

# BECAUSE OF HOPE

# BOOK STUDY LEADER'S GUIDE

By Selah Ulmer

**Study Structure:** This book study is presented to be shared during a retreat, but it could easily be adapted in a typical book club fashion, with meetings weekly, every other week, or monthly. Choose a structure that works best for your group. If sharing over the course of a retreat, it works best if your group has read the entire book ahead of time. If you choose to adapt the study for a book club, assign a certain number of chapters for the group to read prior to each meeting. Be sure to have the book available for participants in advance so group members have plenty of time to prepare.

**Set the Stage:** Begin promoting the book study at least two months in advance. Participants need time to sign up for the event and read the book (for the retreat-based study) or begin reading the book (for a typical book club). Share about the study in your church services, post on social media, put up flyers around your church building, and tell as many people as you can. This book study is a great way to connect generations within your church body. Invite youth, young adults, middle-aged adults, and older adults to join. Ask them to invite their friends to attend as well. Word of mouth is a great way to get people involved. Have group members sign up by a certain date so you have enough time to get everyone a copy of the book.

**Note:** *A few of the stories in this book deal with heavy content that may be intense for younger teens. If you have youth who are interested in attending, make sure you give an overview of the book to their parents or guardians.*

Regardless of the structure you choose, make sure you think through the logistics of the event, including where and when you will host the study. Enlist volunteers to help you prepare snacks, set up for the event, and choose decorations (if doing a retreat structure). The needs of each group will vary, so reflect on the people in your group and let that guide your choices for food, location, and decorations.

You will need pieces of paper, pencils, and markers for each attendee for one of the closing activities.

**Leader Preparation:** Before your retreat or first meeting, make sure you read the book and are ready to lead the discussion. If doing a book club style, reflect and take notes on the assigned reading. If doing a retreat style, choose a specific set of stories you want to talk about, and take notes on them. Pray the Holy Spirit would help you know which stories you should discuss. Build the rest of the retreat to encourage your group. This could include breakout sessions, worship times, fellowship time, etc.

**Introductory Activity:** Stories of hope, redemption, and overcoming impossible odds are stories we all know and love. There is something amazing about a story that ends in victory when defeat seemed all but certain. Start your time together by having group members talk about their favorite stories of hope and redemption from movies, books, TV shows, etc. Ask them to share their favorite moment from these stories. Which moments make them feel flooded with excitement? Which moments make them want to stand up and cheer? Spend time discussing why stories of hope are so powerful.

**Scripture Verse:** Read Hebrews 10:23 to the group: "Let us hold unwaveringly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful." Ask the group members whether they have ever put their hope in something other than God—career, relationships, family, status, etc. Have one or two people share their answers. Remind your group that hoping in things of this world will always disappoint us, but hoping in God never will because He is faithful to His Word and to His people. When we hope in Christ, there will always be victory.

**Book Study:** Move into discussing the book. If doing a book club structure, discuss the assigned chapters. If doing a retreat structure, discuss the chapters you have selected. Give a brief overview of the stories, or ask a group member to do so. Then ask participants to reflect on the stories. Use the following discussion questions to guide your conversation:

Which story (stories) stuck out to you? What was it about these particular stories that stayed with you?

What was surprising to you in the stories?

What stories were inspiring to you?

Some of the topics in these stories are difficult to think about and can be hard to read. Did any of these stories make you uncomfortable or upset? Why do you think it is important that difficult stories are included in this book?

How does this book present hope? What does hope mean to the authors of these stories? Where do they place their hope?

God is amazing at surprising us and doing things we could never dream of happening. Which stories showed God's redemptive power in unexpected ways?

Which of the stories, if any, did you reread?

The stories in this book are all written by different authors, yet many of the same themes consistently appear. What similarities and themes did you see in these stories? What do these similarities tell us about God's work in our lives?

How do these stories inspire hope in your life?

**Closing Activities:** The stories in this book are more than just stories. They are testimonies of God's faithfulness, love, care, and power. They are testimonies of hope in Christ overcoming all things. Divide the group members into smaller groups of two to four people to reflect on their stories of hope. Instruct them to discuss times they have placed their hope in the Lord and seen Him move in mighty ways. Ask them to share where in their lives they currently need hope. Are they struggling or discouraged? Instruct the groups to spend time praying for one another.

Give each group member a piece of paper. On one side in pencil, instruct participants to write two words or phrases. The first word or phrase should describe one of the stories that stuck out to them. Instruct them to choose a word or phrase that represents the hopeless part of the story, before God stepped in. The second word or phrase should describe a difficult season in their lives that seemed hopeless. Then, over those phrases in marker, instruct them to write BECAUSE OF HOPE . . . Tell the group members to turn the paper over, and on the other side, write how God brought victory in both the story from the book and in their situations. Explain these papers are testimonies to God's faithfulness. Challenge them to put this paper somewhere they will see it often and be reminded to place their hope in Christ in any situation that comes their way.

End your time together in prayer.

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