

Caryn Rivadeneira



What Financial Desperation
Revealed About God's Abundance

Six-Part Group Discussion Guide

A NOTE TO THE PARTICIPANTS FROM THE AUTHOR:

Thank you for taking the time to read *Broke* and to gather with others to discuss it. As you've probably noticed, *Broke* is a book about money—that's not really about money.

Financially speaking, broke means we can't pay the bills, leaving us wondering how we'll get by. But *spiritually* speaking, broke can mean we're facing down heartbreak or struggles, that we're facing down any sort of desperation or separation that leaves us with big questions for God and about God.

But because God is so good, he meets us in our broke, uses it as step one toward being remade, rebuilt, and as a wonderful way to experience God with all our senses, with our minds, in the wild and wooliest places.

Whatever type of broke you've experienced, you know being broke stinks. But it offers something more, something terrifying and dazzling all at once. Being broke can *bless* us, can lead us straight into the "abundant life" Jesus promised—like nothing else I know.

So, as you read through *Broke*, you'll read me at my most vulnerable, often at my worst. But, you'll also see God at his best. Which is why I hope your group is willing to do the same. I've read the questions in this guide. They require you to be vulnerable, be honest and show your broke bits so you all can see God shining through it all. I'd suggest that you and your study group become a "group of safety" for one another. Covenant that what you share stays wherever you are. And then risk vulnerability and keep each other's stories.

Of course, you are welcome to skip any of the questions or add your own. My hope would be that the Holy Spirit leads you into conversations you've longed for and have been unable to have anywhere else. I hope you discover that there's no shame in broken. In fact, just the opposite. It's where God works. After all, as we proclaim every time we celebrate communion, Jesus' body was broken for us. The least we can do is be broke for him.

Happy chatting! I'd love see pictures of your group or to hear your thoughts via email (caryn@carynrivadeneira.com), Facebook, Twitter or Instagram.

Peace—






Caryn








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PART I: HEARD AND BREAD

From Chapter 1






-  When did you first understand or know that you were heard by God? How did this change or shape your faith? Do you hear from God still? Often? What does he “sound” like?
-  On page 19, Caryn writes, “... realizing God heard *me* kicked off a lifelong journey of following a God who I understood wanted a relationship with me, listening to shy little me above the cries of older and wiser and churchier sorts.” What does being heard mean to you? What other things help you know that God wants a relationship with you?
-  As Caryn writes, Hagar chose to believe God would work in her life (pg. 23). How or when has faith been an active choice for you? Does the “choice” to believe help or hinder your faith or relationship with God? In what ways?
-  Caryn says she heard clear direction from God, such as “Why don’t you stop?” (pg. 24). Have you heard God speak this clearly? If yes, in what instance? If not, why do you think this is?
-  Caryn refers to God as “the God who lets us linger at the brink but then lets us seek and find him in the woods. The God who sometimes takes away so that we can see more clearly” (pg. 25). How has God’s taking something away or allowing you to linger helped you know him more?

From Chapter 2






-  “My life of abundance,” Caryn writes, “had no room for understanding what praying for daily bread really meant” (pg. 28). Do you relate? Why or why not?
-  Caryn seems to take a lot of liberties in her prayer with God. She almost makes an ultimatum when she says, “But...that’s about it, God. You’ve really got to do better on this other stuff. You’ve really got to pony up” (pg. 30). What do you make of this tone in prayer? Have you prayed like this? Would you? Why or why not?
-  “No such thing as a coincidence in the daily-bread-dependent life,” we read on page 33. Does this strike you true or untrue? Why?
-  Do you agree that God brings creativity out of desperation (pg. 35)? Why or why not? If so, in what ways have you seen desperation fuel creativity?
-  Caryn writes that she always wants to be in need of something that only God can provide (pg 37). What do you think of this statement? Is it good to always be desperate for something from God? Why or why not?

PART II: MYSTERIES AND BIG FISH

From Chapter 3






-  Caryn’s prayer changes from “Help!” to “Why?” She writes that this opens her mind to the possibilities of what God is up to in the waiting season. How might or how has this changed your prayer life?
-  A love of mysteries and exploring drove Caryn to look for signs of God. How has your curiosity shaped your faith, your Bible reading, your church-going?
-  In what ways might God be asking you to “think different” about a situation or circumstance in your life? In what ways does Christianity already encourage us to “think different”?
-  Caryn writes that the best answers to lead to more questions. Agree? Disagree? What’s an example of this you can think of?
-  “I like that God loves me enough to make our relationship this intriguing,” Caryn writes (pg. 50). Do you think God intentionally sets intrigue and mysteries in our lives? Why or why not? What are some ways you’ve experienced this? What’s intriguing you about God right now?

From Chapter 4






-  Caryn jokes about once believing she could be so “helpful to God and his kingdom” (pg. 53). When have you felt like your gifts were indispensable to God?
-  Have you ever had a “Nineveh,” as Caryn calls it—a calling you refused to follow or an action you wouldn’t obey? What was the fallout from your response—or lack of response?
-  Caryn writes that she doesn’t see God as punitive—doesn’t believe he punished them by allowing them to go broke—but instead sees God as a coach, pushing them toward something better. How does that square with your view of or experience with God?
-  We learn that seemingly random Jonah sightings or mentions become a little “elbow nudge” from God (pg. 58) to Caryn, a way of reminding her of God’s presence. What has God used in your life to remind you he is there? What’s been the effect of the nudge?
-  Caryn feels confident in hearing God’s actual voice at times. How does this strike you? Real? Way out there? Do you believe God still speaks actual words? How have you heard God?

PART III: CROSSES AND THE GOODS

From Chapter 5






-  Caryn wrote out and burned lists of her sins. What do you think of this particular practice? Do you have a particular way of confessing? If yes, what is it? If not, what's keeping you from this?
-  "With the ashen cross," Caryn writes, "we wear the Christian paradox: that out of pain, sin, faithlessness and suffering comes the hope, promise, mercy and rebirth of the cross" (pg. 65). Have you traditionally viewed the cross as a paradox? Why? How does or might this view shape your own experience with pain or suffering?
-  During the delivery of her son, Caryn senses God telling her to "focus on the cross" (pg. 69). How does the idea of a conjured-up cross sit with you? What has God given you to focus on in difficult times of your life?
-  Caryn writes: "I could see more clearly what it means to take up a cross, and I could see the good and transforming work that happens when our pain leads us to the cross" (pg. 72). What pain or sources of brokenness has led you to the cross? What did you find when you got there?
-  What do you think about the idea of God *allowing* us to cry (pg. 74)—as opposed to making us? In what areas has God allowed you to cry?

From Chapter 6





-  Caryn has no bones admitting that she subscribes to the doctrine of Total Depravity, a belief sin permeates every bit of our souls and of this world. And yet she speaks of a grace that allows the broken—this very depravity—to "sparkle God's glory at every turn" (pg. 77). How does this sit with you or align with your own belief?
-  On page 82, we read of the "recognition that was God at work, that his kingdom was right there, at the intersection of Wells and Washington." When have you seen God's kingdom appear in unexpectedly or unlikely ways or places?
-  "I love when a story, a concept, an idea, a long-held belief gets flipped on its head," Caryn writes (pg. 84). Do you or do you find this disconcerting? Why?
-  What do you make of the "Amazing Grace" story—when Grace *was* and *experienced* Jesus all at once. How does this sit with you? Have you experienced anything like this in your life?
-  "When we are Jesus to one another," Caryn writes, "when we are Jesus to pigeons and lost dogs and women locked in trunks—we shine light into the darkness" (pg. 85). How has being broken in some ways allowed you to be a bearer of this light as well as a receiver?

PART IV: FROM SHOCKED TO SERENDIPITY

From Chapter 7







-  “The idea that ‘trauma’ can be brought on by the memory of a previous trauma,” Caryn writes, “rings quite true for those who’ve walked through financial disasters” (pg 89). Certainly this rings true for those who’ve walked through other kinds of disasters or stresses. When have you experienced this idea of trauma being brought on by the memory of trauma? How have you experienced God in this?
-  Caryn writes that she’d hear God “speak into her shock and ask, *Who’s got this?*” to which her response would be “You do,” spoken on “autopilot.” How might a “call and response” between you and God help you navigate difficult times? What might that call and response sound like? Is there a Scripture or word you might draw from?
-  “After all, exploring God is all well and good,” we read on page 92, “but so is eating and keeping a roof over my family’s head.” What are some of the ways you’ve had to battle the “practical” versus “spiritual”? What’s the process looked like? What’s been the result?
-  How does the idea of “spiritual shock” (pg. 93) sit with you or compare to your experience with God?
-  “I *could* still let my brain take over,” Caryn writes, “and let my mind and my belief alone be the place that clung to God” (pg. 94). Later, she writes that “faith, really, is a response of our intellect” (pg. 97). How do these statements align with your own view of faith? When have you known faith to be a response of your mind?

From Chapter 8





-  Have you ever experienced the spiritual ecstasy Caryn describes on page 101, the sort where you’re “so aware of God’s hand, so keen on his message, so moved or at ease or fired up in his presence that the world blurs away....”?
-  When have you “stumbled happy-accidentally into Jesus” (pg. 103)?
-  Caryn writes that God uses coincidences to make himself known. What are some of the ways you’ve experienced God’s grand coincidences in your life?
-  What does it mean to you that God keeps you front and center (pg. 105), that you are the apple of his eye? Does this idea sit well with you or trouble you? How so?

PART V: IMAGINARY BUT DAZZLED

From Chapter 9






-  What do you think about having prayers become more like wishes (pg. 108)? How do you think God might receive wish-prayers?
-  What are some of the benefits and/or pitfalls of imagining Jesus with you?
-  Caryn defines prayer as a conversation with God in which we imagine him there (pg. 113). How might this definition affect your own prayer life?
-  “But it is only through our imaginations—this wonderful creative gift from God himself—that we can conceive from God at all,” Caryn writes (pg. 113). What do you think of this statement? What about the Bible and who God tells us who he is? How does this apply to seeing “holy ground,” as Caryn writes about on the next page?
-  On page 116, Caryn contends that “pretend” reflects our desires. What did you pretend as a child? What do you pretend or imagine today? How does this jive with your reality? How does this shape your image of God or your faith? Have you experienced God present in the pretend (pg. 119)?
-  How might learning to find God in the “chaos” as Caryn does (pg. 117) be an important spiritual discipline for you?

From Chapter 10




-  Isaiah 55 offers an invitation to seek God (pg. 124). Where is God inviting you to seek (and find) him right now? How do you sense or know this?
-  On page 127, Caryn writes that asking “Wait, what?” is essential if we want to be dazzled and delighted by God.” What might you need to pause and ask “wait, what?” about right now?
-  How might asking “wait, what?” lead not only to being dazzled and delighted by God, but also to discerning God’s will in your life?
-  “This God is the God who loves us even when we don’t love him, who hears us when we cannot hear him, who never leaves us even when he feels so far away” (pg. 130). How does this thought affect your understanding of God? What does this mean to you? What might it mean for the people in your life who don’t yet know God’s love or sense his nearness?

PART VI: SAFARIS AND PRACTICES




From Chapter 11

-  Where did your “wild-and-wooly, twisty-turny faith journey” (pg. 132) begin? If those words don’t apply to your story, what words would you use to describe it? And what have you discovered on your journey?
-  Caryn writes, “That’s the thing about safaris, right? You don’t just go to see wildlife; you go to change your life” (pg. 136). What adventures or practices—faith or otherwise—have you set out on to change your life?
-  What are some of the things or God encounters you fear you’ve missed out on by plodding along too much—by being too focused on the daily grind (pg. 138)? On the flipside, what are some of your favorite God sightings—things you’ve caught because you stayed mindful of the present?
-  When have you felt God swooping in to carry—or maybe drag—you a bit (pg. 139) during your various safaris through life?
-  How have you learned to spot God while on safari (pg. 141)?

From the Appendix

-  Which of the practices Caryn suggests are most difficult for you? Why? Which ones come most natural? Why?
-  Take a moment and fill in the “Worrywart Prayer” on page 151.
-  What might God be calling you to “trust and obey” him on right now?

Final Questions

-  What has being or going broke done for your spiritual life? What’s your story?
-  Are you in a place where you can feel “blessed” by broke or are you still “in the weeds” with?
-  If you haven’t yet experienced being broke, how does the thought of being blessed by being broke sit with you? Do you recoil at the idea or somehow welcome it?