



Sensible Shoes

STUDY GUIDE

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Taken from *Sensible Shoes Study Guide*
by Sharon Garlough Brown and Sharron Carrns.
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Reading for Week One: Chapter One

Week One: Day One



CHAPTER ONE: INVITATION TO A JOURNEY MEG (PP. 9-12, 36-39)

1. What details from Meg's story catch your attention? Do you sense any connection between her story and yours? If so, what are the common threads? The differences?
2. When the grown-up Meg crosses the threshold into her childhood house, everything has changed. Describe her sense of grief and loss. Have you ever found yourself crossing a "threshold" and asking a *Now what?* question? Spend some time remembering and recording the details in your journal.
3. **Read Psalm 107:1-9.** What are some of the "desert wastelands" you can already identify in Meg's life, just from these opening scenes? What is she hungry and thirsty for?
4. Identify some of the desert wastelands where you have wandered. What are you hungry and thirsty for?

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Prayer: *Lord, I give you thanks for your unfailing love to me, even when I haven't been aware of it. Help me to cry out to you in my trouble and to trust you to lead me to a place of rest. Let me be satisfied with your love and presence. In Jesus' name.*

Week One: Day Two



CHAPTER ONE: INVITATION TO A JOURNEY
HANNAH (PP. 12-17, 24-28)

1. What details from Hannah's story catch your attention? Do you sense any connection between her story and yours? If so, what are the common threads? The differences?
2. Did you have a special confidant or safe haven as a child? What about as an adult? Where do you go with your secrets and heartaches?
3. Consider the rhythm and pace of your own life, your rhythm of work and rest. Have any of Pastor Steve's or Nancy's observations about Hannah ever been true about you? How might God be looking to "prune" you right now?

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4. **Read Psalm 107:1-3, 10-16.** What are some of the “iron chains” you can already identify in Hannah’s life, just from these opening scenes? Where is she captive and in darkness?
5. Using some words or images from Psalm 107, offer your heart to God.

Week One: Day Three



CHAPTER ONE: INVITATION TO A JOURNEY
MARA (PP. 17-20, 31-36)

1. What details from Mara’s story catch your attention? Do you sense any connection between her story and yours? If so, what are the common threads? The differences?
2. Mara was never chosen by her peers. How is the theme of rejection echoed in her relationship with her husband and teenage sons? If you were Mara, how would you respond to Tom and the boys?

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3. **Read Psalm 107:1-9.** What are some of the “desert wastelands” you can already identify in Mara’s life, just from these opening scenes? What is she hungry and thirsty for?
4. Mara has a deep negative reaction to the description of the sacred journey. She hates the word *discipline* because she already feels guilty. What’s your reaction when you hear the phrase *spiritual disciplines*? Does Dawn’s example of the sun rising (p. 34) help you understand the process of transformation? Why or why not?
5. Using some words or images from Psalm 107, offer your longings to God.

Week One: Day Four



CHAPTER ONE: INVITATION TO A JOURNEY
CHARISSA (PP. 21-24, 28-31)

1. What details from Charissa’s story catch your attention? Do you sense any connection between her story and yours? If so, what are the common threads? The differences?

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2. What things have shaped Charissa's sense of self? How have significant people in her life reinforced the message about what is important?

3. **Read Psalm 107:1-3, 10-16.** What are some of the "bars of iron" you can already identify in Charissa's life, just from these opening scenes? Where is she captive and in darkness?

4. What are the things that have shaped your sense of self? What messages have you received from others about what is important? In what ways have these events or messages become places of captivity for you?

5. Charissa's professor has been encouraging his students to find ways to deepen their life with God. What helps you pay attention to the "path and contours of your own spiritual journey" (p. 22)? What gets in the way of paying attention?

6. Using some words or images from Psalm 107, offer your longings to God.

Week One: Day Five



CHAPTER ONE: INVITATION TO A JOURNEY SUMMARY

An invitation from New Hope:

Jesus says, “Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you’ll recover your life. I’ll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won’t lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you’ll learn to live freely and lightly” (**Matthew 11:28-30**, *The Message*). We invite you to come take a sacred journey.

The sacred journey is a pilgrimage for those who are thirsty for more of God. This journey is for all those who are dissatisfied with living on the surface and who want to travel deeper into God’s heart. We invite you to come and explore spiritual disciplines as we seek to create sacred space for God.

1. This week you’ve been introduced to four characters through flashbacks and current experiences. Is there a particular flashback that stirs an emotional response with you? Why? In what ways do you think these childhood events may have affected the adult characters?

2. Each of the women has received an invitation to the New Hope Retreat Center. Each is resisting the invitation for different reasons. What is behind the resistance for each one? How are they encouraged or discouraged

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from moving forward? Who or what encourages or discourages you from traveling deeper into the heart of God?

3. Spend some time thinking about words such as *thirst*, *dissatisfaction*, and *agitation*. How might God use these things to draw you to himself?

4. Jesus has invited you on a sacred journey with him. Write an RSVP note, naming the reasons why you are excited or why you aren't sure about accepting. Be honest about your hopes and fears. Offer your heart in prayer to God.

Week One Group Discussion

CHAPTER ONE: INVITATION TO A JOURNEY

Note from Sharon: One of the best gifts we can give one another in community is the promise of confidentiality. As you begin to walk together, commit to creating a safe place. Devote yourselves to being faithful stewards of one another's stories. Only then are we truly free to offer our authentic selves to one another, without fear of being judged or betrayed. As you continue to journey together, remind yourselves frequently of your commitment to each other. Pray for God to guard, protect, and establish you in your life together.

When you gather together, avoid the impulse to give advice, “fix,” or commiserate (“I know just how you feel because something similar happened to me when . . .”). Give space to pregnant silence. Don't rush to fill the quiet, even if it feels uncomfortable or awkward. Trust that the Holy Spirit is stirring hearts in the midst of the silence and giving people the courage to speak. (This will be a particularly important gift to offer the introverts in your group.) Practice listening for the presence of God in both the silence and the words offered. Encourage one another to share from the heart, without compelling anyone to do so. Gently and lovingly remind one another to return to these practices of life together whenever you find yourself drifting off course.

You'll find suggested group questions at the end of each week in this guide, but feel free to modify them according to the needs and desires of your group. As you find your rhythm together, you may simply want to share in an open-ended way about what God is stirring as a result of your prayerful reflections during the week. Bring your journal to each session just in case there's something specific you want to share or record in it during your time together.

Intro: If the group hasn't been together before, offer introductions and ask, “What are you hoping for in this study together?”

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1. Read Psalm 107:1-9. What are some of the “desert wastelands” you can already identify in Meg’s life? In Mara’s life? What have they been hungry and thirsty for? (From day one and day three.)

What points of connection do you share with these characters?

2. Read Psalm 107:10-16. What are some of the “iron chains” you can already identify in Hannah’s life? In Charissa’s life? Where are they captive? (From day two and day four.)

What points of connection do you share with these characters?

3. Using some of the day five questions as a launching point, discuss resistance and responsiveness to the invitation to travel deep into God’s heart (both the characters’ resistance or responses and your own). How do you feel about taking this journey with others?
4. If you’re comfortable doing so, share your RSVP note with others in the group. How can you pray for one another as you begin to walk together?
5. Close your time of prayer by reading Matthew 11:28-30 (*The Message*) in unison:

[Jesus says,] “Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you’ll recover your life. I’ll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won’t lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you’ll learn to live freely and lightly.”

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