



STUDY + SEE

Jennie Allen

FIND YOUR PEOPLE

Building Deep Community
in a Lonely World

SEVEN SESSIONS

FIND YOUR PEOPLE

**Building Deep Community
in a Lonely World**

A STUDY IN 7 SESSIONS

Jennie Allen



HarperChristian
Resources

Find Your People

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CONTENTS

INSTRUCTIONS AND EXPECTATIONS	4
SESSION 1 ● INTRODUCTION	9
SESSION 2 ● THE DISRUPTION OF COMMUNITY	31
SESSION 3 ● PROXIMITY	55
SESSION 4 ● TRANSPARENCY	77
SESSION 5 ● ACCOUNTABILITY	99
SESSION 6 ● SHARED MISSION	121
SESSION 7 ● CONSISTENCY	143
LEADER'S GUIDE	166

INSTRUCTIONS AND EXPECTATIONS

WHAT DO YOU HOPE TO GET OUT OF THIS STUDY?

GET HONEST

This is going to get messy, but it will be worth it. We will be dealing with the things that make us most vulnerable to other people, and the things that make us lonely. God wants to do something with that. But until we recognize that we are in need of Him, and in need of others, we will miss what He has for us. If you are craving the idea of finding your people, perhaps you would be willing to consider a way to deeper relationships, even if it is costly. Be honest with yourself and honest with God. He knows all of it already anyway.

ENGAGE WITH YOUR SMALL GROUP

In a study all about God's plan for community, your community is going to be essential. You have kindred warriors at your side, fighting with you and for you. Pray, speak truth in love, and encourage each other to open up and be real. Be vulnerable and do not abandon those who are vulnerable with you. Prepare to go to war alongside these women. Keep your group a safe place to wrestle and discover and also a place filled with truth. John describes Christ

as being “full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). I pray that this is how your small group will be described.

“And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free”.
(John 8:32 NKJV)

COMMIT TO BEING CONSISTENT AND PRESENT

Commit to being present at your group meetings, barring an emergency, and arrange your schedule so you do not miss any part in this journey. Have your lesson and projects finished when you come to the group meeting (except for this one, of course).

GROUND RULES FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

BE CONCISE.

Share your answers to the questions while protecting others’ time for sharing. Be thoughtful. Don’t be afraid to share with the group; but try not to dominate the conversation.

"Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak". (James 1:19)

KEEP GROUP MEMBERS' STORIES CONFIDENTIAL.

Many things your group members share are things they are choosing to share with *you*, not with your husband or other friends. Protect each other by not allowing anything shared in the group to leave the group.

RELY ON SCRIPTURE FOR TRUTH.

We are prone to use conventional, worldly wisdom as truth. While there is value in that, this is not the place. If you feel led to respond, please only respond with God's truth and Word, not "advice."

NO COUNSELING.

Protect the group by not directing all attention on solving one person's problem. This is the place for confessing and discovery and applying truth together as a group. Your group leader will be able to direct you to more help outside the group time if you need it. Don't be afraid to ask for help.

STUDY DESIGN

For Group Study: In the first meeting, your group's study guides will be passed out and you will work through the Introduction lesson together. You will watch the video teaching as a group and have discussion based on the Conversation Cards as well.

For Independent Study: Each video teaching is included with your study guide. Simply follow the instructions on the inside cover for access to all the video sessions.

After the first week, each session in the study guide is meant to be completed on your own during the week before coming to the group meeting. These lessons may feel different from studies you have done in the past. They are very interactive. The beginning of each session will involve you, your Bible, and a pen, working through Scripture and listening to God's voice. Each session includes four projects you can do to further process how to live God's Word.

Don't feel as if each study has to be finished in one sitting; take a few blocks of time throughout the week if you need to. The goal of this study is to dig deeply into Scripture and uncover how it applies to your life, *to deeply engage the mind and the heart*. Projects, stories, and Bible study all play a role in it. You may be drawing or journaling or interacting with others in your community. At each group meeting you will discuss your experience in working through that week's material.

WHAT THIS STUDY IS NOT

We all are products of messed-up environments. Even with the best parents, spouses, and friends, we still have wounds from relationships. The hurt from these relationships takes work to process, and there are many great resources your group leader can suggest that take you deeper into the wounds from your past. I believe in the wisdom of Christian counseling, and there is a time and place for it. Christian counseling is a process I went through earlier in my life, and it truly brought so much freedom.

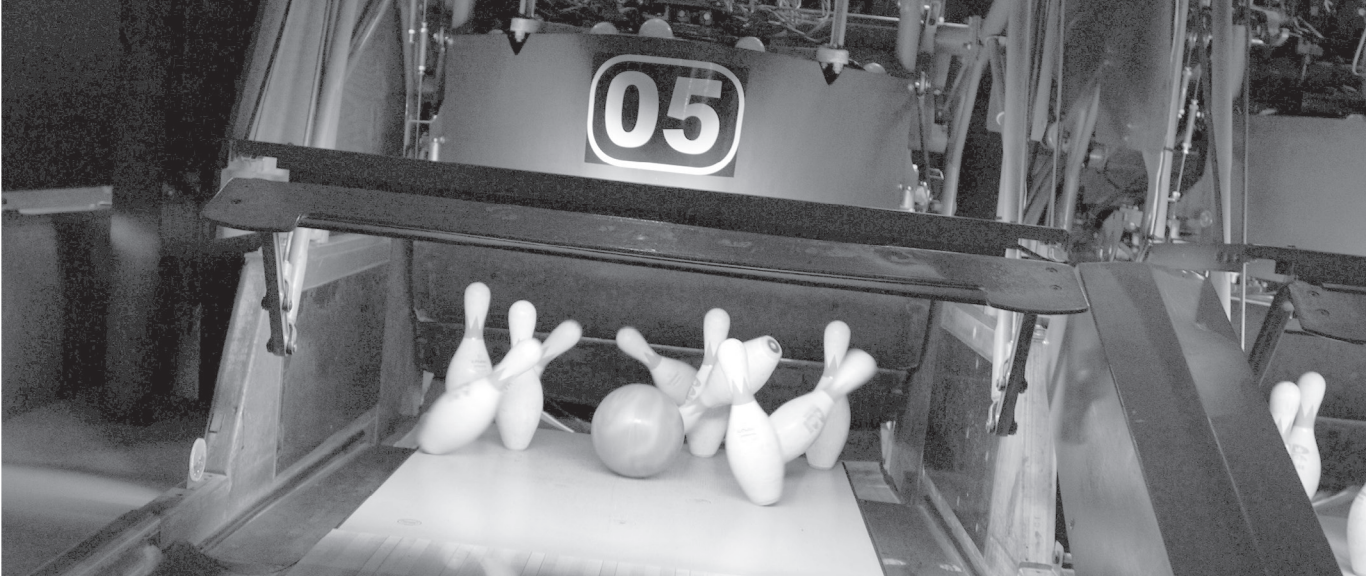
However, in this study the focus is intended to remain on God and His plan for us as a thriving community. I believe growing in our perspective of who He is and what He has for us changes the way we view our past hurts and current struggles.

“He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds”.
(Psalm 147:3 NKJV)

Nothing is more powerful than God getting bigger in our lives. He has the power to heal with a word. My goal as you walk through *Find Your People* is that God would get bigger for you and as He does, you would see a new way to do life, with others, and never alone.

SESSION 1

INTRODUCTION



Before this study was a study, it was a question. In fact, it was the number-one question I've gotten from you all throughout the years. And it's a big one: *How do I make friends as an adult?*

Of all the struggles we go through, this is the one that comes back over and over again because, let's face it: we've all felt that loneliness. Especially living in our spread-out world, which seems tailor-made for isolation and individualism. We're wondering: *How do I get deep with someone? How do I build trust with someone? Why is finding and keeping my people so difficult?*

And the kicker:

Why do I live lonely?

It's a question that hurts to ask, because so many of us would answer that question with, *There's something wrong with me. I must be defective. Or, Because it's the only safe way.*

But listen. It's not just you. This secret hurt and frustration is not so secret anymore. In this study, we're going to shine God's light on this place where we might otherwise remain in the dark—sad and isolated and missing out. We'll seek out His plan for thriving instead of settling for surface and shallow. But first I want you to know:

You're not alone in feeling alone.

When I first started doing my podcast way back in 2016, the whole first season was about loneliness. I wanted to hit this topic out of the gate because it was clear it was at the front of so many minds, and there had to be something we could do about this together.

So I asked people to email me, and answer, straight up:

Why is finding and keeping your people so hard? Why do we live lonely?

And these were some of the answers:

"I reach out, but people can't come over. They are too busy. I finally stopped asking." –**Amanda**

"After being burnt, backstabbed, lied to, and betrayed, I have a hard time letting people inside my walls." –**Patti**

"I don't know how to get past the 'getting to know you' small talk." –**Emily**

"I feel like a burden so I just don't go deep." –**Molly**

"I feel like I have to pretend that I am okay or be judged."
–**Stefanie**

"I have expectations of what I think 'my people' should be and they don't measure up." –**Sandra**

"I'm afraid I might need more than I can give." –**Kim**

"I'm too exhausted from being a mom, wife, employee to be a good friend." –**Kennedy**

"Staying friends after an argument is just too awkward. I don't know how to move past it." –**Ella**

"To be honest, it's easier to do it by myself." –**Ashley**

Does any of this sound familiar to you?

I know it does to me.

And for a staggering number of people.

In 2020, the pandemic opened a lot of our eyes to what we were lacking and missing in our relationships. But even before 2020, when people were sharing their stories with me, the pandemic of loneliness was in full swing. Taking us out. Killing our joy. Killing us physically and mentally. For so many of us, that ache has been there so long that you wonder if it is just the human condition and has no chance of going away.

But I don't think this is the case. I think, in this moment, something is being revealed to us: when it comes to community there is something fundamentally wrong with how we have built our lives.

We tuck into our little residences with our little family or our roommates or alone, staring at our little screens. We never want to trouble our neighbors for anything, so we build a small little crevice in the world with everything we could possibly need. We may feel comfortable, safe, independent, and entertained, but also, we feel completely sad.

I get it. Everyone does it. But this thing that everyone does is just not working for anyone. Research says that more than “three in five Americans report being chronically lonely,” and that number is “on the rise,” stats that are costly and grave.¹ Anxiety, depression, suicidal thoughts are all on the rise.

Is this living? Is this how life is supposed to go?

Before we get into all of it, let me skip to the answer. NO. IT ISN'T SUPPOSED TO BE THIS WAY!

There is a way to live life less alone. There is. It costs something, sometimes more than most are willing to pay. But it's worth it; it's doable; it's possible. Stick with me.

It is possible to live life connected—intimately connected—to other people. And no, we're not going to spend the next seven weeks figuring out how to build a new group of best friends.

¹ Elena Renken, “Most Americans Are Lonely, and Our Workplace Culture May Not Be Helping,” *NPR News*, January 3, 2020, <https://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2020/01/23/798676465/most-americans-are-lonely-and-our-workplace-culture-may-not-be-helping>.

Here is what we are going to do:

- ▶ We are going to look back at how almost every generation has lived until us—and how we are living differently.
- ▶ We are going to talk about community and all the ways it can be in our lives that maybe you've never thought of.
- ▶ We are going to look at what God meant relationships to be and how we have hijacked that.
- ▶ We are going to dream of a new way to find our people and to do life with them in more intentional ways.

My dream for you, God's plan for you, is to build a culture of community in every part of your life.

ON PURPOSE

Why do we expect close friends to somehow appear in our busy lives? We think our acquaintances should just magically produce our few best friends. *Then* our relational needs will be met. Back in the day, people found their friends from their larger village of interconnected people. Think village life, small-town life, or agrarian life, or tribes.

People's needs were met because of the way they lived: close. But because we see community as an accessory, not the essential fabric of life as our ancestors did by default, we are lonely. We are looking to plug a gaping hole. The hole is bigger than a couple people could ever fill, and so we live constantly disappointed, and we further isolate ourselves. It's time to break that cycle—on purpose.

THE BIG PICTURE

We'd all love to make a few new friends. But I have a bigger vision for you. God has a bigger vision for you.

I want us to trade lonely and isolated lives that experience brief bursts of connectedness for intimately connected lives that know only brief bursts of feeling alone.

Think I'm crazy? I'm here to tell you I'm not. I've experienced what I'm fighting for. I have observed with my own two eyes. And once you see it, you can't unsee it. You can't *not* fight for this kind of life.

But most everything in your life flies in the face of what I am about to invite you to do along our journey together. Specifically:

- ▶ Your routines.
- ▶ The way that you buy groceries.
- ▶ Your housing situation.
- ▶ Whether or not you live near your family.
- ▶ The church you choose to be part of.
- ▶ What you do this weekend.
- ▶ And deeper still: How open you choose to be about your sufferings. Your anxiety. Your pain.

-
- ▶ And whether you'll ask the hard question of the person you love who is drinking too much.
 - ▶ And if you'll forgive and fight for the people who have hurt you deeper than you could ever imagine.

It's a risk. It's all a risk to go deeper into this with me. But if you feel that ache for connection, you're in the right place.

STUDY ::

Work through these pages as your
Introduction to God's Plan for Community.

WHAT IS COMMUNITY AND WHERE DID IT COME FROM?

IN THE BEGINNING, GOD

When we look back in Scripture, we see how intentionally God designed us for and invites us to community. In fact, He *is* community.

God existed in relationship with Himself before any of us were here. It's called the Trinity. God is one, and God is three. (If this feels confusing, don't worry. It hurts my brain still, and I've been to seminary.)

The key point is this: **For all of eternity, God has existed in relationship—as Father, Spirit, and Son (Jesus).**

About the **Father and Son**, we learn in Colossians 1:15–17:

“The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.”

And Jesus tells us about the **Spirit** in relation to both of them in John 16:13–15:

“he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. He will glorify me because it is from me that he will receive what he will make known to you. All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will receive from me what he will make known to you.”

Scripture says that the Son exists to glorify the Father, and that the Father exists to glorify the Son. It says that the Spirit exists to glorify them both. What that means is: they help each other, they promote each other, they serve each other, and they love each other. What’s more, this exchange has been going on for all of eternity.

Our God created us *out of* relationship *for* relationship—and not relationship that is surface level, or self-seeking. No, the relationship He has in mind for us is

sacrificial,

intimate,

moment-by-moment connection.

Beautiful.

Relational. It’s who we are, because it’s who God is.

NEXT, FAMILY

First, God existed in community. Then we were created to join in that relationship.

We weren't just created *for* community, **we were created because of it.** We aren't craving something good for us, like vegetables or vitamins; we are craving the fundamental reason we were created: relationship.

Genesis 1:27–28 tells us:

"So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them."

"God blessed them and said to them, 'Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.'"

God's first community on earth is a family, a community "in his own image." Verse 31 says he called it "very good." The only "not good" thing in the creation account was the fact that Adam was first by himself:

“The LORD God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.” (Genesis 2:18)

And so God created Eve and gave she and Adam everything they needed in order to thrive on the earth.

They were naked, and unashamed (Genesis 2:25). No shame before each other, and no shame before God. Just free, beautiful love and the safety of authentic relationship. They shared the goal of caring for creation. They were given a boundary (just one) around the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (vv. 16–17). And they had all the time in the world to enjoy God, His creation, and each other.

Thriving, fruitful community was God’s original plan for humankind.

FINALLY, THERE’S HEAVEN

I like to think of Eden as a little bit of heaven on earth. In this brief moment in time, before sin entered, Adam and Eve were functioning perfectly as a microcosm of community. So, we’re going to look at what was going on there and discover how we can do it too. As Jesus taught us to pray, this is what we desire:

“Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven,”. (Matthew 6:10)

We are going to seek His will, on earth as it is in heaven. So what made Eden heaven on earth? What can we do to see for ourselves Jesus' vision, "On earth as it is in heaven"?

We'll discover five ways.



FIRE

Goal: Proximity
Barrier: Busyness



OPEN DOORS

Goal: Transparency
Barrier: Pain/Shame



ANVIL

Goal: Accountability
Barrier: Pride



SHOVEL

Goal: Shared Purpose
Barrier: Shallow/Small Talk



TABLE

Goal: Consistency
Barrier: Conflict

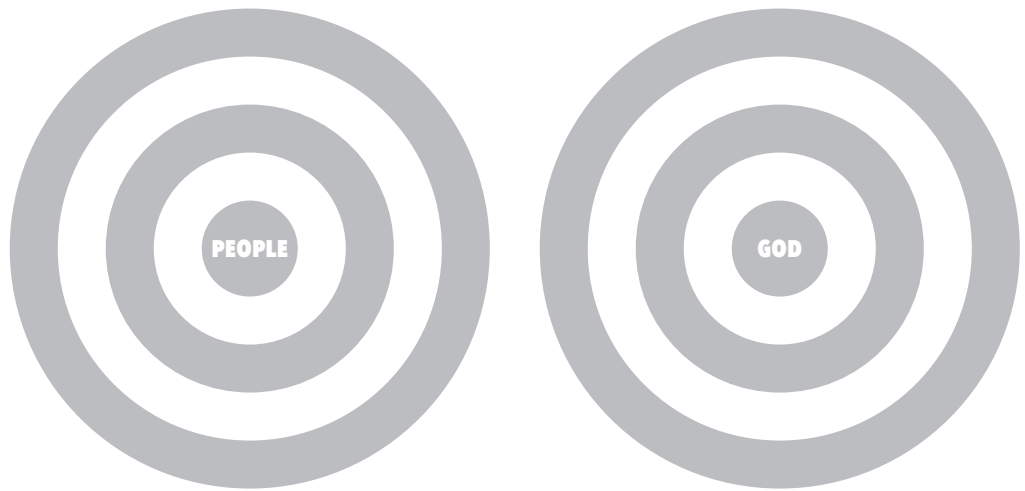
FIVE TASTES OF HEAVEN

Here's what we're going to work to reclaim together in this study. Five particular things characterized the healthy, balanced vision of community in Eden. They were:

- 1. Proximity:** Adam and Eve were with each other all the time, and they walked with God closely. (Genesis 3:8)
- 2. Transparency:** They were fully known and fully loved—naked and unashamed. (Genesis 2:25)
- 3. Accountability:** God set boundaries for them around the Tree, and they were accountable to Him for keeping them. (Genesis 2:17)
- 4. Purpose:** They shared a job, caring for God's beautiful creation. (Genesis 2:15)
- 5. Consistency:** They woke up and showed up every day, with all the time in the world to pour into each other—originally made to flourish without the brokenness of sin and death and conflict.

These five “tastes of heaven” are our framework. God gave us a model to follow here. **God established a perfect community that we can work to reclaim here and now.** These five things will be our goals in our time together. And we'll talk about what keeps us from them—and how we can fight together to get them back.

In this study we're going to build, step by step, a reality out of God's vision for community. That may sound huge and intimidating, but it's really made of small shifts and changes. And eventually you wake up and those small things



have made something beautiful. In the projects at the end of each session, I invite you to peel back the layers of your own experiences with friendship, community, and what you believe about God. This week, we'll do two short projects as a group to prime our hearts and minds to continue on this journey together.

Take a few minutes to reflect by yourself. How close do you feel to people right now? How close do you feel to God/Jesus? Put a dot where you are on each bullseye.

- ▶ **Farther out/way outside the circle:** *Feeling basic lack of human contact/deep divides between you and others.*
- ▶ **A little farther in:** *Wading around, but it doesn't get as deep as you'd like.*
- ▶ **Approaching the center:** *Some good times, but often overwhelmed by experiencing hurt, conflict, humanity that is making you question the need for community or how much you want to give.*
- ▶ **Smack in the center:** *You've had a taste (or you've got a great community), but want to pull other people in. You'd like to see God's will come through community, for the healing of the world.*

We were built for God. And until we come to Him as our Father and friend, we will keep looking to people to fill what only God can. And yes, that relationship is first, but that relationship is meant to send us into loving others.

If you put God in His right place in your heart, you will more likely put people in theirs.

Charles Spurgeon wrote, "We shall not long have love for man if we do not first and chiefly cultivate love for God."

Because you've shown up for this study, I know you're brave enough to take a real look at this issue and not run away, pretending everything's fine. So, begin by taking a moment to reflect on and/or share your answer to these questions:

- ▶ *Why is this so hard for you?*

- ▶ *What are your hopes and expectations of these weeks together?*

CONCLUSION

HOW WE WERE BUILT TO LIVE

The great thing about it is, this isn't just about us feeling better right now. It's about forever—for everyone. It's God's plan to reach his people—essentially, to save the world. Big stuff. But it starts small.

Do you believe that true, radical connection is what you were built for? Does this sound possible? Read each of the following bullets into the middle of this sentence and think about your answers.

Do . . .

- ▶ long conversations with people who have known you for years
- ▶ people who drop by with food unannounced
- ▶ regular unscheduled and unhurried meet-ups with people who feel like family
- ▶ people who show up early to help you cook and stay late to clean up
- ▶ people who hurt you and who you hurt (but you work through it instead of quitting each other)
- ▶ people to live on mission, who challenge you and make you better
- ▶ people who are your people, and you are theirs

. . . seem impossible?

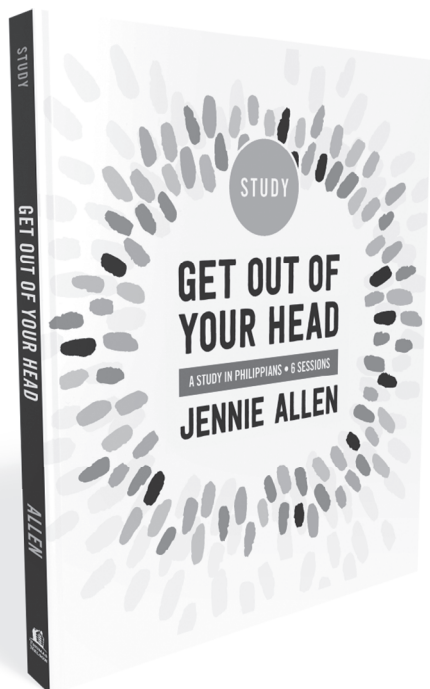
It's possible. All of it.

SEE ::

Watch Video Session 1 now.

Use streaming code on inside cover or DVD.

ALSO AVAILABLE FROM JENNIE ALLEN

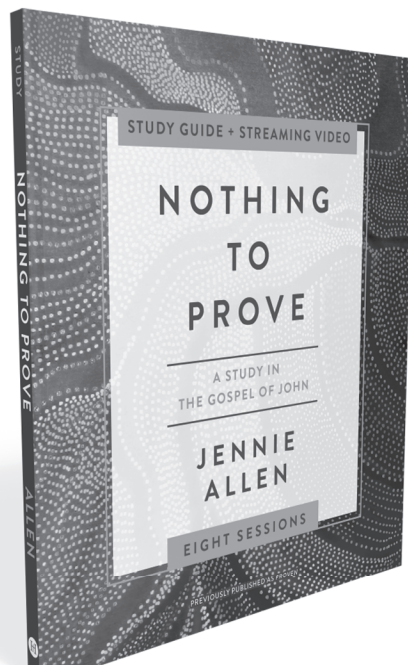


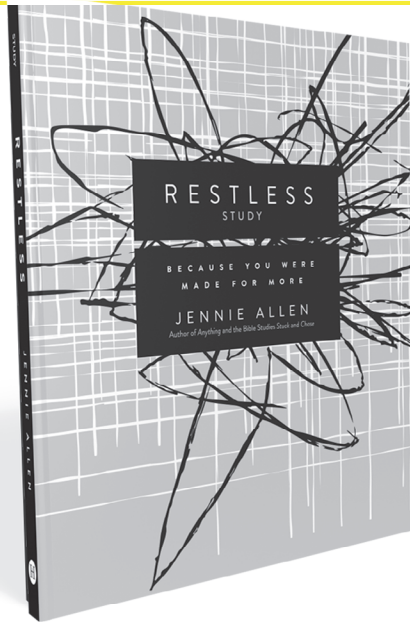
STOPPING THE SPIRAL OF TOXIC THOUGHTS

In *Get Out of Your Head*, a six-session, video-based Bible study, Jennie inspires and equips us to transform our emotions, our outlook, and even our circumstances by taking control of our thoughts.

YOU ARE ENOUGH BECAUSE JESUS IS ENOUGH.

In this 8-session study, Jennie Allen walks through key passages in the Gospel of John that demonstrate how Jesus is enough. We don't have to prove anything because Jesus has proven everything.



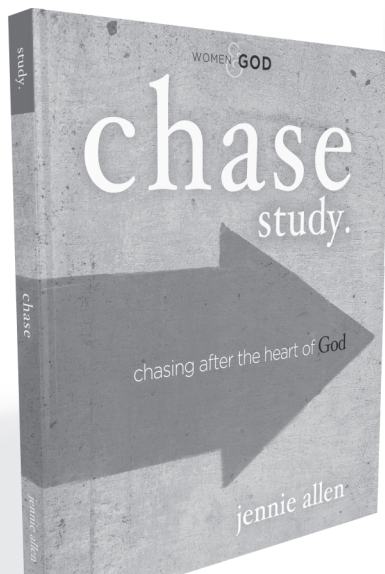
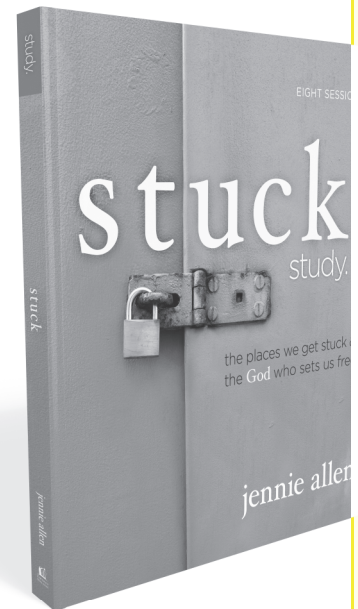


IDENTIFY THE THREADS OF YOUR LIFE

In this DVD-based study using the story of Joseph, Jennie explains how his suffering, gifts, story, and relationships fit into the greater story of God—and how your story can do the same.

THE PLACES WE GET STUCK & THE GOD WHO SETS US FREE

Stuck is an eight-session Bible study experience leading women to the invisible struggles that we fight and to the God who has to set us free.



CHASING AFTER THE HEART OF GOD

Chase is a seven-session Bible study experience to discover the heart of God and what it is exactly He wants from us through major events in the life of David, and the Psalms.

You Aren't Alone in Feeling Alone

Never in the history of civilization have we been more connected and felt more alone. We are all so lonely. What if the ways we have set up our lives are fundamentally broken?

In the *Find Your People* video Bible study, bestselling author Jennie Allen looks at the original community in Genesis, the Trinity, and the creation of people to see what God had planned for us all along. Jennie offers practical solutions for creating true community in a world that's both more connected and more isolating than ever before.

Drawing on fascinating insights from science and history, timeless biblical truth, and vulnerable stories from her own life, Jennie helps us discover exactly how to dive into the deep end and experience the full wonder of community. Along the way, we'll discover the five life patterns required to build deep, connected relationships.

You were created to play, engage, adventure, and explore—with others. Because while the ache of loneliness is real, it doesn't have to be your reality.

THIS STUDY GUIDE INCLUDES:

Individual access to seven streaming video sessions • Personal study between sessions • Leader's Guide

SESSIONS AND VIDEO RUN TIMES:

- | | |
|--|---------------------------|
| 1. Introduction (16:30) | 5. Accountability (17:30) |
| 2. The Disruption of Community (16:30) | 6. Shared Mission (17:00) |
| 3. Proximity (18:30) | 7. Consistency (21:00) |
| 4. Transparency (16:00) | |

Streaming Video Access Code Included* WATCH ON ANY DEVICE

DVD also available, sold separately.



JENNIE ALLEN is the founder and visionary of IF:Gathering as well as the *New York Times* bestselling author of *Get Out of Your Head*, *Made for This*, *Anything*, and *Nothing to Prove*. A frequent speaker at national events and conferences, she is a passionate leader, following God's call on her life to catalyze a generation to live what they believe. Jennie earned a master's in biblical studies from Dallas Theological Seminary. She and her husband, Zac, have four children.

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