



Two Steps Forward

STUDY GUIDE

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Taken from *Two Steps Forward Study Guide* by Sharon Garlough Brown.

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Reading for Week One: Prologue and Chapters One and Two

SPIRITUAL PRACTICE: BREATH PRAYER

Meg practices breath prayer as a way to center herself in God's presence and to be continually reminded that God is with her. This week practice matching a short prayer to your rhythm of breathing. You might choose a verse and divide it into an inhale-exhale pattern. For example: "Be still [inhale], and know that I am God [exhale]" (Psalm 46:10). Or choose a name for God from Scripture and then express a brief declaration of faith, petition, or desire. Examples: "Emmanuel [inhale], you are with me [exhale]." "Author of life [inhale], renew me in your love [exhale]."

Spend time listening for a prayer. How is God inviting you to name him? What does God invite you to declare about who he is or what you need? As you breathe, receive the very breath of God enlivening you. Practice being attentive to your breathing throughout the day so that prayer becomes habitual.

Week One: Day One



PROLOGUE (P. 9)

Scripture Meditation: Hebrews 10:24-25

Slowly read the text out loud a few times, listening for a word or phrase that catches your attention and invites you to linger with it in prayer (lectio divina). How does this particular word or phrase connect with your life? How does it comfort or confront you? Talk with God about your response to this word, your thoughts and feelings that arise. Then listen for God's invitations to you. Finish with a time of silence, resting in God's presence.

For Reflection and Journaling

1. Who are your trustworthy companions on the spiritual journey? Give God thanks for the gift of community and for the ways you have been shaped, encouraged, and challenged (even provoked) by others.
2. How is God inviting you to pray for your fellow travelers? Who do you need to release to God's care today?
3. If you have struggled to find or connect in community, offer your longings, fears, or hurts to God in prayer. Ask God to guide you toward someone who can walk with you.

Week One: Day Two



CHAPTER ONE: MEG AND CHARISSA (PP. 13-25)

Scripture Meditation: 1 Peter 5:7

Read the verse aloud a few times. Then match it with the palms down/palms up prayer (described in *Sensible Shoes*). With your palms down, release your cares and concerns to God. With your palms up, receive God's care and concern for you.

For Reflection and Journaling

1. What comes to mind when you think about the word *hope*? What helps you persevere in hope? As you move forward with this study, light a hope candle when you pray as a declaration of God's presence with you.
2. How do you feel about detours and surprises? Recall a significant detour in your own life. How did you navigate it? How did God reveal himself in the midst of it (or afterward)?
3. In what ways do you struggle to let go of control and trust God? What helps you practice this?

Week One: Day Three



CHAPTER ONE: *HANNAH AND MARA* (PP. 26-39)

Scripture Meditation: Romans 15:13

Read the verse slowly and prayerfully several times. Which word or phrase catches your attention and invites your pondering and response to God?

For Reflection and Journaling

1. Hannah has spent years being overly responsible, hiding behind her busyness, thriving on being needed, and finding her security and

significance in her work. Do you share anything in common with her? Speak to God about what you notice.

2. Do you regularly practice rest and play? If not, spend time identifying both the external and internal obstacles to practicing it. How might you incorporate celebration and rest into your rhythm of life?
3. Mara looks at the landscape of her life and wonders, “What can be born in a place like this?” Spend time considering the landscape of your own life. How are you welcoming Christ’s presence into chaos, trials, or mess?

Week One: Day Four



CHAPTER TWO: MEG (PP. 40-47 AND 53-60)

Scripture Meditation: Matthew 1:21-23

Read the verses aloud several times. What does it mean for you to call Jesus “Immanuel”? Spend time quietly receiving him as “God with us.” What is your prayer?

For Reflection and Journaling

1. Meg contemplates the ways God provides for her through the kindness of strangers—even a stranger she was ready to dismiss as strange. Bring to mind some situations in which God has demonstrated his care and provision for you (perhaps in unexpected ways). How has God shown that

he is “God with you”? How might remembering this affect the ways you trust that God is with you now?

2. Recall a time when you experienced profound disappointment. What were the circumstances? Are you able to see any ways God met you in the midst of them, demonstrating he was “God with you”?
3. Meg prays, “O come, O come, Emmanuel, and ransom me from my captivity.” In what ways are you captive? In what ways are you longing for freedom? Offer Emmanuel what you notice, and ask for his rescue.

Week One: Day Five



CHAPTER TWO: HANNAH (PP. 48-52)

Scripture Meditation: Isaiah 9:2-4

Read the verses slowly several times. Which word or phrase catches your attention and evokes your prayerful response?

For Reflection and Journaling

Use Hannah’s journal questions as your own today.

1. In what ways is the light coming and shining into places where you have dwelt in darkness? How do you respond to the light and what it reveals?

2. What are the yokes that God is longing to break in your life? What burdens do you carry on your shoulders that God is trying to remove and carry for you?
3. How will you practice releasing these burdens and receiving God?

Week One: Day Six



REVIEW

1. In the opening chapters of *Two Steps Forward*, we catch a glimpse of some of the ongoing battles for the characters: fear, grief, envy, self-centeredness, anxiety, discouragement, holding on to control, lacking trust in God, and struggling to rest. In what specific ways do you identify with the women? Offer what you notice to God in prayer.
2. Prayerfully review your notes from this week. Do you glimpse any emerging patterns of receptivity or resistance? Speak with God about what you notice.
3. How has the practice of breath prayer impacted, challenged, or blessed you this week?

Week One Group Discussion

If the group is new, discuss boundaries and expectations. Commit to giving one another the gift of confidentiality. Offer compassionate, attentive listening. Group leaders should determine time parameters each week for discussion questions. If possible, light a candle to remind yourselves that you're in the presence of God together.

Optional icebreaker: Who is your favorite character? Least favorite? Why?

1. Discuss some of the struggles that are evident in the lives of the characters. In what specific ways do you identify with them?
2. Read Isaiah 9:2-4. Then discuss some of your insights from journaling about light, yokes, and burdens (day five) this week.
3. Share your breath prayer with the group. What fruit do you notice from practicing it this week?
4. How can the group pray for you as you move forward in hope?

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