



Sensible Shoes

LEADER'S GUIDE

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LEADER'S NOTES ON EACH SESSION

Week One

BEHIND-THE-SCENES VIEW

When I started writing my manuscript in 2008, I knew there would be four characters who would meet at a retreat center, but I knew nothing else about them. So I asked the Lord to help me see one thing that had happened to each woman when she was a little girl so I could understand where she was stuck or struggling as an adult. As I prayed, images and scenes emerged: Meg hunting for the bells, Hannah concealing her sorrow over her “fixed” teddy bear, Mara being picked last for a team, and Charissa not getting the highest score on a math test. (Charissa’s flashback would eventually be moved to a later chapter in the book.)

The cover of *Sensible Shoes* reflects the importance of childhood experiences in shaping and forming us. I gaze at the top photo and wonder, *Who is the little girl sitting on the suitcase? Where has she come from and where is she going? And is anyone traveling with her?*

As a contrast to the solitary journey of the child, the bottom photo represents the invitation to community and depicts hope as we travel together. None of the characters is physically portrayed by the women in the photo. (Readers are often confused about this and try to figure out who’s who.) But note how the woman on the far left lags a few steps behind, while the woman to her right extends her hand to urge her forward. Those women could be any of the characters at any stage of their journey. They could be us as well. Along the journey we will experience reluctance and hope—sometimes simultaneously!

EXPLORING THE LEADERSHIP LANDSCAPE

Because of her professional training and ministry experience, Hannah is likely to become the default leader of the group of four. She is also the one

most likely to hide. Her role of leadership is protective for her, part of a well-constructed defense mechanism that keeps her from revealing her own heart. Though Hannah is never one to dominate conversation in a group, she is skilled at offering just enough personal information to make others feel as if they've connected with her. She often deflects attention away from herself by inviting others to come out from hiding to reveal intimate details about their own lives. She has finely honed skills of manipulation.

- * Do you identify with Hannah in any of these ways? If so, these aren't issues to be resolved before you begin your leadership (or an opportunity for self-condemnation). Just be aware of any similar inner dynamics. If you don't already have a spiritual director, mentor, or trustworthy friend, ask God to lead you toward someone who can provide confidential support for you as you lead.
- * Prayerfully discern what your role is in the group. Are you a co-participant, freely sharing insights from your own prayerful engagement with the content? Or are you primarily a moderator, helping to keep the group on track, gently redirecting conversation when necessary, and encouraging members to participate? Or perhaps somewhere in the middle? Your role may evolve during the study as the group becomes more comfortable and grows in trust. But you might want to share honestly at the beginning what you expect your role to be.
- * Regardless of how deeply you will share from your own personal experience, remember that God invites you to a sacred journey as well. As you write your RSVP for the journey, focus on God's call to you as a leader. How are you feeling about his call? What are your hopes, fears, longings, or hesitations? Speak honestly with God about these things.

NAVIGATIONAL TIPS

- * As part of your welcome to the group, read the "Note from Sharon" on page 10 of the *Study Guide*. Return to this note frequently as a reminder, since this way of being together may be different than what people have experienced before. You might also mention that we don't have to use words

to communicate judgment, rejection, and condemnation. Remember: Charissa speaks fluent eyebrow and can quickly shame someone with facial expressions and body language.

- * If your group hasn't been together before, you might want to do an additional icebreaker after you ask each person to share a hope for the study (*Study Guide*, p. 10). Gather some props that represent the characters in chapter one: bell (Meg), pruning shears (Hannah), book (Charissa), baseball glove or other sports item (Mara). Have a brief conversation about what each of the items reveals about who the women are. This can provide a good segue into the Scripture reading and questions about the characters.
- * Let the characters do the heavy lifting for getting conversations started, especially in your first few sessions. When we can see the issues they're struggling with, we might more easily move into self-disclosure and discover solidarity. It's a gift when we hear someone else's story and realize, "You too? I thought I was the only one!"

Week Two

BEHIND-THE-SCENES VIEW

While none of the characters are based on real people, each of them received different parts of me. Meg received my sensitivity and some of my fears. Hannah received my overdeveloped sense of responsibility and the compulsion to define myself by my productivity and usefulness. Charissa received my perfectionism and some of my socially acceptable idols, including the pursuit of honor, esteem, and high achievement. And Mara received my childhood wound of always being the last one picked for an athletic team.

I often hear from readers who say, "I saw myself in each of the characters but especially in [fill in the blank.]" Throughout the study, remind your group members that seeing ourselves more clearly is meant to be a gift of grace in our lives, not a source of embarrassment or shame. We are all in process, and

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