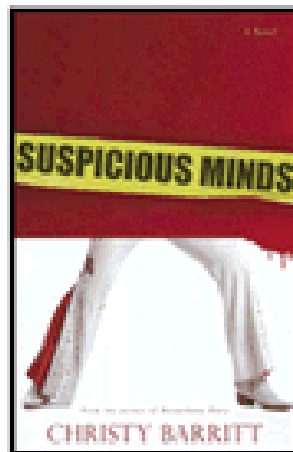


Suspicious Minds

By Christy Barritt

Bible Study Packet

By Kathy Applebee



Suspicious Minds is available from your local book seller and from Amazon.com.

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Royalty free Christian Drama skits can be found at my Fools for Christ website at <http://tiny.cc/rkaz2>

Suspicious Minds

Materials overview

To group members

Welcome. This packet is to assist you and your group as you read *Suspicious Minds* and meet to discuss the book, how it connects with your life and the scriptures. As you read, if you notice something you want your group to talk about jot down a note and page number on the bookmark. You may want to look at the questions about the section you are reading before you read.

If you are using this material solo, you can use the discussion questions as journal prompts or as a personal Bible study.

Group leaders/facilitators:

This is presented as a 4 session Bible study but you should adapt to your group's needs and desires. You may or may not get to all the questions. You may or may not read all the scripture references (although I strongly suggest you read all the passages written out). This is a tool to help generate fruitful discussion, not a detailed road map. Your best preparation for leading the group is to pray about it. God promises to give us wisdom if we ask in James 1:5. You may want to open your study with a prayer that includes God giving all of you wisdom as you meet and talk.

The comfort level of your group will dictate how much of the focus is on Gabby and other characters from *Suspicious Minds* and how much is on the lives of the individuals in your group. It is natural to be more comfortable talking about someone else's problems, thoughts and feelings than one's own in a group one does not know well. Do your best and encourage others to do theirs to make everyone feel welcome but not forced to share. Establish some ground rules everyone is comfortable with such as what stays in the room and what can be shared outside of the group.

Free secular lesson plans on *Hazardous Duty* and *Suspicious Minds* are available on the Teachers Pay Teachers website at <http://www.teacherspayteachers.com/Store/Kathy-Applebee/Products>

Book: Suspicious Minds, by Christy Barritt

Day/Date of my next meeting _____

Pages I need to read by my next meeting: pg. 1-63

As you read write a couple of questions to ask your group at your next meeting. Try to make them OPINION questions, such as “Why do you think...”, or “How did you feel when...”, or “What would you do if...”.

Connecting with others:

*In the beginning of chapter 9 (pages 49-50) Gabby considers her three love interests, ponders calling off dating, and consulting a shrink. With what information you have at this point, who would you advise her to date? Write off? Why?

*Gabby wonders if she is so desperate she would date a man who treated her poorly. How many women wonder the same thing? What bad outcomes do you know of when dating is done out of desperation? Good outcomes? What kind of treatment should all women expect? Should Christian women have higher expectations of their dates or mates? Of themselves?

Connecting with God’s Word:

*Dating is a modern concept but marriage has deep roots in the Bible. Genesis 2: 18-24, 1 Corinthians 7, Matthew 19, 2 Corinthians 6 cover romantic love relationships. Focus on the follow five passages.

Genesis 2: 18 The LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him." 22 Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man.24 For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.

Corinthians 6: 14Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? 15What harmony is there between Christ and Belial ? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever?

Matthew 19: 4 "Haven't you read," (Jesus) he replied, "that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female,' 5 and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh' ? 6 So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate."

1 Corinthians 7:28 those who marry will face many troubles in this life, and I want to spare you this

Hebrews 13:4 Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral.

- Should Riley get involved with Gabby? What would be difficulties if they did marry? Have children?
- What qualities do you think are bare minimum to date someone? What qualities do you specifically look for that others might not value as much as you do? Why are they important to you? What do you think has changed and/or stayed the same in treasured qualities between now and when your parents dated? Between now and Jesus day? What do you think Jesus would consider to be the top 5 considerations for someone to date one of his sisters? Brothers?
- When I was dating a married friend gave me this advice. When you get engaged, make two lists. One list is all the qualities you dislike, hate, loathe or want to change. Read that list every day asking yourself "If nothing changed, could I (would I want to) live with this person the rest of my life?" The other list is of the positive qualities of your future husband. Seal it in an envelope . If you do marry that person, on the morning of your wedding , burn the bad list. Then open the good list and place it where you will read it every day and remind yourself what you prize about your mate. What do you think of this idea?
- Respond to the following: "It is not nearly as important to find the right person as it is to be the right person. If you are the right person, everyone will be looking for you!"
- What bad advice have you been given about dating and marriage? Good advice? What advice would you like to share?

Connecting with yourself (Pray and ponder)

- If you are not married, what would your dream date or dream spouse be like? What is different between a date and a spouse, if anything.?
- If you are married, have your views, priorities and treasured qualities changed from before you were married? How? Why? Or why not?

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Day/Date of my next meeting _____

Pages I need to read by my next meeting: pg. 64-113

Connecting with others:

- On page 72 Gabby mentions her “keeping my enemies closer rule”. Do you think it is a good rule? Why or why not? She also ponders where all the lonely people come from and if loneliness influenced Lynette to wind up with a married man. What do you think?
- On page 81 Gabby asks Parker how one goes from a life with family and friends to dying alone. Parker suggests it is self defense to keep from being hurt. Being alone is a choice everyone makes for themselves. Do you agree or disagree?
- From page 102-104 Gabby changes her mind back and forth about Chad in rapid succession. She loves him; she hates him. How typical is this ? How often have you changed your mind in a day about someone from one extreme to another?
- Gabby is embarrassed when she has to tell Amy her computer information. Is “gabbythomas” and “happilyeverafter”. Why do you think Amy does not react to the information? How embarrassed would the situation have made you? What would you have done in Gabby’s place?

Connecting with God’s Word:

- In Luke 14: 7 – 11 Jesus tells a story of someone who was humiliated at a wedding.
7When he noticed how the guests picked the places of honor at the table, he told them this parable: 8"When someone invites you to a wedding feast, do not take the place of honor, for a person more distinguished than you may have been invited. 9If so, the host who invited both of you will come and say to you, 'Give this man your seat.' Then, humiliated, you will have to take the least important place. 10But when you are invited, take the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he will say to you, 'Friend, move up to a better place.' Then you will be honored in the presence of all your fellow guests. 11For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

- How embarrassing would this situation be to Gabby or you, being asked to move at a social function? Do you agree with verse 11? Why or why not?
- Gabby ponders the differences between isolation and solitude and whether either is healthy. Luke 5:16 But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed. What is the difference between isolation and solitude?
- Like, Gabby, the writer of Ecclesiastes, probably Solomon wrestled with the meaning of life. Consider the following passages.

4: 8-12 8 There was a man all alone;
he had neither son nor brother.
There was no end to his toil,

yet his eyes were not content with his wealth.
"For whom am I toiling," he asked,
"and why am I depriving myself of enjoyment?"
This too is meaningless—
a miserable business!

9 Two are better than one,
because they have a good return for their work:

10 If one falls down,
his friend can help him up.
But pity the man who falls
and has no one to help him up!

11 Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm.
But how can one keep warm alone?

12 Though one may be overpowered,
two can defend themselves.
A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.

9:5 For the living know that they will die,
but the dead know nothing;
they have no further reward,
and even the memory of them is forgotten.

- Which verses would you associate with Gabby? Mr. Hermit? Chad? Yourself?
- Gabby considers having a funeral or wake for a man she calls Mr. Hermit that she has never met. Is it crazy? What do you think is her motivation? How important is having a funeral?
- Who would you want to attend your funeral? What would you want on your tombstone?

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Day/Date of my next meeting _____

Pages I need to read by my next meeting: pg. 113- 176

Connecting with others:

- On page 140 Gabby shares her guilt over her brother's disappearance and the resulting chaos in her family's life. Do you think she has come to terms with this? There aren't many details given in the novel but put yourself in her shoes. How would you feel? Would you feel like "a complete and total failure in the life department?"? What would you do?

Imagine Gabby feels that she can never do enough to make up for what she has done,, that things can never be right between herself and her father. What would you say to Gabby as her friend?

Connecting with God's Word:

Read Genesis 37: 12-39. Joseph's brothers sell him as a slave rather than kill him outright. Years later they are still agonizing over their choice in Genesis 42.. Reuben, the eldest, feels especially guilty. Focus on Genesis 42:21- 22. They said to one another, "Surely we are being punished because of our brother. We saw how distressed he was when he pleaded with us for his life, but we would not listen; that's why this distress has come upon us." Reuben replied, "Didn't I tell you not to sin against the boy? But you wouldn't listen! Now we must give an accounting for his blood."

The ten brothers never came clean with their father, never told the truth about what happened to him. How do you feel about that? What could they have done differently during the Genesis 37 event? In the days following their decision, could they ever do enough to make things right?

How is their situation like Gabby's? How is it different? Is there a real life situation you are aware of like these situations? How is it the same or different?

In Genesis 50, Jacob has died and the brothers fear retribution. Joseph's reassures them of his forgiveness. Focus on 15 – 21. When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, "What if Joseph holds a grudge against us and pays us back for all the wrongs we did to him?" 16 So they sent word to Joseph, saying, "Your father left these instructions before he died: 17 'This is what you are to say to Joseph: I ask you to forgive your brothers the sins and the wrongs they committed in treating you so badly.' Now please forgive the sins of the servants of the God of your father." When their message came to him, Joseph wept.

18 His brothers then came and threw themselves down before him. "We are your slaves," they said.

19 But Joseph said to them, "Don't be afraid. Am I in the place of God? 20 You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. 21 So then, don't be afraid. I will provide for you and your children." And he reassured them and spoke kindly to them.

- What could Joseph have done? Why did he choose to forgive them? What do you think others might have done? What would you have done?

Read I John 4: 19We love because he first loved us. 20If anyone says, "I love God," yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen. 21And he has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother.

- How about forgiveness in spiritual families? In Matthew 1821 Peter asks Jesus how often he should forgive. Verse 22 says "Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times."". What are some situations that make forgiveness difficult? Easy? Can we be right with God and not right with our physical and spiritual families? Explain. (You may wish to read Mt. 18: 23-25, the parable of the unforgiving servant)

Connecting with yourself (Pray and ponder)

- Is there anything you feel you have done or could do that God would not forgive?
- Are there any problems between you and family members that need resolution and forgiveness?

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Day/Date of my next meeting _____

Pages I need to read by my next meeting: 177 – the end

Connecting with others:

- Gabby works on her paper on suicide, wondering why people would want to take their own lives, if society made it too easy for people to become isolated. She cites internet friendships, ordering groceries on line delivered to your door and identity theft. How much effect does today's society have on people's isolation? How can people surrounded by people still be lonely? What can be done to help people before they take their own lives?
- Mrs. Mystery claims she likes to live in anonymity because people might use her if they knew who she was. (page 212) Is this a good reason for being aloof? When is gambling on a relationship worth the risk of being used? How can you tell?
- On page 178, Gabby considers if people doing good deeds to get noticed and be loved are on the same plane as those who turn to crime, drugs and hurting themselves. How would you respond to her? What are constructive ways to avoid loneliness? Destructive?
- "Being in a relationship doesn't equate to being complete." (page 201, Gabby) Do you agree or disagree? Why?
- "I believe in absolute truth. Truth isn't relative – everyone doesn't get to decide their own personal right and wrong Can you imagine how chaotic the world would be if they did? " (page 201, Riley) How would the world in general as well as your own personal world be different without laws? Social custom? How do you balance constraints and order with extenuating circumstances and freedom?

Connecting with God's Word:

Several years ago a TV series called the X-files had the tag line "The truth is out there". Two FBI agents pursued truth about aliens, government secrets and strange phenomena even when they were ridiculed, ostracized and the pursuit of truth put their lives in danger. Let's examine what the Bible says about truth

Proverbs 16: 12 Kings detest wrongdoing,
for a throne is established through righteousness.

13 Kings take pleasure in honest lips;
they value a man who speaks the truth.

John 18: 37 "You are a king, then!" said Pilate (the governor who took the place of the Roman king in foreign places).

Jesus answered, "You are right in saying I am a king. In fact, for this reason I was born, and for this I came

into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me." 38 "What is truth?" Pilate asked.

- Have you, like Pilate, ever asked that question? When? Why? How important is truthfulness in your relationships? Finding the truth when you study or do research?

John 14: 5 Thomas said to him, "Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?" 6 Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

- How can a person be truth?

Throughout the ages man has pursued finding the meaning of life. King Solomon was one such person and he recorded his search in the book of Ecclesiastes. He was in a unique position – not only was he endowed with God given wisdom, he was probably one of the richest men who ever lived. He could afford to try just about anything. And he did. Read Ecclesiastes 2: 1- 11.

1 I thought in my heart, "Come now, I will test you with pleasure to find out what is good." But that also proved to be meaningless. 2 "Laughter," I said, "is foolish. And what does pleasure accomplish?" 3 I tried cheering myself with wine, and embracing folly—my mind still guiding me with wisdom. I wanted to see what was worthwhile for men to do under heaven during the few days of their lives.

4 I undertook great projects: I built houses for myself and planted vineyards. 5 I made gardens and parks and planted all kinds of fruit trees in them. 6 I made reservoirs to water groves of flourishing trees. 7 I bought male and female slaves and had other slaves who were born in my house. I also owned more herds and flocks than anyone in Jerusalem before me. 8 I amassed silver and gold for myself, and the treasure of kings and provinces. I acquired men and women singers, and a harem as well—the delights of the heart of man. 9 I became greater by far than anyone in Jerusalem before me. In all this my wisdom stayed with me.

10 I denied myself nothing my eyes desired;
I refused my heart no pleasure.
My heart took delight in all my work,
and this was the reward for all my labor.

11 Yet when I surveyed all that my hands had done
and what I had toiled to achieve,
everything was meaningless, a chasing after the wind;
nothing was gained under the sun.

Bill Gates might be considered a modern day Solomon as one of the richest and maybe smartest men in the world today. If you had his brain and money, what would you try to find meaning in life?

Compare Jesus' words in Mark 8 and Luke 9. Do they mean the exact same thing? If not, what is the difference?

Mark 8: 35 For whoever wants to save his life^[a] will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it. 36 What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul? 37 Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?

Luke 9: 24For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it. 25What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit his very self?

Riley says “I want to help people by giving them the one true hope - Jesus. All other pursuits are empty.” (page 201, Riley) Do you agree or disagree? Why?

Connecting with yourself: (Pray and ponder):

What is the meaning of your life? If you don't know, how will you find out?

On page 191 – 192 Gabby says love should not feel forced, yet she loves her dad out of obligation Do you ever feel that way toward God?