

Bible Studies and Retreats That

Zing!

Leading women to discover a growing friendship with Jesus is exciting, and it should be the purpose of every women's ministry! Women get to know Jesus as they worship, study, experience, and explore faith together. They get a chance to go deeper and to understand why you're reaching out to them in the first place—because of Jesus' love! This section guides you in doing this well and with vibrant results!



Most churches usually do well at providing Bible studies, but it's important to regularly evaluate what you're offering. Remember, you want to keep your studies fresh and effective. Get your team together, and reflect on these questions.

- How do the studies we offer vary in format, length, and depth?
- How do our studies serve women's varying schedules?
- How do our studies reach women with different learning styles?



Reach more women.

As you evaluate and plan, invite others to give input. Get input from a representative sample of women you're trying to reach. If you only ask women who are already involved in group studies, you might not gain information indicating any changes need to be made. When you ask women who are *not* involved in current studies, you'll begin to see gaps in what you're offering, and you can move forward to make some changes...to reach more women and impact their lives for Jesus!

Refresh your format.

When a group of women are passionate about studying God's Word and find a format they enjoy, they tend to use that same format over and over. There's nothing wrong with this, but it may leave out others who don't enjoy that format.

You're reaching women throughout the community, and you want to structure your study groups for a kaleidoscope of women so they can build relationships and grow in their most important relationship...with Jesus.

There are many studies available, and it can be overwhelming to know where to begin. Start by recognizing differences among studies.

- *Length*—Most studies range from 6 to 12 sessions. How often you meet will impact how long the study will last.
- *Leader helps*—Look for studies that offer tips and helpful coaching for leaders.
- *Technology*—While watching a DVD is easy for leaders, it's not always the best for women in the groups, as they don't get a chance to interact and share their own stories and own reflections. Keep the needs of women in mind as you're making your choices.
- *Additional considerations*—Does the study stand alone, or is it part of a series? What learning styles are targeted? Are the Bible verses included in the text of the study, or will women need to already be familiar with the Bible and how to use it? Details matter when you're reaching women at different places in their spiritual journeys.

Remember, you won't try everything at once. Assess the needs, and consider opportunities to reach different niches of women.






Fit into those crazy calendars!

Women are busy. And there are women who use their busy schedules as the excuse for not getting involved in a group. There's not much you can do about that except pray and encourage. But for some, seeing your flexibility in what groups you offer will be just the nudge they need to get started. Consider offering...

- *Both day and evening groups*—Women working outside their homes are generally available in the evening. Moms who stay home with children may not want to spend time away from family in the evening, and older women may prefer to be out of the house in daylight hours.
- *Both weekly and biweekly groups*—Some women want the accountability of meeting together every week. (And when you're focusing on getting young moms involved, sometimes they need that adult interaction time!) Others will hesitate to commit to every week.
- *Various locations*—Meet in the comfort of women's homes...in a park...at a local coffee shop or restaurant...in a school while children are in class. You'll reach more women when you meet them where they are.



Zest! Ask permission when meeting in a restaurant, school, or anywhere that involves other groups of people. You'll probably be using a room or tables for at least an hour, and while most businesses won't mind, always be considerate.

Teaching or learning?

"Later that same day Jesus left the house and sat beside the lake. A large crowd soon gathered around him, so he got into a boat. Then he sat there and taught as the people stood on the shore. He told many stories in the form of parables, such as this one:

"Listen! A farmer went out to plant some seeds. As he scattered them across his field, some seeds fell on a footpath, and the birds came and ate them. Other seeds fell on shallow soil with underlying rock. The seeds sprouted quickly because the soil was shallow. But the plants soon wilted under the hot sun, and since they didn't have deep roots, they died. Other seeds fell among thorns that grew up and choked out the tender plants. Still other seeds fell on fertile soil, and they produced a crop that was thirty, sixty, and even a hundred times as much as had been planted! Anyone with ears to hear should listen and understand..."

"Now listen to the explanation of the parable about the farmer planting seeds: The seed that fell on the footpath represents those who hear the message about the Kingdom and don't understand it. Then the evil one comes and snatches away the seed that was planted in their hearts. The seed on the rocky soil represents those who hear the message and immediately receive it with joy. But since they don't have deep roots, they don't last long. They fall away as soon as they have problems or are persecuted for believing God's word. The seed that fell among the thorns represents those who hear God's word, but all too quickly the message is crowded out by the worries of this life and the lure of wealth, so no fruit is produced. The seed that fell on good soil represents those who truly hear and understand God's word and produce a harvest of thirty, sixty, or even a hundred times as much as had been planted!" —Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

What do we mean by learner-based?

While this parable is often called the “parable of the sower,” it’s actually about the soil, the various types of ground onto which the seed is cast. Jesus’ focus is the field, the land of the learner. When we think about spreading God’s Word among women, are we considering the women who are actually doing the learning, or are we more concerned about the teaching? What’s the desired result? That God’s Word is *taught* or that God’s Word is *learned*?

In their book *The Dirt on Learning*, Thom and Joani Schultz explain it like this.

Here’s your challenge.

We’re not getting women involved in Bible studies just to pass the time; we’re all much too busy for that! We want to make a difference in women’s lives. We want women’s lives to change because they *experience* Jesus through our ministries—not just hear someone talk about him. We want to change the world for God!

Our challenge to you as you strive for a fresh and vibrant women’s ministry is to take a hard look at what you’re offering for Bible study. Grapple with hard questions, being willing to toss out tradition, if that’s needed, and being willing to truly offer what will help women grow in their relationship with Jesus.



It’s an approach with a clear goal: that learners understand, retain, and apply their learning. The focus is on the learner, not the teacher. Its success is based not on how eloquently the sower casts seeds, but on whether the seeds take root and bear fruit. This shift in perspective is an enormous change for most churches. But the results are stunning—“yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown” (Matthew 13:23b).

Let’s look at some premises in the learner-based approach.

- **Learners are distinct and unique.** People don’t all learn the same way. Some learn primarily through their eyes, others through their ears, others through touch and movement. Some are analytical, others more random and global. Some learn faster than others. Learner-based strategies accommodate all learners.
- **What works for the learners** is far more important than what’s most comfortable for their teachers or leaders.
- **Learners help guide the learning process.** They’re allowed to make choices, follow their curiosity, and explore what interested them. They’re encouraged to make learning relevant to their own lives.
- **Learning occurs best when learners enjoy the process.** They’ll learn and retain more when the curriculum brings delight; when friendships and interactions with other learners are encouraged; and when learners feel appreciated, respected and loved.
- **Education is evaluated on what learners understand, retain, and apply**—not merely on what’s taught, the completeness of the curriculum, or the eloquence of the teachers. Learning is effective when it creates learner appetite for more learning and an insatiable desire to share the learning with others.

Thom and Joani Schultz,
(1999) *The Dirt on Learning*.
Loveland, CO: Group Publishing, pages 44-46.

Get REAL

At Group we believe that these elements are essential for true learning:

Relational. Group resources encourage learners to interact with each other, which makes learning more effective and helps build Christian friendships.

Experiential. With Group's resources, learners don't just listen or read—they actually experience the lesson or event. So biblical principles stick with them up to nine times longer!

Applicable. Every resource incorporates life application, because Christians should be both hearers and doers of the Word.

Learner-based. Different people learn in different ways, so our resources provide a variety of methods to draw people closer to Jesus.

Retreats

We provided basic information about retreats in "Fruitful Events," but we want to answer a few questions women's ministry leaders frequently ask us.

Do I need a retreat speaker?

Not necessarily. When you plan a women's retreat, of course you want it to be effective. Effectiveness involves impacting women's lives, and God works in many ways to impact lives. Think outside the box. Here's how.

Let women experience. When people listen to a speaker for extended periods of time, they might be hearing words, but they're not

fully experiencing the content of what's being presented. Let them talk to each other, stand up and move around the room, or try an experiment that tests an idea. This means a speaker is replaced by a facilitator, who keeps the energy of the retreat moving.

Give women more. When you're not spending significant money on a speaker, you're able to invest your resources into the women attending your retreat. Pass the savings along to them through reduced costs or scholarships. Invest what you would have spent on a speaker into a service project for your community that women work on at the retreat.

Get more women involved. The more you involve others, the more invested they are to invite friends and create an excellent retreat for everyone. Share responsibilities with other women. Women intimidated by speaking to a group will feel more at ease facilitating a retreat session, where the facilitator is minimally involved and women are actively engaged.

Retreats without speakers can significantly impact women's lives. With Group's women's retreat kits, more women get involved in facilitating the retreat, sharing ownership and excitement. Women at the retreat are more involved and engaged. And your retreat becomes a life-changing experience. Give it a try!

How should I promote our retreat?

There's absolutely nothing wrong with promoting your retreat using traditional ideas like hanging posters around your church or adding a flyer to your church bulletin. But let's see how we could take these traditional ideas up a notch.

Use the tried-and-true. Take, for example, the traditional bulletin insert. Make yours a little bigger than the bulletin so it sticks out.

Print it on bright-colored paper. Be sure to use an attention-grabbing headline. And if you want to make it super simple to sign up for your retreat, put your registration form on the back, and just tell them to slip it into the offering basket as it comes by.

Don't forget to hang posters wherever women will be most often, like the children's Sunday school rooms... and the bathroom!

Use social networking. Don't be intimidated...it isn't hard to do! And if you want to get the younger women in-the-know about your retreat, social networking may be the best way to do it.

Create a Facebook page or group. Use it to post updates, photos of the retreat location, a link to more information on your church website, and more. It's also a great place when the retreat is over for women to keep connecting.

If you or anyone you know has a blog, ask them to blog about your retreat. Or create something viral such as a Smilebox greeting (smilebox.com) or a YouTube video, and send it out to all the women you know.

Laugh out loud! If you have fun and creative women who like to be in front of a crowd, recruit them to put on a skit during worship services. Humor goes a long way toward grabbing attention and motivating people to action. Don't know anyone or don't have time? No worries! You'll always find fun commercials (and other promotional tools) in your Group retreat kits.

What do I do when the retreat is over?

Try these simple ideas to follow up with women after your retreat.

Note it! Write a personal note to each woman who attended the retreat. Gather your team together and celebrate the memories as you write notes. Or preprint basic notes and have everyone on your leadership team sign them, assembly-line style.

Share it! Create a brief slide show of photos to show before or during worship services to celebrate the event. This is a great reminder for women who attended and also piques the interest of those who couldn't make it this year...they won't miss again!

Post it! Put photos from the retreat on your church website. Provide a place on your website or blog where women can share their retreat stories. If you've gathered e-mail addresses of the women who attended your retreat, customize a scrapbook or postcard at www.smilebox.com to send to everyone.

Sing it! Coordinate with your Worship Leader to incorporate a couple retreat songs into worship services within one to two weeks of your retreat to help women remember their experiences.

Talk it! Set up monthly dates/times for women to connect at a local coffee shop to stay in touch. Create a fun bookmark or magnet and insert it into the retreat journal for women to take home as a reminder.

Pray it! Give women the opportunity to stay connected by offering a follow-up Bible study, perfect for continuing relationships and helping women take time for God and each other.



Fresh & Vibrant Women's Ministry Bible Studies and Retreats That Zing!

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