



HEALING FROM SEXUAL
& RELATIONAL BROKENNESS



SEXUAL SANITY FOR WOMEN

LEADER'S GUIDE

SMALL GROUP RESOURCE // HARVEST USA

Leader's Guide

**SEXUAL SANITY
FOR WOMEN**

HEALING FROM SEXUAL
AND RELATIONAL BROKENNESS

Harvest USA

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LEADING A WOMEN'S SMALL GROUP

Before You Begin

Leading a group of sexual strugglers isn't for the faint of heart! But it *is* a place where you'll see God work in powerful ways. You don't need to be an expert in the area of relationships and sexuality, but you do need to have an awareness of your need for Christ and his Word. To assist you, these Leader's Notes complement and add to each session. In addition, group ministry can be very intense, so it's crucial that you have the necessary support around you.

The first thing you need to remember is: This group isn't primarily for *you*. God will encourage, teach, and bless you as a leader, but this group is not meant to be a place of *direct ministry* for you. Sometimes women have contacted Harvest USA, seeking to volunteer and/or lead groups, when the priority need was for gospel ministry to be applied to their own hearts in areas of relational and sexual integrity. Sometimes our desire to nurture and be a caregiver arises out of our own broken places. Prayerfully examine your heart and life to discern if you're ready to lead a group like this. This doesn't mean being in a place of perfection, free of struggle! It is, however, important that your walk with Christ be currently and consistently free of captivity to sexual sin and broken relational patterns. Seek the affirmation of wise and trusted spiritual leaders or mentors who know you well.

Second, you need to have accountability and resources outside the group, including spiritual support and oversight from others. A key way to ascertain your readiness for leadership is whether you already have all the necessary relationships and accountability in your life prior to beginning the group. Are you walking in the light with others? Is your life marked by sexual and relational integrity?

Attempting to lead a group before you're ready will be detrimental to your own soul and to the women who attend. Again, a leader can't use the group for her own personal healing. If you haven't begun to grow significantly in these areas, leadership may exacerbate your struggle. You may be tempted to hide behind serving and meeting the needs of others as a way of avoiding the Lord's dealing with your *own* heart. All of us who serve in ministry leadership need to ask ourselves these hard questions!

Getting Started

First, determine a venue for the group. Often, groups are held off church property to give group members a greater sense of confidentiality, which helps it to feel safe. If you decide to meet at church, be sure to take steps to preserve participants' anonymity. For example, don't broadly advertise the location/time/day of the group meeting; and meet in a room that will be private and out of the traffic flow of church activities.

Next, decide on the frequency of the group meetings. We have found that it's most effective for the group to meet weekly. If this isn't feasible, provide some additional avenue of support for group members between meetings, such as a check-in phone call or email.

Most sessions are structured to be covered in a 90-minute timeframe, but some may require extra time depending on the amount of group discussion. When noted, certain sessions are structured for 120 minutes (Sessions 8 and 9). As the leader you may decide to take two meetings to discuss one session. Follow your own judgment in this regard. While there are 20 sessions in this material, you may want to ask women to commit to a total of 24 meeting times, so as to factor in extra sessions if needed. Guide your group in extended times of prayer if certain sessions end early, or if discussion seems light. The Leader's Notes are meant for you to read prior to each session as you prepare. These are not meant to be read to the group; but as you lead the discussion, feel free to share information from the Leader's Notes which you think will help the women in understanding concepts more deeply.

How will women find out about your group? Some people will only feel comfortable attending a group where they'll be anonymous, and therefore they won't attend at their home church. Others will feel comfortable at their own church setting, especially if they know the leader is a "safe person." Either way,

consider allowing other local churches in your area to be aware of the group and to invite them to refer their members.

Along these lines, we recommend a *modified closed-group format*. This means that new members can't simply walk in off the street and join the group. This curriculum isn't built for a drop-in-when-you-want format. There needs to be an initial contact person who receives calls from interested women, and then meets with them prior to their joining the group. Ideally, this person is one of the group leaders. *Members should be ready to commit to attending the group for the twenty-session duration*. A commitment to attendance nurtures trust among group members, and builds a sense of safety and journeying together that's key when women are pressing through their sexual struggles.

As mentioned above, it's crucial to have necessary oversight. Your church's leadership needs to support you in this work and give you opportunities to discuss the challenges you're facing as you minister to your group—both in terms of your group and your own soul care. Consider asking a pastor or another leader in the church. This person doesn't need to know the names or details of the women in the group, but they do need to know *you* in your *leading of the group*.

Group Logistics

It's important that group members know their confidentiality is protected in the group, and *by the group*. Emphasize that women are free to share outside the group about what they're *individually* learning. However, anything regarding the group makeup, churches represented by the members, names, etc., are to be held in confidence. Ultimately, your women need to trust each other to be faithful to this commitment. Without confidentiality, your group's effectiveness will be weakened because women will not feel free to be truly honest in the group. However, let women know that this confidentiality can be broken if they demonstrate that they're a danger to themselves or others—for instance, if there's been a confession of sexual activity with minors.

Along these lines, it's very important that women are sensitive to the nature of one another's struggles. For instance, women dealing with same-sex attraction often feel ostracized in the church. It's imperative to make clear at the outset of the group that all sin is sin. No form of sexual sin is worse

than another; therefore, women need to be warned against making disparaging comments.

A way to guard the hearts and minds of the women in the group is to give guidelines for how they are to share about their sin struggles. Some women who have never shared about their sexual temptations and sin patterns can over-share, giving graphic details that leave images in the minds of other group members. Be ready to “throw a red flag” and interrupt someone if they’re going in that direction. It would be terrible to have women attend your group, seeking freedom from sexual sin, only to be spurred on in their unholy desires and sin as others fan unholy imaginations.

There may be women from other churches or theological backgrounds. Be careful to avoid thorny theological issues that bring division among Christians. Make it clear to your group that the focus is for women to let Christ deal with their hearts and that debating on theological issues may distract them from what is most important. That being said, there may be times when it’s necessary to step in and gently correct unbiblical statements. Pick your battles wisely.

Facing Challenges

As a leader, you must be willing to have difficult conversations with women in your group. As just mentioned, you may need to gently interrupt women from sharing too much graphic information or from taking the conversation in unhelpful theological directions. But it goes deeper. You must be willing to meet one-on-one with certain women concerning unhelpful and perhaps damaging behavior they’re showing in the group. Some continually take the conversation off-track in theological directions, or draw attention to their personal problems. If so, you need to help them see how they monopolize the group. Others will talk about pain and trials but not share honestly about their struggles with sin. In this case, you need to be willing to ask them direct questions about their behavior. Yet others may share prayer requests focused on the people who’ve sinned against them, relatives who are sick, or challenges at home with children, but may not want to walk in the light regarding their current temptations. You, sister, need to challenge them that this group is for them to discuss their battles with sexual sin and relational idols—*not* a general women’s Bible study or prayer group. As the leader, God will give you grace

and wisdom to guide the discussions each week so that the material is covered in a way that helps the women focus on Christ's work in their hearts and in their personal relational and sexual struggles.

Many people wrestling with sexual sin also have deeply broken ways of interacting with others and are usually blind to their own behavior. You must be willing to speak the truth in love, so they can begin breaking these patterns of behavior and addressing the deeper roots in their hearts.

It is also wise to safeguard women's interactions outside the group. At Harvest USA, we don't forbid members of our biblical support groups from getting together outside the group meeting, but they must commit to making group leaders aware of their contact and respect the leader's counsel if told that a relationship outside group would be unwise at this time. This is a way to help the women avoid temptations toward codependency that may arise from their interactions with one another. For women who are already relationally connected outside the group, emphasize the importance of keeping you (the leader) in the loop of how they are relating to one another.

One of the treasures of leading a group that is seeking to be intentional about facing sexual brokenness is that women will feel safe to share things perhaps kept secret for years. You may face the challenge of ministering to someone with past experience of initiating sexual contact with minors. Exercise wisdom about bringing women with this history into the group. Many of your women will have experience with being sexually abused, sometimes by other women. The presence of a perpetrator can make their time in group extremely painful and unproductive. Unless a woman has had effective counseling, demonstrates godly sorrow, and shows no signs of blame-shifting, be hesitant to admit her into the group. You also need to be aware that if sexual contact with a minor has been confessed to you, you are mandated by the government to report it. Even if it is many years prior, you should anonymously contact your state agency to discuss the circumstances. One exception: If someone confesses to viewing child or teenage pornography, you are not mandated to report it (unless they're actively engaged in the production of the pornography).

Understanding Your Role

Remember: It is not your job to fix or heal anybody. The surest way to burn out is to take God's responsibility on your shoulders and attempt to be a rescuer or

mini-messiah. Praise God—only *he* is the heart-healer, Savior, and Redeemer! You must be diligent in prayer and surrendered to the leading of the Spirit of God, who alone can transform lives. As he leads you, you'll grow in becoming a woman who listens well and is the fragrance of Christ to the women in the group. Some women will be easy to love; others will be a challenge. This is one of the key ways God wants to transform *you* in the midst of leading this group!

Be ready to ask questions about women's lives, both current and historical. Listen carefully to the beliefs they express about God, themselves, and life expectations. Be willing to enter their experience. Pray for a heart of compassion, especially as you interact with others whose struggles are different than your own. Pay particular attention to the places of pain, disappointment, rejection, fear, and anger. Be willing to model vulnerability by opening up about your own life story and current places of struggle. This study will help your women begin to see ways their worldview is out of line with Scripture. Come alongside and help them see this clearly, especially if their answers to the reflective questions are too superficial.

This study will guide you in helping women identify the idols and motivations behind their sexual sin. It will help them see their struggles and lives through a biblical lens that leads them to the gracious love and heart-changing power of Jesus. You can't force women to grow, engage the material at a heart level, or desire change. However, the Lord can. Therefore, rest in knowing that your ultimate role is to point women to him and to prepare faithfully each week to guide them through the sessions.

Finally, it is crucial that we model a dependent trust and repentance. Repentance is the process of turning to the Lord, away from our sin and idols. Your women will be encouraged and will grow as they see you model how to return to God and rest in the gospel in the face of current life challenges. We need to model the centrality of repentance in the Christian life. You can only do this if you're willing to be vulnerable and honest with the women in your group! Hopefully, these women will grow through your example as a follower of Jesus who rests in the love of God in the midst of life's ups and downs

Sister, God is calling you to a significant work. On your own, you are insufficient for these things, but God promises to give you more grace as you humble yourself and seek his face. Be prepared to see him do amazing things through you—as well as change your own heart through this process!

May God grant you wisdom, hope, and grace as you go through this material. Our prayer is that much glory will come to King Jesus as women are set free to love, serve, and worship him!

SESSION 1—GETTING STARTED

Welcome

This session will invite participants to share their fears about being in a group like this. So before you consider facilitating this discussion, let's consider a few questions for *you*: Are you fearful of what you'll hear? Of not knowing all the answers to the questions your women have? Of being overwhelmed by painful stories of sin committed against the women in your group? If your answer to any of these questions is "yes," know that Jesus offers everything you need to lead this group and to take care of the women in it. Scripture will be your anchor. Here's a suggested prayer for you to offer to God, as you begin this journey yourself:

Lord, this is my prayer—that my love for the women in this group would abound more and more in real knowledge and depth of insight, so that I'd be able to discern what is best. Thank you that all things were created by you and for you. I entrust this group to you and ask you to use my story of change and daily dependence upon you for your purposes. I pray that your glory would be revealed and that each woman in the group would be increasingly conformed to Jesus. Amen. (Based on Philippians 1:9; Colossians 1:16; Psalm 138:8; and Romans 8:28–29.)

You may want to open your session by thanking God for bringing each of your women to this group. Ask God to make his love and mercy known to everyone, including you. Ask for God's blessings on your women as they begin the journey he has in store for each of them.

Then, lead a brief time of welcoming everyone to the group. Begin by introducing yourself, then invite women to share a few general things about

themselves. Sessions 3 and 4 will include time for participants to share more personally and specifically about their struggles and why they're in the group. Therefore, guide the sharing time for this first meeting to stay on a more general level.

Note: In future sessions, this opening section will be entitled Review and Reflect. Because that's how you'll start each session—with a time of review and reflection on the homework from the previous week. But for now, take the time to begin to get to know the women in your group.

Before discussing the questions, review the group rules from the Introduction, on pages 2–3.

As you begin your discussion time, be sensitive to those who are more quiet and timid. Do not push for information, but be genuinely concerned and gentle. Keep in mind that each woman is probably at a different place on her spiritual journey, as well as in her battle against sin. You may wish to summarize this time by pointing out common themes that have been shared. Possible themes may include fear of the unknown, grief over lost relationships, fear of failure, or hope for true change and freedom.

Although your group is on a journey together, each woman is also on an individual faith walk with Christ. God will enable group members to encourage each other as they grow in trust and knowledge of one another, taking steps of faith in the coming weeks.

Read the Key Concept, and then read Proverbs 4:23 and Luke 6:43–45 aloud to the group. A biblical view explains that we live out of our hearts. It's crucial for us to learn that our behaviors, thoughts, patterns of relating, and desires are the results of deeper heart issues within each of us. Our lives—including our behaviors and thought patterns—change as our deeper issues are addressed through the lens of the gospel of Jesus Christ. This will be the key theme throughout this study.

Key Concept

3. There will likely be a variety of answers shared—and that's OK! At this point, don't seek to teach or analyze the answers. Rather, listen intently with the goal of getting a sense of what each woman views as motivating and perhaps even causing her sin. Expect mixed reactions. Realize that some women have experienced painful trauma in their lives (sexual, physical, or emotional abuse;

abandonment by parents and/or husbands; rejection by peers). Now is not the time to delve into these issues. If someone brings them up, gently explain that later sessions will focus on trauma and painful experiences, and that it would be better to discuss those issues when the group has had more time to grow together and become a safe place.

4. Listen and learn! The answers you receive from this question will help you begin to get a sense of how the women do or don't see connections between their struggles and what the Bible teaches.

5. The goal of discussing this first Key Concept is so women can begin to realize that one of the reasons their behaviors confuse them, or seem compulsive, is the deeper issues that drive these behaviors. While each of us has been impacted by a variety of influences, ultimately our behavior flows out of our hearts. Allow women to share about specific events. However, don't allow them to be too graphic. Guide them in sharing general descriptions. For example: Describe how a certain relationship was compulsive and obsessive, but don't include details that would describe sexual activities.

Read the section about sexual addictions aloud or have the group read silently.

6. Invite the women to share their responses. Affirm and encourage any evidences of humility, teachability, and desire for growth and change.

7. Affirm and comfort anyone who expresses fear or insecurity about the process of growth. Second Corinthians 1:3–4 and Philippians 1:6 might be helpful scriptures to share at this point.

8. In later sessions, the concept of addiction will be discussed in terms of habitual patterns of behavior and response. Scripture speaks of strongholds in our thinking and of besetting sins or entrenched patterns (2 Corinthians 10:3–5). Many women have never heard these topics framed through the lens of Scripture. Affirm anyone who expresses that this is a difficult concept to understand.

9. Often, the reason a person does or doesn't believe that Jesus loves sexual sinners is based on her own experience of Christians or the church. A woman hurt by Christians will have a hard time believing Jesus loves her and won't shame her for her sexual sin. This question also probes acceptance of the Bible. Acknowledge that sometimes the Bible has been used un-lovingly and in an un-biblical(!) way. Some women may have experienced the Bible being used as

a legalistic club, a tool of manipulation, or a means by which their womanhood was despised.

Making It Personal

Read this section together as a group. Invite women to share any thoughts or feelings they have after this first lesson. Encourage the group by accepting the difficulty of what they're about to do in addressing their sexual issues. Affirm their courage and explain the goal of digging deeper beneath the surface of behaviors using the Tree Model.

On Your Own

Explain to your group members that these are reflective questions and Scriptures for them to read and journal about during the week. Each session will begin with time to discuss the reflective questions and journaling that women have done as homework. Encourage your women to engage fully in the homework. Also assure them that they will not be obligated to share or read all of their answers.