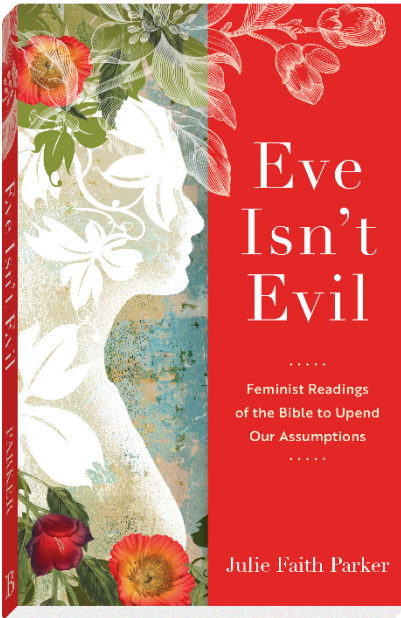


Eve Isn't Evil: Feminist Readings of the Bible to Upend Our Assumptions Discussion Guide



A Simple Guide for Facilitators of Group Discussion

by Julie Faith Parker

Thank you so much for choosing *Eve Isn't Evil* for your book discussion! I hope that this guide will bring your group into closer community through meaningful conversation.

Listening carefully, valuing each other's stories, and sharing power and leadership are all feminist practices. The process and questions below offer the opportunity to experience these aspects of feminism while exploring feminist biblical interpretation.

First, a few guidelines:

- The goal is to honor each person's insights and foster connections among the group members. For this reason, I am not supplying academic background or other information that will set one person apart as the "expert." If someone in the group (perhaps a clergyperson with seminary training) has academic knowledge of the Bible, they might offer themselves as a resource for questions. But the presence of such a person is not at all necessary for fruitful discussion.
- With this guide, any person in the group can serve as the facilitator. You might consider rotating who leads the discussion each week. A key responsibility of the facilitator is to make sure all participants are heard and everyone has a chance to speak.
- This study guide is designed for five meetings, although sessions can be condensed and combined for fewer gatherings or expanded for more sessions using the questions at the back of each chapter. Each session focuses on two chapters or sections of the book, including the academic excurses (from chapter 10), that relate to the chapters discussed. Questions with an asterisk next to the number come from the book and are listed at the end of the related chapter. (I am posting this guide as a Word document [not a pdf], so you can easily adapt it for your group. Please feel free to adjust the questions and sessions to fit your needs.)

- You might consider emailing the questions to participants in advance of each session or the entire study guide at the start of your discussion series. If group members have the questions in advance and can think about them as they read, these prompts can help facilitate discussion.
- For groups that might want to work with a Bible passage directly, a biblical text for optional discussion is provided in each session. This element might be especially helpful for religious groups. You might try working with the text during the first week to see how it goes.
- Depending on your group, you might allow time at the beginning of each session to ask for reactions to what people have read. You can also save some time for overall impressions at the end of each session.
- If your group would like me to Zoom into a session for questions and answers, I'm glad to do so (at no cost to you). Please send verification of book purchases via my website (juliefaithparker.com) and we can arrange a time. The more advance notice you give me, the better the chance that I can make it to one of your sessions via Zoom.

Session 1

The goals of this session are to establish group rapport and introduce the book. Please adapt this session to your needs, depending on how well people already know each other.

Prior Reading:

Chapter 1: "In the Beginning"

Appendix 1: "Bible Basics"

Opening: Welcome people to the group discussion and thank them for coming.

One Sentence Icebreaker:

Invite people to go around and say their name and what kind of books they like to read (in one sentence).

Model answering with brevity by going first:

"My name is _____ and I like to read _____."

If on Zoom, you might put the sentence (as above) in the chat. You could call on one person to share, and then ask that person to call on someone else, and so on and so forth until everyone has shared their sentence of introduction.

If in person, you might put the sentence on a whiteboard or newsprint, then gather responses by going around the circle or table, depending on how the participants are seated.

Session Opener:

Eve Isn't Evil is both an academic and personal book, which also includes elements of a memoir. This approach makes it unusual among scholarly publications. This session will look at one of the more academic sections, appendix 1, as well as the first chapter, which is more personal.

Questions:

1. In “Bible Basics” (appendix 1), Parker notes that she found the Bible very confusing during the first part of her life, even though she went to church weekly with her family.

What was your experience of the Bible during your early life?

If you did not grow up with the Bible, what were your thoughts about it?

2. This appendix gives a lot of information about the Bible’s contents and origins.

What did you learn that you found interesting?

What surprised you?

3. Parker opens the first chapter of *Eve Isn't Evil* by sharing about her experience with a medium.

What do you think about tapping such unconventional sources for spiritual insight?

Have you ever gotten advice from an unlikely source? What happened?

4. On page 5, Parker speaks about *feminist* as a loaded term and confides, “I claim ‘feminist’ with a touch of trepidation because this term carries negative connotations for many people. But not for me. To me, feminism simply means liberty and justice for all, including people who identify as female.” She then shares how choices in her life are due to the work of feminists who came before her (p. 6).

Does the word *feminism* resonate positively or negatively for you? Why?

Does your understanding of feminism match Parker’s?

If it differs, what is feminism to you?

How does feminism relate to your own life and the choices you have made?

5. Optional Look at the Biblical Text

Read the first chapter of Ruth with a feminist lens.

What do you notice about the women in this story? How would you describe them?

How would you describe the women's relationship with each other?

Which of the characters do you relate to in some way? How do you relate to them?

Closing: Thank people for coming and explain that the next session will focus on chapters 2 and 3, along with the related discussions from chapter 10.

Religious groups may want to end with the following prayer or offer their own.

(Creator God, we thank you for your Word that invites us into relationship with you.

As we leave this time of gathering, help us to notice the ways you continually reach out to us so that we might, in turn, reach out to others with your love. Amen.)

Session 2

The goals of this session are to upend assumptions about Eve as the source of original sin and expand awareness of how biblical families are flawed, like our own.

Prior Reading:

Chapter 2: "Eve Isn't Evil—Why I Love Her and You Should Too"

and "Misleading Translations of Genesis 3:6 and 3:16"
(pages 132–35 from chapter 10)

Chapter 3: "Think Your Family's a Mess? Biblical Families R Us"

and "The Status of Women in the Biblical World"
(pages 135–37 from chapter 10)

Opening: Thank people for returning and welcome newcomers. *One Sentence Icebreaker:*

Invite people to go around and say their name and one positive adjective a friend would use to describe them.

Model answering with brevity by going first:

“My name is _____ and my friends would say that I’m _____.”

If on Zoom, you might put the sentence (as above) in the chat. You could call on one person to share, and then ask that person to call on someone else, and so on and so forth until everyone has shared their sentence of introduction.

If in person, you might put the sentence on a whiteboard or newsprint, then gather responses by going around the circle or table, depending on how the participants are seated.

Session Opener:

Most people think of Eve as the creator of original sin. Many of the adjectives commonly used to describe her are negative: *sinful, gullible, weak, tempting*, etc. In this session we will question some of those presuppositions. Conversely, a lot of people think that biblical families are ideal models to be emulated. Chapter 3 questions this presupposition and offers a more relatable view of biblical families.

Questions:

1. In chapter 2 (the book’s title chapter), Parker retells the story of Genesis 2–3 through a feminist lens to emphasize Eve’s power, intelligence, and desire for ethical wisdom.

What did you think of Parker’s interpretation?

What surprised you?

2. In the section from chapter 10 titled “Misleading Translations of Genesis 3:6 and 3:16,” Parker explains that Adam was with Eve (*immah*, meaning “with her”) throughout Eve’s conversation with the snake, but translators have frequently taken out the phrase “with her.”

What difference does it make if Adam is present when Eve talks with the serpent?

3.* Eve is given the amazing ability to nurture life in her own body, and she is called “the mother of all living.”

What do you like to create?

If you could be called the “mother/father/ parent” of something, what would it be?

4. Abraham and Sarah begin the legacy of the Israelites. They leave their homeland, and their lives are forever changed.

What elements of the story of this biblical family relate to your own?

What is one transition in your life that has changed your story significantly?

5. Optional Look at the Biblical Text

Read the story of Rebekah (Genesis 24) with a feminist lens (keep in mind the discussion from the section “The Status of Women in the Biblical World,” which is in chapter 10).

How would you describe Rebekah?

What are her sources of power?

What does her family seem to think about her? How can you tell?

What traits might you share with her?

Closing: Thank people for coming and explain that the next session will focus on chapters 4 and 5 and the related discussions from chapter 10.

Religious groups may want to end with the following prayer or offer their own.

(God who journeys with us, we thank you for accompanying us since our own beginning. Guide us each day as we seek to live into the fullness of our God-imaged selves. And help us to be grateful for how far we have come by faith. Amen.)

Session 3

The goals of this session are to expand awareness of the wide range of characters in the Bible (including goddesses and prostitutes) and the ways of spiritual power (including prophetic gifts in the world around us).

Prior Reading:

Chapter 4: “Sex Workers, Slaughters, and Deities without Borders”

and “Goddesses of the Hebrew Bible and Ugaritic Literature”
(pages 137–41 from chapter 10)

Chapter 5: “Profit from Prophecy”

and “Children Can Be Prophets Too” (pages 141–44 from chapter 10)

Opening: Thank people for returning and welcome newcomers.

One Sentence Icebreaker:

Invite people to go around and say their name and state one ability or skill that they have.

Model answering with brevity by going first:

“My name is _____ and I am able to _____.”

If on Zoom, you might put the sentence (as above) in the chat. You could call on one person to share, and then ask that person to call on someone else, and so on and so forth until everyone has shared their sentence of introduction.

If in person, you might put the sentence on a whiteboard or newsprint, then gather responses by going around the circle or table, depending on how the participants are seated.

Session Opener:

Many people do not realize the diversity of biblical characters and their spiritual gifts. Chapter 4 highlights the roles of prostitutes and goddesses in the Bible, while addressing the problematic issue of genocide in the book of Joshua. Chapter 5 and the discussion in chapter 10 show that women and children, along with men, are prophets in the Bible. This session will invite us to expand our awareness of the biblical world and the world around us.

Questions:

1. In chapter 4 and in the discussion from chapter 10 (“Goddesses of the Hebrew Bible and Ugaritic Literature”), Parker writes about Asherah and other goddesses of the biblical world.

What was your reaction to learning that there are goddesses in the Bible?

What difference does it make to know that there were so many other deities in the biblical world, in addition to Yahweh (whom we call “God”)?

2. Rahab and the women who come before Solomon seeking justice for a living baby are prostitutes, whom we often judge unfairly due to their sexual roles. The biblical text, however, does not view them negatively.

Whom does our society judge unfairly?

How might the Bible, or even the stories of Rahab and the prostitutes before Solomon, help us overcome our prejudices?

3. In chapter 5 and in the discussion from chapter 10, “Children Can Be Prophets Too,” Parker writes about women and children who are prophets in the Bible. She affirms that “Unlike people, the Holy Spirit does not discriminate, as seen in the distribution of prophetic gifts” (p. 141).

Have you ever known anyone who had extraordinary gifts? Who? What were their gifts?

What gifts and abilities do you have, extraordinary or not, that can be used in positive ways?

4.* One woman in the Bible with prophetic gifts, the woman of Endor, goes out of her way to help King Saul when he is troubled. She also offers extravagant hospitality when he is deeply distressed.

When have you gone out of your way to help someone in a difficult situation, or when has someone done the same for you?

When have you offered or received extravagant hospitality?

How did you or your relationship with the other person change due to these encounters?

5. Optional Look at the Biblical Text

Read the story of Deborah in Judges 4 with a feminist lens.

What roles does Deborah have?

Does this surprise you?

Does she remind you of any women today, either publicly famous or in your own life?

Who?

Closing: Thank people for coming and explain that the next session will focus on chapters 6 and 7, along with the related discussions from chapter 10.

Religious groups may want to end with the following prayer or offer their own.

(God of wonders, help us to notice and appreciate the everyday miracles around us. May we recognize and appreciate our own gifts, skills, and abilities—and then use them in your service. Amen.)

Session 4

The goal of this session is to recognize how the Bible speaks to the personal realities of our own lives, including our hopes and heartaches.

Prior Reading:

Chapter 6: “The job of Job”

and “Job’s Wife—Cursing or Blessing?” (pages 144–47 from chapter 10)

Chapter 7: “Guns and Psalms”

and “Women Musicians in the Ancient Near East” (pages 147–52 from chapter 10)

Opening: Thank people for returning and welcome newcomers.

One Sentence Icebreaker:

Invite people to go around and say their name and state the kind of music that they like.

Model answering with brevity by going first:

“My name is _____ and I like to listen to _____.”

If on Zoom, you might put the sentence (as above) in the chat. You could call on one person to share, and then ask that person to call on someone else, and so on and so forth until everyone has shared their sentence of introduction.

If in person, you might put the sentence on a whiteboard or newsprint, then gather responses by going around the circle or table, depending on how the participants are seated.

Session Opener:

The books of Job and Psalms focus on the individual and therefore have a timeless quality in relating to us today. Job deals with the very difficult question of why horrible things happen to good people (which they do all the time!). The book of Psalms gives voice to a wide range of human emotions: pain, fear, longing, gratitude, and joy. This session will help us notice how the Bible can offer solace and support with its honesty and courage.

Questions:

1. In chapter 6, Parker notes the parallel between Job's sudden slew of losses and those that her father faced at the end of his life. The book of Job grapples with the pain of loss, which we all experience.

If someone asked you for advice on how to get through a tough time,
what might you suggest?

2. As the discussion "Job's Wife—Cursing or Blessing" explains, Job's wife does not tell her suffering husband to "curse God." Rather, she literally tells him to "bless God."

What was your reaction to learning about this difference?

Why does translation matter?

3. Ancient believers used the Psalms the same way believers do today: to feel spiritually connected to God at any time and in any place. We all carry words around in our heads that can offer us strength and solace when needed.

What words, sayings, thoughts, or songs offer you comfort or inspiration or peace?

Where do they come from? How did you learn them?

4.* In Psalm 137, the psalmist is far from home.

What is the furthest you have ever been from your home?

What or who took you there? What was the experience like?

5. Optional Look at the Text

Read Psalm 68, in which God is extolled as the Divine Warrior. The people join in a processional tribute to the deity, which includes girls playing drums in celebration (v. 25).

What feelings do you think the psalmist is trying to call forward from listeners?

What is your reaction to envisioning girls as part of the procession, and as music makers in the ancient Near East?

Closing: Thank people for coming and explain that the next session will be the final session, with a focus on chapters 8 and 9 along with the related discussions from chapter 10.

Religious groups may want to end with the following prayer or offer their own.

(God, who knows our hopes and heartaches, help us to be honest with ourselves, with each other, and with you. When we are distressed, may we look for helpers and turn to you in prayer. When we are joyful, may we share this spirit generously and offer you praise. And we thank you for your love that cherishes us always. Amen.)

Session 5

The goal of this session is to question common understandings about people who commit crimes (in and beyond the Bible), and to explore Jesus's relationship to his faith and with the women who were his followers and friends.

Prior Reading:

Chapter 8: "Song of Songs in Sing Sing"

and "Beyond the Binary" (pages 152–55 from chapter 10)

Chapter 9: "My Favorite Feminist Jew"

and "Martha, or More Mary?" (pages 155–60 from chapter 10)

Opening: Thank people for returning and welcome newcomers.

One Sentence Icebreaker:

Invite people to go around and say their name and state one thing that they like to do with a friend.

Model answering with brevity by going first:

“My name is _____ and when I am with a friend, I like to _____.”

If on Zoom, you might put the sentence (as above) in the chat. You could call on one person to share, and then ask that person to call on someone else, and so on and so forth until everyone has shared their sentence of introduction.

If in person, you might put the sentence on a whiteboard or newsprint, then gather responses by going around the circle or table, depending on how the participants are seated.

Session Opener:

These chapters invite us to question common assumptions that many of us carry around, even without realizing it. A lot of people think that individuals who commit crimes are depraved in some way. However, as discussed in chapter 8, the Bible’s great heroes commit crimes. A lot of people also think that Jesus was essentially a Christian. However, as discussed in chapter 9, Jesus is deeply grounded in his Jewish heritage. How might these insights influence our perceptions of others and ourselves?

Questions:

1. In chapter 7 Parker shares about her nervousness when she entered Sing Sing Correctional Facility for the first time. She then shows how she came to cherish the experience of teaching in prison.

When have you ever stepped outside your comfort zone?

How did this experience influence you?

2.* Moses, David, Jesus, and Paul are recognized as great leaders in the Bible, despite their crimes.

Whom do you know or admire who has achieved greatness despite a challenging past?

What have you accomplished despite obstacles?

3. On page 120 Parker offers two assessments. She describes “brown-skinned Palestinian Jews” in the image of Jesus and suggests that women were among Jesus’s disciples.

What do you think of these assertions?

How does her description of Jesus influence your understanding of him?

How does her portrayal of women as disciples influence your understanding of them?

4.* Sometimes what we unlearn is more important than what we learn.

What have you been taught that did not feel true to your experience or that served someone else’s interest at your expense?

How did you discover a truth that differed from what you had been told?

5. Optional Look at the Biblical Text

Read John 11 and consider the discussion “Martha, or More Mary?” (starting on p. 155)

How would you describe Jesus’s relationship with his female friends?

What do you think of Schrader Polczer’s suggestion that Mary Magdalene may have been Lazarus’s sister?

Based on this possibility, and considering the discussion of Mary Magdalene in chapter 9 (p. 126), how would you describe this well-known biblical woman?

Closing: Thank people for coming and participating in this study.

Religious groups may want to close with a circle prayer in which everyone says just one word that is on their heart.

The facilitator explains the process then begins:

God, we thank you for the time we have shared together.

We bring to you now these words on our hearts:

On Zoom, the facilitator would call on each person.

In person, people would stand in a circle and each say their word successively. [participants offer words—e.g., hope, gratitude, rest, strength, etc.]

When everyone has said one word, the facilitator concludes:

*All this we bring before you, loving God, and ask for your blessing.
Amen.*

I truly hope that your group enjoyed reading and discussing Eve Isn't Evil.

I am delighted and honored by your interest in this book.

Thank you!

JFP

