

HEALING WATERS

A Bible Study on Forgiveness,
Grace, and Second Chances



Based on The Inn at Shining Waters Series

With MELODY CARLSON

LEADER GUIDE
Lori Jones, Contributor

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A Bible Study on Forgiveness, Grace, and Second Chances
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Leader Guide
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Based on The Inn at Shining Waters Series

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INTRODUCTION

Everything You Need to Know About This Study

Healing Waters is an eight-week Bible study that invites you on a journey to healing, a journey in which God, the Lord who heals, walks with us and invites us to experience His love and mercy every step of the way. Together with the other women in your group, you will learn how to

- embrace grace and forgiveness for yourselves and for your relationships;
- restore broken relationships;
- live in life-giving community;
- allow the God of second chances to transform you and bless you with new beginnings.

As leader, you will be shepherding the women in your group on this journey. It will be a time of learning, sharing, and leaning in to the heart of God to make wonderful and life-changing discoveries about grace, forgiveness, trust, and hope.

A New Approach to Bible Study

This study is unique in that it uses Christian fiction as a backdrop to explore the sometimes challenging and often surprising journey to healing and wholeness. Just as Jesus used stories (parables) to teach important principles, sometimes fiction can inspire and change us as well. Through the characters and stories of The Inn at Shining Waters Series, you will consider the need for forgiveness and mercy in your own lives and discover the important role that second chances and new beginnings play in healing your relationships and your spirits. This refreshing approach of combining Bible study with narrative storytelling will not only enrich and enhance your study of God's Word but also help you to better understand and apply what you're learning in your own life as you relate to the characters and their experiences.

Everything you need to lead the study is provided in this leader guide and the DVD. Every group member will need a copy of the participant book. *Reading the novels is not required.* However, anyone who enjoys reading and wants to read the novels in tandem with the study (each is a quick read) will find that this enhances the overall experience.

Optional Reading Plan

Book 1: *River's Song* — Weeks 1-3
Book 2: *River's Call* — Weeks 4-5
Book 3: *River's End* — Weeks 6-7



This study is unique in that it uses Christian fiction as a backdrop to explore the sometimes challenging and often surprising journey to healing and wholeness.

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Whether you and the women in your group choose to read the novels or only the excerpts and character sketches provided in the participant book, over the next eight weeks you will come to know three generations of women (Anna, her daughter Lauren, and granddaughter Sarah—all descendants of the Siuslaw Indians) and the life challenges and healing journeys they experience over several decades of life. Each woman’s journey is connected in some way to the beautiful Siuslaw River, located along Oregon’s Pacific coast, which links to her heritage and serves as a place of healing. As you encounter their stories, you will be exploring the themes of healing, forgiveness, grace, relationships, community, transformation, new beginnings, and the goodness of God—all through a biblical framework. The foundational text for the study is Psalm 103, which is a beautiful passage of Scripture describing God’s love and provision for us and celebrating how only God can make us whole.

About the Participant Book

The participant book is divided into three sections, each corresponding to one of the three novels. A summary of each novel precedes the beginning of its section, along with several character sketches. This introductory material is titled “Before You Begin.” You will want to encourage participants to read this material before delving into the weekly readings in that section.

Each week begins with a Scripture for the week and an excerpt from the related novel, setting the stage for the five readings that follow. Each day’s reading, which may be completed in approximately 20-30 minutes, follows this format:

Read God’s Word	Focus Scripture for the day.
Reflect and Respond	Commentary on the focus Scripture and other selected Scriptures, personal application, and occasional excerpts from the novels—all offering insights related to the respective themes.
Talk to God	A prayer to use as is or to guide a personal time of prayer.
As You Go	Suggestion for the day—a question to ponder, Scripture to consider, or action to take.

Questions for reflection and response are sprinkled throughout the Reflect and Respond section. Participants will have the opportunity to share responses to some of these questions when you gather as a small group. As a writer, I’m well aware of the power of putting words to paper. It can be an effective step toward self-discovery and healing. Those who take the time to write responses in their books will be more prepared for the group session and will have a record of the insights they are gaining along the journey.

About This Leader Guide

This leader guide provides outlines for 8 group sessions, each structured for 60 minutes. If desired, you may extend the group sessions to 90 minutes by using the additional material provided at the end of each session outline (titled If You Have More Time).

Each session plan follows this format:

Getting Started (10 minutes)
A Few Minutes With Melody (8-10 minutes)
Let's Talk About It (10 minutes)
Diving In (25 minutes)
In Closing (5 minutes)
If You Have More Time (30 additional minutes)

Getting Started provides ideas and suggestions for opening your time together and getting the conversation flowing. After this opening time, you will watch **A Few Minutes With Melody**, a video interview providing background information and insights into the characters, stories, and themes of the novels as well as the weekly study themes. Then, **Let's Talk About It** gives participants the opportunity to respond to the video segment. Next comes **Diving In**, an interactive time of study and discussion focused on the week's readings in the participant book. Specific directions, comments, questions, and thoughts are provided to help you lead your group during this time. You may read the material aloud where indicated or paraphrase this material in your own words. Feel free to adapt all of the material in this section as you wish to make it your own and meet the needs of your particular group. Finally, **In Closing** presents an activity and/or prayer to conclude your time together. (Note: If you are extending the session to 90 minutes, you may choose from the additional discussion questions and activities provided in **If You Have More Time**, using them before In Closing.)

Tips for Shepherding Your Group

Leading a group involves responsibilities as well as great rewards. To help make your experience as fruitful and rewarding as possible, here are a few helpful tips:

- Have a clear beginning and ending time for your group. Starting and ending on time shows members that their time and efforts to attend are respected.
- Meet in a comfortable place that encourages good conversation. Consider having light snacks and drinks to create a welcoming atmosphere.
- Be prepared to answer discussion questions first if it seems that others are slow to do so, but keep in mind that you should not do all the talking. Be comfortable with awkward pauses or moments of silence. Encourage others when they do respond.
- Because of the personal nature of this study, the recommended group size is 6-12 women. If your group has more than 12, you might want to watch the video segment together and divide into small groups for discussing the study material.
- Be aware that some women in your group may have strong emotions and reactions to some of the material in this study. They may seek healing in deep places, and the hurts in their lives may be substantial. Demonstrate through your actions and words that it's okay if participants become emotional when discussing content. It's

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important that, as the leader, you foster a supportive environment for exploring the deep places where God is healing. Providing boxes of tissue can help to communicate a safe and open atmosphere in which openness and emotions are allowed.

I am honored to walk alongside you as we travel this road together. I pray that God blesses you and your group with His love, mercy, and grace each step of the way.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Melody Carlson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Melody" on the top line and the last name "Carlson" on the bottom line.



THEME 1

Healing Through
Forgiveness and Grace

River's Song

WEEK 1

THE JOURNEY TO HEALING



Getting Started (10 minutes)

- If your group is meeting together for the first time, have each person introduce herself by telling her name and something about herself (e.g., what she likes to do in her spare time; her favorite book, TV show, magazine; etc.). If your group has met previously, have each member share an area of her life in which God is challenging her right now.
- Take a few minutes to introduce the study. Explain that participants need to read and complete the readings for each week (found in the participant book) prior to the group session. Review the format of the group session (see introduction) and ask if there are any questions before starting.
- Open with prayer, asking God to bless your time together.

A Few Minutes With Melody (8-10 minutes)

Play the video for week 1.

Let's Talk About It (10 minutes)

- Melody talks about her inspiration for writing the Inn at Shining Waters, explaining that the story called to her like the river called to Anna. How does knowing about the matriarchal society of the Siuslaw Indians enrich your understanding of the novels?
- What is “calling” to you in your life? Like Anna, do you have any baggage, sadness, or disillusionment creating a need for healing or restoration?
- How does forgiveness play a role in the healing process?
- Melody explains how Anna struggles with accepting her Siuslaw Indian heritage, and how returning to her heritage opens the way for healing. Why do you think this is so? Are there aspects of your own family heritage you need to make peace with—to accept or embrace?
- According to Melody, how is the river a symbol of healing in the novels?
- What other points or insights from the video would you like to discuss with the group?

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Diving In (25 minutes)

Read Aloud

This week we have been studying healing—how God actively heals our hearts and equips us with everything we need on the journey to healing. As we'll find in the Inn at Shining Waters Series, God's healing comes to us in many forms and in God's own time, but it does come.

- Have someone read aloud the story of the woman at the well, found in John 4:5–30.

It was a normal day for this woman who came to Jacob's well to draw water. Scholars theorize that she was an outcast and came to draw water in the heat of the day, at noon, long after the other women had left. Maybe she wanted to avoid the nasty glances and not-so-hushed gossip from the other women in the village. She wanted to go about her day in peace, but this day she went to the well unaware that her life was about to change. A Jewish man walked up and sat down, and he spoke to her. This surprised her; Jews and Samaritans hated one another and actively went out of their way to avoid one another.

But Jesus didn't avoid her. Instead, he looked her in the eyes. There was no anger or sarcasm in his voice, only a knowing look and words that penetrated her soul. That day God surprised her—with truth and an invitation.

Discuss

- Have you ever been surprised by God? What happened, and what did that experience teach you about God?

Read Aloud

Jesus knew everything about the woman at the well. His question about her husband was an invitation to offer Him the hurts in her life.

- Have someone read aloud John 4:17–18.

This woman's situation may be nothing like ours, but it's not hard to see ourselves in her. Many of us have spoken half-truths and lies to ourselves and to others in order to cover up our pain. We've said, "It's no big deal. I'm over it. That was a long time ago." We are afraid to acknowledge how big and deep our hurts are for fear that we will be judged and rejected—that what we've done and what we've experienced are too much.

But it's not too much for God. Though we may be afraid to speak the truth to God, God already knows it; and God invites us to come just the same and drink of living water. God is not afraid of our pasts. God knows the depth of our sin and pain and wants us to run to Him for healing.

Like Anna in *River's Song*, we all experience loss in our lives at one time or another, but sometimes we don't know what to do with the strong emotions we feel. We may be afraid of our emotions, but God isn't. Throughout Scripture we see God comforting, reassuring, and healing the hearts and minds of those who love Him. When we are overwhelmed and confused, God is present and patient, diligently caring for us. God knows the extent of our pain and grief and how to lead us through it.

Discuss

- How did Anna experience loss prior to returning to her old family home on the river?
- How did Jesus challenge the woman at the well to admit the hurts and failures in her life?
- How does acknowledging pain and hurt bring those things out of the darkness and into the light, where they can be recognized and healed?
- What often holds us back from exposing our pain and hurt?

Thoughts: Fear and pride can hold us back from sharing our pain—fear that we will be rejected or snubbed or seen negatively in the eyes of others. Maybe we're afraid to let go of hurts and pains that have been a part of us for a long time; maybe we're afraid of who we might be without our hurt and pain to define us; maybe we're afraid of exposing ourselves to accountability and correction.

- Why do you think it's sometimes hard for us to trust God with our hurts—to offer them up and ask for healing?

Thoughts: We like to be in control (or at least think we're in control). We are afraid of how God will respond to us. We are afraid even to acknowledge our pain.

Read Aloud

- Have someone read aloud Mark 9:14-27.

This father, dismayed and desperate, came to Jesus for help. We don't know what the man had heard about Jesus, but he most certainly believed that Jesus was an important man who had some ability to heal. The man said to Jesus, "If you can do anything, help us!" (*THE MESSAGE*). If—a small word filled with doubt and uncertainty yet full of hope.

The father was struggling, full of doubt and fear, and Jesus called him to believe. Then the father said: "I believe. Help me with my doubts!" (*THE MESSAGE*). This

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simple prayer from a helpless sinner is an acknowledgment that everything comes from God—even faith itself—and that God is the only one who can conquer our doubts and fear and help us believe His promises.

God isn't afraid of our questions and fears. God is big enough to handle them all. In fact, God is so committed to our healing and salvation that He sent his Son, Jesus, to earth. Jesus said, "Healthy people don't need a doctor, but sick people do. Go and learn what this means: *I want mercy and not sacrifice. I didn't come to call righteous people, but sinners*" (Matthew 9:12-13).

Jesus came for you—in all of your sinful squalor, in all of your doubt and self-reliance, in all of your inability to trust and to receive. Jesus came to make you whole, and He is able to do just that.

Discuss

- Why is the father's statement—"I believe. Help me with my doubts!"—such a powerful one?

Thoughts: This statement acknowledges complete dependence on God, even for the gift of faith. The father had completely exhausted his own resources; he knew that he could not do anything to fix his son's situation. In his desperation, he admitted that he wanted to trust Jesus, but his own fear and doubt were getting in the way. His admission gave Jesus room to work.

- Have someone read aloud 2 Corinthians 12:9. How might trusting that "God's grace is enough for you" affect your daily life? How would this affect your view of yourself? Your relationships with others? Your work?

Read Aloud

As we walk along this journey to healing, we no doubt need help and support along the way. Just as Anna had Hazel and Babette to encourage and support her, we have each other for the journey ahead—as well as other supportive people in our lives. In the coming weeks, we will explore how God has equipped us for this journey and how God sends others to walk alongside us and to support us and enrich our lives. What we'll find on this journey is that God gives us exactly what we need, when we need it.

God listens to us. God understands our insecurities and fears and knows that sometimes we need others in our lives to help us along the way. In Colossians 3:15-16, the Apostle Paul says this:

Let the peace of Christ keep you in tune with each other, in step with each other. None of this going off and doing your own thing. And cultivate thankfulness. Let the Word of Christ—the Message—have the run of the house. Give it plenty of room in

your lives. Instruct and direct one another using good common sense. (THE MESSAGE)

Discuss

- Why do you think Paul instructed these early believers not to go off and do their own thing?
- Why is it important for us to walk in community with other believers?

Thoughts: God did not intend that we walk this journey on our own. God gives us other believers to encourage us, challenge us, keep us accountable, and remind us of the truth. God also wants us to enjoy one another and to reflect His love and kindness.

In Closing (5 minutes)

You will need: manilla envelope, slips of paper (one for each member), pens or pencils.

Ask each participant to spend a few minutes in silent prayer and to write on a slip of paper a situation or area in which she desires healing in her life. Have each individual fold her paper and write her name on the outside. Assure the group that these will not be read by anyone; rather, at the end of the study, you will return each piece of paper to its owner to see how God has responded to her need. When they are finished, allow individuals to share with the group as they are willing. Then have the women put their slips of paper into the manilla envelope and seal it.

As you hold the envelope, close in prayer, asking God to use this study to bring healing and a deeper knowledge of God to each and every woman. Pray that you will be encouraged and spurred on by one another, and that each woman will know she is not alone on this journey. Thank God for one another. Finally, ask God to hear the prayers of his daughters represented on the slips of paper you are holding.

Note: You will want to keep the sealed envelope with the slips of paper in a safe place until the final session; then return them to their owners in a closing activity.

If You Have More Time (30 additional minutes; use before In Closing)

Choose from the following:

- Invite participants to talk more about their expectations for this study. *Discuss:* What do you think it means to be healed? What do you hope to learn or gain from this study?

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