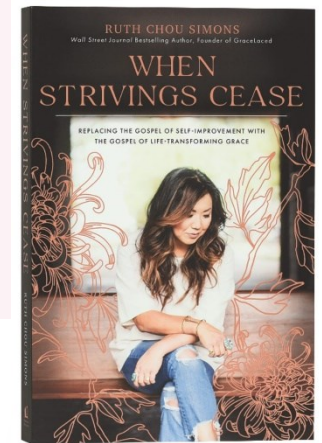




LEADER'S GUIDE

WHEN STRIVING CEASE BY RUTH CHOU SIMONS



"We say we trust that Jesus is enough, but we spend our lives trying to prove that we are, instead."

RUTH CHOU SIMONS

THEMES

Striving

Rest

Grace

Faith

Belonging

Acceptance

Forgiveness

Our Stories

BOOK SUMMARY

Ruth presents a very thorough, thoughtful, and encouraging case for God's sufficiency in our weakness. A calling to cease striving, surrender to our mighty God, and be filled with hope as we rid ourselves of our need for self-improvement. Instead, we aim to view our lives through His perfection, enoughness, and unlimited grace.

Ruth invites us to join her on a journey she's still on. The beauty of this book is found both in the powerful truth of scripture woven throughout the pages and in Ruth's personal stories and testimony. As she shares her hope of discovering God's Grace in everyday things and knowing it is more than enough to sustain it her this side of eternity.

"God desires to prove his faithfulness through our surrender in our weakness, but so often we choose to resist his help, clinging to our own determination to prove ourselves strong. We'd rather limp along in our striving than surrender in weakness. The reason we limp along and live worn out in our Christian lives is what I hope to uncover in these pages you hold in your hands, and it's what I seek to lead us out of through the means of grace" (p9).

Part One; When Striving Isn't Enough

Striving for self-improvement is a dead-end street, and many of us are unknowingly worshipping a gospel of self-sufficiency instead of the Gospel of Jesus. We long for welcome and acceptance while suffering from disappointment and apathy. But we must remember that Jesus is the hero of our stories, not us! We can't cover our shame or save ourselves; Jesus is our covering.

"The gospel of self-improvement is a damning one. It is a gospel that is not good news at all; it will wall you off, shrivel you up, and destroy your sensitivity to God's pursuit"... and "Herein lies the whole reason we must cease striving through good works: they do not save" (p103).

Part Two; When Grace Changes Everything

Striving ceases when:

- We no longer need to prove our worth.
- We stop chasing approval as our comfort.
- We glory in our weaknesses.
- God is greater than our accomplishments.
- We know peace apart from pleasing others.
- God is for us and no longer against us.
- Jesus so captures our gaze we stop chasing everything else" (p226).



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS & TALKING POINTS

1

Q. "If we believe Jesus is all we need, then why do we live our days worn out, fearful and anxiously striving as if we are lacking and unable to measure up?" (pxii).

TALKING POINTS

- We may feel we lack resources such as time, achievement, clarity, purpose, energy, confidence, or acceptance/welcome from a Holy God (pxxi).
- We may feel that we don't measure up as friends, at work, as mothers, as wives, as parents, with our appearance, in our seasons or as followers of Christ (pxxi).
- It can be easy to default to striving when experiencing seasons of fear, worry, isolation, loss, sadness and lack of control.
- Sometimes we believe God is enough to save us from eternal despair but not enough to secure us here and now – our actions often suggest putting our trust in ourselves instead of God.

2

Q. "We are living in the now and not yet" (p12). Discuss.

TALKING POINTS

As Christians, we live between two worlds (p12):

- "We are planted here on earth, but our hope is in heaven."
- "We live in earthly bodies but abide in the eternal."
- We are given work to do on earth which will have eternal significance.
- We are continuously being made new; present, and progressively.
- "Everything that is ours in Christ is true right now but, at the same time, not fully recognised."
- "We can mistake the not yet for not enough if we're not grounded in what the Bible says about God's favour and how we receive it."
- "We're not yet sinless, but his forgiveness is enough to make us clean."
- "We're not yet with him face-to-face, but his presence is enough to sustain us."
- "We're not yet fully transformed, but his glory is enough to declare us worthy."

3

Q. Ruth asks us, "What's your current response when you read about the Christian life in the Bible?" (p15). Did this change between starting and completing the book?

TALKING POINTS

You can trace your belief back to your core belief by starting with your response (p15);

- "When you believe your only hope is God's grace, you'll respond with gratitude and relief."
- "When you believe it's up to you to perfectly please God, you'll struggle with guilt and fear."
- "And if you believe God is unknowable, unkind, or unfair in what he asks of his creation, you'll stop trying to know him at all."

4

Q. "What faulty view of God do you have?" (p28). Discuss.

TALKING POINTS

"Because we naturally form patterns of thought in our minds based on our feelings, we must be intentional about replacing our faulty ideas of God with what is actually true about who he is and what he desires of us" (p26). In Chapter Two, Ruth shares how the words from her earthly father, "You have not finished the dishes", impacted her view of her Heavenly Father. Internally she imagined God saying (p25):

- "You haven't read your Bible – don't come to me until you do."
- "You haven't made the right choices – don't cry for help when you're in trouble."
- "You haven't acted very Christlike – clean yourself up before you draw near."

If we don't correct our wrong thinking, we're likely to operate out of a place of fear, self-pity, self-condemnation, and guilt. We will confuse God's complete acceptance of us (in Christ) with how culture accepts/rejects us.

On pages 28 and 29, Ruth clarifies how God welcomes us through Christ;

- He is patient with us.
- He calls us sons and daughters.
- He is a tender father. We needn't fear.
- He knows our frailty yet has compassion for us.
- He knows everything about us (and made us lovingly).
- He invites us in and makes us family.
- He makes us able to draw near with confidence.
- He listens to the details, fears and burdens we bear and responds.

5

Q. "How would you describe the grace of God in your life?" (p41). Discuss.

TALKING POINTS

All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23):

- The holiness of God found us lacking.
The mercy of God sent Jesus to bear the punishment we deserve.
- The righteousness of God declared us forgiven.
- The goodness of God reshapes us into his likeness
- The love of God overcomes evil so that we might share in all that is Christ's.

God's gift of Grace – or God's unmerited favour (p117):

- "We didn't deserve it and did nothing to merit his favour toward us."
- "God pursued us with love and intention to pull us out of the sinkhole of misery and self-sufficiency, and he made us fit to be with Jesus through Jesus."
- "He made it abundantly clear that it was his idea, his provision, his way, and his gift."

Read Ephesians 2:1-10 together.

6

Q. "What is something God has given you to do?" (p64). Discuss.

TALKING POINTS

"Does the approval of others keep you from responding in faith? Are you more concerned with your performance or God's presence in doing the work?" (p64):

- When we substitute God's purpose with our performance, we make ourselves slaves to perfection.
- When we believe that our performance is the key to securing all that we want and need, we lose our joy in the task.
- We become consumed with appearing righteous and eager to flaunt perfection – holding others up to unachievable standards.
- "Adherence and execution minus love equals joyless religiosity" (p65).

We know when we're driven by delight and not a burden to perform because we desire to keep going, and we feel God's delight in what he's called us to do (p73).

- We can't save ourselves no matter how well we perform; we will only find true joy when we do what God has called us to do from a place of peace – knowing Jesus is the hero.

7

Q. What does the Bible say about our belonging to Christ?

TALKING POINTS

"Without knowing our belong in Jesus, we will strive to belong as our highest hope -in groups, among peers, with family, at church" (p85).

What is our only hope in life and death? (p81 & 82);

- I am not my own. (1 Cor. 6:19-20)
- I am his in life and death. (Rom. 14:7-9)
- I belong to Christ, and Christ belongs to God. (1 Cor. 3:23)
- I am purchased and paid for. (1 Peter 1:18-19)
- I am set free. (John 8:34-36)
- I am safe and secure. (John 10:27-30)
- I am intimately cared for. (Matt 10:29-31)
- God purposes all things for my good. (Rom 8:28)
- I am forever sealed and secured in him. (Eph 1:13-14)
- I'm enabled to live by the Spirit. (Rom. 8:1-17)

8

Q. "Right living overflows from right believing" (p153). Discuss.

TALKING POINTS

What is the relationship between orthodoxy and orthopraxy?

- Orthopraxy means right conduct or command (*ortho* means straight, *praxy* means practise) (p149).
- Orthopraxy is what we do because of our faith (p150).
- Orthodoxy is what we believe (p150).
- "Orthodoxy tells us what is straight; orthopraxy tells us how to walk along that straight line" (p150).
- Orthodoxy is important; without sound biblical belief and comprehension, we cannot walk out Christian Orthopraxy well.
- "Without the Orthodoxy – or what is true about who God is and what he's done – the orthopraxy would be basically impossible" (p151).

9

Q. Finish the sentence, "I am from..." (173).

TALKING POINTS

Some of our 'from' stories are painful, difficult to share or think about, and we might even wish they didn't exist:

- We may have grown up in a loving Christian family – yet we still have trauma, hurts, and hang ups from the fallen world we inhabit.
- We may have grown up in a family who knew about Jesus and went to church but lacked Christian orthopraxy which can be both harmful and confusing or a stumbling block to keeping in the faith.
- We may be first-generation Christians with no family roots in the faith – paving the way, learning how to role model Christ through trial and error to our own families and friends – never having seen it done before.

"And like the early believers in exile, our 'I am from...' pales in comparison to 'Who I am and what I have in Christ'" (p184). As followers of Christ, our backstories no longer define us; we are His.

10

Q. "What are the stressors that reveal your natural propensities toward striving and control in response to fear and doubt?" (192) and how will you cease striving? Discuss.

TALKING POINTS

Striving is often connected to fear and lies from the enemy;

- Fear of not meeting expectations.
- Fear of not being loved, welcomed, or accepted.
- Fear of feeling not good enough.
- Lie; God is only faithful when we are faithful.
- Lie; God will only forgive me once I get my act together.
- Lie; God's favour for me isn't certain.

Fear is overcome with freedom;

- "A sound mind and secure identity in Christ together anchor us to the realities of what grace has accomplished for us - even when we can't *yet see* all that grace will one day transform in us" (199).
- "True change is made up of a million small, daily, seemingly insignificant choices" (p191).
- "The good life isn't the absence of heartache; it's the presence of God, by grace, in the midst of it" (p183).
- Our hope in the midst of hardship is that Jesus doesn't just work things out for our good – he *is* our good" (p183).
- ""You don't have to be blooming to be growing" (p91).
- We need to acknowledge the enemy's lies and attacks but focus on renewing our minds through Christ and his truth – it's not enough to expose the lie. We must also renew our minds.
- "God's grace saves, trains, purifies, and sustains. And most of all, God's grace makes us his" (p223).
- "I know you think you have to hold it all together... But the life-transforming gospel of grace declares that it is Christ who is holding all things together" (p224).

Close your meeting by all speaking aloud Ruth's prayer on pages 227-228.



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