction against you?
2. What is the difference between 'forgiveness' and 'absolution'? (Reference an online dictionary.)
3. **Read Matthew 18:21-35** about the ungrateful servant who had much forgiven of him, but failed to forgive a smaller debt owed to himself. Why is this story important in teaching us about forgiveness?
4. Why do you think God wants us to forgive? Why do you think He forgives us so readily? (See Psalm 103:12; Daniel 9:9; and, 1 John 1:9.)
5. Christi had a miraculous healing of her MS symptoms. Do you believe in miracles? Have you experienced a miracle? Have you prayed for a miracle that never materialized?
6. God's love for us transcends what He does for us. He is not the genie in the bottle to grant our wishes. His ways are not our ways, and we don't always get what we want. How does this make you feel?
7. Why do you think we need to trust God in all things?

This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us.

~1 John 5:14

WEEK #6: Faith

1. In the Afterword, Christi explains how the events in her life led back to God. Can you think of times in your life when you weren't aware of God, but He was there guiding you?
2. Christi says: *"If someone doesn't have the capacity for faith, they can't believe. You can't have faith out of an emergency. You can't pray when things are bad for God to fix everything, then when things calm down, you ignore God again. I know that when I'm willing to put my faith in God, in the good times and the bad times, that He'll come through. He may not work it out the way I want, but God will finish the task."*

- Have you had similar thoughts or experiences regarding God? How have you approached your faith and God in the past? Now?
3. Why is it hard to have faith? Do you struggle with faith?
 4. **Read Luke 16:19-31** about the rich man and Lazarus. What does this story tell you about faith? How does it impact how you understand the difference between 'faith' and 'proof'?
 5. Does our human pride interfere with our faith in God?
 6. What is the only way to God? (See John 3:16; John 14:6; and 1 Timothy 2:5.)
 7. Each of us has a testimony. Maybe yours is still being 'written,' maybe it's been spoken time and again. Maybe you have several. If you have a testimony and there is time, please share with the group.

Christi is grateful that her birth parents, Wilma Faye and Mike, chose to put her up for adoption. While abortion was not legal at the time, it was still an option for many women. Christi wants everyone to remember that life is precious, and if she had been aborted then she and her son Ian would not be here. Even with all the trials in her life, she would still choose life. If you've had an abortion and you ask God to forgive you, He will. Life is precious. God is good.

Please visit www.catherineannelewis.com for your own writing inspiration.

Thanks again for hosting our book for your Small Group Study!