

Lesson 3: Select the Best Bible Study



Is This the First Step?

Listen to needs and identify your audience

Learn about your audience and set goals

Consider style then review, evaluate, and select a Bible study

Introduction

No, this is not the first step. If you wanted to skip the earlier lessons and start here to select a Bible study and start planning, you should probably stop here. If you didn't hunger for the spiritual feast in Lesson 1 and Lesson 2, you are not ready to lead or teach women who are thirsty for living water and growth in the Word.

Lesson 1 encouraged and addressed your personal faith because preparation starts in your heart. You listen. You learn. You are filled. The private, intimate moments you have with God in the Word are what truly equip you to teach women with your words and actions. The fire, crucible, and joy of connecting with Christ in Scripture will humble and shape you to lead. The sacraments are given as powerful gifts to strengthen your faith.

Lesson 2 taught you about fruitful living in response to the gospel. Prayers are constantly whispered in your heart or spoken with transparency. Yielded hearts linger in the Word with a growing desire to reflect God's image and honor his name. Acts of service—seen and unseen—will adorn your life of faith.

With Lessons 1 and 2 burning in your heart, this lesson begins to specifically equip you to find the best Bible study for your group. You know the importance of finding the right study—and you know it isn't as easy as pulling an eye-catching book from a shelf.

But do you actually know how to find the right Bible study?

As you begin, you will find renewed appreciation for the spiritual guidance and encouragement of your pastor. Divinely called to equip you for service, your pastor's spiritual leadership is a gift designed by God to help you be a faithful Bible study teacher.

Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers,¹² to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up. (Ephesians 4:11-12)



The Gift of Your Pastor's Spiritual Leadership

Your pastor is called by God to serve your congregation as he proclaims the Word, administers the sacraments, and equips the body of Christ. His responsibilities include spiritual leadership, growth in the Word, accountability for souls, and much, much more.

You have been placed under his spiritual care to be nurtured, encouraged, and equipped for service. Flourish under his divinely appointed service, grow from his spiritual insights, and learn from his extensive knowledge of the Word. Receive the blessings of his spiritual leadership.

Before you meet with your pastor to discuss Bible study, it will help to outline some of your thoughts and ideas (long narratives are not your best option).

- If you are starting a new women's Bible study, the lessons in this module will be especially helpful with the planning and preparation. It will help you to see a mental map of the journey and get an idea of what you need as you begin.
- If you currently teach a Bible study group, you will be able to quickly work through the section on selecting an audience. But don't miss the importance of learning about your audience, setting goals, and establishing learning objectives for your Bible study group.

Pastors will have individual preferences of how to handle the planning, preparation, and conversations about your women's Bible study. Some pastors will give direct, specific guidance during the initial planning and throughout the process. Other pastors may be comfortable with your suggestions and encourage you to follow through with your ideas. Your pastor will determine what his leadership and involvement will look like in this process. Ask him how often he wants to meet, what information he needs, and how he would like to get updates.

What do you need? Be specific about what you need to avoid miscommunication. He is there to answer questions, train you, and teach you to be faithful to the Word. He is there to lead, direct, and support your service.



Make sure your communication and expectations are clear

God's kingdom work thrives as pastors and leaders work together with respect, love, good communication, and clear, common goals.

It helps to ask questions.

Make sure you understand your pastor's expectations and let him know specifically what you need from him.

- "Where could I learn more about the congregation's ministry goals before we meet to plan the next Bible study?"
- "Is there a congregational assessment/demographic study that would be helpful for me to review?"
- "Are there others who would like to participate in the planning or be mentored as a Bible study leader?"
- "I have noticed a few needs in my conversations with women, would you like me to send you those thoughts ahead of time, or can we discuss them when we set the goals for Bible study?"
- "Would you like me to bring suggestions I have for Bible study material, or what would you suggest?"
- "Would you like to go through the material together, or would you like to review it and then meet to give me feedback?"
- "How often would you like me to check in with you—and what information is most important to you?"
- "Do you have a preference for handling questions I can't answer? How would you like to respond to those questions?"
- "What is the most convenient way for us to communicate?"
- "Should the details for the bulletin/newsletter/media go to the secretary, or would you like them sent to you?"
- "Will you need the number of women attending recorded for a statistical report?"
- "Are there any concerns you would like me to be aware of?"
- "Do you have any suggestions or advice on how I could be a more effective or faithful teacher?"

Don't forget to express your appreciation for his faithful service.

LISTEN TO NEEDS AND IDENTIFY YOUR AUDIENCE

Listen to the Needs of Others

Before you identify the groups of women you will invite to Bible study, listen carefully to learn about the needs of others.

Filled with genuine love for your sisters in Christ, you will be concerned about the burdens and temptations women face in their daily lives. Because of sin, there are always problems that need to be addressed, healed or fixed. You know the needs of your sisters in Christ will not simply vanish when they come to Bible study. You also know the power of God's Word to strengthen those in need.

Make an intentional effort to visit with women, nurture relationships, and foster support in personal or spiritual matters. Listen to these women and pray for them. Keep their needs on your mind—their needs will shape your plans for Bible study.

Women may have an ongoing health issue, employment problem, or financial set back. Social, racial, and relationship trauma happens at home, online, or in church. People have real hardships that feel like the center of their universe.

Listen to their hearts because *"The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit"* (Psalm 34:18).

The words of others may also betray a growing root of sin. The deceit of wealth, greed, and bitter resentment give evidence to faith that is choking or weak. Disrespectful, selfish attitudes spill over from prideful hearts.

Listen to their words, *"for the mouth speaks what the heart is full of"* (Luke 6:45).

Reflect as you listen. What burden does a woman carry that seems like a barrier to the hope of Christ? Where do her thoughts wander? What worries her? What influences are vying for a position of authority? What blinds her from the truth?

For the purpose of this training, we will talk about attentive listening to identify the needs of others—though sometimes it can be hard for people to understand and articulate their needs. God wants to speak to women about their needs through his Word—he wants to draw them to himself. Listen carefully as you consider who might come to hear his truth and what they need to hear.

Attentive listening means you will talk less and listen more. Proverbs 18:2 condemns fools who *"find no pleasure in understanding but delight in airing their own opinions."* Use your words to ask questions rather than react, state opinions, or tell your own story.

Listen to understand.

- “It sounds like...”
- “Tell me more about that...”
- “Is that something you need help with?”
- “What can I be praying for?”
- “Have you talked to pastor about that?”
- “How are you holding up?”
- “How is that effecting your faith?”

Some of the needs you identify may move the congregation to begin a new ministry outreach, intercede with prayers, or start a Bible study. This opportunity begins with concerned, attentive listening. It is filled as believers engage to reach out with the message of the gospel and demonstrate God’s love.

*By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.
(John 13:35)*



What About Social Issues and Needs?

There are many real social issues and needs that bind believers with debilitating fear, frustration, or concern. It is important to discuss those problems with your pastor and let him find the best balance between the social needs that are present and the congregation’s mission of proclaiming the gospel.

Compelled by love, you may find that addressing earthly needs can be a stepping stone to share God’s love and his plan of salvation in Christ. To learn more about this balance, read “[Church—Mission—Ministry](#)” by [Armin Schuetze](#), published by Northwestern Publishing House.

Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. ¹⁶ If one of you says to them, “Go in peace; keep warm and well fed,” but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? (James 2:15-16)

You may also have important conversations with spiritually mature women who long for an in-depth study of Scripture. They marvel with Paul, “*Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God!*” (Romans 11:33). Some believers want to learn about the Bible with a grasp of God’s Word that broadly understands its purpose yet lingers over specific words with rich insights. They want to understand the history, context, and Christ-centered truths of Scripture.

These women might ask:

- “How can I learn the Bible so well that it becomes the source of all I think, do and say?”
- “How can I learn about passages that will strengthen me in times of need and equip me to encourage others with the Word?”
- “How can I learn the history and context of these Scripture verses so I clearly understand how to apply them to my life?”
- “How can I learn to let Scripture interpret Scripture or distinguish law and gospel? Where can I practice that?”

You will find that women have a very broad spectrum of needs. Pray about them.



Is Your Congregation Already Working to Meet Any of These Needs?

If your congregation already has ministry efforts in place to meet some of the needs you have identified, it would be best to promote those efforts rather than start something new.

Identify Your Target Audience

With conversations swirling in your head, it may seem impossible to list the needs of new and mature believers, single and married women, mothers, seniors, and everyone else that falls between the cracks. How do you know who to serve?

Your view from 30,000 feet will give you the opportunity to see who is missing. Look carefully and prayerfully consider who could be served by your Bible study. Consider how a Bible study could address the needs you learned about.

1. Are there women who need patient love and Christian support because they don't know what they need?
2. Are there women who feel stuck because they can't see past what they need? (Whether this is a real or perceived need, they still feel stuck).
3. Are there women who need special encouragement because of a difficult situation or hardship?
4. Are there women who will come to Bible study just to meet their social needs?
5. Are there women who need to deepen their connection to the congregation and feel a sense of belonging?
6. Are there women who need Christian fellowship?

7. Are there women who would be interested in learning more about Jesus?
8. Are there women who need to learn basic Bible stories?
9. Are there women with a deep desire to learn the rich truths of Scripture?
10. Are there women who would be encouraged by cross-generational or cross-cultural ministry?
11. Are there women who cannot attend Bible study because of a learning disability, language barrier, or illness?
12. Are there women who have a friend they could invite to Bible study?
13. Are there any needs that seem urgent?
14. Are there any needs that can be met by current ministry efforts?
15. Are there women who struggle to feel welcome at Bible study?

These are some of the needs and groups to keep in your prayers. Ask God to help you know which group you should serve—this will become your target audience.



Why Is A Target Audience Important?

When you try to meet the needs of everyone you rarely meet the needs of anyone. A target audience helps you specify the group of people you hope to serve. This will help you make decisions in Bible study planning as you evaluate what is best for the particular group you intend to teach.

But there are also times Bible study planning begins with a blank piece of paper and a desire to find those who are underserved. This audience is identified in the early stages of planning with a broad assessment of women and opportunities. How do you find women to invite to Bible study? A formal assessment is not always required but it helps to know the demographics of your area.



Understanding Demographics

A demographical study provides statistical data about a group of people in a particular area. It can tell you about unemployment rate, education level, race, family structure, native language. . . almost anything you would want to know. This analytical data can be helpful as congregations evaluate ministry and outreach opportunities.

www.data.census.gov will allow you to type in your zip code to access free reports from the United States Census.

The appendix includes a list of people groups you might consider serving as you analyze your demographics or review a congregational assessment.

If you use a demographical study to your identify target audience, you will gain many insights that will help you tailor your Bible study to a specific group.

1. Age, race, culture, or family makeup could direct you to consider a topic that is especially important or relevant.
2. Education level, language barriers, and communication styles would shape the teaching level or style of your Bible study.
3. Special needs or disabilities must be considered especially when serving those who have physical needs or learning limitations.
4. The spiritual background of participants will determine how many Old Testament references or Lutheran teachings you should use.
5. Responsibilities such as work or family would guide your decision about the day of the week or time of the day for your study.
6. Generational or people group data will help you understand possible philosophies, communication styles, or expectations.

At this point you have compassionately listened and prayerfully identified many needs and several groups that could be served. The input of a few other women will be helpful as different perspectives provide good thoughts for consideration.

Invest yourself in a team approach to identify needs and groups for Bible study. A “my ministry” mindset diminishes and undermines the God-pleasing ministry partnership he wants you to have with your congregation. Resist plans and ideas that are just interesting to you or simply convenient.



What Do the Pastor and Congregational Leaders Think?

Your pastor may suggest a group for your study, or perhaps he has worked through this process with you. Other pastors may appreciate the time you spend gathering information for this important decision.

Follow the direction of your pastor and congregational leaders as you identify the target audience for your Bible study. Work with them to consider the big picture as they lead the ministry of the congregation.

The last step in this process is to work with your pastor to prayerfully finalize your target audience. Then write down every person that might fit into this group. Ask other women if they know of someone that fits your target audience. Continue to pray for these women and others who may attend your Bible study.

Now you have identified your target audience.



Activity: Listen to Needs and Identify Your Audience

It's your turn to Listen to Needs and Identify Your Audience.

Step One: Write out and memorize two key questions that will help you learn about someone who might attend Bible study. (If you are able, role play a conversation with at least one of those questions)

Step Two: List several unique needs of a group who wants in-depth Bible study. How would their needs be different and what is required to meet those needs?

Step Three: Practice using demographics as you consider what you may know about young, stay at home mothers. What needs might they have? Evaluate the ways Bible study may—or may not—answer those needs.

LEARN ABOUT YOUR AUDIENCE AND SET GOALS

Though you have a target audience, you still need to learn more as you work to set goals and select a study. Your next step will be to receive feedback from your target audience. Their input will provide direction and buy-in as they feel a sense of investment or ownership in the Bible study. A concise and effective survey can clarify specific needs and help you plan logistics. Other times you will find that personal conversations provide the information you need.

Learn About Your Target Audience

Some Bible study groups begin as women at church build Christian friendships. These women eagerly look for the spiritual growth and fellowship found in Bible study—and you may be friends with many of these women.

Yet you still want to take time to learn about their spiritual background and understand their story. What has shaped or influenced their faith? What teachers or relationships have guided them? What is their greatest influence now? When you understand these things it will guide you to communicate God's truth more clearly. Continue to nurture those relationships and build trust with one another.

But it is also possible that you won't know your audience. What shapes and drives their thinking? Scripture demonstrates the benefit of understanding others—and how the Spirit uses those insights to connect people. Listen to the apostle Paul:

People of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. ²³ For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. So you are ignorant of the very thing you worship—and this is what I am going to proclaim to you. ²⁴ "The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by human hands. (Acts 17:22-24)

Paul did his homework. He paid attention to the culture and worship in Athens so he could understand the people and speak to their spiritual need. You can follow his example by listening to people attentively and understanding how they think.

Give careful thought to how people communicate because words mean different things to different people. What you think you say may not be what they hear.

Think about "baby-boomers" and "millennials" for a moment. These terms refer to people born in specific a time frame—but you know they refer more directly to the comparable traits, needs, and characteristics of their generation. Very simply—if you serve a specific group of people, you need to learn more about them.

Talk with your pastor about the group you plan to teach so you are prepared to connect and communicate well with a variety of people. Challenges with diversity and communication are not limited to age or culture—you may have varying political opinions, values, or social standing in your group. Some talk to think, and others think to talk. One woman is confident and outspoken while another is insecure and quiet. How can you reach them all with God's Word of truth?

Now go; I will help you speak and will teach you what to say. (Exodus: 4:12)



Uniting the Body of Christ

There are many ways for you to reflect on the diversity of your group. Demographical studies show social data. A personality assessment shows strengths and weaknesses. Social media reflects a person's interests and values. There are many ways to see how women are different, what they need, and how they think.

Appreciate and rejoice in God's unique design of each person! But never forget Paul's powerful words in Colossians 3:14, "*And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.*"

Your task as a Bible study leader is to unite all the participants in and through the Word of God. The messages of law and gospel are great equalizers. We are all sinners and all are equally forgiven and saved. Draw your Bible study group together in Jesus. The faith they share as believers far exceeds any differences they have. God unites them in humility and fellowship through Scripture.

Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. ³ Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. ⁴ There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; ⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism; ⁶ one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. (Ephesians 4:2-6)

Utilize Surveys and Conversations to Receive Input

You have begun to learn about your target audience, but there is more input you can receive that will help before you begin logistical planning. These important steps will help in the next stage of planning:

- Build support and get women on board to create interest. Help women see how they will fit in and how Bible study will be a blessing to them personally. Consider how to create ownership for the participants. Listen for ways you can improve the Bible study.
- Get input from your target audience about the best day, time, length, and frequency for Bible study. Does the group want homework assignments or extra reading material? Should you meet at church, a restaurant, or in homes? Is daycare needed?
- Since you will soon set ministry goals, it will help to ask women what they hope to get out of Bible study. This question will provide you with great insights. Consider their input as you set ministry goals.

A survey may be the easiest way for you to gather this information.



The Difference Between a Demographical Study and a Survey

You learned that a demographical study identifies groups of people.

A survey can be used with your target audience. It would ask individuals for their input regarding a Bible study. Surveys allow you to get solid information about what works best for people and what they need.

The appendix includes several resources to help survey your Bible study group:

- Four Ways to Survey a Bible Study Group
- Four Tips When Surveying a Bible Study Group
- Ten Sample Questions for Bible Study Surveys
- Two Bible Study Surveys

Other women will find that conversations or e-mails are the easiest way to gather this information. The logistical plans will begin to take shape throughout the next steps. The end of Lesson 4 covers a complete list for logistical planning.

Set Ministry Goals for Your Bible Study

With feedback from your target audience, the next critical step is to set goals for your Bible study. For the purpose of this module, think of goals in terms of ministry goals. The ministry goals you set will answer the question, "What blessings do you hope the Spirit provides through this Bible study?"

These ministry goals are not the learning objectives for the study (you'll learn about those later), these are the overarching goals you hope to see when the study ends or as it continues. Here are some samples of ministry goals you might set:

- Create a community of women who gather around the Word.
- Increase the amount of time women spend reading the Word.
- Strengthen the connection women have with their church or each other.
- Nurture, mentor, and develop new leaders or Bible study teachers.
- Provide an in-depth study that examines the Bible with mature believers.
- Teach Scripture to correct a Biblical misunderstanding or address a problem.
- Create a Bible study group that addresses this unmet need: [identify it].

Ministry goals for a more advanced study group might include an introduction to the writings of the early church fathers or a familiarity with materials like Luther's Large Catechism or the Augsburg Confession. You may want to linger in topics like sanctification, the Trinity, or creation.

Another excellent in-depth study would be an introduction to apologetics. Apologetics requires considerable training in Scripture—and it demands excellence in speaking and listening.



What Are Apologetics and What Is an Apologist?

But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect. (1 Peter 3:15)

"**Apologetics**" is a clear, methodical defense of truth.

An "**apologist**" is one who defends or explains their beliefs and helps renew the thinking of others.

In Philippians 1:7 Paul writes, "*In my defense and confirmation of the gospel, you all share in this grace with me.*" The word "apologetics" comes from the Greek word translated "*defense.*"

Learn More About Apologetics



If you are interested in learning more about getting involved in conversations about Christ, consider reading Mark Paustian's excellent books, [Prepared to Answer](#) and [More Prepared to Answer](#) from NPH.

There are many valuable Bible study goals that could serve your congregation. Those goals might be met by anything from an apologetics training to a women's social event. Talk to your pastor about the ministry goals you are considering to determine how they fit into the mission statement of the congregation. Do they line up with the current goals for the congregation? What is the best fit? This is where you may also discuss any feedback regarding goals from the survey, or thoughts you have gathered from conversations.



A Comparison to See the Importance of Bible Study Goals

- One Bible study leader is planning to go through the book of Philippians because her friend recommended a great book. The bulletin announcement reads,
 "Women's Bible study on Philippians will be Tuesdays at 7pm."
- Another Bible study leader has noticed that women in the congregation feel disconnected and aren't sure their service has spiritual value. A few young moms are exhausted and overwhelmed—they are discouraged because their faith isn't radiant and joyful. After praying and talking to the pastor, three goals are set. The bulletin announcement reads,
 "Women's Bible study will meet on Tuesdays at 7pm. Join us as we work through the book of Philippians! You will learn to:
 - ✓ Strengthen your connection to other believers at church
 - ✓ Understand how God works in and through believers
 - ✓ Fight sin-driven guilt that condemns failure in joyful living

An invitation to study God's Word to meet needs and strengthen areas of weakness will draw more women to Bible study. They will inherently understand why they "need" to attend Bible study.

More importantly, you are training women to look to Scripture when they face hardship or need encouragement. This practice reinforces their need for the Word and sets a pattern of going to Scripture as the first and best resource for life.

Now that you understand the importance of setting goals, look at the big picture:

This is what you see: You have identified this.	This is your goal: You work toward this.	This is what you study: You'll look for this next.
Resentment toward those in a position of authority in the workplace, church, government, or home.	Increased appreciation and respect for those in authority. Lives that reflect God's good design of authority.	How God designed and uses authority as a blessing. Examples of how God used believers and unbelievers in positions of authority to bless his people. Trust in God's design, wisdom, and plans.
Confusion or uncertainty about the differences between Christian or Lutheran churches. Lack of interest, familiarity, or respect for important Biblical doctrines.	Unity, commitment, and understanding of key doctrinal issues and why they are important. Ability to explain basic doctrines and find the supporting passages in Scripture.	The creeds or Catechism. Material written to distinguish doctrinal differences. Biblical or historical accounts of believers led astray by false teachers. Judgment of false teachers/leaders.
Women who want to encourage other believers in times of difficulty or hardship. Women who want to walk by the side of someone who is suffering.	Familiarity with verses of comfort that will strengthen others. Know the Biblical accounts of believers who suffered or faced hardship and received strength.	A study of verses that offer encouragement and comfort in the Old and New Testament. Bible books (like Job, Ruth, or Philippians) that let you walk with believers who lived through hardship.
A hunger and thirst for a deeper understanding of Scripture. A place to ask difficult questions and learn how to apply difficult principles.	Opportunity to engage in deeper Bible study. Ongoing desire to study Scripture.	Books of the Bible with study notes from solid resources and reputable authors. People's Bible Teaching Lutheran Confessions

To start the process, take a big step back and remember the needs and audience you identified. Don't be overwhelmed by the immense needs or heavy burdens of the people you will serve. Look at what you know but don't try to be the solution to every problem. Remember what you have learned about those people.

Pray for wisdom and talk to your pastor as you:

1. Review or create a list of felt, perceived, or observed needs.
2. Analyze the feedback from the survey of your target group to consider common goals or needs not previously identified
3. Determine what goals would be beneficial and discuss them with your pastor or congregational leaders.
4. Establish ministry goals by answering the question, "What do I hope the Spirit will accomplish through this study?"

Now you can set ministry goals for the Bible study. Selflessly long for what will unite, build, and bless others—seek ministry goals that will best serve this group.

The zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this. (2 Kings 19:31b)

When you have determined the ministry goals for your Bible study, keep them handy and use them in a variety of settings. Don't lose sight of them as you move forward in your planning.

- Incorporate the ministry goals in your conversations and encourage women to see and tell others how this Bible study will help them.
- Use the ministry goals in your publicity and marketing materials (social media, personal invitations, bulletins, and newsletters).
- Integrate the ministry goals in your lesson plans and review them throughout your Bible study.



Activity: Learn About Your Audience and Set Goals

It's your turn to Learn About Your Audience and Set Goals.

Step One: Look at the two sample surveys in the appendix. Which survey would be best for your group and what changes would you make to the survey?

Step Two: Refer to the chart in this lesson on setting goals and focus on the first two columns, "This is What You See" and "This is Your Goal." Select two of the following scenarios and write out what you see—then write out suggested goals.

- Women in secular leadership who are struggling to let their light shine in a competitive work world where their faith is not respected.
- Elderly women who have lived faithful, quiet lives raising a family.
- Young high school or college women at your church that are facing decisions, temptations, and struggles in the journey to womanhood.

Step Three: Use the information below to write one social media post on each goal for the Bible study (one post for the first goal, one for the second goal, etc.).

"Women's Bible study will meet on Tuesdays at 7pm. Join us as we work through the book of Philippians and learn how to strengthen our connection to other believers at church, understand how God works in and through believers, and fight sin-driven guilt that condemns failure in joyful living."

CONSIDER STYLE, REVIEW AND EVALUATE, SELECT A STUDY

With your audience and goals intact, the next step is to select a style or format for the Bible study material.

What kind of Bible study are you looking for? As you are looking you will likely find a wide variety of materials that are close to what you are looking for—but don't quite hit the mark. This section will teach you about the options and how to make the best decision.

It may be very difficult to find a Bible study that addresses the exact goals you have identified. It is even harder if you are looking for a specific format or style. But a solid Bible study can be tailored to meet those needs by simply adding content. Many Bible studies are intentionally written to a general audience so they can be adapted easily to the needs of a specific group.

On the contrary, it is very challenging to work through a complex study and skip over difficult material. Participants will likely be confused. Bible studies that need corrections or clarifications are also more time-consuming and problematic. "Salvageable" is not a good option since confusion or misunderstanding can occur.

Invest your time to find the best Bible study material.

Your pastor will let you know how to work through the final steps of reviewing, evaluating and selecting a Bible study—it can be done several ways.

Consider the Best Style or Format for the Bible Study

With all you have invested to this point, it is important to remain diligent in considering what type of study to select. Here are some questions you should consider (or ask your participants about) to select the right style of Bible study.

- Do the participants have a language barrier? Consider having them bring a Bible in their native language.
- Are there participants that have diminished eye sight and need larger print? Could you find material that can be enlarged for them?
- Is the class intended to teach English as a second language with the Bible as a text? (These are called ESL classes—English as a Second Language).
- Are there any special needs that would influence the reading level or content of the Bible study? Remember to check out [WELS Special Ministries](#) or [Jesus Cares Ministries](#).
- Will all the participants be able to find Scripture references, or do you want the Scripture passages printed out? Be mindful of new believers who

may not be able to find references and can't keep up—but remember the importance of helping them become familiar with their Bible.

- Will participants be interested in video clips, video lessons, music, or additional media? Do you have the equipment to view it easily?
- Is there a specific time frame for the study that would require a minimum number of lessons or limit how many lessons you can cover? Do you need 6 lessons or 8 lessons? Can the lessons be covered in the 60 minutes or 90 minutes you have set for Bible study?
- Do you expect women to attend regularly or might attendance be sporadic? Consider how easily participants will be able to jump into a study if they have missed a lesson—perhaps independent lessons would be easier for participants who have varying schedules.
- Are the participants willing to purchase a Bible study book, or is there a budget to purchase materials? Be sure to ask—you may be surprised at the answer. Your pastor may know of a generous donor. Purchases may qualify for a bulk discount.
- Do participants want individual lessons printed each week or do they prefer the material collated in a binder? Lessons could be added weekly.
- Where do they want to write notes? Do they prefer a workbook style or a journal notebook? This could be as simple as a spiral notebook.
- Are participants willing to prepare for Bible study? If so, will it be required or just optional? How long will they need to prepare?
- Do participants want homework or reading assignments? If so, how long will they have for homework and what materials will they need?
- Is the theological level appropriate for your group? Consider familiarity with Biblical history, theological terms and principles or Lutheran theology—is it too deep or too shallow?

Now you have a clear list of what you are looking for—and not looking for. As you work to find a Bible study, consider everything you have worked on so far but remember that if you try to accomplish too much, you'll accomplish nothing.

Review and Evaluate with Discernment



The Difference Between a Review and an Evaluation

For the purposes of this training, we will use the following terms:

Review—a review includes perusing a variety of studies pertinent to the topic or needs of the target audience. It will likely include several styles or formats and will result in the choice of two or three suitable studies.

Evaluation—an evaluation is a theological examination that thoroughly compares the teaching of the study with Scripture and the teachings of the Lutheran Church. This will determine whether the study is suitable.

Now you are ready for the general review process as you look through a variety of materials and narrow down your selections. Then your final study choices will be evaluated to find the best Bible study.

At this point you need to clearly understand how your pastor wants to proceed. Follow his leadership and suggestions—this could happen in several ways:

- Your pastor may select the study.
- Your pastor may suggest several optional titles for you to review.
- Your pastor may point you to look for a study.
- Your pastor may evaluate a study you recommend.
- Your pastor may have you evaluate a study and assess your evaluation.

Your Pastor May Select the Study

Your pastor may have worked with you through this whole process and will let you know he has a Bible study that is a good fit for the group. If that is the case, count it a rich blessing and start studying!

Your Pastor May Suggest Several Options for Your Review

Your pastor may offer several titles for you to look at and suggest you review them. Look through the materials to see which resource best fits your group. Consider what you know about your audience, the goals you have set, and the style or format that would work well. Let him know which study you think is best.



Supplemental Material

Your pastor may also suggest supplemental resources related to your topic. He may help you find good illustrations, examples, or even videos that can help Scripture’s teaching be more effective and meaningful. Remember he may have maps or teaching resources to assist your group in learning. Keep those resources handy!

Your Pastor May Point You to Look for a Study

Your pastor may suggest you look for Bible study material at Northwestern Publishing House (NPH.net) or Concordia Publishing House (CPH.org). He may recommend that you look at a study of the People’s Bible or the People’s Bible Teaching series (see the appendix sample). He may steer you toward—or away from—a particular resource, author, or publishing company.

He may also recommend Bible study material posted by WELS Women’s Ministry. You will find free downloads of Bible studies that have been reviewed by reputable pastors and professors in WELS. There are a variety of topics, authors, and styles.

Your Pastor May Evaluate a Study You Recommend

Your pastor may be willing to evaluate a study that you recommend. When you are reviewing material to bring for his approval exercise your best judgment and give him an opportunity to see your love and respect for the Word. The next section on discernment will be especially helpful.

Your Pastor May Have You Evaluate a Study and Assess Your Evaluation

Your pastor may have you evaluate the material and share your assessment with him so you can grow in discernment. The skill of discernment is refined over time with much practice. Your pastor can work through your review to help you learn and grow.

Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth. (2 Timothy 2:15).

The discernment you exercise may have an eternal impact—don’t approach this responsibility casually.

Be diligent in these matters; give yourself wholly to them, so that everyone may see your progress. ¹⁶ Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers. (1 Timothy 4:15-16)

Discernment isn’t as simple as “Five Questions” but there are good evaluation tools to get you started. Wrestle with the concepts in these questions and consider

them carefully. An additional discernment tool can be found in the appendix.

Here are some questions to consider as you evaluate a Bible study:

1. What are the strengths and weaknesses of the study?
2. Are passages or topics presented in the correct context?
3. Does it present doctrinal issues correctly?
4. Does it faithfully teach and interpret the truth of Scripture?
5. Will the questions reinforce Scripture or could the ensuing discussions lead participants away from what Scripture teaches?



What Does “The Best” Material Look Like? It Has...

- An emphasis on the gospel which clearly teaches God’s plan and work of salvation through Christ alone.
- A presentation of the law that does not distort or minimize sin and its consequences.
- A proper interpretation of Scripture which clearly presents God’s intended meaning.
- A clear message that God’s work of salvation in Christ is more important than our response of godly living and obedience.
- References to the Sacraments that are doctrinally correct and emphasize God’s work to create and strengthen faith through the means of grace.
- Directives to pray frequently and confidently without implying that God strengthens faith through prayer.

Finally, ask yourself “What is the key thought that women will remember as they go home?” Think about what will fill the hearts and minds of those who attend Bible study. Will they be filled with the love of Christ and joy of forgiveness? Will they be motivated by grace and guided to lives of humble thanksgiving? Or will participants feel burdened with guilt and consumed with a responsibility to be better Christians?

Select the Best Bible Study with Your Pastor

Your pastor is a well-trained teacher whose ability to review the strengths and weaknesses of the Bible study will be a blessing. Listen to his thoughts and evaluation of the material. Learn from his comments or his assessment of your evaluation. Gracefully accept redirection to greener pastures if needed.

Also remember that your pastor works to coordinate ministry. He knows the congregation’s priorities and long range plans. If his six-month plan includes a sermon series on the Apostles’ Creed he might direct you away from repeating a study on the same topic—or he might suggest that you plan a study that coordinates with the sermon series!

Pastors are involved in difficult situations behind the scenes. Since he knows about private frustrations, discussions, or personal situations, he may steer you away from a sensitive topic. And remember that he may not explain his reason to you as he protects the reputation of others. This is part of your trust and respect of his position—follow his counsel with a willing spirit.

Finally, there may be situations where your pastor has concerns about a lay-led Bible study or a women's Bible study—and he may have good reasons. Again, this is a time to demonstrate respect for your pastor and congregational leaders. There are many things going on in ministry that you aren't aware of. Be understanding, positive, and patient as your congregation sets its priorities for ministry. Trust God to work through the leaders at your church.



Thoughts From a Pastor For a Pastor

God gives pastors the responsibility to train and equip members for ministry. If a woman is willing and interested in leading women in a Bible study, that seems to be a win-win, not only for ministry but also for getting people involved.

Instead of seeing it as another item on an already busy schedule, you have an opportunity to equip someone to carry out ministry so ministry efforts are doubled and the work load is reduced. It is certainly within the scope of work that God gives to pastors. What a blessing from God! It will require work and effort but it is something that God can certainly bless.

It is a joy to equip a saint, walk her through Scripture, and equip her to teach well.

Perhaps an area women's Bible study with other WELS congregations could be considered. Continue to look for ways to serve and seek solutions that bless your congregation's ministry or perhaps include a broader area.



Area WELS Women's Bible Study

An area women's Bible study can be a good solution for many congregations. One pastor or a circuit pastor is designated to oversee the Bible study and work with the Bible study teacher. The Bible study is promoted in surrounding WELS churches and all women are invited.

At this point some pastors and congregations may want a written request or proposal that can be submitted for approval as an official ministry of the congregation. If a proposal or report is requested, use the information you have gathered through this process as your formal proposal or report.

You can include:

- The target audience and needs of the group.
- The ministry goals set for the Bible study.
- The logistical planning (day, time, length, frequency, start and end dates).
- The approved materials to be covered.
- The name(s) and contact information of those who are teaching the study.

Some congregations may also want reports submitted for quarterly or annual voter's meetings. This information can be especially helpful as the congregation reviews Bible study attendance (this information is submitted to the Synod as part of a statistical report). It also keeps the congregation see the vital role of women's Bible study as a part of their ministry.



Activity: Consider Style, Review and Evaluate, Select a Study

It's your turn to Consider Style, Review and Evaluate, Select a Study.

Step One: Explain the advantages of adding content to a simple Bible study, or explain the disadvantages of using a more complex study that may have errors.

Step Two: Practice reviewing material by selecting the top two titles from this imaginary list of Bible studies. Explain your choices.

1. Being God's Woman
This dynamic study of Proverbs 31 will freshen your countenance and open new doors for you to serve God! Find the full life God wants you to have by walking in the shoes of this amazing woman.
2. Receiving Grace
God offers grace through Christ to believers who sincerely seek his face. Find the many ways God strengthens your faith as you live in the blessing of obedience. Open your heart to find his grace for you!
3. The Fruit of the Spirit
What does the fruit of the Holy Spirit look like and how do you know he will bear fruit in your life? Study Scripture to learn the purpose of God's gift of the Holy Spirit. Learn to confidently depend on his work in your life.
4. You Can Do All Things For Christ's Glory! (this has a pretty cover)
Learn about your personal mission and worth by listening to the Spirit. Find the power of God and be equipped for amazing opportunities. Ask and you will receive!
5. To the Unfaithful
This study of Hosea points to the faithful God who loves his people even when they are unfaithful. Learn about God's faithfulness, the unfaithfulness of God's people and the loving forgiveness God offers through Christ.

Step Three: If this were a page in a Bible study you were evaluating, what would you note?

Courageous Contagious Faith

As we consider the idea of being courageous and contagious in our faith we can readily think of the apostle Paul who richly embodied those characteristics throughout his life. His ministry, recorded in Acts, includes a ship wreck, a deadly snake bite, beatings, imprisonments, and more.

But we also see how his radiant faith touched the lives of those around him. Lost souls heard the message of Christ and believers came together to gather around the Word and sacraments for worship and fellowship.

Certainly the apostle Paul had a unique and exceptional calling in his ministry. It was not an easy life of ministry—and not one that we will be able to emulate. But there are lessons for us to learn as we rejoice in our brother's life of faith.

PART ONE - Paul's courage as he traveled

The three missionary journeys of Paul are found on the Bible maps (page 37).

1. Review the maps to note the areas covered by Paul's ministry. While much of Jesus' earthly ministry branched north, east, and south of Jerusalem, Paul traveled much further north and braved the Mediterranean and Aegean Seas to the west as he journeyed as far as Rome. He ventured into Asia Minor on missionary journeys for almost 11 years.
2. Read Acts 16-18 to follow Paul's second missionary journey.

Your Turn to Select the Best Bible Study

It's your turn to Select the Best Bible Study

Review and Exercises

Review the following exercises from this lesson. If you are uncertain how to proceed, reread the appropriate section.

Listen to Needs and Identify Your Audience

- Practice using demographics as you consider what you know about young, stay at home mothers. What needs might they have? Evaluate the ways Bible study may—or may not—answer those needs.

Learn About Your Audience and Set Goals

- Use the information below to write one social media post on each goal for the Bible study (one post for the first goal, one for the second goal, etc.).
“Women’s Bible study will meet on Tuesdays at 7pm. Join us as we work through the book of Philippians and learn how to strengthen our connection to other believers at church, understand how God works in and through believers, and fight sin-driven guilt that condemns failure in joyful living.”

Consider Style, Review and Evaluate, Select a Study

- Explain the advantages of adding content to a simple Bible study, or explain the disadvantages of using a more complex study that may have errors.