



by Sue Edwards and Jodie Niznik

Galatians

Discovering Freedom in Christ Through Daily Practice



LEADER'S GUIDE



Galatians: Discovering Freedom in Christ Through Daily Practice
Leader's Guide © 2018 Sue Edwards and Jodie Niznik

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Before You Begin . . .

We are delighted that you've chosen *Galatians: Discovering Freedom in Christ Through Daily Practice* to enrich your understanding of God's Word and help others in the process. Familiarize yourself with this overview as you prepare to lead the study and invite women to join you.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

Many Christian women become sidetracked in their relationship with God because of distorted ideas about who God is and how much he loves them. They see him as a taskmaster, impossible to please and eager to punish them when they mess up. Toxic churches attempt to control their members through guilt and threats. Films and books portray Christianity as a religion of rules focused more on dos and don'ts than on loving one's neighbors and providing a source of hope. People forget that the first hospitals, universities, and charitable organizations were founded by Christians, and many of them are still active. These distorted perceptions often disrupt the intimate relationship the Lord desires with his daughters; misconceptions hinder women from investing in a relationship with God and from making a study of his Word a high priority. Possibly more than any other book of the Bible, Paul's letter to Christians in the region of Galatia, modern day Turkey, corrects this flawed theology and enables women to understand grace, some maybe for the first time or others at a much deeper level.

This has been true for both of us. We are both seminary graduates, all in for God and active in our churches and ministries to women. Sue's focus is in the academy as a seminary professor, and Jodie is on staff in her church. We both equip leaders, write curriculum, and teach the Bible. Yet we both found Galatians taking us to richer and deeper places in our understanding of grace. This resulted in enhanced intimacy with Jesus. Digging into Galatians as a whole book study has taken our faith to another level, and we pray that will be your experience too.

The lessons will walk you through this letter verse by verse so that you don't miss any of its treasures. Encourage women in your group to set aside quality time during the week to work through each lesson. They will quickly find it is worth their effort as the Lord uses their faithful study to transform them.



A NOTE ON BIBLE TRANSLATIONS

The 2011 New International Version (NIV) is the version used throughout this study. Because it uses gender neutral language where that fits with the intent of the original text, we recommend this version for clarity. If you use another version, you’ll need to keep in mind that the 1984 NIV and many other standard Bible translations use “man” and “sons” to represent people in general.

PREPARATION FOR THE STUDY

Leading the small group. Whether your group is small enough to meet all together or whether you are working with a Bible study that’s large enough for the women to break up into smaller groups, be sure to take time to train yourself and your leaders in the basics of leading small groups well. For help, go to www.discovertogetherseries.com and under Supplements click on Training Guide. You’ll find a simple downloadable manual that you can use to equip your discussion leaders. For more information, see Sue’s book *New Doors in Ministry to Women*, chapters 6, 7, and 8. An updated edition is scheduled for release in 2019.

Leading a small group is a skill. Even if you are leading a small group in your home or church, learning how to lead the group according to sound principles is still needed for the group to thrive. It takes support, practice, and feedback.

Resources for leading small groups.

Boren, M. Scott. *Leading Small Groups in the Way of Jesus*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015.

Donahue, Bill. *Leading Life-Changing Small Groups*. 3rd ed. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012.

Edwards, Sue and Kelley Mathews. *New Doors in Ministry to Women*. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2002, 2019.

Gorman, Julie. *Community That Is Christian: A Handbook on Small Groups*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002.

Zempel, Heather. *Community Is Messy: The Perils and Promise of Small Group Ministry*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012.

Will there be teaching? Resources to sharpen your teaching skills are provided on the following pages. If you believe that God may want you to teach the Bible, step out and try. Women love to hear their own leaders teach them rather than virtual teachers on screens. At first, your skills may not be as honed as those of more experienced teachers, but in time and with practice, you should improve. And you have advantages over a virtual teacher. Women need models they can watch, hug, and talk to. And when

one of their own steps out and is used by God, everyone is inspired to step forward and use their gifts too. So if something in you says, “Teach!”—then go for it!

Enlisting women to teach with you. Other women have something to say that would benefit the group. Listen attentively when they talk about how God works in their lives. Identify women who inspire others, hold a high view of the Bible, enjoy studying, walk close to Jesus, live wisely, are organized in their thinking, and are articulate, passionate, growing, and mature. Of course, they may not fulfill all these qualities, but if you see that they are on the road to spiritual maturity and evidence the gift of teaching, however developed, your role is to help equip them to develop their gifts more fully.

If you have decided to add a teaching element to your Bible study format, consider asking one of these women to share a short testimony or deliver a message to the entire group one week. She will need a cooperative attitude. When you give a woman the platform, you give her influence. I’ve worked with a few women who took advantage of this opportunity. They spoke twice as long as the allotted time, or they refused to prepare, wandering aimlessly, or they became so emotional that they broke down, upsetting women in the study.

To alleviate these problems, set a time limit and ask women to write out what they plan to say. Stress that cutting into group discussion time will irritate participants. Insist that they review their message with you. Use wisdom as you select women presenters, but consider how much the group will benefit by hearing a variety of voices.

Resources for teaching with accuracy and skill.

LeFever, Marlene D. *Creative Teaching Methods*. Colorado Springs: Cook Ministry Resources, 1985.

Mathews, Alice P. *Preaching That Speaks to Women*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003.

Robinson, Haddon. *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages*. 2nd ed. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001.

Stanley, Andy, and Lane Jones. *Communicating For a Change*, Colorado Spring: Multnomah Books, 2006.

Stott, John. *Between Two Worlds: The Art of Preaching in the Twentieth Century*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982.

Swindoll, Charles R. *Touching Others with Your Words: The Art and Practice of Successful Speaking*. New York: Faith Words, 2013.

Willhite, Keith, and Scott Gibson, eds. *The Big Idea of Biblical Preaching: Connecting the Bible to People*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998.

Resources for help in studying the book of Galatians.

George, Bob. *Classic Christianity*. Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1989.

Keller, Timothy. *Galatians for You*. Epsom, United Kingdom: The Good Book Company, 2013.

Constable, Thomas L. *Notes on Galatians*. 2017 edition. soniclight.com/constable/notes/pdf/galatians.pdf.

PLANNING YOUR FIRST SESSION

You might want to ask women to come prepared to discuss the first lesson, or you might plan a launch of the study and then assign the first lesson for the following meeting. Whichever you choose, you’ll need to plan your time accordingly.

Pray. Open with prayer. Should you pray or invite one of the participants to do so? Be sensitive to the women. If they are comfortable praying out loud, give them the opportunity. If not, you, as the leader, pray.

Break the ice. If time allows, spend your first meeting connecting with questions or icebreakers. For example, ask each woman to introduce herself by telling something about her family, hobbies, what she likes to do on a Saturday night, pet peeves, or what she hopes to gain from the study.

For an extended community builder, ask participants to play the game “Six Things.” To do this, write down questions on a piece of paper and then fold them in a basket. Have each person go around and draw one question and then give six answers to that question. For example: six of your favorite foods, six jobs you’ve had, six places you have traveled, six books you love, six activities you did as a child. Feel free to come up with questions that are fun and that will tell you a little about the people in your group. You can change the number six if you want to.

Another idea is to play the coin game. To do this, place a handful of coins in a bowl. Have each participant draw a coin from the bowl and tell the group a story from their life that happened during the year printed on the coin (or as close as they can remember). If she wasn’t alive that year, she can draw another coin. This is a fun way to hear stories from your group members that you wouldn’t otherwise hear. It’s a great way to start connecting and you’ll be surprised how much you learn about your group.

Get focused. Look over the study guide with your group and express your excitement about the topic. Discuss ground rules. You may want to create Discussion Group Guidelines for your group so everyone knows the parameters and what to expect. Include issues you prefer not to discuss, such as politics or different denominations.

Help women understand the way you want the group to function. If women join later, remember to orient them. Stress the importance of confidentiality.

Some women come to Bible study for the sole purpose of studying Scripture. Others come for community, to find friends. Regardless of your own bent, honor both desires. We all need a relationship with God through serious Bible study *and* relationships in authentic community. Be sure the schedule reflects time for both.

Watch the video. The first week you meet, you may want to view our introductory video available at www.discovertogetherseries.com/galatians (or via the QR code on page 11), or you may want to plan an introductory message of your own. (See the “Training Guide for Small-Group Leaders” for teaching tips.)

Introduce the “Practice” feature. We love the practice component, unique to *Galatians: Discovering Freedom in Christ Through Daily Practice*, that opens each lesson; and in our field testing of the study, many other women did too! These activities are simple and related to the lesson content. They are designed to enhance women’s relationships with the Lord in new ways. Encourage women to participate by highlighting the benefits, but don’t make it mandatory. If women don’t choose to participate, simply don’t have time, or choose to participate in some but not others, don’t embarrass them or in any way make them feel less spiritual. Opening conversation around each practice may provide a comfortable way to launch each session.

Open discussion. Each lesson in the book has a short introduction (two to five paragraphs following the practice questions) to focus the reader’s mind on the day’s topic. Quickly summarize the introductory material, and then guide the group through the study by reading the questions and drawing the women into discussion and discovery. Plan ahead. If you find the lessons contains too many questions for the group to discuss in depth in the time you have allotted, don’t discuss every question. You can quickly summarize some of the questions and skip others that don’t interfere with the flow of the lesson.

Choose blocks of questions to cover and eliminate others. Or skim over observation questions and spend more time on opinion and application questions. Tailor the questions you discuss to your particular group but do all you can to maintain the flow of the text to help women understand what you are studying in context. And be careful not to skip so many questions that you miss the depth, beauty, nuances, and flow of the text—after all, this is a *Bible study*! Do everything you can to make it an interesting *conversation* involving all group members and not a question-and-answer schoolroom-like session between the leader and an individual group member.

As leader, your role is *not* to illumine the group with your own answers but to

provide a safe place for women to share what God is teaching them. Set an atmosphere where they can respectfully explore different ideas. Roadblocks to spiritual maturity dissolve in these kinds of groups.

Don’t expect deep sharing for the first few weeks. Occasionally women will bond quickly, but often they need time to learn to trust one another.

Leading small groups and teaching are different skills. Again, the “Training Guide for Small-Group Leaders” provides sound principles to help you lead your group. Note that when you wear your small-group leaders hat, you do *not* lecture. But you may want to end your time by putting on your teacher hat. Participants often enjoy hearing a message to crystallize biblical truth.

Your wrap-up might be a ten-minute informal presentation, allowing for interaction and questions, or a thirty-five-minute formal lecture, in a style more like a pastor’s Sunday message. If your study consists of several small groups, you may prefer to gather everyone for a formal lecture. If you’re meeting in a home, your group may prefer a more interactive format. Use what works for you and your group.

CREATE A POSITIVE GROUP ETHOS

Ethos (e-thas) is the distinguishing environment or atmosphere of a group. As the leader, you set the ethos, and although you cannot see it, women respond or shut down in response. Every home has ethos. In some homes, children experience unconditional love and fair discipline. As a result, they usually grow up confident and secure. Other homes exude a chill—children walk on eggshells knowing that performance earns affection, which is easily withdrawn when they mess up.

Ethos impacts classrooms. In some classes, students are comfortable asking questions, even dumb ones. Students know the teacher won’t intentionally embarrass them and has their best interest at heart. In others, students don’t dare open their mouths. The classroom is a threatening place. Why? Ethos.

And women in your small group are influenced by the ethos you create. Will your group be a place where women can voice their deep hurts and difficult questions? Can women be honest and work through their questions and struggles in your group? Only then can the process of forgiveness and healing take root. To learn how to create positive group ethos, review the “Training Guide for Small-Group Leaders” at discovertogetherseries.com. This resource focuses on the importance of affirmation and controlling your own talking. Remember, the group time is not about you! It’s about giving the women a safe place to discuss what *they* learn, try out *their* new ideas, and articulate *their* convictions.

LESSON 1

Understanding the Law

This lesson begins with a practice session on rest. Many women don't get enough sleep and love this exercise. It's a great way to kick off these activities. Who wouldn't want to go to bed at a reasonable hour and sleep until they're naturally awakened? But this session also takes on an additional meaning. Truly understanding grace will help us all trust God more and lay down our stress and anxiety. Grace ultimately leads to a more rested lifestyle and overall healthy emotional state. Strongly encourage women to take advantage of this spiritual practice.

LESSON CONTENT

The biblical portion of the lesson takes us all the way back to Genesis and the basis of salvation for Old Testament believers. Be sure the women understand the terms and concepts related to unilateral and unconditional covenants in contrast to bilateral and conditional covenants. Ancient kings, landlords, people groups, and nations entered into different kinds of covenants to make alliances with other kings, landlords, people groups, and nations. Paul's readers would have been familiar with these ideas since they saw them lived out regularly. However, this way of making alliances and doing business is foreign to most people today.

To seal the covenant, the two parties would typically kill some animals and cut them into two halves. Then they would place the halves in two rows, leaving space in the middle to walk through them. In a bilateral conditional covenant, both parties would walk through, signifying that if either party broke the covenant, they understood that what happened to the animals would happen to them. You might call this ceremony a blood oath.

But a unilateral unconditional covenant depended on just one party to walk through and fulfill the obligation. In Genesis 15, God made an unconditional covenant with Abram (later called Abraham). To seal the covenant, God caused Abram to fall into a deep sleep and God alone passed through the pieces as a "smoking firepot" to seal the promises he made to Abram and his future offspring (Genesis 15:17). This ceremony foreshadowed the grace that characterizes our relationship with God through the blood sacrifice of his Son, Jesus Christ.



TROUBLESHOOTING

This lesson should help the participants understand the differences between the Abrahamic covenant and the Mosaic covenant. Understanding covenants and the laws that come out of them are foundational to understanding how God relates to his children through grace (undeserved favor). In addition, participants will discover the duration of the law and several important purposes for the law, while also realizing one of the purposes is *not* to earn favor with God or earn our salvation.

Some women may struggle with learning new information about the law and its purposes. It's okay to wrestle with this tension; just remind them that you will be revisiting the law in more depth in a few weeks.

CREATIVE ARTS IDEA

Create and then laminate a bookmark with the words from Galatians 5:1 or 2:16. As women use the bookmark during the study, they will be reminded of these key concepts.

LESSON 2

Grace, Peace, and Astonishment

One of many women's greatest hindrances to rest is their dependence on media. The media fast is designed to raise awareness and foster self-control. Encourage women to tailor this exercise to their individual needs and challenges. Some may find this exercise extremely difficult or almost impossible, which suggests addictive behavior. If this raises red flags that they begin to deal with, the activity will have been a tremendous success. Again, approach this practice with flexibility and grace.

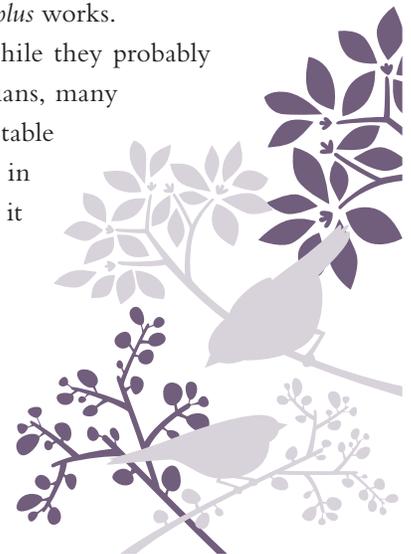
LESSON CONTENT

Lesson 2 introduces the greeting in the letter and Paul's admonition to his audience. Paul's other letters tend to start with a longer greeting of encouragement, blessing, and prayer. In Galatians, his prayer is short, almost curt, and expresses how upset Paul is with what they have done. This beginning sets the tone for the vital truth that Paul teaches them: salvation is by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone, for the glory of God, and not by anything we do or can do. The entire letter is a series of arguments that emphasize these critical points.

TROUBLESHOOTING

It's important to make sure your group understands what this group of false teachers, often called Judaizers, were teaching and why it was so dangerous. The Judaizers didn't accept that the old order of life under the law had passed away and a new way had come. Thus, they advocated for a third way—the mingling of law with grace. The Judaizers, clinging to the exclusivity of the Old Covenant, maintained that Jesus was only for the Jewish people. They agreed that Gentiles could come to faith, but only by way of Judaism; they advocated for conversion before salvation. They were saying that faith in Jesus wasn't enough—salvation required Jesus *plus* works.

Many women subtly buy into a similar way of thinking. While they probably don't think people need to convert to Judaism to become Christians, many think there are certain things they need to do to become acceptable to God. This is Jesus-*plus*-works thinking. Challenge the women in your group to identify where they do this, and help clarify what it means to trust in Jesus alone for salvation.



WILL YOU PRAY TOGETHER AS A GROUP?

Lesson 2 might be a good catalyst to discuss whether or not your group wants to pray together. Give them the freedom to decide either way. If they desire to spend time in conversational prayer, see the “Training Guide for Small-Group Leaders” for suggestions.

RESOURCE

Dean, Jennifer Kennedy. *Heart’s Cry: Principles of Prayer*. Birmingham, AL: New Hope, 1992.

CREATIVE ARTS IDEA

Divide the women into smaller groups (two to six women per group, depending on the number of women overall) and provide a poster board and several magazines for each group. Ask the women to look through the magazines for images that express grace and peace and to make a collage with the images. Give them ten or fifteen minutes to complete the activity and then ask them to explain their creations to the other groups.

LESSON 3

Credible Messenger, Credible Message

This week the practice exercise is generosity, which relates to Galatians 2:10: “All they asked was that we should continue to remember the poor, the very thing I had been eager to do all along.”

LESSON CONTENT

In Galatians 1:11–2:10, we learn more about Paul’s life than we do in probably any other text. We can track his life between his conversion and his year at Antioch (followed by his three missionary journeys) to gain valuable insight into his personality, thinking, and temperament.

TROUBLESHOOTING

Question 13 asks about what Paul did after his conversion and before his year at the Antioch church. Many scholars believe that instead of going immediately to Jerusalem after his conversion, he went to a desert region in Arabia for three years to prepare for his new calling to preach the gospel to the Gentiles. Paul points out that he didn’t spend much time with the other apostles because the Judaizers were probably saying that the other apostles, not Jesus, were the ones who commissioned him, lessening Paul’s credibility. Paul makes it clear that his call did not come from other people but from God alone. Also, Paul spent three years in Arabia, the same amount of time that the other apostles spent with Jesus during his earthly ministry. It’s pure speculation, but Jesus may have met with Paul in the desert to train him for his important church-planting trips ahead. This time with Jesus would also give him credibility with the other apostles who had spent personal time with Jesus.

CREATIVE ARTS IDEA

Consider taking time to live out the practice activity in lesson 3 by volunteering as a group to bless your community, especially victims of injustice, poverty, or sexual exploitation. Giving time or treasure to a homeless shelter, food pantry, or tutoring project brings women face-to-face with the realities they’re learning about. Find creative ways to bless your neighbors.



LESSON 4

Crucified with Christ

The practice section this week focuses on unity among believers by praying for a church other than your own. Pay close attention to the instructions and encourage the participants to find a church nearby to lift up to the Lord. The intended result is to enlarge women's thinking regarding the universal church and to break down divisive walls that easily lead to competition and pride. The ultimate hope is that churches will work together on ministries, projects, and ways to bless their communities. We are in this together!

LESSON CONTENT

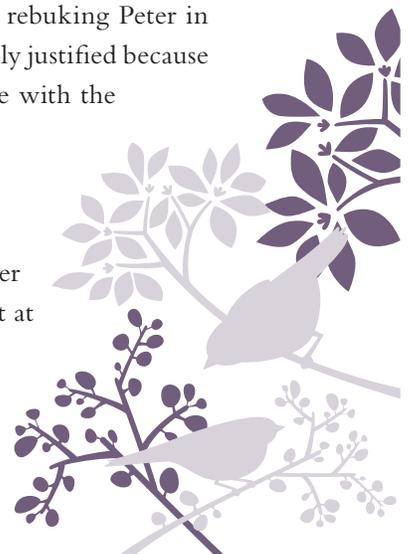
In this part of the letter, Paul describes a tense public encounter with Peter when he was visiting the Antioch church. Peter, although he knew better, gave in to the pressure of the Judaizers not to eat with Christian Gentiles. The Judaizers insisted that Gentiles must first become Jews and obey the Mosaic law before they could be accepted into the family of God and the Christian church. Paul tells the Galatians about the arguments he used to confront Peter. Identical arguments could be used against the Judaizers who were attempting to persuade the Galatians to follow the same distorted ideas. After telling them about his experience, Paul begins his theological argument for salvation by grace alone in Christ alone. Some women may struggle with Paul's theological terms like *justified* and *works of the law*. Encourage them to learn these terms. They are helpful in understanding foundational truths concerning the gospel that can change women's view of God, his expectations, and attitudes toward them.

TROUBLESHOOTING

Question 5 asks participants whether or not Paul was justified in rebuking Peter in public. Expect varied answers. The authors believe Paul was probably justified because this situation was so dire that the entire church needed to grapple with the issue.

CREATIVE ARTS IDEAS

Depending on the size of your group, your location, and whether or not your leadership would approve, consider attending an event at another church in hopes of building unity. If this works out, refrain



from comparing the strengths and weaknesses of each church but instead enjoy the fellowship and differences among brothers and sisters in Christ. Consider seeking out a church whose demographic and/or denomination is different from your own. Here are some other possible ideas:

- Write one or more notes to let another church know that you're praying for their ministry.
- Plan a low-key, low-budget social event to which you can invite women from another church. You might reach out to their women's Bible study group(s), for example.
- Find a ministry opportunity to participate in where you know you will work alongside women from other churches. Plan to engage fellow workers in friendly conversation, demonstrating a spirit of unity.

LESSON 5

Declared Righteous

This week's practice of journaling asks the women to remember ways God has strengthened their faith by showing himself active in their lives. Some women love to journal to process their emotions and communicate with God; other women don't find journaling helpful. However, writing about one's earliest memories of God, answered prayers, and faith journey and then sharing these insights with others can reap significant benefits. Being careful not to guilt women into participating, encourage them to move through the exercise even if they don't plan to take up journaling as a regular practice.

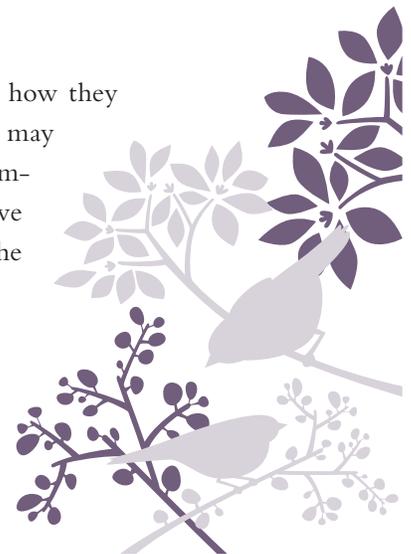
LESSON CONTENT

In this lesson, Paul continues his theological debate with the Judaizers. He lays out the beautiful truth that because of Christ's sacrifice on the cross, Christ has exchanged our sin for his righteousness. When God the Father sees us, he sees Christ. This is grace, unmerited favor, that none of us deserve. A deep understanding of this truth should change our motivation for living the Christian life from "ought to" to "want to" out of profound gratitude for what God has done for us.

Note the study method laid out in the lesson that moves from observing the text carefully, interpreting the meaning based on what we observe, and then applying the text based on sound observation and interpretation. Walking through a biblical text using these three steps guards against faulty ideas about what God is telling us. A major reason so many people disagree about the Bible is because they have not taken the time and effort to walk through these critical steps when attempting to understand and live out what God is saying. Sometimes people believe God is saying something he's not saying at all, with tragic consequences.

TROUBLESHOOTING

Question 2 asks women how they received the Holy Spirit and how they knew that they had. Women from different faith backgrounds may answer this question differently. Focus discussion on the recommended passages and other biblical evidence. The authors believe that everyone receives all the Holy Spirit they will ever get at the



moment of salvation. If some women bring up other ideas, listen respectfully and enlist other perspectives. Don't let this question become a source of conflict.

Question 18 asks women if they believe they can lose their righteous standing before God. This is an important question! Some denominations teach that there's a line of sin we can cross and if we do, God will abandon us, exile us from his family, and sentence us to hell. Based on passages such as John 10:28–29, Ephesians 1:13–14, and Hebrews 6:18–20 as well as Paul's arguments in Galatians, the authors believe that this is not true; rather, if you truly believe through faith then you are eternally saved. This doesn't mean that you won't reap consequences for your sin after you're saved. God orchestrates and allows all kinds of situations to discipline his children, get their attention, and draw them back to him. A wayward believer who rebels against God Almighty has taken advantage of the grace of God, and the end result may well be catastrophic. That's God's prerogative. But that doesn't negate the reality that once God accepts us through faith in Jesus, we are always accepted—this is assurance.

It's healthy to discuss this issue. If a participant brings up doubts and questions, listen respectfully and seek input from others in the group. Grace is difficult to accept because just about everything else in the world is based on merit, except the love of parents in healthy families, which is probably one reason God established the family unit as the core of civilization.

CREATIVE ARTS IDEA

With inexpensive notebooks, colored papers, and beautiful images from magazines, have the women create journals by making a collage on the front of each notebook and then using Mod Podge craft glue (or something similar) to seal the creations. Encourage them to use this notebook to journal personal prayers. For those who don't like to journal, they can use it to record prayer requests and answers.

LESSON 6

The Law—Then and Now

To challenge the women to take their Bible study more seriously, the practice activity in lesson 6 is to intentionally and diligently study the lesson for the week. The practice instructions explain the rationale.

LESSON CONTENT

This lesson again picks up the question, How do we apply the law today? Since the term *law* has several different meanings, emphasize the definition explained on page 71. Paul uses the term to refer to the Mosaic covenant between God and Israel, instituted on Mount Sinai and ended at the death of Christ. Paul continues his theological arguments to help us establish these important concepts in our minds and hearts.

For more insight on Galatians 4:21–31 and the story of Abraham’s two children, see the resources on Galatians listed on page 6 of this leader’s guide.

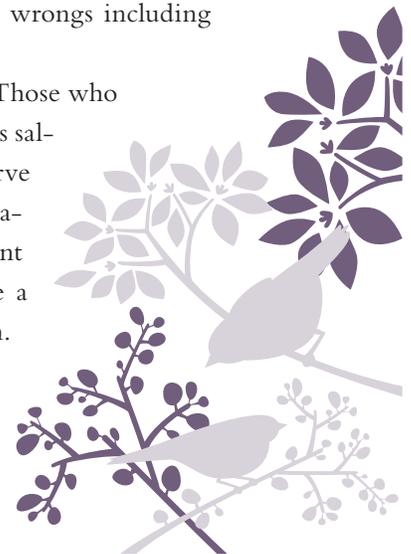
Lesson 6 wraps up Paul’s theological arguments to the Galatians. The rest of the letter concerns how to apply these truths to our everyday lives.

TROUBLESHOOTING

Questions 19 and 20 relate to the controversial subjects found in Galatians 3:28: “There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”

If the issue of slavery comes up in your group, remind the women that the Bible never endorses slavery; it’s hideous in God’s eyes (see 1 Timothy 1:9–11 and Philemon). But it’s also true that Jesus did not come as a political or social crusader. He came to save people from their sins, to rescue and redeem them. Out of that *personal* transformation, tremendous social justice has resulted, although injustice is still the norm in this fallen world. When Jesus returns, he will right all wrongs including social and political ills.

The issue of the role of women may come up in your group. Those who would limit women’s service in the church say this phrase concerns salvation only. Those who believe that women should be free to serve in any capacity in the church agree that it pertains mainly to salvation but insist that there should be social ramifications. If different perspectives come up in your discussion, do your best to guide a respectful interchange, allowing everyone to express their opinion.



Question 21 relates to Galatians 3:29: “If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.” The Judaizers were claiming that they alone were Abraham’s seed because they could trace their genealogy back for generations. They insisted that to be in favor with God, men must be circumcised and all people must obey the Mosaic law. They wanted to limit salvation to Jews only. Paul makes the point that it’s not circumcision of the body that makes one a part of God’s family but instead circumcision of the heart (as will be clarified by Galatians 6:15). Thus, believers are new creations by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. These believers also inherit the promises made to Abraham, as do Old Testament believers and any Jews who come to faith in Jesus.

CREATIVE ARTS IDEAS

To celebrate that we’ve been adopted into God’s family, consider one of the following ideas as a group:

- If you can identify a family who is on the path to adoption, offer to pray for them on a regular basis. See if there is any financial need that you could help meet.
- Identify a family who recently adopted and gift them with diapers or other needed items.
- If your group’s resources allow, identify a family with adopted children who may benefit from a new outfit for each child in the family.
- If your group is fairly homogeneous, have each member “adopt” someone outside the group to be a special friend to, either secretly (like secret sisters) or openly, for a set period of time. For instance, young women could adopt a widow as a “grandma.” Older women could adopt a young mom. Married women could adopt a college student. Encourage your special friends through notes, a coffee date, an invitation to dinner, purposeful conversation each time you see her in passing, text messages or notes via social media, or small gifts. The idea is that—through Christ—we are all family.

LESSON 7

For Freedom

For the practice session this week, participants are being asked to take the initiative to get to know a neighbor. One of the most effective ways to woo people to a transformative relationship with Jesus is through a relationship with one of his followers. Often through natural conversation we can demonstrate the beauty of a faith walk with God—but that’s impossible if we barely know our neighbors. In our fast-paced, technological world, even a face-to-face conversation with the people next door can be rare, so it will probably take intentionality on our part.

LESSON CONTENT

This lesson should help participants understand what Paul means when he uses the term *freedom*. It’s not legalism or license. Understanding true biblical freedom is your goal in this lesson.

CREATIVE ARTS IDEA

Consider taking time to live out lesson 7 by volunteering as a group to bless the community, especially the elderly, single moms, widows, and victims of injustice, poverty, or sexual exploitation. Mowing a yard, helping with chores, or serving in a homeless shelter, food pantry, or tutoring project brings women face-to-face with the realities they’ve been learning about. Find creative ways to bless your neighbors.



LESSON 8

Walk by the Spirit

The practice exercise is called *daily examen*—just fancy words for deeply reflecting through focused attention and repetition on where God is at work in our lives.

LESSON CONTENT

What does it mean to walk in the Spirit? This lesson should help women answer that important question. Be sure the women understand terms like *flesh* and *sin nature*. Paul contrasts the sins of the flesh with the fruit of the Spirit, truths women must grasp to live the Christian life well.

TROUBLESHOOTING

Questions 7 through 14 relate to our sin nature (Galatians 5:19–21). This section ends with a confusing passage which says that those who live this sinful lifestyle will not inherit the kingdom of God. See the text after question 14 for help. Question 15 refers to 1 Corinthians 3:11–15 which describes what happens to believers' works at the *bema*, the judgment seat of Christ, where believers will receive their rewards.

Question 19 asks about the difference between spiritual gifts and the fruit of the Spirit. Spiritual gifts are abilities given to believers at the time of their conversion to enable them to serve in the church. The fruit of the Spirit are character qualities that are naturally produced when a believer abides in Christ and walks in the Spirit.

CREATIVE ARTS IDEA

Consider helping your group learn a little more about what it means to walk in the Spirit by going on a prayer walk together. Have them pray through the fruit of the Spirit as they walk. Then stop to reflect on what was learned as they walked together in prayer.



SAYING GOODBYE OR GOING ON TOGETHER?

Before beginning lesson 9, you'll need to decide if this a short-term group or if you want to continue meeting to embark on a new study. The first decision is yours as the leader of the group. Count the cost. Is the group thriving? Bonding? Committed? Worth the effort you are investing? Answer these questions honestly. Every group has a beginning and an end. Is this the time for your group to disband? If so, kindly but emphatically tell the group your reasons. Don't be pressured into continuing against your better judgment and God's leading.

If you're excited about leading the group through another study, you may want to poll the group to learn their desires. If they too wish to continue, plan a date to meet for a brainstorming session on what to study and what changes might be in order, if any. Consider tackling another Discover Together study on a book of the Bible to ensure you stay focused on God's Word.

Whether you disband or continue, use this last gathering of the study to reflect, review, and celebrate what has been accomplished. Plan a time that will foster a sense of closure, possibly with festive food, a potluck brunch or luncheon, or some other special activity. One activity might be listing benefits in the lives of women as a result of the study. Share changes you observed in the members as a result of sharing this study. In some way, celebrate this final chapter in your group experience. Praise and thank God for what he has done in your lives individually and as a worshipping community. If any of the participants are leaving the group, be sure to say goodbye and pray for them.

The Creative Arts Idea for lesson 9 has more ideas for an additional wrap-up session of this study.



LESSON 9

Live Out Love

The practice section challenges the women to ask God to identify someone who needs some “load-lightening” and to make a plan to help them.

LESSON CONTENT

Paul ends his letter with the admonition to bear one another’s burdens, thus fulfilling the law which is to love God and love others well. He challenges us to persevere in good works, living to love others rather than living obliged to obey the law.

In addition to Paul’s command that we bear one another’s burdens, Paul also says we must each carry our own load. This distinction should raise interesting conversation in the group. He lists various principles that teach us how to relate to one another in healthy ways. He also makes a final request that the Galatians reject the Judaizers’ false teaching and embrace the true gospel that transforms them into new creations in Christ.

TROUBLESHOOTING

Question 19 asks if we are promised to reap a harvest if we do good. The answer is yes, but we are not promised that harvest in this life. This is another example of the biblical text pointing toward the *bema*, the judgment seat of Christ, where rewards will be handed out to believers for their good works.

CREATIVE ARTS IDEA

Encourage women to choose an artistic expression of any sort to convey what they’ve learned during this study. They might share one of their journal entries, write a poem or song, draw, sculpt, sew, or cook. Schedule an optional extra session during which those who chose to participate can have a show-and-tell. You’ll be amazed at the women’s creativity, and these presentations will help the learning stick in new ways.

