

# God's Amazing Grace

## Getting Ready for January Bible Study

When we are facing an important event in our lives, we always get prepared. If the event is a vacation, we schedule the trip, make hotel reservations, and plan the budget to cover expenses. If the event is the birth of a child, we spend time preparing the baby's room, packing the suitcase for the quick trip to the hospital, and taking care of many other details.

Because January Bible Study is an important event, we must make preparation. In this Administrative Guide, you will find ideas to help you prepare your church for January Bible Study. Start planning now. Even if you are unable to use everything suggested in this guide, use what you can. Plan as if everything depends on you and pray as if everything depends on God.

### What is the schedule and who is January Bible Study for?

January Bible Study is provided as a ministry of your church's Sunday School. Since churches are unique, their approaches to the study will vary. Some churches provide studies to include all age groups in a church, while others provide JBS only for adults. Each year in this event, adults and youth focus on the same book of the Bible, portions of a Bible book, or major Bible truths. Age appropriate children and preschool studies are also provided that support the overall theme of January Bible Study.

January Bible Study plays an important role throughout Southern Baptist life because it involves learners in a concentrated, in-depth study of God's Word. Each year, the first week of January is set aside on the denominational calendar for January Bible Study. However, many churches find that for a variety of reasons (busy schedules, severe weather in some regions) they need to move this annual Bible study to another time.

The course is set up for a minimum of four sessions with two lessons in each session. Thus, the total time allotted to January Bible Study would be eight hours or the equivalent of two months of Sunday School.

Schedules for January Bible Study vary from church to church. The important thing is to choose the best schedule for your congregation. Your pastor may wish to preach through Romans on consecutive Sunday mornings, Sunday nights, or Wednesday nights. While many churches choose this option, keep in mind that January Bible Study provides much more than excellent preaching material. The teaching plans in the adult leader guide, as well as the expository notes, provide for an interactive study. Often it is difficult to accomplish this style of teaching during a worship service. This is why some churches choose to hold the study on consecutive nights of the same week.

Another option may be a retreat setting. Some churches will provide a one- or two-day retreat at the church, a camp, or retreat center. In this setting, not only would the January Bible Study be accomplished, but it can provide more opportunities for fellowship and building relationships. In the retreat setting, time could also be provided for personal reflection and spiritual growth.

An additional option would be to have a midweek, daytime study. This would be helpful to senior adults or mothers who do not work outside the home. This option could also be combined with the Sunday option. The pastor or January Bible Study leader could then simply repeat the study to this midweek class.

There is no right or wrong schedule. Simply develop the option that will work best for your church and will provide the opportunity for in-depth Bible study and personal growth for the greatest number of people.

## Benefits of January Bible Study

Conducting a January Bible Study is a healthy practice for your church. In addition to providing time to build fellowship and relationships, several other benefits can occur as the church gathers to study God's Word. Listed below are some of those benefits:

- The church reasserts the priority of Bible study as a new year begins. At a time when New Year's resolutions are made, a commitment to studying God's Word is crucial.
- The opportunity to involve the entire family in Bible study is provided.
- Families are strengthened when parents are equipped with the message of the January Bible Study. Many unchurched families may recognize this short-term study as one that allows all ages to study the same theme.
- Pastors can preach and/or teach in-depth from one book of the Bible. This year's study would provide the pastor the opportunity of preaching or teaching Romans.
- When properly planned and promoted, January Bible Study can help build attendance at a time when attendance traditionally may be down.
- Transformation can occur in learners as they are drawn into a lifestyle of continuing to study God's Word.
- Pastors and teachers from several area churches can experience a time of simultaneous renewal as they participate in January Bible Study events.
- January Bible Study can be a pivotal event in encouraging learners to become lifetime students of studying God's Word.
- Members will find an additional source of strength as they enjoy hearing some of the best Bible teachers in the church discuss a common text with other adult members of the church.
- Children will be nurtured in their spiritual journeys as they observe the priority their parents place on studying God's Word.

## Planning January Bible Study

The key to a successful January Bible Study is to begin planning early. January Bible Study needs to be a priority for your church and staff. By marking it on the calendar early, you will assure that January Bible Study receives the attention it deserves. It is also important to "block out" the week before and the week after January Bible Study. This enables people to have the time and energy to attend. Early planning will also maximize your church's potential for impacting members of your congregation and for reaching out to the community as a whole.

To maximize your planning process for January Bible Study, give consideration to the following areas of work:

**1. Develop a Countdown Calendar.** As you read through the Administrative Guide, you will discover the many details associated with getting ready for an effective January Bible Study. As you process the best way to cover the details, a countdown calendar may be helpful. Typically, such a calendar includes the dates preceding the event and the items that need to be taken care of by that date. Also, it can include information about who is responsible for taking care of the assorted details related to preparing for the event. The countdown calendar can help you see the tasks to be done in light of the overall plan. As you think about a countdown calendar for January Bible Study, consider using the

Planning Worksheet on pages 4-5 as a place to begin preparing one yourself.

**2. Enlist a January Bible Study Director.** Work with the nominating committee or your church staff and enlist a January Bible Study director. This step is similar to enlisting a Vacation Bible School director. Like Vacation Bible School, January Bible Study is a short-term study. By enlisting this person to serve as the director, you will accomplish several things. First, a committed layperson may have more time available to plan the January Bible Study. Second, this director will involve other people whom you might not have thought of. This will increase your leadership pool as well as build more relationships in the church. Third, the more people you involve in the planning and implementation of January Bible Study, the more who will attend.

The individual you choose should have certain qualifications. First, you want to be confident of this person's administrative abilities. Second, the director should certainly be committed to Bible study in his own life and in the life of the congregation. Third, this person will need to have good leadership skills in dealing with volunteers. In all likelihood, this person will also serve as the leader of the administrative team described in the next step.

**3. Enlist a January Bible Study Administrative Team.** This team is comprised of the pastor, minister of education (or appropriate staff member), January Bible Study director, and a leader representing each age group (preschool, children, youth, and adult). The primary responsibilities of this team will involve planning, promoting, conducting, and evaluating your church's January Bible Study. (Some churches may choose to use their Sunday School Council of Bible Study Ministry Team for this purpose.) This team should enthusiastically embrace their assignment. Encourage this team to explore new ways of planning, promoting, and conducting January Bible Study. The enthusiasm generated by this team will be contagious to the entire congregation.

**4. Identify Your Target Audience.** One of the first questions the administrative team must answer is "Who is January Bible Study for?" If your objective is simply to provide the study as in years past, the answer is obvious. If you want to plan and reach people, then some thought will need to go into the response. January Bible Study provides a wonderful opportunity to reach out to the unchurched in your community. The 2008 Study in Romans also provides a great forum for the unchurched to find answers that will help them come to know Christ as their Savior and begin their journey of growing as disciples.

The administrative team will need to determine where, when, and how many January Bible Study opportunities you will provide. Consider the needs of different people as you determine your plans. For example, senior adults, median adults, young adults, university students, youth, business people, military or medical personnel, school teachers, single adults, apartment dwellers, homemakers, or special needs groups all have the need to be involved in Bible study. Each should be considered in making your plans.

**5. Select the Dates and a Schedule for January Bible Study.** The next step is to select the dates that will best meet the needs of your target audience. Again, early planning is very important. Generally speaking, three to four months of planning are necessary to accomplish a successful January Bible Study. Many churches select the date(s) during annual planning. This provides ample time and intentional calendaring. Since January Bible Study involves the entire church, clearing the entire church calendar is important. As stated earlier, clear at least one week before and one week after January Bible Study. This will ensure greater participation and less burn-out of members.

Another consideration in selecting the dates is to determine the best time of the year for your church to hold the study. The denominational calendar suggests the first full week of January. However, that may not be the best time for your church. In some regions, the weather may not cooperate. In selecting the date, it is important to know your target audience and your church, and plan accordingly. Select the dates and times that best meet the needs of your audience and provide for the best use of church leadership.

## Planning Worksheet January Bible Study 2008

### 1. Develop a Countdown Calendar

When: \_\_\_\_\_

Who is responsible: Pastor, minister of education, or Sunday School director

Tip: Use this form. After setting the JBS dates, the administrative team will fill in deadlines for steps 4-14.

### 2. Enlist a January Bible Study Director

When: \_\_\_\_\_

Who is responsible: Pastor, minister of education, or Sunday School director (or in some churches, the nominating committee)

Tip: Prayerfully determine whom God wants in this position, explain to that person the process you used, and ask him or her to prayerfully consider serving.

### 3. Enlist a January Bible Study Administrative Team

When: \_\_\_\_\_

Who is responsible: January Bible Study director

Tip: Be sure to have a permanent churchwide leader (pastor, minister of education, or Sunday school director) work with the January Bible Study director in leading this team.

### 4. Identify Your Target Audience

When: \_\_\_\_\_

Who is responsible: January Bible Study administrative team

Tip: Think “outside the box,” and think outside your church. Don’t miss this wonderful opportunity to reach out to the unchurched of your community.

### 5. Select the Dates and Schedule

When: \_\_\_\_\_

Who is responsible: January Bible Study administrative team

Tip: Consider a combined approach of multiple schedules to involve different target groups.

### 6. Determine the Budget

When: \_\_\_\_\_ (six months before the event)

Who is responsible: January Bible Study administrative team (or church stewardship committee)

Tip: First find out if the church has already set your budget.

### 7. Order the Materials

When: \_\_\_\_\_ (six months before the event)

Who is responsible: January Bible Study director

Tip: If church cash flow is tight, order a Leader Guide and Learner Guide for each teacher now and order the rest of the Learner Guides six weeks before the event.

## Planning Worksheet January Bible Study 2008

### 8. Assign the Space

When: \_\_\_\_\_ (six months before the event)

Who is responsible: January Bible Study administrative team

Tip: For preschoolers and children, try to maintain the groupings used on Sunday mornings and assign them to their regular rooms.

### 9. Enlist the Study Leaders

When: \_\_\_\_\_ (five months before the event)

Who is responsible: January Bible Study director or age group representatives on the January Bible Study administrative team

Tip: Give your regular preschool and children's workers a break by enlisting others to teach in January Bible Study.

### 10. Train the Study Leaders

When: \_\_\_\_\_ (four months before the event)

Tip: If no January Bible Study clinics are planned, check with your association or state convention about sending a team of consultants to train your leaders.

### 11. Enlist Additional Volunteers

When: \_\_\_\_\_ (three months before the event)

Tip: The more people you involve, the more successful your January Bible Study will be.

### 12. Promote the Event

When: \_\_\_\_\_ (two months before the event)

Tip: Use ideas in the Worship Planning and Preaching Guide to promote January Bible Study during worship services.

### 13. Conduct the Event

When: \_\_\_\_\_ (the dates of the event)

Tip: Have a five-minute prayer meeting in the refreshment area one hour before the first session begins.

### 14. Evaluate the Event

When: \_\_\_\_\_ (within one to three weeks after the event)

Tip: Pass the evaluation notes on to the next January Bible Study director and administrative team.

The possibilities are endless when it comes to the schedule for January Bible Study. Develop the best schedule suited for your church and the needs you intend to meet. Here are several possibilities:

- The pastor may simply choose to use the January Bible Study for his sermon materials. He may choose to preach consecutive services (morning and evening), consecutive Sundays, or consecutive Wednesday nights.
- JBS materials could be taught during the Discipleship Training hour for four to eight consecutive weeks. This format may enable you to provide for all age groups. It would also work well for a church with a busy schedule or a church with facilities not located near residential areas (such as a downtown city church). Using the time members already have allotted for church would probably ensure good attendance.
- Conducting a seminar on consecutive nights, such as Sunday through Wednesday, works for many churches. Adults could meet in the fellowship hall or a large room with tables for learners and a chalkboard for the leader. Meeting somewhere other than the sanctuary will enhance discussion and facilitate the serving of refreshments.
- A Thursday and Friday evening schedule may work well for college students, or perhaps you could use an all-day Saturday format. Be sure to include refreshments or even a special event following the study. Consider partnering with the Baptist Collegiate Ministry (BCM) in your area. Contact your association or state convention office if you are not sure where BCM's are located in your state.
- An early morning breakfast or noontime meal followed by a brief time of Bible study could serve your church well if you are located near the business community. If this approach is used, be sensitive to work schedules.
- Single adults who do not have children may be willing to attend a Saturday seminar. Consider beginning with a continental breakfast, offering a light lunch, and finishing the study early in the afternoon.
- Consider scheduling January Bible Study for apartment complexes, mobile home parks, and language and ethnic groups. You may wish to take January Bible Study "on the road" to these individuals. Many apartment complexes have recreation rooms available. Consider using January Bible Study to reach out to one or more of these groups.

**6. Determine the Budget.** Since January Bible Study is considered a part of Sunday School, the event should be included in your church's Sunday School ministry budget. Items you need to include in your budget are:

- planning and promotion of the event
- teaching materials
- compensation for guest leaders, if necessary
- refreshments or snacks
- any additional expenses due to optional approaches, such as rental of facilities away from the church
- Adult Learner Guides for each person expected to be present

**7. Order the January Bible Study Materials.** An order form is included in this packet for use in ordering January Bible Study materials. Carefully determine all the materials you will need to conduct your study. Remember that the teaching plans will call for learners to use their learner guides. The best practice is to make sure you order one adult learner guide for each person expected to be present. Order the materials early and distribute leader materials to your leaders as soon as possible.

**8. Assign the Space.** Consider age-appropriate rooms as you begin to think of room assignments for the study. Preschoolers will be much more comfortable in the same classrooms they use for Sunday School. If you choose the option of holding your January Bible Study on consecutive weeknights and you expect a smaller than normal crowd, you may want to provide added security. Preschoolers and children may be located some distance from the adult study. Go the extra mile to ensure their safety. Youth will require a room that allows for plenty of space for activities. As stated earlier, adults could work well in a large room, such as a fellowship hall. This larger room could accommodate tables for use in note taking as well as allow ease in serving snacks or refreshments. Make sure each room allows the leaders to use age-appropriate teaching

resources, including overhead projectors, maps, and chalkboards.

Decide on the location of the rooms in advance of January Bible Study. Communicate the assigned room numbers to your leadership team and include the room numbers in your January Bible Study promotional materials. Directional signs would also be helpful when learners arrive for January Bible Study.

**9. Enlist the Study Leaders.** The success of January Bible Study will rely on a successful leadership team. As you pray about leadership, seek to provide the best possible leaders in all areas of January Bible Study. The study leaders could come from the following options:

- Enlist faculty from within your church for all age groups. Perhaps your pastor would teach the adults. If not, perhaps an associate pastor or minister of education would. Other age group leaders would be enlisted from within the church by the January Bible Study director and the administrative team.
- Invite guest leaders from other churches to teach. Some churches have established “leadership swap” where leaders from one church will lead the other church’s January Bible Study. Later, the favor is returned by providing leadership for the other congregation’s January Bible Study.
- Enlist well-known Bible teachers. Your budget and the availability of these individuals will set limits on this option.
- Use a combination of any or all of these suggested options.

Remember, early planning is important in all areas of preparation for January Bible Study. However, it is particularly important in the enlistment of faculty. When going outside the church for your leadership, make sure you enlist them well in advance of the event. This will be necessary to ensure your church’s January Bible Study will be included on their calendars as well as in your church budget.

**10. Provide Team Training.** Many associations and/or state conventions provide training times for January Bible Study. Contact your director of missions or state convention to discover such training opportunities.

If your church is going to provide training opportunities for your leadership team, you will need to determine who will lead this event. Once this person is enlisted, provide the necessary materials. The earlier you can provide the teaching materials the better. The training event for your team will not only need to relate to content but also contain an introduction to the use of the materials.

**11. Enlist Additional Volunteers.** Enlist additional volunteers to assist with preparing and serving refreshments, leading fellowship activities, providing transportation, greeting, keeping records, and selling the materials (if necessary). A personal invitation to these individuals will assist in helping your January Bible Study run smoother and also serve to increase your attendance. Enlist these helpers several weeks prior to the study.

## Promoting January Bible Study

In this pack, you will find a resource entitled *Worship Planning and Preaching Guide January Bible Study 2008*. This resource offers several ideas to use in promoting your January Bible Study. Consider using one or more of the sample readings or introductory ideas suggested in the *Worship Planning and Preaching Guide*. These materials have been designed for use in a worship service, a Sunday School department meeting, or even in a January Bible Study session. As you consider how to use these materials and other suggested items, think of ways to create the most exposure. Often this will involve the Sunday morning worship service. However, for many churches this is one of the most difficult times because of time restraints. If you choose to use these ideas as part of the Sunday morning worship experience, plan your time carefully and communicate your plans to the pastor or other appropriate individuals.

This pack also contains January Bible Study Promotional Posters (Pack Items 1-5). Consider displaying these posters in strategic areas around the church. You may also want to display posters in area businesses. Check with owners or management personnel and gain their permission to display these posters.

If your church uses PowerPoint slides to promote events, contact the appropriate individuals and enlist them to develop a promotion slide for use at least three weeks prior to January Bible Study.

A poster contest in the children's division in Sunday School can also help build excitement for January Bible Study. Ask those who work with children for their help in promoting this contest. If they agree, provide the necessary materials (poster boards, markers, etc.). Be sure to explain this year's theme so children can include it in their posters. Enlist volunteers to judge the posters and present the top three winners and their posters in the worship service. If your church is large, you may wish to divide the children's division into smaller units or by grades for this contest. Be sure to display all posters in the hallways of the church.

Newspapers, radio, television, and other forms of media in your area provide public service announcements. Contact these outlets two months before your January Bible Study dates to determine what information is needed, what format is required, and the deadline to be posted.

For those churches with available budgets, you may choose to purchase ads in local newspapers or on local radio or television stations. Note to pastors: Never underestimate your power to promote the January Bible Study event. You have the power of the pulpit and the ear of the people. Use your influence to encourage attendance.

### Conducting the January Bible Study Event

As you prepare to conduct the January Bible Study event, you may wish to go back through this Administrative Guide and double-check to make sure you have covered all the bases. Complete any final details that may still need to be covered. Such items may include conducting faculty meetings, setting up rooms, arranging for breaks and/or fellowship meals, securing attendance records, arranging for building needs (opening, closing, thermostats, security), and lodging and transportation for guest faculty. No matter which format you have chosen for your study, pray for God's leadership and power to be evident.

### Following-up and Evaluating the January Bible Study Event

Several actions should be taken promptly after January Bible Study:

- Request Christian Growth Study Plan credit for participants. (Note: See page 98 in the Adult JBS Learner Guide for information related to this step.)
- Be sure to keep good records during January Bible Study. The records of attendance and enrollment in all age groups become the "eyes and ears" of next year's January Bible Study director.
- Search for prospects for your church and Sunday School. How well you promoted your January Bible Study outside the walls of your church will determine the number of prospects that attend. Retain prospect information received at registration and make sure this information is placed in the hands of the appropriate Sunday School outreach leader or teacher. Remember, it is the Sunday School class or department that will be responsible for follow-up.
- Be sure to let your team of teachers, leaders, and volunteers know how much you appreciate their ministry. Recognize those who have served in any way in January Bible Study. Send letters of appreciation to all volunteers and teachers to let them know how much their hard work helped make January Bible Study a success. Make the letters as personal as possible. Place a list of all volunteers in the church newsletter.
- Evaluate January Bible Study. Look at what worked well and what did not work well. Make notes and plans for next year. Place the file in a safe location for next year's preparation.
- Celebrate what God has done through January Bible Study!