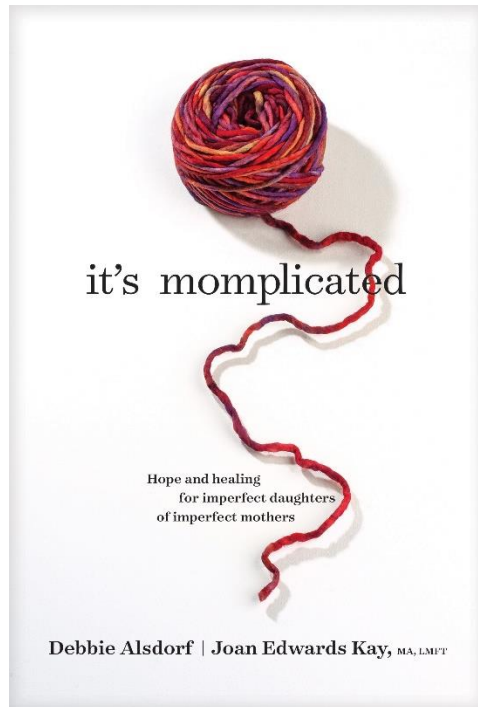


## Small Group Discussion Guide

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# **It's Momplicated** **Hope and Healing** **for Imperfect Daughters of Imperfect Mothers**

**by**  
**Debbie Alsdorf/Joan Edwards Kay, MA, LMFT**

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## **It's Momplicated**

This discussion guide will assist a leader, facilitator, or participant who is using ***It's Momplicated*** within the context of a Bible study, life group, or mentoring relationship. (Unless noted otherwise, all Scripture quotations are from the *New Living Translation*.) This guide is not a replacement for the exercises at the end of each chapter. After each chapter there are two sections, ***Explore Your Story*** and ***Connect with God***, designed for a woman's personal journey and interaction with the material. This guide can help expand what a woman is learning into a growing experience in community with others.

For use in a class or weekly meeting group, it is broken into seven weekly meeting sessions, beginning with an introductory week followed by six weeks covering two chapters each.

The participants will read assigned chapters and complete the exercises at the end of the chapters before coming to the group. Each group meeting will begin with a video segment, followed by group participation through this discussion guide.

**It's Momplicated  
Discussion/Study Group  
Overview**

- Week 1: Introduction: My Mother—My Heart
- Week 2: Every Woman Has a Story—Every Woman Has an Imperfect Mother
- Week 3: Every Woman Carries Her Mother's Mark—Every Woman Can Live a Better Story
- Week 4: Mom, Where Are You? Mom, Will You Keep Me Safe?
- Week 5: Mom, Will You Teach and Guide Me? Mom, Will You Celebrate Me as a Unique Individual?
- Week 6: Healing Starts with Facing Reality—Healing Continues by Living in the Truth
- Week 7: Healing Can Happen in Your Current Relationship—Changing the Legacy You Leave

It is our prayer that God will use *It's Momplicated* to meet you on your personal journey toward a healthier you and a healthier relationship with your mother.

For questions or more information, contact us: [www.momplicated.net](http://www.momplicated.net)

*Debbie Alsdorf and Joan Edwards Kay*



## **It's Momplicated - Week 1**

### **Introduction**

#### **My Mother—My Heart**

The mother-daughter relationship is beautiful and sacred, but it can also be complicated and painful. Our mothers have a profound effect on our lives. Whether your mother is living or no longer with you, taking a look at this important relationship will provide insights into what has shaped you from your earliest beginning. Many of us carry the “little girl” in us into all our adult relationships. This precious child, created in God’s image, may or may not have been treated kindly and fairly growing up. Every detail of our lives is important to God, and he desires to heal us in our inward parts. He also can lead us on a path to find healing and peace with our mothers in our adult relationships with them.

### **Scripture Reading**

“Can a mother forget her nursing child? Can she feel no love for the child she has borne? But even if that were possible, I would not forget you! See, I have written your name on the palms of my hands.”

Isaiah 49:15-16

### **Holding on to Biblical Truth**

We are seen, we are remembered, and we are loved. Our names are written on the hands and heart of God. Though others may have wounded us, God draws us close to himself and cares for us with the tenderness of a nursing mother caring for her child’s need.

The following key bullet points serve as the introductory guide for the book and this first meeting:

- We have all been imprinted by this important and primary relationship.
- We have been impacted by both the beautiful and the broken parts of our mothers.
- Looking at your early story will give you valuable information to understand who you are today.
- Many of our beliefs, reactions, and habitual responses come from this vital relationship.
- Along the way, the imprinting may have impacted your sense of being precious, beautiful, safe, nurtured, and strong.
- Think of this book as a step back to God's original plan to claim you as his own treasure.
- This book will help you have compassion on yourself as well as your mother.
- The best thing you can do for those who follow you is receive healing for your hurts.
- God will turn the pain of your story into a redemption song.

### **Discussion Questions**

1. What happens when you hear the word *mother*?
2. What is (or was) the best thing about your relationship with your mom?  
What has been (or was) the hardest thing about your relationship with her?
3. Have you thought about how your mother has imprinted you?  
Have you been affected by her?
4. What does the Isaiah verse say to you if your mother hasn't loved, nurtured, or treated you perfectly?
5. Your mother's influence is always with you. Whether she is living or not, coming to peace with Mom is an important part of our spiritual and emotional health. Where are you on that journey?  
What do you hope to gain from going through *It's Momplicated*?



## **It's Momplicated - Week 2**

### **Part One: Momplications**

#### **Chapter 1**

##### **Every Woman Has a Story**

The story of you began long before anyone had a thought of you. Before your conception, God had thoughts, plans, and dreams for you. You are not only a miracle of life, but a template of God's design. You are important to the God who created you, and your story has value.

##### **Scripture Reading**

"So God created human beings in his own image. In the image of God he created them; male and female he created them." Genesis 1:27

"Then God looked over all he had made, and he saw that it was very good!" Genesis 1:31

"Everything was created through him and for him. He existed before anything else, and he holds all creation together." Colossians 1:16-17

"Thank you for making me so wonderfully complex! Your workmanship is marvelous—how well I know it. You watched me as I was being formed in utter seclusion, as I was woven together in the dark of the womb. You saw me before I was born. Every day of my life was recorded in your book. Every moment was laid out before a single day had passed." Psalm 139:14-16

“For we are God’s masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.” Ephesians 2:10

“He himself gives life and breath to everything, and he satisfies every need.” Acts 17:25

### **Holding On to Biblical Truth**

- You are God’s design and God’s plan.
- You are created in the image of God.
- You were seen and loved before you were born.
- God knit you together in YOUR mother’s womb for a purpose.
- All your days have been laid out by the God who created you.

### **Discussion Questions**

1. When you view your earliest beginnings through the lens of being God’s desire, design, and creation, do you have hope and a sense of purpose?
2. Were you comforted physically and/or emotionally as a child by your mother?
3. Can you identify any areas that you might be emotionally reactive? Stuck? Or an area where you might need healing?
4. What would being courageous enough to face and accept your own story and the healing needed look like to you?

## **Chapter 2**

### **Every Woman Has an Imperfect Mother**

There is no perfect mother. Most mothers love their children and have done the best they could with the tools they have been given.

## **Scripture Reading**

“For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God’s glorious standard.”

Romans 3:23

## **Holding on to Biblical Truth**

There are no perfect people.

But we are loved by a perfect God.

This chapter helps us begin to recognize wounds we may have carried into adulthood with us.

Here are eight blocks that may be keeping you from recognizing the ways your mother was less than perfect.

- Things are good between us and our mothers at this moment.
- We are grateful for all the ways our mothers have gifted us.
- We never stop longing for our mothers’ love.
- We have compassion for the difficulties our mothers endured.
- Some wounds do not feel like wounds.
- Some wounds come from too much “love” or too much involvement.
- We can’t remember our early years.
- We have a natural denial system.

We have provided an assessment in this chapter to identify your personal “momplications.”

### **Discussion Questions**

1. What three words describe the positive qualities of your mother? How have her positive qualities impacted you as a woman today?
2. What three words describe her negative qualities? How have her negative qualities impacted you as you grew up and as a woman today?
3. Is there anything from the eight-point list that you identify with, that might be keeping you in denial about the need for healing?
4. What did you discover as you did the momplications assessment in this chapter?



## **It's Momplicated - Week 3**

### **Chapter 3**

#### **Every Woman Carries Her Mother's Mark**

Mothers have a profound impact on their daughters. Looking back allows us to see where we have come from and what things might have had a lasting impact on our lives. This chapter looks at the power of imprinting that happens early in life and shapes us as we grow up.

Here are a few key points:

- Our mothers' lives touch ours and leave heartprints on us.
- Imprinting starts early and affects our identities.
- Our mothers' imprints affect our intimacy patterns.
- When the heartprint from Mom is less than desirable, we need the negative to be replaced with a Godprint of truth.
- Our mothers are human, like us, and most did the best they could with what they had. As we explore our history, it is wise to pray to have grace and understanding for our mothers' stories and where they came from as well.

#### **Identity**

Our earliest beliefs about ourselves start with our mothers. They are our first mirrors in which we see ourselves; we learn who we are by what we see reflected in their eyes. If they view us as precious, lovable, valuable, capable, etc., we will assume their viewpoint.

#### **Attachment Styles**

This chapter looks at the way our mothers' attachment to us, or lack of attachment, may have affected us from our earliest beginnings.

In the following verses we can find comfort in knowing that God is our ultimate security and completely safe attachment.

### **Scripture Reading**

“I have loved you even as the Father has loved me. Remain in my love.”  
John 15:9

“And the very hairs on your head are all numbered. So don’t be afraid; you are more valuable to God than a whole flock of sparrows.” Luke 12:7

“‘I will never fail you. I will never abandon you.’  
So we can say with confidence, ‘The LORD is my helper, so I will have no fear.’” Hebrews 13:5-6

“I have cared for you since you were born. Yes, I carried you before you were born. I will be your God throughout your lifetime—until your hair is white with age. I made you, and I will care for you. I will carry you along and save you.” Isaiah 46:3-4

“The LORD hears his people when they call to him for help. He rescues them from all their troubles. The LORD is close to the brokenhearted; he rescues those whose spirits are crushed.” Psalm 34:17-18

### **Holding on to Biblical Truth**

- The love of the Father is upon us, connecting us to him.
- We are invited to remain in the love of God.
- We are completely known and valued.
- We can live without fear.
- God hears us always and cares for us deeply.
- God will never abandon us, reject us, or turn us away.

## **Discussion Questions**

1. What positive and negative beliefs about your identity did you receive as a young child?
2. Attachment styles can affect our adult relationships. Which attachment style best describes you? Why?
  - Secure—a basic trust in relationship to others
  - Anxious—an emotional push-pull in relationship to others
  - Avoidant—shut down and not expecting much
  - Disorganized—inconsistent and confused
3. Have a group member read the “Heartprints” poem in this chapter and discuss the imprints, both good and bad.

While being grateful for the positive, we need to recognize what has been negative, so we can work to change the unhealthy ways we have learned to cope. When we do, we can more readily leave positive, life-giving marks on others.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Every Woman Can Live a Better Story**

God is our perfect parent and is in the business of redemption and restoration. He holds out abundant life for us regardless of our past or present circumstances. Part of living a better story is being transformed by the renewing of our minds. This chapter speaks of the default system of mindless thinking that we are probably not conscious of, and how thinking things that are not productive or true about life may be holding us back.

## **Scripture Reading**

“Don’t copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God’s will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect.” Romans 12:2

“Let the Spirit renew your thoughts and attitudes.” Ephesians 4:23

“We are human, but we don’t wage war as humans do. We use God’s mighty weapons, not worldly weapons, to knock down the strongholds of human reasoning and to destroy false arguments.” 2 Corinthians 10:3-4

## **Holding on to Biblical Truth**

- Our thinking is important.
- We can be transformed into new people by allowing God to change us and the way we think.
- The Spirit of God has the power to renew our attitudes and thoughts.

We don’t fight our thinking with worldly weapons, but we destroy all that is false in God’s power while replacing lies with truth.

## **Discussion Questions**

1. All of us have a default network of mindless thinking. What is the area of mindless thinking that traps you the most?
2. Does your thinking change when you remember you are part of a bigger story?
3. Which description of God (pages 72–73) is the most meaningful to you today?



## **It's Momplicated - Week 4**

### **Part Two:**

### **Falling Short of God's Design**

We have explored the idea of momplications and have begun to identify some of our own. Over the next two weeks, we will be looking at four basic things a daughter needs from her mother. You may discover what was lacking and how you now need God to reparent you to full emotional health. If you are currently raising children, you can become aware of being a mama who learns to live on the high road emotionally rather than the low road.

### **Four Needs**

- Daughters need a present, attuned, nurturing mother.
- Daughters need to feel safe.
- Daughters need teaching and guidance.
- Daughters need to be celebrated for the unique people God has made them to be.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Mom, Where Are You?**

We are now looking at the first basic need—to have a present, attuned, nurturing mother—and how God is always present to fill that need.

Have a group member read aloud a copy of the children's classic *The Runaway Bunny*.

### **Scripture Reading**

"I can never escape from your Spirit! I can never get away from your presence! If I go up to heaven, you are there; if I go down to the grave, you are there. If I ride the wings of the morning, if I dwell by the farthest oceans, even there your hand will guide me, and your strength will support me." Psalm 139:7-10

"The eyes of the LORD watch over those who do right; his ears are open to their cries for help." Psalm 34:15

"Hagar used another name to refer to the LORD, who had spoken to her. She said, 'You are the God who sees me.'" Genesis 16:13

"They will call him Immanuel, which means 'God is with us.'"

Matthew 1:23

"I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever—the Spirit of truth. . . . He lives with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans." John 14:16-18, NIV

### **Holding on to Biblical Truth**

- God is attuned to my every need.
- The God who made everything made me and guides me today.
- He is the God who sees me, seeing my childhood, seeing the effects.
- He is a God who is with me still.
- The Spirit of truth will be with me forever.
- I am not an orphan; I am not on my own. I am loved by God and am his daughter.

## **Discussion Questions**

1. What emotions does the story *The Runaway Bunny* bring up for you?
2. Was your mother present? If not, how do you think that might have impacted you?
3. What truths about God's presence speak to you the most?

## **Chapter 6**

### **Mom, Will You Keep Me Safe?**

Children are vulnerable and dependent. One of the needs we have as children is to be kept safe. But in a fallen world with imperfect parents, situations, and people, safety has not been the story. A lack of safety can impact us with fear for years. Jesus wants to untangle the knots that keep us bound up, freeing us to know we are not only loved but ultimately safe.

## **Scripture Reading**

"Those who live in the shelter of the Most High will find rest in the shadow of the Almighty. This I declare about the LORD; He alone is my refuge, my place of safety; he is my God, and I trust him. For he will rescue you from every trap and protect you from deadly disease. He will cover you with his feathers. He will shelter you with his wings. His faithful promises are your armor and protection." Psalm 91:1-4

## **Holding on to Biblical Truth**

- In God, you have a place of safety.
- He rescues you and covers you.
- If you did not have a safe environment growing up, God wants to turn your thinking into peace and safety rather than fear and dread.
- In this world we are not always physically safe, but God keeps our souls safe in him.

## **Discussion Questions**

1. Growing up, when did you feel loved by being kept safe?
2. When did you feel vulnerable by not being protected?
3. Is fear one of the ways the enemy tries to tempt you to doubt God and refuse to take appropriate risks?
4. What lies have you believed about safety?



## **It's Momplicated - Week 5**

### **Chapter 7**

#### **Mom, Will You Teach and Guide Me?**

Children need instruction. Girls in particular need to have a mother show them things about being a woman. Though men also assume many of the traditional female roles such as cooking, there are things that a girl can only learn from another girl. Her mother is the best “girl” to teach her about life as a growing girl. If a mother was not attuned or was otherwise distracted, she may have skipped this vital need altogether.

#### **Scripture Reading**

“I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you with my loving eye on you.” Psalm 32:8, NIV

“Your hands made me and formed me; give me understanding to learn your commands.” Psalm 119:73, NIV

“Look upon me with love; teach me your decrees.” Psalm 119:135, NIV

“These older women must train the younger women to love their husbands and their children, to live wisely and be pure, to work in their homes, to do good . . .” Titus 2:4

## **Holding on to Biblical Truth**

- We may not have been instructed, but now God will be our teacher and guide.
- God himself looks upon us and desires to teach us things we need to know.
- Women are to mentor and teach younger women.
- If you did not have that mentoring, God fills in the gaps.

## **Discussion Questions**

1. Did your mother teach you basic life skills?
2. What did your mother teach you about handling your emotions?
3. Did your mother define what it means to be a woman?
4. What did your mother teach you about your body?
5. Did your mother teach you how to relate to men?
6. Did your mother teach you about God and his love for you?

## **Chapter 8**

### **Mom, Will You Celebrate Me as a Unique Individual?**

Both mothers and fathers have a profound ability to build up a daughter's sense of self through affirming words and actions. These words are often pressed into the child's soul and become part of her default network. Mothers are particularly powerful in the early life of a girl, but part of growing up is a girl discovering who she is apart from her mother. If a mother does not affirm her daughter or if she does not encourage her to find her own separate identity, the daughter may begin to form distorted beliefs about herself. She may not realize she is precious, unique, and valuable.

### **Scripture Reading**

“For you are a holy people, who belong to the LORD your God. Of all the people on the earth, the LORD your God has chosen you to be his own special treasure.” Deuteronomy 7:6

“How precious are your thoughts about me, O God. They cannot be numbered! I can’t even count them; they outnumber the grains of sand!” Psalm 139:17-18

### **Holding on to Biblical Truth**

- God celebrates you.
- You are precious to him.
- He calls you his treasure.
- He is always thinking about you.
- No one can take your place in his story. You are unique.

### **Discussion Questions**

1. Did your mother encourage you often?
2. Was she okay with you being different from her?
3. Was she too involved? A helicopter mom?
4. Was she controlling or narcissistic?
5. Did your mother enforce rules, or was she too permissive?



## **It's Momplicated - Week 6**

### **Part Three:**

### **Restoring Our Hearts**

God desires to restore us to God's original intent for us.

### **Chapter 9**

### **Healing Starts with Facing Reality**

Now that you have identified areas in which you had less-than-ideal imprinting or where your heart has held pain, you can begin to pursue healing. Not only does healing relieve our pain, but it also helps us become the women of love, truth, and integrity God designed us to be.

### **Scripture Reading**

"When I was a child, I spoke and thought and reasoned as a child. But when I grew up, I put away childish things." 1 Corinthians 13:11

"We now have this light shining in our hearts, but we ourselves are like fragile clay jars containing this great treasure. This makes it clear that our great power is from God, not from ourselves." 2 Corinthians 4:7

### **Holding On to Biblical Truth**

- You have a God who understands you.
- You are to approach him confidently in prayer.
- God cares about your pain, misbeliefs, and weaknesses.
- God has walked through life in human form, so he empathizes with your struggles and has much to teach you.

## **Discussion Questions**

1. Identify any of the following coping mechanisms that pertain to you and share what God is revealing to you:
  - People pleasing
  - Numbing yourself with sex, food, drugs, shopping, position
  - Excessive dependency
  - Excessive self-reliance
  - Becoming controlling
2. Share with the group any beliefs that you have carried into adulthood based on discovery after doing your time line.
3. What is one core lie you have believed?
4. How did you cope with the pain that resulted from that false belief?

## **Chapter 10**

### **Healing Continues by Living in the Truth**

We began our inner healing journey with some initial steps:

- Pray
- Identify core lies
- Explore their impact

In this next chapter we look at three more steps that will move us forward:

- Apply God's truth
- Acknowledge the good
- Live out of your Spirit-led self

## **Scripture Reading**

“The word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.” Hebrews 4:12, NIV

“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the [woman] of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.” 2 Timothy 3:16, NIV

“We capture their rebellious thoughts and teach them to obey Christ.” 2 Corinthians 10:5

“Whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.” Philippians 4:8, NIV

## **Holding On to Biblical Truth**

- God’s Word is powerful to penetrate my heart and emotions.
- All Scripture will teach me what doesn’t work for me and what is right for me.
- I am to challenge the thoughts that are not in agreement with God’s Word.
- I am to put off the false and dwell on what is good.

## **Discussion Questions**

1. What are some of the thoughts that feed the main lie you have believed about yourself or your life?
2. What is the nature of God’s love and heart toward you?
3. Share a childhood photo of you and proclaim the love of God over that little girl.
4. What is the difference between living in “self” and living in “the Spirit”?



## **It's Momplicated - Week 7**

### **Chapter 11**

#### **Healing Can Happen in Your Current Relationship**

It takes courage to determine how far your mom is able and willing to go with you in the healing process. If she has passed away, all that remains is for you to heal internally. If she is living, only God knows what possibilities exist to improve the relationship. Take every step to bring love and instill harmony with your mother. Be diligent to do your part.

#### **Scripture Reading**

“Do all that you can to live in peace with everyone.” Romans 12:18

“Honor your father and mother. Then you will live a long, full life.”  
Exodus 20:12

“Accept each other just as Christ has accepted you so that God will be given glory.” Romans 15:7

“Since God chose you to be the holy people he loves, you must clothe yourselves with tenderhearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. Make allowance for each other's faults, and forgive anyone who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others.” Colossians 3:12-13

## **Holding on to Biblical Truth**

- I am to explore what I can do to make the relationship better.
- Honoring my mother is important, and God will show me what that looks like in my situation.
- I am accepted by God, and I am to accept my mother.
- I am to clothe myself with a tender heart and forgive.

## **Discussion Questions**

1. Do the Serenity Prayer exercise at the end of the chapter and share with the group what you discovered.
2. What do healthy boundaries look like with your mother?
3. What actions might you take to ensure healthy boundaries?

## **Chapter 12**

### **Changing the Legacy You Leave**

Since the moment you were conceived, your mother has shaped you, and she was shaped by the generations that preceded her. Her love or inability to love is woven into the fabric that defines who you have become. Regardless of how we as daughters began our journeys, one thing is certain: We, too, are adding texture and meaning to the fabric of the lives that come after us. We are difference makers in the lives of our daughters, granddaughters, stepdaughters, and others, and the difference we make will go on for eternity. Whether we have biological children or not, we all leave a legacy.

## **Scripture Reading**

“Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.” Deuteronomy 6:5-9, NIV

## **Holding on to Biblical Truth**

- We are to love God with all that is in us.
- We are to press the truth into the lives that follow us.
- We are to talk about God and his goodness.
- We are to live out of the bigger story of who God is and how much he loves us.

## **Discussion Questions**

1. What bad habits or negative patterns have been passed down to you that you don't want to pass down to others?
2. Write your own eulogy and share it with your group.
3. How would your life change if you began to live like it's real?
4. Now that you have reached the end of the book and healing journey, share with the others how God has touched you, convicted you, healed you, or improved your relationship with your mother.