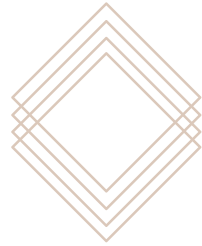


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Abide Together

A SIMPLE GUIDE TO STARTING A BIBLE STUDY

GOSPEL-HOPE FOR MOMS

What does a book written more than three thousand years ago have to do with us now?

Metaphors, detailed imagery, narrative, prophecy and even apocalyptic writings – how in the world do these things relate to a mom in the twenty-first century? These are good questions. And why we need to study the Bible, not just flip randomly through the pages. Studying alongside other women will provide accountability, mutual correction, different perspectives, and help everyone come to a deeper understanding and application of God’s word. It’s a treasure to learn about God and be transformed alongside other women who desire to understand more about who God is.

In this guide, we’ll cover the basics for how to start and facilitate a Bible study. Our hope is to encourage you to study God’s word with fellow believers, equipping you with practical how-tos for starting a study in your local church or community.

Within these pages you’ll find answers to questions like:

- “What’s the difference between doing a Bible study or learning through other resources like podcasts or devotionals?”
- “How can I logistically gather a group of women and get started?”
- “What do I need to know as a leader?”
- “How do I choose Bible study materials?”
- “How can group members work together to engage in great discussion?”

But before we get going, we want to encourage you to first look into joining an existing Bible study at your local church. A local church has a structure and leaders that are committed to truth and the spiritual protection of those in their flock. Because of that, a great place to start is by connecting with your church’s women’s ministry. Many times, there is already a study that you can join which brings together women from many generations and life experiences to grow in Christ together.

However, sometimes there are valid reasons to start a Bible study group on your own, maybe you’re in an “off season” for your church’s Bible study and there isn’t currently any groups to be a part of. Maybe you’re already involved in a church Bible study, but you want to do something more evangelistic to reach moms in your neighborhood or community. Or, maybe you just want more opportunities for gospel-fellowship with women in the stage of little ones. Whatever the reason, starting a Bible study group is valuable and surprisingly accessible and through this guide we’ll walk you through each step. Let’s get started.

Do you think that scripture takes a specific black and white position on preventing pregnancy, or do you believe it’s an area of freedom? What scriptures lead you to believe this?

We've never had more resources available to us than we do right now, but only one resource qualifies as a Bible study. There are books, online articles, printed magazines, podcasts, videos, and music coming at us from every direction. As a woman eager to learn more about God's word, it can be exhilarating to have easy access to so many teachers and influencers. While these resources can be extremely helpful, and can encourage a busy mom when her hands are full of little children and dirty dishes, they are not the same as studying the Bible itself.

Studying the Bible grows us in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ so that we're not carried away by poor doctrine. For example, most of us can't immediately tell the difference between a high-quality cubic zirconia and a real diamond. But a jeweler can spot it right away, because they spend time closely examining the real thing. Only long hours and varied experiences with precious jewels allow them to discern the difference between authentic stones and their counterfeits. It's important that we recognize a Bible study can only be one thing: studying the actual Bible. A true Bible study is digging into the pages of scripture, praying for wisdom and understanding, and discovering more about who God is.

HOW ARE DEVOTIONALS DIFFERENT FROM STUDYING THE BIBLE?

These days, the words "devotional" and "Bible study" are often used interchangeably, but in reality they are two different things. For many of us, when we are not sure how to understand God's word, it's easy to start with a devotional book. Devotionals are usually meant for reading one-day-at-a-time, beginning with a short Bible verse that is explained with an encouraging commentary written by the author. This type of reading has a place as long as we understand how devotionals fit into the bigger picture. In fact, they can be helpful when it comes to thinking about and applying specific scripture passages and praying for the day.

In contrast a Bible study is reading scripture to understand and discern its truth for ourselves. We ask questions like, "What is happening in this passage? Why did God put this in the Bible? How does this fit into the bigger story of the Bible?" As we examine the text, either through inductive study or a guided question/answer format, we start to uncover the truth with the help of the Holy Spirit. We get a feel for specific passages and the Bible as a whole, which increases our literacy and ability to apply it to our lives rightly. It's unlike any resource -- which is why it's so valuable for women to gather to study the Bible itself.

WE NEED FIRST-HAND KNOWLEDGE OF THE ETERNAL WORD OF GOD SO WE CAN DISCERN THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE COUNTERFIT AND THE REAL THING.

HOW TO CHOOSE A BIBLE STUDY

Selecting the right study is one of the more critical aspects of starting a Bible study, but the right study isn't necessarily the one that will be the easiest or make the group most comfortable.

Instead, it's a delicate balance of committing to a curriculum that's rooted in the gospel message with challenges for women at many levels, without being bland or discouragingly difficult.

Discerning A Solid Study

There are many types of Bible studies on the market today. Maybe you're interested in a commentary-style book with simple discussion questions at the end of each chapter. Or maybe you'd like a study with few teaching texts to reference, but lots of questions to walk you through an inductive method of understanding scripture. Some studies focus on going through a whole book of the Bible, and others are completely topic-driven. There are even studies that don't have questions, but prescribe a method that can be used with simply a pen, a notebook, and a Bible.

Regardless of the style of the study, it's important to make sure it encourages women to understand scripture in its original context, points them to other scriptures for the purpose of interpretation, and is laced with a strong thread of the gospel narrative.

Another way to check the soundness of a study is to take time to research the author. Ask questions like:

- What are his or her credentials?
- Do they work for an organization?
- Does that person and or organization or church hold a high view of God, believe in the inerrancy of scripture, and desire to see women become biblically literate?
- What do you think is their goal in writing the study?

Answering some of these questions in a ministry team setting, under the guidance and authority of church leaders, will prove helpful when it comes to choosing a study.

Consider the Needs of Your Group

During the study selection process, it will be important to think about the needs of your group. You might consider the specific spiritual needs of the group based on age, stage-of-life, or how the study complements other things the women are learning at church on Sunday. Is your group full of non-believers and new believers, or are you leading a

seasoned group of women who've studied scripture for years? Is your group going to be consistently attended by nearly all of the women, or will it be scattered attendance where women need to be able to pick back after being gone? Is your group going to be a short and efficient meeting because of a ticking clock with childcare, or is it a leisurely meeting over coffee?

Choosing a Study Format

Some common Bible study formats include elements such as a prayer time, worship and praise through singing, a time for informal discussion or icebreaker questions, formal discussion with time to answer questions, and teaching (either in person or on a video) that provides a helpful summary to the group. Your study doesn't need to include every one of these components, but women might benefit from having access to these different elements in some form of another if they aren't provided directly in the study itself.

Gather Recommendations

Choosing a great Bible study is best done with the help of a group in your local church, and it requires time, discernment, and prayer. It's important to be realistic about what your group can accomplish, choosing something that will point them to truth and challenge them spiritually, without being so hard and time consuming that they just give up. If you're looking for a jumping off point, we've recommended several of our favorite studies here. It might feel like you aren't able to accommodate everyone's stages and needs, but when you entrust your time to him and seek to make disciples of women, God is faithful and his word will not return void.

**AS IMAGE BEARERS OF GOD, WE CAN ONLY
UNDERSTAND OURSELVES CORRECTLY
THROUGH THE LENS OF WHO GOD IS.**

He has given us his word as an invitation to know him, and when we humbly open the pages of the Bible with a mind and heart to know our Creator, we are transformed more and more into the likeness of Christ.

HOW TO GATHER A GROUP FOR STUDY

Most of the time, the most difficult part of studying the Bible together is finding someone who is willing to organize it.

This can seem daunting at first, but it's not difficult. It just takes someone who's willing to stay organized and coordinate the details. Sometimes, it's even nice to grab a couple of friends so you can all put your heads together, planning and supporting each other throughout the process. And remember – just because you're coordinating the group of women, it doesn't mean you have to have all the answers! Here are a few tips as you form your group.

Pray

It's always best to start with prayer. Pray that God will gather together the right women for the study, lead you with wisdom in selecting the appropriate curriculum, and equip you to diligently persevere as a leader throughout the length of the study.

Consider Who To Invite

While God can graciously use Bible study groups to meet some of our emotional or relational needs, it's important to have a right heart when meeting with other women. Our motivations should center around loving God and loving others, putting their needs before our own. As you think through women to include in the group, consider inviting women in different life stages and from different cultural backgrounds. You will always find a common interest in the gospel, and God often uses those most unlike us to make us more like himself.

Determine When And Where You'll Meet (And What It Will Look Like)

There are no special requirements for this one – and it will look vastly different depending on the needs of your group! Get creative with where to meet. Maybe it's in a group member's home after all the kiddos go to bed, in the daytime during a park playdate, a night out at a local restaurant, or even a Google Hangout across state lines during naptime. The options are endless, but keep a few things in mind:

- It doesn't have to be perfect. If you or another woman in the group chooses to host - wonderful! Just remember that growing in your understanding of God's word doesn't depend on an empty dishwasher or all the clothes being folded in the drawers upstairs. People understand that real life happens, and often, the imperfections make it easier for everyone to feel comfortable during the conversation.

- While refreshments are nice, contrary to popular belief, they are not a requirement for a Bible study! Don't feel like someone needs to make a triple chocolate cake or a seven-layer trifle for each meeting. Of course, if you love to bake, have at it! But there is nothing wrong with apple slices and a sleeve of Oreos, or even just meeting over coffee and tea.
- If your group is made up of moms, especially moms of little ones, you'll need to consider childcare needs. Will the discussion time be a casual meet up at a local park while the kiddos run on the playground, or something more formal – with everyone chipping in a few bucks for childcare in the basement while the moms meet upstairs? Settling this upfront will help women know how to plan so they can be involved in the study.

Determine What You'll Study

You can do this beforehand, or poll the women that agree to participate with a few options once you've narrowed it down. Visit this post for more details on selecting the actual study for your group.

Make The Ask

Once you have the basic details nailed down, make the ask! Shoot out an email, Vox or text, make a few phone calls, or find them in person and let them know the details the study. As much as possible, give women time to make sure it works well with their families' schedules.

Stay Connected

One of your roles will be communicating housekeeping details with the members. This might be arranging a babysitter, making alternate plans if the host is sick, or emailing the group each week letting them know what you're discussing.

EVEN THE MOST BRILLIANT AND WISE HUMAN MINDS STRUGGLE TO DETERMINE TRUTH IN ISOLATION.

When left to ourselves, we're often left with parts of scripture we're still wrestling with. But bringing together a group of women from a variety of perspectives and backgrounds will challenge hidden biases and false thinking. Which means gathering a group of women for Bible study is not only a great way to make friends and spend time together, but it's also instructive for our Christian walk.

STUDY DISCUSSION FOR GROUP MEMBERS

Our Bible study groups should challenge us, refresh us, and connect us closer to others who love God. But this doesn't always come naturally.

When we aren't intentional, conversations with small groups of women can be lopsided and off-topic. Instead of discussing the Bible and all of the wonderful things we're learning about God, it can turn into one person's venting session or well-meaning conversations about things that aren't about the Bible at all. Of course, get-to-know-each-other conversations are good, but remember, the point of taking time away from your families and your otherwise busy schedules is to glorify God and learn about him together.

So how can you, either as a leader or a group member, love others well and maximize the discussion time? Here are a few ideas:

Recognize The Value Of Everyone's Contributions

It's both wise and loving for us to listen, and helpful and edifying for us to share what we're learning. If we do either of those things to an extreme degree (always staying silent or answering every single question), we're going to miss out on some of the blessings of abiding together. One way to guard against this is to love the women in your group and genuinely care about what they have to say, no matter their Bible knowledge, personality, or background.

When you're in a Bible study discussion, resolve to participate and love others by reaching out to include them in the discussion too. You might be blown away by the truth you learn from one another! And if you're a little less comfortable talking in a group, resolve to answer one or two questions (maybe one you've already thought about beforehand) and bless others by sharing what you're learning about God. Instead of keeping those treasures buried inside, be a vessel of God's grace to others.

Recognize The Value Of Discussing The Bible

As much as you might want to share all the details about the latest conflict with your mother-in-law or the dramatic story from your recent potty training experiences, prayerfully remember the purpose of the Bible study time. There might be space before and after the discussion to fellowship with each other (enjoying friendly communication with those who share common interests), but when it's time to get down to the discussion of scripture itself, try to stay focused. The word of God has the power to teach, encourage, comfort, rebuke, and build everyone up in love. It will be more than sufficient as the topic of conversation.

Give concise answers, tell stories that are relevant to what you're learning from God's word, share things that make God look wonderful and big (Because he is!), and be ready to hear from others too. As you stay on-topic during the Bible study discussion time, you will affirm the value of God's word and learn more as a group.

Recognize The Value Of Making Connections Based On Authenticity

It's easy to get self-conscious when you're sharing about "Bible stuff" in a group of women, especially when you're sure some of them know more than you. It's normal to want to sound polished like you have-it-all-together or stay silent because you're worried you might give an answer others are not impressed by. But resist that temptation. Just as a great conversation with a good friend over hot coffee is built on authenticity and humble sharing, so is a group discussion.

It's amazing to watch the Holy Spirit work in the hearts of women when we're willing to be vulnerable, share areas where we're failing, and open up about our hard questions. When you root your identity in Christ, being willing to talk about an area of weakness because you know it doesn't define you, Jesus shines brightly before everyone. You show off God's strength, and others who might be afraid of examining their hearts have an opportunity to see the comfort of the gospel.

Recognize The Group Isn't About You

You're coming together with other women from your local church or community to learn about and glorify God. The goal of your meeting isn't to become best friends (although you might make some), to be heard by other women, or even to stay completely silent and let others talk. The goal is for everyone to grow in their knowledge and love for the Lord, based on truth from the word. So get down to business, be excited about the discussion, share from an honest heart, and watch the amazing things that God does in the lives of those in your group.

ALTHOUGH WE SHOULDN'T BE ROMANTIC OR UNREALISTIC ABOUT OUR BIBLE STUDY GROUPS, IT IS POSSIBLE FOR THEM TO MIRROR A MEMORABLE CONVERSATION WITH A CLOSE FRIEND.

As you step out in faith to coordinate a study, trust God to gather the right group of women from various perspectives and backgrounds to grow in your devotion of God's word together.

STUDY DISCUSSION FOR LEADERS - A NOTE FOR THE LEADER

So, you've invited women to your study, you've chosen great materials, and logistically, all of the pieces are coming together. But now you're getting a little nervous about "leading" the group. Isn't it going to be awkward?

Well, it doesn't have to be!

First of all, most women are just grateful that someone took the time and energy to coordinate the study, and they are happy that they aren't on the hook to lead the discussion. People probably aren't thinking about you at all, they're just excited to get started and enjoy the fellowship. Instead of putting pressure on yourself to have all the Bible knowledge in the world, or seem more spiritual than you really are, think of yourself as a facilitator (a person who coordinates a process and makes it easier for everyone). That's not too bad, right?

If you can commit to pray faithfully for the women in your group, complete your study on time, and care for the hearts of women in your group by asking good questions and listening well - you can lead a Bible study. Here are a few additional tips to help things run more smoothly:

Start And End On Time

All moms know how hard it can be to make it to places on time, and they also know how much effort it takes to get out of the house at all (with or without kids)! As a leader, you can respect the women in your group, and their investment of time in the study, by starting the discussion at the agreed-upon time. That's not to say you should aggressively cut-off all the small talk (great conversations might be happening), but you can emphasize the importance of the Bible and the eternal investments of your study by helping everyone stay focused. It might feel strange the first time, but when there's a break in the conversation, just say, "Hey, I'm really excited to dig in. Let's get started!"

Likewise, it also conveys respect when you end on time, even if the discussion isn't totally finished. Of course, some women might want to linger and keep talking (Yay!), but it allows those who might be running on a tight schedule to keep going with their day, without feeling rude or awkward.

Learn The Group's Dynamics

Good leaders are also good listeners and observers. As you're engaging in discussion during the discussion during the first meeting, consider the personalities of the group, especially

identifying those who will be more of the ‘talkers’ and those who will be more of the ‘thinkers.’ You’ll want to actively engage both. Additionally, make a mental note of where people are at with their Bible knowledge and application so you’re ready to draw out wisdom and redirect the conversation as needed. If you get stuck, you can always ask for other thoughts from those with more Bible knowledge in the group or ask the women what God is teaching them personally (versus sharing stories about what other people are learning). Understanding the nuances of the group is a way you can love these women by creating a safe environment where everyone can share without the fear of being belittled, attacked, excluded, or showcased.

Be Prepared

While you definitely don’t need to go to seminary, or have lots of previous experience to lead a Bible study, it’s still important to be prepared. Women will look to you to set the tone, so if you’ve invested time into your study, they will play-off of that and rise to the occasion.

Another way prepare is to think about what you’ll say at the beginning and end of the discussion. Not that you need a word-for-word speech (that would be super weird), but it’s nice to draw women into the questions, maybe by sharing something that was particularly exciting to you that week. You could close by recapping some of the best nuggets of truth that the women shared during that time, which leads nicely into prayer.

Finally, consider looking carefully at the questions (or whatever the discussion format will be) before the group time, and estimate how much time you would like to spend on each area. This isn’t something you need to follow with rigidity, but it can help you stay on track when the group starts down a bunny-trail. Let the Holy Spirit lead, but also remember that women learned from the study and are eager to cover all of the material if possible!

Pray With Intentionality

As the leader, it’s also important to pray for your group members when you’re preparing for a meeting and when you’re in the study time together. Remember, more than a leader who has it all together, they need God to change their hearts. This isn’t something you can do by your own willpower, it’s a gracious work of the Holy Spirit, so ask him to move in the hearts of the women in your group.

Also, you’ll want to consider how to help the women pray for each other, and it works well to have some structure for this. Some groups enjoy spending a long time in prayer together in prayer together during the evening. For others, it might not be as conducive due to children and time constraints.

There are many ways to going about prayer. For instance, you can have the group email or text you requests beforehand, and then you can share those with the group in a document or follow-up email. The downside to this method is privacy concerns (some people have requests that they don't want others to stumble upon) and it can feel less personal. Another idea is to have women exchange requests with the person sitting to their right and pray for her by name in the group. There are many ways to do prayer requests, but coming up with a plan helps everyone stay on-track.

And Remember: It's Not About You

All of this might sound intimidating, but take heart, because it's not really about you at all! The point of gathering together to study the Bible is to learn about, point each other to, and fall more in love with Jesus and his gospel - not to make you look good (or awkward). One thing that will keep this in perspective is prayer. Pray for the women by name when you aren't together, and pray for them as a group when you are. As you desire God's glory, wanting everyone to invest in eternal things, God will be faithful to help you by his Spirit.