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# The Resource Page

... creative and practical ideas

Brought to you this month  
by Rena Henderson



## 'Not on Sunday' Bible study

Some 10 years ago on St. Simons Island, Ga., a group of young women gathered for breakfast and to welcome some newcomers in the group to town. We left with an expressed desire to meet for a weekly Bible study that would allow for a deeper level of learning than the Sunday morning structure.

Soon six or seven of us began meeting on Wednesday mornings at the First Baptist Church, embarking on a 10-week study, complete with workbook. Within just a few years, more than 100 women of various backgrounds and denominations had signed up for each "term" of Bible study. Following are some thoughts about the motivation for creating such a ministry and factors that can contribute to its attraction.

Most important is the *life-transforming power* of the open, honest and deep search of Scripture. As leader, after a couple of "semesters" I began to ask at the end of each term what difference the study had made in the lives of the participants. I was astounded by some of their stories of transformation.

One young woman (and we were honored by the presence of several men along the way) from a faith background that did not emphasize a personal relationship with Christ found a new and invigorating faith that transformed her own church experience. Her growing confidence led her husband to explore and find faith, thus permeating their family life with a whole new model for living. Our group also grew with her through her father's battle with cancer and her beloved sister's struggle with an autoimmune disease. When she returned to our group after the funerals of her family members, she shared an audiotape of her sister's service. A choir of friends had sung the old André Crouch song that included the line, "No more dying there, we are going to see the King!" I remember listening to the tape in my car with tears streaming as I thought of the yielding of this family's end of a long season of

### Suggested Resources

- *The Jesus I Never Knew* by Philip Yancey
- *What's So Amazing About Grace?* by Philip Yancey
- The book of James
- New Testament parables
- Beth Moore studies
- *Boundaries* by Henry Cloud and John Townsend
- *Balcony People* by Joyce Landorf Heatherly
- *Messy Spirituality* by Mike Yaconelli
- *The Will of God* by Leslie Weatherhead

dying to a new season of life — and this same gift offered to all of us by God.

Another woman, quiet but always faithful, joined our study. I did not know her well, but one day she shared her story in a letter to me. When she began the Bible study, she was searching for a place to belong in the community of faith, not so much a church, but an entry level for the relationship she hoped was there for her. She and her husband came from different church backgrounds and could not find a satisfying place to attend together as a family. Over time her growing faith began to matter more than holding on to her roots, so she and her family joined a totally different fellowship where they found excitement and continued spiritual growth.

Life transformation? Did I mention my own? Living, grappling, teaching, studying and steady confrontation changed my life, deepened my understanding of faith, increased my trust in God and expanded my sense of grace to a broader kingdom of God.

Other purposes emerged from a church perspective. Our study grew by word of mouth and as a byproduct *brought new people to our church*. We made a conscious effort for the environment to be safe — no question or issue was off limits — and for people to be welcomed and invited into relationship with us. Groups frequently went out for lunch

afterwards, and our church provided dependable childcare. After a couple of years we expanded to a second time slot, offering the same study during regular Wednesday night activities. This way, working men and women also benefited from the life-transforming power of Bible study. Later, a group of young single adults began meeting on Tuesday nights at a local restaurant after hours.

In addition, new folks found it an avenue to be more easily *assimilated into church life and community*. This is always a challenge in traditional church life. Sometimes we are a much more closed system than we think we are or than we say we want to be.

Based on my experience at St. Simons, following are suggestions for conducting a similar group study:

- Welcome and honor any level of faith or lack of faith. Deal tactfully with "mature" participants who feel the need to "straighten out" others.
- Encourage weekly attendance and completion of assignments, but refrain from making these qualifications for "membership." Structure sessions such that participants will prepare and attend out of a personal desire.
- Adhere to a schedule planned around legal and school holidays so that participants will know what they will study on a given day.
- Use a variety of authors, supplemental resources and Scripture. Avoid following a particular writer or scholar or line of thought.
- Be honest and open, revealing personal struggles and uncertainties to create an environment that encourages self-examination. Maintain a sense of humility and prayer.
- Encourage the gifts and contributions of participants in areas such as providing snacks, coordinating childcare and brainstorming.
- Work toward making disciples rather than building institutional churches. Provide an open door, consistency and freedom of expression. **BT**

**THE RESOURCE PAGE** is provided by the Congregational Life office of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship in partnership with *Baptists Today* and for those dedicated lay leaders working in the educational ministries of local churches. This month's page was written by Rena Henderson, a layperson and the mother of two college students. After many years in the pastorate in Georgia, she and her husband Bill are enjoying intentional interim ministry in North Carolina.