

Women of The Word

NEW TRENDS IN BIBLE STUDIES CATER TO THE TIME-DEPRIVED AND THE INTERNET SAVVY.

Women have long been known to be the backbone of Christian congregations in America. According to a 2000 report from Christian researcher George Barna, one out of every five Christian women—or 20 percent—belong to a small group that meets regularly for Bible study, prayer or Christian fellowship. The same statistic among men is only 13 percent.

Unfortunately, family and jobs tend to dictate how much time a woman devotes to study of the Word. As women progress through different life stages they desire Bible studies that are tailored to their interests, schedules and spiritual maturity.

“There will always be new moms looking for new-mom studies and a new batch of empty nesters looking for empty-nester material,” says Jennifer Leo, marketing director for Tyndale House Publishers. “The same woman will look for different things at different points in her life.”

Authors have stepped up to the plate and created Bible studies that cover all areas of the spectrum: some require no homework, others include daily assignments; some are designed for personal study and others are for groups; and some studies are self-contained while others guide users to utilize encyclopedias, concordances and different translations of the Bible.

Here are some trends to consider when looking for your next Bible study and ideas to make current study more meaningful.

LESS IS MORE

“Stay-at-home moms and working women are looking for interaction with other women who are at the same place in life,” says Julie Daniel, a Bible study leader and co-

coordinator for Mothers of Preschoolers (MOPS) near Chattanooga, Tennessee. "They want to dig deeper in Scripture but not with a Bible study that is so complicated they fall behind and become discouraged."

She says a top priority for her 10-member group is a study that can be worked around their families' schedules.

"We have definitely seen an interest in studies that take less time," says Tara Miller, marketing manager for New Hope Publishers. "Women are hungry for solid biblical content and application but often do not have the time to dedicate to time-intensive studies."

Popular Bible study author Kay Arthur, whose inductive Bible studies demand an hour of homework a night, now offers a study targeted at this new trend. Her series of seven 40-minute studies requires no homework for a six-week period.

WIRED FOR THE WORD

The Internet has become a natural gathering place for women who work there, shop there and now study there. Last fall well-known Bible teacher Beth Moore hosted her first Internet-only Bible study, *Believing God*. Some 35,000 women signed up for the first study with a second one expected to begin in September.

For a nominal fee, participants receive an ID and password that allows them to log on to the 10-week sessions from their home computers. The fee includes online discussion boards, study tools with various Bible translations, printable listening guides, leader guides and session homework.

Participants need an Internet connection with a Windows Media Player, which can be downloaded for free to a PC or Mac. "It's another option to help women find the best situation for them to get into God's Word," says Cindy McClain, marketing strategist for LifeWay Church Resources. "The draw is that a woman can work at her own pace without leaving her home."

CHURCH RESOURCES

Six years ago there were so many groups duplicating Bible study resources at Northland, a Church Distributed, in Longwood, Florida, that church leaders decided to streamline the process by implementing a point person to monitor the Bible study needs of its congregation.

Today, there's a constant waiting list for the 52 Bible studies housed by Suzanne McCutchen, volunteer coordinator for Northland's small-group resource library. She ensures that all the materials are returned on time and reassigned to the next group.

"It's fiscally responsible for us to do things this way," McCutchen says. "Instead of going out and spending \$200 for a study, you just wait your turn."

The library experiences peak periods in September and January as people gear up for serious study. "People tend to take the summer off or do something not quite as meaty."

Even though women's lives have gotten busier and more demanding, they are taking advantage of the myriad options available today to study God's Word and to encourage one another. McCutchen sums it up, "They want the course that's going to help them deepen their relationship with God."

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