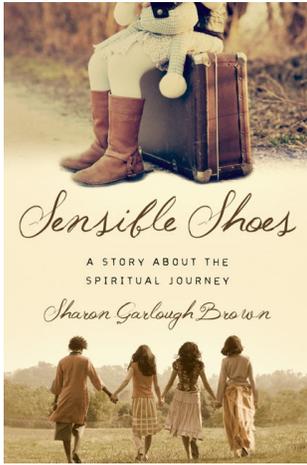




BOOK EXCERPT



Sensible Shoes: A Story about the Spiritual Journey

March 2013

\$18, 349 pages, paperback

978-0-8308-4305-3

sensibleshoesclub.com

"I have been on retreats with [these characters] and I am one of them. Their neediness, arrogance, cluelessness, perfectionism, self-pity, codependence . . . are mine. By the end of the book I was grateful for author Sharon Garlough Brown's fresh eyes and voice. She not only gave me resharpened tools for my journey with Jesus but also reminded me that I need fellow pilgrims to love me and keep me honest along the way."

— Sybil MacBeth, author of *Praying in Color*

Spiritual Journeys You Can Relate To

"The most important notes you'll take are not notes on what I say, though I hope you'll glean a few helpful nuggets here and there. Your most important notes will be on what you're noticing about your own life with God. Plan to keep some kind of journal—words, images, prayers, art, photos—something that will help you record what God reveals to you. You won't need to share your reflections with anyone else unless you choose to do so. But give yourself the gift of documenting your journey.

"As we walk together the next couple of months, we're going to explore some spiritual practices that have helped Christians throughout the centuries pay attention to the movement of the Holy Spirit. While there are many rich and fruitful spiritual disciplines that help us love and serve God's world, we're going to explore disciplines that focus on the transformation of the inner life so that we're then set free to love and serve others in renewed ways. We'll engage in practices that help us cultivate a deeper attachment to Jesus. We'll look at ways to create sacred space in our lives so we have more freedom to say yes to God."

Freedom to say yes to God. Hannah wrote that down. She could use that in Chicago. She had a feeling she would be able to adapt and use a lot of what Katherine would be presenting. Good. Very good.

Hannah watched Charissa's hand shoot up when Katherine asked if anyone had any questions. "Are you going to give us a syllabus and a supplementary reading list?" Charissa asked, enunciating her consonants with careful precision.

The corners of Katherine's mouth curled into a slight smile. "I know this will be frustrating to some of you, but I won't be assigning readings or using a syllabus. For the most part, I won't even tell you ahead of time what to expect, though you'll have personal reflections to do in the weeks between our sessions."

Charissa threw her shoulders back.

Katherine was scanning the room as she continued. "One thing I've learned to pay attention to over the years is my impulse to want to control my life. We can be so quick to take the reins and charge ahead of what God is doing in us and around us that we miss the gentler promptings of the Spirit. It's not that I won't be giving you tools to help you encounter God in the journey," she explained. "It's just that I don't want to give you anything right now that might tempt you to rely on your own understanding. I want to help you respond to the Spirit in deeper freedom and trust." She brushed a wisp of silver hair away from her cheek. "Any other questions?"

—From Chapter 2, "The Pilgrimage Begins"

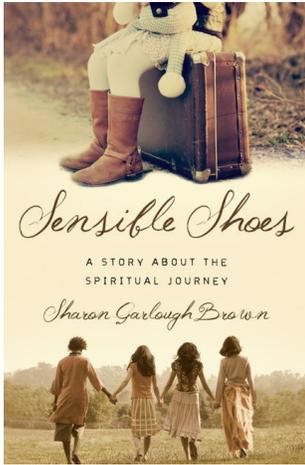
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Join the Sensible Shoes Club

What is the story behind *Sensible Shoes*?

Sharon Brown: In September of 2008 I began leading a weekly women's spiritual formation group at the church where my husband and I pastor. I had led many kinds of groups over the years—Bible studies, prayer groups, pastoral care groups and book discussions—and I thought I knew what this Monday morning group of twelve women would become. I expected to study spiritual disciplines together, using one of the many excellent resources about how Christ is formed in us.

By our second meeting, however, I was convinced that God was asking me to drop the idea of a book study. Instead, he was inviting me to trust him to journey into an unknown place without a syllabus or a curriculum. I began to introduce to the group some of the spiritual disciplines that had been life-giving to me: *lectio divina*, the prayer of examen, the labyrinth, journaling, spiritual direction and contemplative prayer. We learned to sit with stillness and silence. Our time together became sacred space where we encountered the living God. The women grew to deeply trust one another, confessing their sins and heartaches so that they could be more open to receiving God's healing love and power.

In one of our first meetings together, one of the women in the group looked around the circle, commenting, "Everybody here is wearing really cute but sensible shoes!" The phrase stuck, and we began to refer to ourselves as the "Sensible Shoes Club." God was leading us through the difficult, unpredictable and sometimes treacherous terrain of the inner life, and we needed sensible shoes for the journey. We also needed one another.

As we walked together, we began to witness stunning and breathtakingly beautiful transformation. The Spirit was healing old wounds, opening blind eyes and setting captives free. I began to sense that God was inviting me to share the story of the group by creating characters who were also learning to walk closely with God.

And so, Meg, Hannah, Mara and Charissa emerged from my imagination, surprising me with their own stories of struggle and grace.

None of the characters represent "real" people. But they do wrestle with real issues: letting go of control, trusting God, people-pleasing, perfectionism, hiding behind roles and busyness, fear, regret, guilt and shame. Though the details are different, their stories are our stories of healing and redemption.



Sharon Garlough Brown holds an M.Div. from Princeton Theological Seminary and is a pastor and spiritual director with the Evangelical Covenant Church. She lives in West Michigan with her husband, Jack, and son, David.

What is the main message that comes out of *Sensible Shoes*?

Sharon: We are extravagantly loved by God, and we are called to walk together in that love. God invites us to explore the ways we have hidden from him, others and ourselves so that we can experience healing, transformation and freedom.

How is this book different than other books on spiritual formation?

Sharon: The use of fiction to present spiritual disciplines is a unique approach and provides a gentle entry point for readers who have never heard of spiritual formation. The book gives language to express longings for deeper intimacy with God. The characters serve as windows and mirrors for seeing God and ourselves more clearly. We find our stories in their stories.

What do you hope readers take away from *Sensible Shoes*?

Sharon:

- Confidence in the lavish love of God
- Courage to pursue healing and transformation
- Longing for authentic Christian community
- Desire to explore spiritual formation, especially to explore spiritual disciplines not as obligations or guilt-driven burdens, but as ways to practice receiving, resting in and responding to the love of God
- Insights about our own patterns of resisting and avoiding intimacy with God, self and others