

Bible Study for Busy Women

14 Small Group Lessons for
Nurture and Encouragement

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These Bible study guides have been prepared by Ardis Dick Stenbakken and Carole Ferch-Johnson as a resource of the General Conference Department of Women's Ministries. Although the study guides are designed for use in small groups, they may be adapted to other settings as well.

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INTRODUCTION

This series of Bible studies is designed to encourage and nurture the Adventist woman and those who want to know more about the Christian way of life. We pray that it may be a blessing to you.

These guides can be used for individual or small group Bible study. If you would like to share in Bible study with a small group, we have included some guidelines to help you get started and to keep your group running well.

Small-group Bible study has more than one purpose. It fosters a better understanding of the Bible and of our Lord Jesus Christ. It also helps the women in the group build positive relationships. For this reason each session includes a fellowship activity. This activity is related to the study for that day and also helps the women to become better acquainted with one another. During this time, the group leader can take the opportunity to acknowledge each woman, finding out how her week has been and what her needs and joys are. If it has been a hard week or if she is facing difficult days, the group can encourage and pray for her. The texts provided are not exhaustive on any given topic but are suggestions to guide you in your study. We have not listed very many so that you can take time to really look at each one and study what it may have to say specifically to women. The questions that follow can guide you in understanding the texts and help you discover how each topic is important to women.

Because many versions of the Bible use the masculine pronoun when referring to people in general, your group may find it more personal to substitute feminine pronouns or the word "daughter" in place of "son" and "woman" instead of "man." This is not new or radical. When Paul quoted 2 Samuel 7:14— "I will be his father and he will be my son"— he quoted it as, "I will be his father and you will be my sons and daughters" (2 Cor. 6:18). If you would like to use a version which has already made these changes where the original language permits, you can use the *New Revised Standard Version*.

Prayer is an important feature for a Bible study group. We have suggested prayer activities that nurture and that also relate to the topic. A wide variety of prayer options is given to encourage the group to try new ways of praying. Most prayers suggest that one follow the four principal parts of prayer: praise, confession, request, and thanks.

Because Bible study is effective only when personal application of its content is made to our lives, we have suggested some ways of encouraging personal application. By the same token, each woman present should also be encouraged to make personal application to her own life. This may be done as a group or in private.



GUIDELINES FOR YOUR SMALL GROUP MINISTRY

Small-group ministries provide an effective way of building meaningful bonds between women in the local church. Through small groups women can experience closer friendship, appropriate support and a stronger sense of belonging to other Christian women, and thus to the whole congregation.

Small groups help to fill a variety of needs in the life of women. These needs include spiritual issues such as personal and intercessory prayer, sharing through Bible study, and involvement through group discussion on spiritual themes. Small groups also provide support when difficult issues are faced or when women pass through hard experiences. There is potential for as many specialty support groups to be formed among the women of the church as the needs indicate. Such support groups could include grief recovery, divorce recovery, women whose partners do not share their faith, as well as support groups for lifestyle management, to name just a few.

How Does a Small Group Get Started?

Small groups often begin with the vision of just one woman. She talks with a friend about starting a group with a specific purpose. They meet together, decide who else in the congregation could benefit from being a member of their group, and invite two or three other women to join.

Where and When Should the Group Meet?

The time and place for group meetings need to be decided by the group members. Some can meet only outside normal working hours while others are able to meet during the day. Some groups function best if they meet once a week, while others meet once or twice a month. Frequency of meetings and scheduled times really depend on the availability of members.

What Are the Characteristics of a Healthy Small Group?

1. The group must have a well-defined purpose for meeting and must fulfill that purpose each time it meets. The purpose should be uncomplicated, simply stated, and well understood by each group member. The purpose could be decided by the group or be one of the following:

- To study God's word together.
- To uphold one another in prayer.
- To pray for one another's children.
- To support one another through the loss of a loved one.
- To encourage one another in a weight-management program.

2. Every group needs a set of ethics to govern its behavior. Some of these include:

- Retain all information which is shared by group members within the group. This is the only way to build and maintain trust among group members. The life of the group will depend upon maintaining trust. If confidence is broken the group will tend to disintegrate.
- Share information about others outside the group only when it is helpful to those individuals to do so. Talking about others when this does not directly benefit the persons involved is tantamount to gossip and has no place in a women's small-group ministry.
- Resist the temptation to sit in judgement on each other or to assume the role of a corrective parent toward another group member.

3. Every group needs leadership to keep it on course and to give it direction. The group membership decides who its group leader will be. Her tasks are:

- To draw up an agreed schedule for meeting times and places. To remind members of these at the end of each session.
- To restate the purpose for the group getting together and to lead the discussion in that direction. To introduce each phase in the process the group follows in achieving its purpose and to bring the meeting to a conclusion.
- Group leadership can rotate if sufficient able leaders are group members. In any event the group must be satisfied with the leadership style of the one chosen to fill this role.

What If We Have a Difficult Person In Our Group?

To avoid takeover by a dominant personality or the exploitation of the group by someone who talks too much, the leader needs to outline some basic ground rules and to repeat these whenever the need arises.

Such ground rules may include:

- The group is free to confront anyone who dominates or seeks to control the functioning of the group.
- Any group member may intervene when one individual talks too long, thus reducing the opportunity others have to share. Ultimately, it is the role of the leader to ask an offender to give others a chance to speak.

- When a group member does not take part in the discussion, other members may invite her to do so. Although it is preferable for everyone to contribute, it is not mandatory for everyone to do so.

What Should Be the Size of the Group?

In order to encourage full participation the group size should be limited to a minimum of three and a maximum of six women. When group members begin to share the benefits of belonging to their group with other women, these may wish to join also. Rather than expand the size of the group beyond six, it is better to divide and form another group. This retains the potential for intimacy that is inherent in the small group. A small group membership also helps ensure 100% attendance more regularly. When groups become too large, it *is* more difficult to maintain full attendance.

How Long Should the Group Continue?

Groups vary in the length of their life depending on their purpose for existing. Some support groups last as long as the need remains and are discontinued once the need is met. Others are on-going. It is up to the members to decide if they want to begin with a trial period to assess the viability of the group. They may wish to set a time to evaluate how the group is functioning and to decide whether or not to continue.

The blessings that small-group ministries may bring to the women of the church are rich and rewarding. We encourage you to think and pray about this kind of ministry. Perhaps the Lord has a role for you to play in encouraging others through this means.

WHY THE BIBLE IS IMPORTANT TO WOMEN

Fellowship Activity

If you lived in Bible times, which woman of the Bible would you like to be? Encourage each woman in the group to share why she is choosing this Bible woman.

Texts on the Topic

1 Samuel 2:1-11

Judges 4, 5

Luke 1:46-55

Esther 9:11-32; Exodus 17:8-16; 1 Samuel 15:7-26

Discussion Starters

- Biblical writers record the experiences of the people in song and liturgy. How do the songs of Hannah, Deborah, and Mary indicate that they were familiar with earlier stories of the history of Israel (story of the Bible)?
- What did their knowledge of Scripture do for the personal faith of these women?
- How did they see God's hand in the lives of people?

Prayer Activity Suggestions

- Begin a group prayer journal/request list.
- Write down the requests of each member of the group. These can become the prayer focus, with new requests being added each time the group meets.

Personal Application

- What role does the knowledge of Scripture play in my life? This week I intend to improve my knowledge of Scripture by doing the following: (List specific activities.)
- What do these Scripture passages tell me about God that I can apply to my personal life this week?

WHY JESUS IS IMPORTANT TO WOMEN

Fellowship Activity

If you could be a part of Jesus' story, which female character would you like to be? Example: the woman who lost her coin, the widow with two mites, etc. Please share with the group what you would like to do for Jesus, or with Him, if you could be in the story.

Texts on the Topic

Matthew 9:18-26 (also found in Mark 5:22-56 and Luke 8:41-56)

Luke 8:1-3

Luke 10:38-42

John 4:1-42

John 8:3-11

Luke 15:8-10

Discussion Starters

What impressions do these stories give you about Jesus' attitude toward women?

Why do you think Jesus broke with the conventions of His day in order to communicate with women?

Why was Jesus not threatened by close contact with women?

What do these stories help you to understand about God? About yourself?

Personal Application

Discuss how Jesus would interact with women today in your culture.

What cultural issues affecting women might He challenge in order to meet their needs?

What expectations of my culture am I willing to disregard in order to follow Jesus?

WHY SALVATION IS IMPORTANT TO WOMEN

Fellowship Activity

Have each woman share with the group about a person or an occasion when someone she knows was saved from harm.

Texts on the Topic

Genesis 3:21

Isaiah 9:6, 7

Matthew 1:21

John 3:16

Hosea 2:14-20

Revelation 21:14

Discussion Starters

- Describe women's importance in the plan of salvation.
- What do these texts tell us about God's passionate love and His desire to save His people?

Prayer Activity Suggestions

- Record any new requests in the prayer journal.
- Choose a Bible text that you like and pray through the text, adding your own name into the text wherever you can. Example: Ephesians 2:4-10, "For because of his great love for [insert your name] God, who is rich in mercy, made [insert your name]. .. etc.

Personal Application

- Do I have full assurance that Jesus died for me and that I will live forever with Him?
- Who do I know who does not have the assurance of salvation?
- How will I share the gospel with her/him?
- Three Bible texts which I will memorize this month showing God's passionate love for me are:

WHY PRAYER IS IMPORTANT TO WOMEN

Fellowship Activity

Have each woman share what she would do with \$1,000,000. Discuss for a few minutes what possible trouble such money might bring.

Texts on the Topic

Isaiah 49:15

Genesis 21:14-19

Exodus 15:20, 21

Genesis 16:13

Matthew 15:21-28

1 Samuel 1

Discussion Starters

- Why is prayer special to God? Why would He listen— especially to women?
- How did women in Bible times praise the Lord and praise other women in prayer?
- Find examples of praise, confession, request, and thanks in these prayers.
- What evidence can you find that these Bible women knew that they were special to God?

Prayer Activity Suggestions

- Add any new requests to the prayer journal.
- Go through the prayer journal/request list and note all answered prayers.
- Pass the journal around, and as each holds it, thank the Lord especially for these answers.

Personal Application

- With which of these Bible women do I most closely identify in my prayer experience?
- How will I share praise to God with another person today?
- How will I encourage another woman to know and understand that God hears and answers women's prayers?

WHY SPIRITUAL GROWTH IS IMPORTANT TO WOMEN

Fellowship Activity

Share with the group what you, as a child, wanted to be when you grew up.

Texts on the Topic

Galatians 5:22 - 6:5

Philippians 1:9-11

2 Peter 1:5-11

1 Peter 2:1, 2

1 John 2:38-3:10

Discussion Starters

- What are the essential ingredients for spiritual growth?
- According to these texts, what are the characteristics of the growing Christian?
- How does spiritual growth help us to overcome judgmental and critical attitudes toward others?
- Against what undesirable characteristics does spiritual growth protect the Christian woman?

Prayer Activity Suggestions

- Record any new prayer requests in the prayer journal.
- Have each woman write a prayer request regarding spiritual growth on a piece of colored card. Keep these anonymous so that they may be as candid as desired.
 - Put these requests in a basket.
 - Have each woman draw out a different color than she put into the basket and silently pray for this request.

Personal Application

- In what primary area do I earnestly desire spiritual growth?
- Invite the group to share how each member can support spiritual growth in one another.

WHY RELATIONSHIPS ARE IMPORTANT TO WOMEN

Fellowship Activity

Invite each woman to describe a woman she knows whose interpersonal skills she admires.

Texts on the Topic

Ephesians 4:25-32

James 1:26, 27

Colossians 3:12-14

1 John 3:14-18

Luke 10:38-42

Discussion Starters

- What do these passages tell you about God?
- List some principles of positive interpersonal relationships noted in these passages.
- How do these principles relate especially to women? How do they relate to you in your daily living?
- What do you think is the key to Jesus' interpersonal relationships?

Prayer Activity Suggestions

- Add any new prayer requests to the prayer journal.
- Divide into pairs and listen for two minutes each while the other person describes her relationship with others.
- Pray for each other's relational needs.

Personal Application

- What positive interpersonal skills noted in Scripture would I like to strengthen in my life?
- What will I do this week to begin? Example: I might start a log on what I do and how that affects those with whom I deal.

WHY SELF WORTH IS IMPORTANT TO WOMEN

Fellowship Activity

If you know the meaning or the history of your name, share it with the group. Or if you would have preferred to have had a different name, tell it to the group and share why.

Texts on the Topic

Genesis 1:26, 27

Psalm 8:4, 5

1 Peter 2:5, 9, 10

Psalm 139:13-18

Ephesians 2:19

Romans 12:3

Discussion Starters

- Do these texts apply to both men and women? How do you know?
- What do these texts tell you about your value in God's sight? Can this value be taken away from you?
- How does self-worth differ from pride?

Prayer Activity Suggestions

- Record any new prayer requests in the prayer journal.
- Offer a sentence prayer with emphasis on self-worth.
 - One person begins by praising God in one short sentence for something He has done in her life. Do not say "Amen." The second person adds a sentence of praise, and so on around the group.
 - The first to pray then prays a sentence of confession, followed by the others in the group.
 - The first then prays a sentence of request, following the same procedure.
 - Last, the first woman prays a prayer of thanks, followed by each person in the group. The last person to pray concludes with "Amen."

Personal Application

- Go around the circle with each woman describing at least one thing she likes about herself and then saying something complimentary about the woman to her right. That woman should respond only with, "Thank you."
- What benefits do I experience from having a healthy sense of self-worth?
- Each time I pray this week I will thank God for making me a special woman, and I will name the special feature for which I want to thank Him.

WHY PERSONAL INTEGRITY IS IMPORTANT TO WOMEN

Fellowship Activity

Have each woman share what she would do about the following scenario: You are in a hurry for an important appointment. You see your neighbor and two small children standing in the rain at the bus stop. You remember that the neighbor's car is being repaired and she is taking her children to school. Do you stop and take them to school, making yourself late to your appointment? Or do you drive by?

Texts on the Topic

Titus 2:11-14 1	Romans 12:1, 2	1 Timothy 2:9, 10 Micah
Samuel 15:22 Jeremiah	Psalms 112:4, 5	6:8 Proverbs 21:3 Proverbs
31:33, 34 Hosea 2:19,	Deuteronomy 6:4-6	2:1-11 (substitute
20	Isaiah 59	"daughter" for "son")

Discussion Starters

- What is of higher value to a woman than outward adornment?
- What is the source of moral sensitivity?
- Discuss how people with or without personal integrity can do good deeds.
- Why does the Bible equate personal integrity with wisdom?
- What are the rewards of personal integrity?

Prayer Activity Suggestions

- Record prayer requests in the prayer journal.
- Ask each woman to pray silently, specifying her weaknesses to God and asking Him for a new heart with higher motivation for personal integrity.

Personal Application

- Have each woman write down some area in which she feels she lacks personal integrity. Collect the papers and then shred or burn them. If possible, replace the destroyed paper with an attractive bookmark inscribed with a Bible text such as Psalm 119:11 or Psalm 40:8.
- If I have wronged another person, what will I do this week to make it right?

WHY THE KINSMAN-REDEEMER IS IMPORTANT TO WOMEN

Fellowship Activity

Ask each woman to share briefly about the loss of someone special to her and how God helped her through the time of grief.

Texts on the Topic

Matthew 1:5	Ruth (the whole book, but especially 2:21 and chapter 4)
Jeremiah 50:34	Isaiah 41:14; 47:4; 63:16
Job 19:25	Proverbs 23:11 (compare in different versions if possible)

Discussion Starters

- List all the ways Boaz, the kinsman-redeemer, protected and cared for Ruth and Naomi.
- Who else in the story, besides Boaz, is a kinsman-redeemer (see Ruth 4:14,15)?
- Discuss what we can expect from Jesus, our Kinsman-Redeemer.

Prayer Activity Suggestions

- Record any new prayer requests in the prayer journal.
- Invite the group to engage in a "bidding prayer." One person leads the prayers of praise, confession, request, and thankfulness. Rather than praying herself, however, she will introduce each section, allowing others to use words or short phrases to indicate what is being praised, confessed, requested, or appreciated. For example: the leader will say, "We now want to praise You for..." and then she will allow women in the group to say what they are praising God for, or what they are requesting, etc.

Personal Application

- In what ways has Jesus been my Kinsman-Redeemer and my Protector?
- I can be a protector to someone in my life by: (list specific examples).

WHY MANAGING EMOTIONS IS IMPORTANT TO WOMEN

Fellowship Activity

Share with the group a positive emotional characteristic or personality trait you inherited from one of your parents and why you are glad you have that trait or characteristic.

Texts on the Topic

Romans 8:38

Isaiah 41:10

Isaiah 54:5, 8

Philippians 4:4-8

Isaiah 49:5,15,16

Ephesians 4:26, 31, 32

Matthew 5:11,12

Discussion Starters

- According to these texts, are emotions good or bad?
- What role do emotions play in the life of a Christian woman?
- In what ways does the Bible provide healing for damaged emotions?
- How does God meet our emotional needs?

Prayer Activity Suggestions

- Record any new prayer requests in the prayer journal.
- Have the group offer a chain prayer. One person starts the prayer with praise, request, thanks, or confession for one thing. The next person praises, requests, thanks, or confesses to God for the same thing and adds one other item of praise, request, thanks; or confession. The next person repeats the last item and adds one of her own, etc., on around the group. The person who started the prayer chain repeats the last item and closes the prayer.

Personal Application

- What will I do in the coming week to have more joy in my life?
- How will I, as a Christian woman, offer emotional support to another person?

WHY COPING WITH WORRY IS IMPORTANT TO WOMEN

Fellowship Activity

Ask the group to comment on the following: If your house were burning down and you could save only one object, what would you save and why? Share your reasons with the group.

Texts on the Topic

Esther 4:12-16

Genesis 30:1, 2, 14-17, 22, 23

Matthew 6:25-31

Luke 12:22-34

Philippians 4:6, 7

Proverbs 12:25

1 Peter 5:7

Discussion Starters

- Contrast the experience of Rachel with that of Esther. How did each relate to worry and anxiety?
- List God's solutions to worry.
- When is worry wrong?
- Compare Matthew 6:25-34 with Luke 12:22-34. Are there any differences between these two accounts? If so, what do you think is the significance of these differences?

Prayer Activity Suggestions

- Record any new prayer requests in the prayer journal.
- Go around the circle with each woman praying a four-sentence prayer. In the first sentence, she praises God for providing solutions to the worries of life. In the second sentence, she makes confession for what worries her. In the third, she makes a request for someone other than herself. In the fourth sentence, she thanks God for answering this need.

Personal Application

- What worries me most? Identify and share this worry with the group.
- What biblical solutions can I use to develop strategies for addressing this worry during the coming week?
- What suggestions can I offer a friend who worries unnecessarily?

WHY MENTORING IS IMPORTANT TO WOMEN

Fellowship Activity

Invite each woman to share with the group some good advice she has received from another woman at some time. Share who the person is and what the good advice was.

Texts on the Topic

Titus 2:1-5	Proverbs 15:22	Proverbs 12:15
Luke 1:39-56	Proverbs 22:17-19	Deuteronomy 4:9
Judges 2:10	1 Corinthians 3:6	Hebrews 12:1
Acts 18:18-28	Ruth 1:16-18; 2:23 - 3:18	Proverbs 20:19

Discussion Starters

- What do you think Elizabeth was able to do for Mary which gave Mary the courage to go home again and face the questions and suspicions surrounding the circumstances of her pregnancy?
- Think of other examples of Bible characters, either men or women, who helped others to develop their skills.
- What do Ruth's decisions imply regarding Naomi's mentoring?
- What is the difference between mentoring, dominating, and controlling?
- How do you mentor a teenage daughter or a teen in the church?

Prayer Activity Suggestions

- Record any new prayer requests in the prayer journal.
- Invite each woman to pray, thanking the Lord for someone who has mentored her in some way, and praying a prayer of request for someone she thinks she might be able to mentor.

Personal Application

- With which woman in the church could I intentionally develop a friendship? This means I will make contact with her on Sabbath and at least one other time during the week with the intention of developing a mentoring relationship.
- Who do I think could mentor me? This means I would ask her if she would be willing to mentor me for a specific time and/or topic. I could send a card or note to a mentor expressing what her mentoring has meant to me.

WHY MANAGING RESOURCES IS IMPORTANT TO WOMEN

Fellowship Activity

Ask each member of the group to share what she would do and where she would go if she could go anywhere and do anything for five days with all expenses paid.

Texts on the Topic

Malachi 3:7-12

Leviticus 27:30-33

Exodus 20:8-11

Ecclesiastes 3

Genesis 1:20-30

Matthew 25:14-30

Philippians 4:8, 9

Discussion Starters

- Why does God ask for a certain percentage of money for tithe, but asks that offerings be according to a person's free will?
- How is the Sabbath a resource?
- What responsibilities do we have toward the natural world, knowing it will soon end?
- What effect does our management of resources have on our spiritual life?
- How many different resources can you think of that God has given women to manage?

Prayer Activity Suggestions

- Record any new prayer requests in the prayer journal.
- Decide before praying what resources each woman will pray about specifically.
- Ask God's continued blessing, giving thanks and praying for strength and courage to manage resources well.

Personal Application

- To what resources have I not given careful stewardship? Develop a plan to begin better management this week.
- What will I do in my home to take better care of natural resources?

Bible Study Guide 14

WHY REST IS IMPORTANT TO WOMEN

Fellowship Activity

Describe to the group a birthday you remember from childhood and share why you remember that particular day.

Texts on the Topic

Ruth 1:9; 3:1

Psalm 62:1, 2

Psalm 91:1, 2

Isaiah 30:15

Jeremiah 6:16

Matthew 11:28

Hebrews 4:1-7

Exodus 20:8-11

Discussion Starters

What do you think rest would signify to Ruth and Naomi? Would it be primarily physical, emotional, or spiritual rest?

How are God's rest and His salvation related? Can you have one without the other?

How can the Sabbath be made more a day of rest for the whole person?

Prayer Activity Suggestions

Record any new prayer requests in the prayer journal.

Look around your immediate environment, either indoors or outside, for objects which symbolize the Sabbath. Place these objects in the center of the group and explain the symbolism. Let each woman pray, asking God to help her remember and understand the symbolism of the Sabbath.

- Someone in the group may want to continue to keep the prayer journal and report from time to time to the group about answered prayers.

Personal Application

- What types of burdens am I carrying from which I would like to have rest? Let the group discuss a plan for beginning to make it happen this week.
- Sabbath is not always a day of rest or relaxation for women, especially mothers. What ideas can the group come up with for making this day more restful for mothers?
- What can I do to make this next Sabbath a special day of rest?