



The Peaceful Caregiver

LEADERS GUIDE

STUDY OVERVIEW

We are going to learn how we can have peace regardless of our circumstances. That happens when we remember who and Whose we are and why we are here. Then we are going to learn five actionable steps and scripture to help keep us on the path to peace.

Author's Notes

Thank you for stepping up to lead a group of caregivers in your community! As you may know, people who are caring for a loved one often end up overwhelmed, exhausted and isolated. Too often our caregiving duties have separated us from normal activities/routine—that includes time in God's Word and fellowship.

Getting caregivers connected, talking, sharing, even laughing, can break through the negative emotions and habits that form when we're alone with and afraid of suffering.

Leadership

There are many different leadership styles, and any of them can work with *The Peaceful Caregiver* study guide. A good leader is transparent, ready to share, ready to encourage, and committed to keeping things moving forward.

A simple approach is a book club format. The group is assigned a chapter a week and then you discuss it together.

Some leaders choose to open and close in prayer as well as make time to pray for member concerns.

Some leaders have members read the Scripture in the workbook out loud. Some go even further by doing additional Scripture research to add to the study.

Group Focus

Unlike a typical support group, the focus of *The Peaceful Caregiver* group is the emotional and spiritual transformation of the caregivers. These groups are not about the disease or disability but about the ever-present and powerful support of God to do the loving, caring, and healing through us. While each person will need to share their specific and unique situation, the leader's primary goal is to keep the group focused on what God's Word has to say about loving and caring for others.

Gathering the Group

The content is meant to apply to caregivers of all kinds, for instance parents of children with exceptional needs, adult children caring for parents with Alzheimer's or dementia, or a person caring for their spouse with cancer. The content works for men and women, young and old. The groups can be specific (only for moms of small children with special needs) or they can have broad reach (anyone who is a caregiver). The content and discussions are beneficial to all.

You may want to only open your group to people in your faith community, or you may choose to send an open invitation to the broader community through word of mouth or advertising.

There is no perfect size for the group, but for the first time, six to eight members is manageable.

The best time of day to offer a group is when caregivers have other means of support. That may be during the morning when day programs and respite care are available. Lunchtime is also good when people can bring their bagged lunch. Evenings tend to be more difficult due to supper, bath time, homework, and lack of availability of respite workers.

If you're having a hard time finding space at a suitable hour, you may want to consider hosting an online group through free and simple-to-use video chat services.

Setting

There are many different settings that work for this kind of small group. *The Peaceful Caregiver* groups have been held in private homes, church halls, community centers, in video chat rooms online, and even the chapel of a hospital! There is no right or wrong setting. However, there are things you can do to make the group more comfortable to share with each other.

- Always have a box of tissues on hand. People need to know it's okay to cry.
- In the first few sessions, have name tags for people to wear until names are familiar.
- Take a roster collecting email and phone numbers. If there is a reason the group session needs to be moved or canceled, you can easily communicate. Groups also tend to bond and want to contact each other. Ask members if they are okay sharing contact information among members.

First Session

The first session is meant to be an icebreaker. Ask each member to briefly share their name and the relationship and condition of the person they are caring for (i.e. my daughter with special needs, my husband with Alzheimer's, etc.).

It's important to have a group discussion about all the things that are keeping participants from peace. Knowing others are struggling with similar issues, thoughts, and feelings is bonding and provides immediate relief for those who thought they were the only ones struggling. This exercise alone may take the whole hour, but it's very important.

Length of the Course

There are nine chapters in *The Peaceful Caregiver*. However, that does not mean there have to be nine sessions. Usually, the course is offered as a ten-week commitment but allow your group to help you determine if they want to go faster or slower. If you're experiencing rich participation and bonding, you may want to vote on spending

more time on the study. As a matter of fact, most caregivers find it difficult for the group to end. Many do the study more than once. Some groups go on to find new material to discuss while staying together.

Advice

We're all on a journey, but the destination is different for each one of us. Only God knows the point of our struggles. Somehow, He's working it all together for good. The small group is a safe place where we can express and share and experience relief. It is a place of grace, mercy and understanding.

We cannot fix each other; only God can do that. There's great power in allowing what is to just be. When we allow—rather than try to fix, control, worry about, or change something—we leave room for God to work things out His perfect way: the way that's right for everyone involved.

A small group is a safe place to share and learn from others. To keep the time productive and fulfilling, here are a few simple guidelines that should be read at the beginning of each session.

Small Group Guidelines

- We will begin and end on time out of respect for each other.
- Everything that is shared in the group stays in the group unless a member has threatened to harm themselves or others.
- Everyone is free to share thoughts and feelings. However we will not talk over one another or engage in conversations in the group that exclude others. We will not attempt to fix each other (only God can do that), and we will respectfully allow time for others to share.

Small Group Format

- Begin your time with prayer to quiet the group and acknowledge God as your source of help and comfort.
- Guide members through each week's discussion topics from the workbook.
- Encourage members to share experiences and observations with the group. Take notes and write freely in this study guide.
- End each session with prayer, lifting the group's petitions to God as a sign of hope.

Author's Close

There are more than 40 million caregivers in the United States alone. Most of us are overwhelmed, exhausted, and isolated. Some caregivers even experience stress levels on par with post-traumatic stress disorder. Caring for someone with exceptional needs affects finances, relationships, faith, as well as emotional and personal health.

As a leader of a caregiver small group, you are indeed a missionary, taking God's Word into an overlooked and forgotten land. People are concerned with the ones who are sick, but those who are doing day-to-day caring are often forgotten. Please know that I am praying for you and your group members, that God will use you mightily to help the world remember the high honor of the calling to love and serve—the very calling of Jesus.

STUDY GUIDE

CHAPTER ONE: EXPLORING PEACE

Leader Tips:

Pray for all who need this study to find it.

Pray for open hearts and a sense of community and love as strangers come together seeking comfort.

Be kind to yourself as the leader. Only God can heal people. Your role is to welcome, encourage and guide participants to find the comfort and support they need in His Word and Presence.

The first session is meant to be an “ice breaker.” Ask each member to tell you (very briefly) their name and the relationship and condition of the person they care for (i.e. my daughter with special needs, my husband with Alzheimer’s, etc.).

IMPORTANT: People need to talk about their pain, and this first session is the time to do it, but the goal of *The Peaceful Caregiver* is a closer relationship with God. This is precious time when participants are allowing God to touch them in a deep and meaningful way. There is much material to cover and leaders should keep conversations in context with healing and spiritual growth. Allowing one or two people to dominate the sessions with their pain can ruin it for others who have come to heal.

Help participants to get honest about what is stealing their peace by offering some of the things, inside and outside of caregiving, that steal your peace. You can’t change what you are not aware of.

It’s important to allow them to make this assessment and see it on paper and hear the comments of other caregivers. Knowing they are not the only ones who have these feelings and acknowledging those feelings is the first step towards healing. This exercise alone may take the whole hour, but it is very important.

KEY BIBLE VERSES: John 14:27 on page 3. Emphasize the word “let,” reinforcing that peace is a choice.

KEY CONCEPTS: We’re going to learn how to have peace regardless of circumstances, because most things that steal our peace will probably not change, at least not to our complete satisfaction. We are the ones that have to change our perspective.

TAKE AWAY: You are not alone. The author of the study guide and the people in this group have loads of situations, emotions and responsibilities that steal their peace, too. It is “common to man.” The Truth is, God promises peace to His people. Next let’s learn how to recognize and dismantle the lies that keep us separated from His perfect peace.

CHAPTER TWO: FINDING OUR TRUE ID

Leader Tips:

Pray for bonding and trust within the group.

Pray for the Holy Spirit to initiate the conversations that He can work through.

KEY BIBLE VERSE: Romans 8:6

KEY CONCEPTS: (to challenge participants to live out what they are learning)

The key to success with this chapter is getting people to see that what they think has been greatly influenced by the world (media, culture, family, generational pain, even lies taught in church and school). There are lies that influence not only what we think of given situations, but what we think of other people who are not like us, and what we think about ourselves.

TAKE AWAY: We are here to do the work God created in advance for us to do, but to do it from our True Identity as HIS! Additional scripture to look up and read together to reinforce this concept:

- | | |
|---------------------|----------------------|
| ■ Ephesians 1:11-12 | ■ 1 Corinthians 7:17 |
| ■ 2 Corinthians 5:5 | ■ John 15:16 |
| ■ Esther 4:14 | ■ Romans 14:7-8 |

Scripture to read before closing prayer: Isaiah 26:3

CHAPTER THREE: LIFE IN THE SPIRIT

Leader Tips:

Pray for your participants to continue to be able to come to group. You will find that people will start running into all kinds of problems in getting to group – whether real or perceived. Most people make firm arrangements for the first few sessions, but Guilt and Resistance in their many forms start sabotaging participants' plans.

Your role is to encourage and show compassion. Never make them feel guilty or pressured. Remind them that commitment to this work can make a lifetime of difference but let the Lord handle the rest. Remind them they are always welcome no matter how many times they've missed.

At this point, ask the group if they are OK with exchanging contact information with each other and if so, send out a master list.

KEY BIBLE VERSE: Romans 12:2

KEY CONCEPT: Just like Romans 8:6 from the previous chapter, we have a choice between ego/flesh/the world and The Spirit. Most of us have conformed to the patterns of this world, but Jesus came to show us there is a different Way to overcome the world.

God does not rescue us FROM hard trials (Daniel in the lion's den, the Holy Smoke brothers in the furnace). He is inviting us to let Him walk us into and through the struggles of this world through the connection, protection and guidance of His Spirit. This is why Jesus said in John, 16:7 that it was good for Him to leave so the Holy Spirit could come. But too often, we find ourselves relying on our old patterns of thinking to try and carry us through.

Take Away: Letting Spirit guide is VERY difficult when we have let ego/flesh/the world determine how we think and act. It can even lead to a dark night of the soul as we are no longer conforming to the patterns of this world, but it is what Jesus came to show us as the Way to overcome, love and serve like He did. If we are living one way, but we were created to live another way, no wonder life can be so hard!

■ Philippians 3:3

■ Romans 13:14

■ James 4:4-6

■ John 6:63

Scripture to read before closing prayer: Romans 8:5-13

CHAPTER FOUR: PRACTICING PEACE – PART ONE

Leader Tips:

Notice this is Part One of the Five Steps on the Patch to Peace. This is where the rubber hits the road. If we don't put these concepts into practice, transformation will not occur and peace will seem out of reach.

KEY BIBLE VERSES: Luke 6:46-49

KEY CONCEPTS: You can't clean house without seeing the dirt. You have become aware of triggers. You may realize if you change your thoughts, you can change your life.

It is essential to peace to not react the way you have been to exterior triggers and old emotions. Through just a moment of stillness, honor God. Acknowledge that He is present and able to help you and over time that sacred pause will become your lifeline to peace.

TAKE AWAY: What if you could face each day, like the psalmist in Psalm 131:1-2. He is like a weaned child in his mother's arms. Safe, content, at peace. Circumstances would not bother you as much. Perhaps in this state, it would be much easier to perceive the new thing God is doing in your heart and in your relationships.

Scripture to read before closing prayer: Luke 11:28

CHAPTER FIVE: PRACTICING PEACE: PART TWO

Leader Tips:

It not only takes practice, but we must be willing to change- old thoughts, old patterns, old expectations. Like we discussed in Chapter One, it is very difficult to change, to think that it is even necessary. You may want to quickly review page 8.

KEY BIBLE VERSES: Ephesians 4:22-24

KEY CONCEPTS: Participants have been exposed to a lot of Truths from scripture that they may not have grasped before, but at this point, it's not just knowing about these Truths. Things only change when we are practicing them. In our daily lives.

TAKE AWAY: This is where we come to understand what it means to “die to self,” Luke 9:23. The old thoughts, opinions, judgements, etc. that have been shaping our very ideas of the world just might not be true. We need to die to that old self and let God make us new – be reborn.

- Matthew 10:39 – emptying
- John 5:30 – not praying for our will
- Luke 10: 38-42 – Mary is listening
- 1 Corinthians 2:12-13 – how to listen (by spirit)

Scripture to read before closing prayer: 1 Thessalonians 5:16-17

CHAPTER SIX: MAKING PEACE

Leader Tips:

After Reading the first two paragraphs together, ask participants if they are a peacekeeper or peacemaker and why. You might be a peacemaker, but it's not OK to stay there as peacekeeping is what is stealing your peace!

KEY BIBLE VERSES: 2 Timothy 3:17, Ephesians 3:12

KEY CONCEPTS: Peacemaking is allowing God to be at the center of everything. He controls the outcome. He carries the burden of responsibility. He is the only one who knows what needs to be done in every situation represented. (i.e. He knows why your mom is angry. He knows why it makes you cry. He knows why your brother won't help. He knows how to get the teacher to help your child instead of punish him/her.)

That is why peace with God is the essential. He is the answer. He IS our peace. (Ephesians 2:14) He is the wisdom that can walk us through any situation, but we have to believe and follow Him. (Jeremiah 7:22-26).

TAKE AWAY: We each have differing opinions about God and our relationship with Him, but the Truth of Who God is and Who you are in Him have been true since the beginning of time. We don't have anything to earn, any debt to pay, any guilt to carry. He has already forgiven us and there is no separation. We are free to receive all of His love and support. Read these scriptures in addition to the ones on pages 58 and 59. Notice the tenses that reveal there is nothing for you to do but receive!

■ Romans 5:8-11

■ Ephesians 2:4-5

Scripture to read before closing prayer: Psalm 145:3

CHAPTER SEVEN: PEACE WITH SELF

Leader Tips:

This content of this week opens the door to grace. Once we understand the grace that has been extended to us, we can begin to extend grace to ourselves and others. Allowing becomes easier.

Ask participants:

Why, would you guess, that God chose you to do this important and difficult work?

Have you noticed any, even the smallest amount, of change in you for the better? (i.e. more patience, more time listening for God, listening to the person you care for, more compassion, less stress about perfection, etc.)

KEY BIBLE VERSES: 1 Corinthians 1:26-29

KEY CONCEPTS: If God chooses the weak to shame the strong and the foolish to shame the wise, why did God choose you?

Until we receive God's love and forgiveness for ourselves, we won't be able to freely love and not condemn others.

TAKE AWAY: We keep trying to serve God and serve others from our own strength, but when we die to self and let the one who is already at peace with us take over, we get the results we are looking for. Make peace with yourself as the car (not the co-pilot) and let Him drive. Make peace with yourself as the glove (not the hand) and let God do this good work through you.

Scripture to read before closing prayer: 1 Corinthians 1:26-27 (again) then 2 Timothy 1:9

CHAPTER EIGHT: PEACE WITH OTHERS

Leader Tips:

Many denominations do not emphasize or explain the term, “the body of Christ,” so this idea may be new to some, but the figure on page 73 can be enlightening. When reading scripture throughout this lesson, direct participants who may be struggling to apply the concepts to the figure to help them make better sense.

- Colossians 1:17
- Ephesians 2:21-22
- Colossians 2:19

KEY BIBLE VERSES: 1 Corinthians 12:22-26

KEY CONCEPTS: If we have done this work and let it change our hearts, we can be exposed to the pain of others but not be offended or repulsed by it because we see it as a cry for love, not more fear. We recognize our own need for love, patience and understanding.

TAKE AWAY: Grasping this connection to each other, under the leadership of the mind of Christ, we can see how important it is to be at peace with and love others.

- | | |
|-------------------|---------------|
| ■ 1 John 3:11 | ■ John 13:35 |
| ■ Leviticus 19:18 | ■ Romans 15:7 |

Scripture to read before closing prayer: Philippians 2:3-4

CHAPTER NINE: PEACE WITH TIME AND TRANSITION

Leader Tips:

Be sensitive to the fact that not everyone in your group is comfortable with the topic of death. Try to keep the discussion on the hope of heaven and how it affects our day to day.

As you wrap up the study, leave time for reflection as well as discussion about what comes next. Some choose to do *The Heart of the Caregiver* again. Some have found other books and materials for consideration. No matter what, the most important thing is to choose something that keeps the group growing in Christ, not just discussion legal matters, meds, treatment options, etc.

KEY BIBLE VERSES: There is a lot of scripture to read in this chapter. Read ahead and find ones that you think are relevant to the situations in your group and pick those to be read out loud.

KEY CONCEPTS: We can have peace with things (time and transition) that we can't change.

TAKE AWAY: When we're ready to die, we are finally ready to live!

Scripture to read before closing prayer: Numbers 6:24-26