

Awaken Your Soul

group leader's guide

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How to Use This Guide

This four-week discussion guide is ideal for small groups of six to twelve participants. If you are using this guide with a larger group of women, create multiple small groups of six to twelve that can consistently meet together for these discussions.

Each session includes:

- **Pair Up**—A chance for participants to reflect on their week's experiences with a partner.
- **Tune In**—A brief time of prayer focused on tuning in to God's presence.
- **Talk Through**—Small group discussion questions that open the week's themes.
- **Reflect On**—Small group Scripture exploration and discussion.
- **Live By**—A brief time of prayerful corporate Scripture contemplation.
- **Step Out**—A concluding exercise focused on life application.
- **Offer Up**—A closing prayer to wrap up your meeting.
- **Plan On**—Specifics about preparation for next week's meeting.



Created for intimacy

Before the meeting, encourage participants to journey through days 1–7 in *Awaken Your Soul*. Make sure each participant brings her copy of *Awaken Your Soul*, journal, and Bible to the meeting.

Pair Up

Direct participants to form pairs and discuss these questions:

- Which experience or activity from *Awaken Your Soul* days 1–7 stood out to you the most? Why?
- How have you been personally challenged, inspired, or changed in your spiritual journey over the last week? Explain.

Tune in

Gather together and lead the group in a brief time of prayer. Include a short time of silence in the prayer as participants intentionally set aside worries or distracting thoughts in order to focus on God’s presence.

Talk Through

As a small group, talk through these questions:

- Think of a time in your life when you felt close to God—a particular moment or experience. What was that moment like? Describe your experience. Where were you? What were you doing?
- How would you explain the idea of having a “relationship with God” to a new Christian? Or to a nonbeliever? (Direct participants to reflect on their experiences from day 4 “Ponder” and “Interact.”)

REFLECT ON

Invite a volunteer to read aloud **Psalm 63**.

- In what ways have you experienced yearning for God? Longing for something deeper, something more in life? (Prompt participants to draw upon insights from day 3 “Ponder” and to share thoughts they recorded from day 3 “Journal.”)
- Your longing points to your need for the relationship you were made for! What kind of relationship do you desire deep down to have with God? (Direct participants to draw upon their responses from day 7 “Journal.”)

Invite volunteers to select and read aloud one Scripture passage from each relationship picture listed in day 5 “Examine.”

- God relates to us in many different ways. Which of the relational pictures outlined in day 5 best fits the way you most naturally relate to God?
- Which of these relational pictures is one you desire to grow in? Is new to you? Is something you want to explore more? Why?
Optional: Invite participants to share their drawings from day 6 “Create.”
- What do you see as some of the key differences between relating to God as a “being” versus treating God like an idea?
- When have you been tempted to treat God like an idea rather than as a being? Why is that sometimes easier than truly relating to him as the Being he really is?

LIVE BY

Invite a volunteer to slowly and expressively read aloud **Psalm 63:1** for a brief time of prayerful Scripture meditation together.

Optional: Lead the group in praying this simple prayer aloud in response to Scripture.

Speak to us, Lord, through your Word.
Inspire us, Lord, with your truth.
Change us, Lord, through your Holy Spirit.
Amen.

STEP OUT

Prompt participants to form pairs and share with each other which specific relational picture (from days 5 and 6) they desire to grow in and explore more. Which really connects with her needs right now? Which does she feel God drawing her toward? Instruct pairs to commit to pray for each

other throughout the week, specifically asking that they would experience God's love and presence as they deepen their intimacy with him. (Suggest that pairs connect with each other at least once during the week [via phone, texting, e-mail, or social media] to encourage each other.)

OFFER UP

Close by using the day 6 "Internalize" prompts as a framework for a time of prayer. Spend about one minute for each relational picture, reading the Scripture passage aloud and then allowing time for participants to silently pray.

Plan On

Remind participants to journey through days 8–15 for next week's meeting. Make sure each participant brings her copy of *Awaken Your Soul*, journal, and Bible to the meeting



THE WORK OF PRAYER

Before the meeting, encourage participants to journey through days 8–15 in *Awaken Your Soul*. Make sure each participant brings her copy of *Awaken Your Soul*, journal, and Bible to the meeting.

Pair Up

Direct participants to form pairs and discuss these questions:

- Which experience or activity from *Awaken Your Soul* days 8–15 stood out to you the most? Why?
- How have you been personally challenged, inspired, or changed in your spiritual journey over the last week? Explain.

Tune In

Gather together and lead the group in a brief time of prayer. Include a short time of silence in the prayer as participants intentionally set aside worries or distracting thoughts in order to focus on God’s presence.

TALK THROUGH

As a small group, talk through these questions:

- Prayer sounds easy, but it can actually be pretty tough! What factors can make prayer a difficult spiritual practice? (Create a large, brainstormed list of prayer roadblocks together. Also encourage participants to draw upon their responses from day 8 “Journal.”)
- How would you describe your experience with prayer in just a few words? (Prompt participants to draw from their responses from day 9 “Journal.”)

REFLECT ON

Invite volunteers to read aloud **Matthew 6:5–15** and **7:7–12**.

- What strikes you as the most important ideas in Jesus’ teachings on prayer here? Why? (Direct participants to reflect on their notes from day 11 “Examine.”)
- Which of these ideas from Jesus do you find to be the most challenging for you personally? Why?

Invite volunteers to select and read aloud several of the passages describing Jesus’ own prayer life listed from day 12 “Examine.”

- What inspires you most about Jesus’ example? How would you describe Jesus’ prayer life in just a few words?
- Though we may think first of one particular approach to prayer, the Bible and church history show us that prayer can take many forms. Review the ideas from day 10 “Ponder.” Which of these forms of prayer is most natural to you? Explain.
- How do you desire to be more “real” with God in your prayer life? (Guide participants in reflecting on the ideas from day 13 “Ponder” and day 14 “Examine.”)
- How do you most desire for your attitude about prayer or your prayer habits to grow or change? What fresh vision do you have for the kind of prayer life you want to cultivate in your relationship with God?

LIVE BY

Invite a volunteer to slowly and expressively read aloud **Matthew 6:9–13** for a brief time of prayerful Scripture meditation together.

Optional: Lead the group in praying this simple prayer aloud in response to Scripture.

Speak to us, Lord, through your Word.
Inspire us, Lord, with your truth.
Change us, Lord, through your Holy Spirit.
Amen.

STEP OUT

As a group, take turns identifying and sharing one specific method of prayer (described in day 10 “Ponder”) that you’ll each try at least once this week. Encourage everyone to pick a prayer method that’s different from their norm and that may be a stretch for them, but also something that they feel positive and excited about trying.

Offer Up

Close by praying Dietrich Bonhoeffer's prayer (from day 14 "Pray") aloud and in unison.

Plan On

Remind participants to journey through days 16–23 for next week's meeting. Make sure each participant brings her copy of *Awaken Your Soul*, journal, and Bible to the meeting.



God is Present

Before the meeting, encourage participants to journey through days 16–23 in *Awaken Your Soul*. Make sure each participant brings her copy of *Awaken Your Soul*, journal, and Bible to the meeting.

Pair Up

Direct participants to form pairs and discuss these questions:

- Which experience or activity from *Awaken Your Soul* days 16–23 stood out to you the most? Why?
- How have you been personally challenged, inspired, or changed in your spiritual journey over the last week? Explain.

Tune In

Gather together and lead the group in a brief time of prayer. Include a short time of silence in the prayer as participants intentionally set aside worries or distracting thoughts in order to focus on God's presence.

Talk Through

As a small group, talk through these questions:

- Think through your regular routine over a typical week. When are times when you're normally aware—to some degree—that God is with you? When is it easiest or most natural for you to draw your soul's attention to God?
- On the other hand, when are times during your typical routine that you're least aware of God or God's presence with you? When is your attention the furthest from God?

REFLECT ON

Invite volunteers to read aloud **Psalm 139:1–12** and **Matthew 28:20**.

- Why is it meaningful to you that God is *always* present with you? What comfort, hope, or encouragement does this reality offer you? When you really grab onto this truth, how does it change your perspective of your daily life?
- What’s your reaction to the thoughts of Brother Lawrence and the idea of practicing the presence of God? (Direct participants to use day 16 “Ponder” in their discussion.)
- How do feelings factor into this? How can God use our feelings (such as feeling like he is close, feeling awe, feeling delight with beauty in the world, and so on) to help us grow in faith?
- How ought we respond when it feels like God is far away or absent? When have you had an experience of spiritual loneliness or abandonment—when it felt like God wasn’t there? How did you get through it? (Prompt participants to draw upon their ideas from day 22.)

Invite volunteers to read aloud the avenues through which we can hear from God, described in day 20 “Journal.”

- Which of these avenues is the main way you expect to hear from God?
- How do you desire to deepen and broaden your “listening” to him? Why? (Prompt participants to talk about their reflections from day 20 “Interact” and “Journal”.)

Invite a volunteer to read aloud **Psalm 46:10**.

- How can stillness, listening, and time in nature help you grow closer to God and hear from him?
- Do these ideas seem easy or hard to you? Why? Share your thoughts and experiences. (Direct participants to share their reflections from day 17 “Journal” and day 23 “Ponder” and “Journal.”)

Live By

Invite a volunteer to slowly and expressively read aloud **Psalm 139:7–12** for a brief time of prayerful Scripture meditation together.

Optional: Lead the group in praying this simple prayer aloud in response to Scripture.

Speak to us, Lord, through your Word.
Inspire us, Lord, with your truth.
Change us, Lord, through your Holy Spirit.
Amen.

STEP OUT

Challenge participants to put these ideas into practice by committing to spend at least thirty minutes this week connecting with God in the outdoors or through practicing stillness. (If needed, participants could do this in shorter spans of time, such as three different ten-minute segments.) Prompt participants to use the information and tips in “Spend Time Outdoors” and “Practice Stillness” in *Go Deeper* to guide their experiences.

OFFER UP

Close by leading the group in a call and response prayer (loosely based on Psalm 139). Go around the circle once or twice, one at a time stating a place where a person goes or an experience that a person has during her normal life using this wording: “When I _____ . . . “ After each statement, the group can respond in unison, “You are there.”

For example:

When I drive my daughter to preschool . . .

Group: You are there.

When I do my tasks at work . . .

Group: You are there.

When I lay in bed to go to sleep . . .

Group: You are there.

Plan On

Remind participants to journey through days 24–30 for next week’s meeting. Make sure each participant brings her copy of *Awaken Your Soul*, journal, and Bible to the meeting.



Soul Posture

Before the meeting, encourage participants to journey through days 24–30 in *Awaken Your Soul*. Make sure each participant brings her copy of *Awaken Your Soul*, journal, and Bible to the meeting.

Pair Up

Direct participants to form pairs and discuss these questions:

- Which experience or activity from *Awaken Your Soul* days 24–30 stood out to you the most? Why?
- How have you been personally challenged, inspired, or changed in your spiritual journey over the last week? Explain.

Tune In

Gather together and lead the group in a brief time of prayer. Include a short time of silence in the prayer as participants intentionally set aside worries or distracting thoughts in order to focus on God's presence.

Talk Through

As a small group, talk through these questions:

- What first comes to your mind when you hear the word *worship*? Why?
- Describe a meaningful worship experience for you. How do you most like to express your praise, thanks, or love for God? Through music? Silence? Writing? Art? Laughter? Something else? What's most natural or instinctive for you?

REFLECT ON

Invite volunteers to select and read aloud three to five of the Scripture passages listed in day 26 “Examine.”

- Based on these passages and your reading this week in *Awaken Your Soul*, how would you define *worship* in your own words? Why? How has your understanding of worship grown or changed over the years?
- When has your work or activity been a meaningful avenue of worship for you? How could the idea of practicing God’s presence factor into this notion of work as worship? (Prompt participants to draw from all exercises from day 27 to supplement your discussion.)
- How does time in worship affect you? Change your mind-set or perspective on life? Awaken your soul? (Direct participants to draw upon their written reflections from day 24 “Journal.”)

Invite a volunteer to read aloud **Psalm 42:1–2**.

- What is your reaction to Ole Hallesby’s claim that “Helplessness is the secret of prayer” (day 28 “Ponder”)? Why?
- In your own life, when have periods of helplessness—a deep awareness of your need for God—led you to draw closer to him? On the other hand, when have periods of comfortable self-reliance—losing sight of your need for God—coincided with lessened intimacy with God? Explain.
- In light of all you’ve read, studied, prayed through, and discussed, what do you sense God most wants you to focus on? How is God drawing you to him? How is he inviting you to deepen your relationship with him?

Live By

Invite a volunteer to slowly and expressively read aloud **Psalm 42:1–2** for a brief time of prayerful Scripture meditation together.

Optional: Lead the group in praying this simple prayer aloud in response to Scripture.

Speak to us, Lord, through your Word.
Inspire us, Lord, with your truth.
Change us, Lord, through your Holy Spirit.
Amen.

STEP OUT

Worship God together in a creative way (that doesn't involve music!). Use the text and ideas from day 29 "Create" to make a collage of worship images. Give each woman a single piece of paper and pass out colored markers and pens. Take a few minutes for each participant to express a commitment of worship, intimacy, or soul-repose on her paper. She can use words, doodles, symbols, sketches—whatever she wants. Remind participants that the goal isn't to impress others, but to express oneself to God.

Use tape to post all the papers to a wall like a quilt or mosaic. Give participants time to look together at all of their individual expressions of worship joining together in one singular expression to God.

OFFER UP

Close by worshiping God together through music. Sing "Holy, Holy, Holy" (day 25 "Worship") or another favorite hymn as your unified expression of praise.

Plan On

Encourage participants to extend their journey through *Awaken Your Soul* by committing to do the "God-Spy Journal" exercise in Go Deeper. (Or select a different Go Deeper exercise to do together as a group.) If you're able, meet up as a group after one month to share your reflections from the experience.