

## Chapter Four: Bible Studies and Prayer Groups

**Editor's note:** *When the Council decided to include a chapter on how to lead Bible Studies and prayer groups, I naturally turned to the women with experience in leading both groups, Aletha Hinthorn and Carolyn Johnson, to write this chapter.*

### Prayerfully Prepare

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If you sense a desire from the Lord to lead a Bible study, consider it to be a gift from God. Psalm 37:4 tells us, *Delight yourself in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart.* God never gives you a longing to do a task for Him without providing all you need to accomplish that task. This is true for leading a Bible study. Your most important qualification for this role is a sense of dependence on the Lord for His perfect provisions.

Lorne Sanny said, "Prayer is the battle; witnessing is taking the spoils." It's just as true to say, "Prayer is the battle; leading a small group is taking the spoils." You lead with more confidence if you have prayed until you are trusting God to work in the class. Through prayer you gain sensitivity to the Holy Spirit so you can allow Him to guide the discussion according to the group's needs.

As you study, seek to find a truth from the Word that excites you. Your excitement for the Word will be contagious. The psalmist wrote, *Blessed is the man ... who finds great delight in his commands* (Psalm 112:1). *The Living Bible* adds that such a woman *shall have influence and honor* (Psalm. 112:1).

If the truths you share have only reached your intellect, they will probably only reach the intellect of those in your group. But if the truths have reached your heart and changed your life, then those truths are more likely to reach the hearts of the participants and change their lives, too.

Rely upon the Lord to be the teacher, because spiritual truths must be taught by the Spirit. Isaiah 55:10 promises that the Word will be *seed to the sower and bread to the eater* (KJV). Your role is simply to sow the seed. As you do, God promises to provide the miracle of turning it into bread for those who receive it. Before every group meeting, ask God to provide spiritual bread for each woman coming.

In the Tabernacle, bread was always to be sitting on the table, ready for those who entered (Exodus 25:30). As you trust Him, God will always provide the exact bread each woman needs that day. When you're tempted to think your supply of seeds is exhausted, claim 2 Corinthians 9:10: *Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness.*

## Lead with Confidence

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Be willing to share how God has worked in your life. Paul asked his listeners to follow him as he followed Jesus: *Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me — put it into practice* (Philippians 4:9). As you let the women see how you follow Jesus, you not only show them how to follow Him, but also provide the motivation. Many times Christians know what they must do to follow Christ, but simply need the leadership of one who is wholeheartedly committed to obedience. Be that woman for those in your group.

Make sure you keep the Bible study alive and friendly. Your own attitude is a key factor in the group's enthusiasm. Develop a genuine interest in each woman's remarks and expect to learn from them. Concentrate on developing acceptance and compassion in the group.

Don't be afraid of silence after asking a question. Give everyone time to think. Use "What do you think?" questions to help keep the discussion from seeming pressured or unnatural. These kinds of questions have no wrong answers.

Remember that your goal is not simply to lead an interesting discussion but also to help your group understand and apply God's Word so it becomes life to them. As Deuteronomy 32:27 says, *These are not idle words for you; they are your life.*

Occasionally suggest, "Next week, let's bring to class the verses that have especially ministered to us." Usually a verse becomes special when it meets a personal need, so class members will often share needs as well. Studying Scripture develops bonds of true friendship.

Enjoy the breaking of spiritual bread that occurs in group Bible studies: *Then those who feared the Lord talked with each other, and the Lord listened and heard. A scroll of remembrance was written in his presence concerning those who feared the Lord and honored his name* (Malachi 3:16). The Hebrew word for "listened" paints a picture of a mother bending over to listen to her children. Imagine God listening to you speak of Him and telling His recording angel to note your conversation in a heavenly journal!

*The lips of the righteous know what is fitting* (Proverbs 10:32). Lead with confidence, because the Lord will help your words to be appropriate as you learn to depend on Him.

## Practical Tips

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*In his heart a man plans his course, but the Lord determines his steps*, Proverbs 16:9 tells us. As you make plans to respond to the desires He has given, the Lord will direct your steps and provide the specific guidance you need.

When selecting your study book, consider the women who will attend. Some books present the plan of salvation, while others assume the readers are Christians. So think through your goals

with the group as you evaluate different study books, and choose one accordingly. After the book is selected, whether you've chosen a book for unbelievers, new believers, or seasoned believers, welcome all who wish to join you. In the Early Church, the Lord added to their number. He is still Lord of the harvest. He knows whom to draw and gives a desire to all of those who should be a part of your group. Depend upon the Lord to direct those to attend who would profit from the study.

Unless you are meeting as a Sunday School class or other regularly scheduled meeting at church, the ideal setting is often the home of a hospitable woman. Trust the Lord for details regarding time of meeting and place for weekly classes. Perhaps you could meet once when everyone can come and then determine the details.

If you, as the leader, come early, you do more than set a good example. You also communicate your enthusiasm and delight in the group.

Begin on time, even if not all members are present. Be sure chairs are set up so latecomers can easily join you. Don't ignore latecomers, but don't let them disrupt the session. Greet them warmly, then return to the study.

If you decide to include refreshments, you can make a sign-up sheet available at the first meeting for women who are willing to provide refreshments.

Begin each meeting with prayer. Prayer is more than a transition from small talk to Bible study. Through prayer, you provide the class with a consciousness that they are in God's presence.

Give time for prayer requests before the opening or closing prayer. If someone has a special need, ask for volunteers to spend five or ten minutes during the next week praying for that woman. Twelve segments of five minutes of prayer make an hour of prayer! Perhaps at times you will want to send around a sheet of paper with the prayer request written down and ask volunteers to write down how many minutes they will pray. This will help the women feel that they have indeed committed themselves to pray.

You may want to begin each session by reviewing memorized Scripture. Encourage the women to write down either the suggested verse or a passage that challenges or encourages them. Urge them to reflect on this Scripture during the coming week. The women will find that it affects their motives and action. We quickly forget what we read once, but remember what we ponder and act upon.

Keep in contact with the group members between weekly meetings. Make their burdens your own, and let them know you are praying for them. When they are absent, call the women to tell them you missed them, but don't pressure for attendance.

You are *Christ's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do* (Ephesians 2:10). Take heart as you prepare of the study group and remember that all

you need for your study has been preplanned by Him.

## Types of Bible Studies

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Several types of Bible Study groups exist. Each has its unique ministry opportunities and goals.

1. **Neighborhood Bible Class** is often largely comprised of unsaved people. This type of class is evangelistic. The members come from various backgrounds, and denominations, and some may not be active in any church. They have the common need of knowing Jesus. You will probably want to limit the number of mature Christians who attend this class. A ratio of six to eight non-Christians to two or three Christians works well. Too many mature Christians tend to stifle the openness and participation of the group. Members of this group discover the power of God's Word to change their lives.

2. **Bible Class for New Christians** helps new believers discover the riches and challenges of God's Word. They learn that the Bible is the source for Christian growth and development. They begin to see the need for holy living.

3. **Bible Studies for Working Women** meet regularly during lunch. These may be "brown bag" lunches in a conference room at an office or held in a meeting room of a restaurant. These Bible studies provide an opportunity for us to reach working women who don't attend a church. These groups offer an alternative to evening Bible Study for working women.

4. **In-depth Bible Study** is designed for people who need the challenge of studying the Word more deeply. These groups explore the cultural setting for the first hearers and study word origins to understand the impact the Word had for the first audience, and can have for us.

5. **Talk-it-Over** is an alternative to the lecture-type Bible study. The main purpose of this style is to provide a solid Bible study with active discussion. The entire group is involved with the emphasis on relating the lesson to everyday life.

## Procedural Suggestions

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1. Provide comfortable seating. Circles work well since everyone can see other members of the group.

2. Tables simplify note taking. Arrange them so that the whole group can see the leader. If you place them in a square or "u" formation, participants can also see each other.

3. Unless the groups are structured, leave extra seats by the door so late arrivals can join with little disruption.

4. Encourage everyone to bring a Bible. Provide extra Bibles for those who forgot or do not own a Bible.

5. Assign reading before the study. Then the women who don't read well or are uncomfortable speaking in a group will be able to avoid embarrassment or intimidation.

6. Begin with group conversation, leaving time to share the events of the week and prayer concerns.
7. Make newcomers feel comfortable. Take time for the group to become acquainted with the new women.
8. Maintain a list of the members' names, addresses, phone numbers, and e-mail addresses.
9. Provide time for the group to pray together.
10. Include praise in each session. This may be in the form of a song, testimonies, or response to a question such as, "What was one positive experience you enjoyed this week?"
11. Stress the confidentiality of the group. This insures that your Bible study will be a safe place to break down walls and remove masks. Emphasize that, "What's said here, stays here!"
12. Let the women choose their participation level. Be aware of women who tend to dominate the discussions. To draw others into discussion, address questions to specific people.
13. Let members tell how the lesson related to them and how they can apply the lesson to their lives.

## Scripture Memorization

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Though memorizing scriptures is more frequently stressed with children, it should be part of every Christian's life. When God's Word is part of our hearts and minds, it becomes alive and active. It is always present to guide our actions and reactions.

Memorizing scripture may take longer for adults than it does for children. However, it is an attainable and necessary life goal. Here are some tips to help you memorize.

1. Have a definite daily time for study.
  - a. Print the verse on cards and place them over the mirror or sink to study while dressing, doing dishes, or preparing meals.
  - b. Study and recite verses while ironing or driving or other such chores.
  - c. Carry cards to study while exercising or while waiting in lines.
2. Note the key words and their positions in the sentences.
3. Learn what triggers your recall of Scripture — key words? first word? situation?
4. Some people find that visualizing the position of the words on the page helps trigger recall.
5. Memorize scriptures from the version of the Bible you find most comfortable. When you understand the passage, memorizing is much easier. Memorization confronts us with God's Word. We must understand it and apply it to life to retain the meaning.
6. Form a review system to maintain what you learned the previous week. Regularly review the verses you've memorized.

## Calling Women to Prayer

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### The Power of United Praying

Satan fears prayer more than all else. Satan starts to tremble when he sees a Christian in prayer. Imagine how he quivers when he sees two kneeling together!

When two or more prevail together, their prayer power is multiplied. *Five of you will chase a hundred and a hundred of you will chase ten thousand*, Leviticus 26:8 tells us. Five chasing one hundred speaks of great power, but one hundred overcoming ten thousand almost surpasses belief.

Years ago people attended “horse pulls.” A strong horse could sometimes pull 7,000 pounds and another might pull an amazing 9,000 pounds. But when the two horses were hitched together, they could pull 33,000 pounds. The increased amount is called synergy.

We can be praying with others, though, and still pull only our individual loads of 7,000 or 9,000 pounds each if we are not praying for the same thing at the same time. When we all desire the same thing, with one leading in prayer, our prayers become synergistic.

Many light bulbs shining together make a bright light, but if they are concentrated into one light beam, they give a laser beam effect capable of penetrating the hardest substance. Think of your agreeing in prayer as focusing your light into a laser beam that God can use to penetrate those “inaccessible” situations.

One woman was concerned about her unsaved neighbors so she asked two other women in her neighborhood to weekly join her for a brief prayer time. The neighborhood grew quieter. Neighbors began to get along better. One young woman came to know Jesus.

The pastor of the First Church of the Nazarene in Independence, Missouri, asked the prayer partners to pray that the Holy Spirit's presence would be in their facilities. After they began praying this, an unchurched lady began feeling drawn to the church on the corner. One Sunday morning she walked in the doors, and before the day was over, she gave her heart to the Lord.

One pastor told a leader of home prayer meetings, “When I walk into the pulpit on Sunday morning, I can tell if your group met to pray for the services this week.”

A prayer leader of one church said, “We have a prayer vigil on Friday nights. Two to four of us meet at the church to pray from 10 PM until midnight. Every Friday night we leave anticipating a glorious worship service on Sunday morning. We are not disappointed.”

### Listen to the Spirit

*See, I am doing a new thing, now it springs up, do you not perceive it? Isaiah 43:19* tells us. God is doing a new thing in prayer today. His call is going forth. More people than before are interested in

personal prayer and spiritual formation. One source estimates that ten million prayer groups are meeting across the country, and 1,400 prayer networks coordinate prayer from city to city. Local churches are praying together in new and exciting ways.

The Holy Spirit is the prayer coordinator in the local church. Women who are calling for prayer emphasize that all prayer is initiated and sustained by the Holy Spirit.

“We felt the Spirit call us to have nights of prayer.”

“You have to be listening and moving with the Spirit. He gives assignments.”

“If I tried anything on my own, it didn't work.”

“We asked Him to lay on our hearts His path for our fasting.”

As leaders we are to discern where God is working, and move in that direction. Then, as we move in step with the Spirit, He does His work.

The people in Haggai's day had grown disinterested in the unfinished temple project, which was begun sixteen years earlier. Haggai saw the problem and committed himself to getting the people to go back to work on the temple. Haggai was successful in his venture for one reason: *God had sent him* (Haggai 1:12). The Lord stirred up the spirit of the leaders and the people, and they worked on the house of the Lord. Why? Because the Spirit of the Lord had initiated Haggai's venture.

As we pray and wait on the Lord, trusting the Holy Spirit to go ahead of us and give us His ideas and timing, the women will respond.

## Mobilizing Women to Pray

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Many ministries in our local churches are highly organized. Yet, when it comes to prayer, often no plan, leadership, recruitment, or training exists. We just hope people are praying, and we hope they know how to pray effectively. However, Jesus said, *My Father's house shall be a house of prayer* (Matt. 21:13). He is looking to see that prayer occurs in His house.

To begin a prayer ministry, first choose a prayer coordinator. The prayer coordinator is essential to an effective, long-lasting prayer ministry. She is the woman who will help integrate prayer into the total life of the church.

She should have a strong personal prayer life, spiritual maturity, gifts to organize and encourage, a good reputation, the confidence of leaders, plus enough time to attend key prayer events.

Her responsibilities will be:

1. To identify key people who will take ownership in the Prayer effort.
2. To research and evaluate the church's current prayer ministry.
3. To look for areas that need prayer.
4. To develop and put into action a prayer plan.

## Prayer Plan Possibilities

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### Guarding the Flock

If you want to ensure that every member of your church is prayed for by name, prepare a list of the church members' names. Find those who will take a list and commit to pray for every member. Also suggest specific scriptures to be prayed so all can pray effectively. Scripture suggestions include:

*Strengthen and protect him [or her] from the evil one ... Direct his [or her] heart into God's love and Christ's perseverance* (2 Thessalonians 3:3, 5).

*Ransom him unharmed from the battle waged against him* (Psalm 55:18).

*Supply all his needs according to your riches in glory through Christ Jesus* (Philippians 4:19).

*Make all grace abound to him, so that in all things at all times, having all that he needs, he will abound in every good work* (2 Corinthians 9:8).

Pastors are under severe attack from the enemy and need intercessory prayer. Each pastor needs someone who will "pay the price" for their success. The excellent book *The Prayer Shield* by C. Peter Wagner will help you recruit intercessors for spiritual leaders.

### Corporate Prayer

Corporate prayer is when a group prays together, either by meeting together or scattered about. It is a focused prayer by a number of people interceding in line with God's heart. In many churches, Wednesday night prayer meetings have served as a corporate prayer time.

Sample Guidelines for corporate prayer include:

1. Be sensitive to pray under the Spirit's guidance.
2. Pray the promises of Scripture.
3. Listen to, affirm, and agree with the one praying.

### Prayer-Walking

Prayer-walking is called "praying on site with insight." The goal is to pray while walking. You can do this alone, as families, in small groups, or large groups. You can either pray for the area in which you're walking or combine exercise with prayers. When you are praying for specific areas, your walking/praying sites can include workplaces, neighborhoods, sites of consecrated use, overlook points, sites of past sin, or even sites of ongoing sin in the community. Prayer-walking helps us agree in prayer and focus our faith.

### Prayer Vigils

Prayer vigils are organized to focus intense prayer on a particular situation to win a breakthrough. You can schedule vigils to last a few hours, all night, all day, or for several days. Vigils can be more effective if coupled with a time of fasting. It is important to announce the results of the vigil and celebrate answers. A schedule for an all night vigil might include worship, prayer for specific

needs, teaching, testimonies, quiet individual prayer and reflection, and a prayer-walk.

### **Prayer Triplets**

A prayer triplet is a group of three Christians committed to pray together regularly for the lost. Each chooses three non-Christians for whom all will pray to find Jesus as Savior. They can also select a country or people group and pray for specific missionaries.

Pray once a week for fifteen minutes. Don't spend time chatting or eating. It is not a social gathering with prayer as a sideline, but a deep, disciplined time to pray for those needing Jesus.

Decide in advance how many months you will promise to pray together. Renew your commitment at the end of that time.

Select a chairperson to keep track of who is praying in triplets, and report all victories to the chairperson.

### **Moms In Touch**

The purpose of Moms In Touch is to intercede for our children, and to pray that our schools will be guided by biblical values and high moral standards. The founder, Fern Nichols, says, "Our desire is for God to raise up moms to intercede for every school across the U.S. and around the world."

To begin, pray for other moms to join you. Order a *Moms In Touch* book by writing to Moms In Touch, P.O. Box 1120, Poway, CA 92074-1120, or by calling 800-949-MOMS, or going to [www.momsintouch.org](http://www.momsintouch.org). It is important to be in contact with the national headquarters, so if others in your city want to be a part of Moms In Touch, the headquarters can tell them of your group.

### **Lydia Prayer Groups**

Lydia Prayer Groups are clusters of women forming around the world uniting their hearts in prayer on behalf of themselves, their families, churches, communities, and the world. The name is taken from the story in Acts 16:6-15 where Paul went to the riverbank and encountered Lydia and a group of women. From there the church in Europe was birthed, and the course of history was changed.

Lydia Prayer Groups are praying for a mighty outpouring of the Spirit of Jesus throughout the earth! The main focus of the Lydia Prayer Ministry is to pray for revival beginning in our own hearts and then asking Jesus to come and touch His people once again.

Lydia Prayer Groups are praying in North and South America, Africa, Europe, Australia, and Asia. "Psalm One" and "Come to the Fire" Men's Prayer Groups have also started as an outgrowth of the Lydia Prayer Groups Ministry. Groups are praying in prisons, at restaurants, and other creative locations. Some Lydia groups meet weekly. Others meet every other week or once a month. Their vision is to see multiplication.

You are invited to be an active participant in the Lydia Prayer Group movement and experience the incredible power of united prayer! A Lydia Prayer Groups guide is available in both English

and Spanish and is being translated in other languages. There are leaders' packets, a booklet of prayer group suggestions in English and Spanish, a prayer guide for men, and a prayer guide for students available. Also, a weekly email is sent to Lydia leaders giving a scripture focus and prayer needs.

For more information or to order material, go to Francis Asbury Society, [www.francisasburysociety.com](http://www.francisasburysociety.com). Under Women's Ministry, click "Lydia Groups" or call 859-858-4222.

## Resources for Bible Studies

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*The Satisfied Heart Topical Bible Study Series: Simply Trusting, Boldly Asking, Joyfully Following, and Quietly Resting*, Aletha Hinthorn, Beacon Hill Press, Kansas City, Missouri, 1996.

*The All for His Glory Bible Study Series: Filled With His Glory, Transformed by His Glory, and Behold His Glory*, Aletha Hinthorn, Beacon Hill Press, Kansas City, Missouri, 2001.

*How to Read the Bible so It Changes Your Life*, Beacon Hill Press, Kansas City, Missouri, 2004.

*Leaders God Uses*, Aletha Hinthorn, Beacon Hill Press, Kansas City, Missouri, 2002.