A Women’s Retreat Planning Guide

Loving

God’s

Abundant

Life

I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.
John 10:10
The mission of CTA is to glorify God by providing purposeful products that lift up and encourage the body of Christ—because we love him!

Loving God’s Abundant Life
A Women’s Retreat Planning Guide

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If this retreat planner proves to be helpful to you, we would like to hear from you. Your words will encourage us! If you have suggestions for us to consider as we create ministry helps like this in the future, please send those, too. Send e-mail to editor@CTAinc.com. Please include the subject line: LGA4DR. Or write to Editorial Coordinator, Dept. LGA4DR, PO Box 1205, Fenton, MO 63026-1205.
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Remember to smile today. God’s forever life is yours!
Getting Started

This guide will help you plan a simple, two or three hour mini retreat for women’s groups in your congregation or Christian organization. While intended for groups of 5 to 35, the material can be adapted for larger and smaller groups. By adjusting the schedule a bit, you may shorten or lengthen the retreat to meet the needs of your group.

• To shorten it, use only one of the two discussion modules. You may want to use the other one on the Sunday morning after the retreat or at your next regularly scheduled women’s ministry meeting.

• To lengthen it, consider spending more time on each of the two modules. Or add more material (for example, additional time for group worship, a guest speaker, a craft, breakfast or a light lunch, or a prayer garden activity).

Details, Details

If you and your group are new to retreat planning, many helpful guidebooks will walk you step-by-step through the details. Visit your local Christian bookstore, search a website like Pinterest, or log on to your favorite online bookseller and type “Christian retreat planning” into the search engine.

On the other hand, if you have participated in a few retreats or have planned them previously, you will probably be able to think through the various details on your own.

In either case, you’ll want to arrange for and assign people to plan the following:

• **Prayer** for before, during, and after the retreat.

• **Accommodations** at a nearby retreat center, hotel meeting room, bed and breakfast, lakeside condominium, or some other inviting location if you intend to take your group off-site.

• **Transportation** or carpooling to the location, if necessary.

• **Hospitality**, including arranging chairs and tables in the meeting room (unless the facility you use provides this), distributing goodie bags, welcoming participants, and creating “welcome packets.” These packets should include information about the facility at which you are staying, pertinent housekeeping details, and amenities (for example, walking paths or a prayer chapel).

• **Snacks**, if the facility you’ve chosen doesn’t offer them. Consider providing various kinds of tea and asking each participant to bring a dozen of her favorite cookies. Or ask everyone to contribute one Trail Mix ingredient and bring a large mixing bowl, a wooden spoon,
napkins, and mix the ingredients together to share at an informal break time.

- **Publicity**, including asking regular attendees to invite friends. CTA has created postcards especially for this purpose. You may print them out for free here. [www.CTAinc.com/FREE](http://www.CTAinc.com/FREE)

- **Program**, including coordination of a guest speaker if you use one, small-group discussion leaders, and music for worship. Program planners will want to consider providing modest, themed thank-you gifts for those who carry major leadership responsibilities for the retreat. For example, the Loving God’s Abundant Life felt coaster set or the Loving God’s Abundant Life ceramic mug (Item #LGA4CMB) would be especially appropriate. See your CTA catalog or the CTA website for details.

- **Leadership** for the activities you plan to include, such as the craft/project activities, lunch, or music/worship.

Most importantly, you will also need one go-to person who is willing to coordinate the details listed above and answer questions as they arise from volunteer workers and potential registrants.

**Goodie Bags and Retreat Favors**

The hospitality committee should create a package of inexpensive gift reminders for each person attending. A gracious benefactor might want to pick up the cost. Otherwise, build the cost into the retreat fee. CTA offers a number of Loving God’s Abundant Life themed products appropriate for this purpose, including:

- Ceramic Mug with Spoon (English and Spanish)
- Prayer Journal and Pen Set (English and Spanish)
- Jumbo Bookmark and Pen Set (English and Spanish)
- Felt Coasters
- Notepad with Pen
- Laminated Shopping Tote Bag
Many of these items can be purchased by the dozen at an amazing price! If you have a limited budget, consider using some of the items above to create two or three gift sets and award them as door prizes. Draw names. Tape a note under “winning chairs” or a “winning lunch plate.” Or award prizes to the people who traveled the farthest or who will celebrate her birthday soonest.

You could also arrange a variety of themed gift baskets on each table and invite participants to choose one or two items from the basket that they would especially like to have.

Regarding the Small-Group Sessions

For retreat discussions, prepare the following:

• Use preregistration information to set up discussion groups of 4-5 members each or simply let participants form their own groups the day of the retreat. If you pre-select group members, consider creating place cards and arranging them appropriately at tables.

• If you organize groups ahead of time, select one person from each group who has some leadership skills and the faith and understandings to lead the discussion. Ask this person ahead of time to facilitate her group. Make it clear that she is not the “teacher.” Rather, her main job is to keep discussion moving along and to make sure each person has opportunities to share in the conversation.

• Duplicate copies of the discussion guides for the two discussion sessions. See p. 9. Each participant will need a copy. Although copies are designed in full color, they’ll still look very nice if copied in black and white.

• Retreat leaders should ensure that guests who have come by themselves and other individuals who need help finding friends during the grouping-up process are welcomed into an appropriate group.

As you begin each discussion session, someone in leadership should distribute the appropriate discussion guide for that session and explain the “time budget” for completing it. Encourage group members to listen carefully to one another’s comments and to add thoughtful, helpful responses.

When discussion time for each session has expired, a retreat leader should call for the whole group’s attention to ask for insights, comments, or questions and respond appropriately.

If you have a leader whose insights and biblical knowledge participants will respect, and if that person feels comfortable fielding questions and making comments without prior preparation, consider letting her preside over the small-group debriefing sessions during the retreat. If not, simply frame each debriefing time as a time to share insights. Remember, the main purpose of this retreat is to deepen relationships, to provide a respite from the busyness of life, and to encourage participants in their faith relationship with Jesus. Reserve in-depth Bible study for other settings in your church.
Session 1: Loving Life!

Small-group discussion—30 minutes

**Key Scripture Verse:** *I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.* John 10:10

**Each person needs:**

- Copy of the discussion guide (page 11)
- Bible
- *Loving God’s Abundant Life* Jumbo Bookmark and Pen set (Item #LGA4JST)

Have participants sit down near others in their group.

Distribute the discussion guides and the *Loving God’s Abundant Life* jumbo bookmarks (Item #LGA4JST).

If you have enlisted small-group discussion leaders ahead of time, introduce them now. If not, ask each small group to choose a leader. Explain that this person is **not the teacher**. Instead, she is responsible for keeping track of time, making sure everyone has a chance to participate, and keeping everyone focused on the questions in the discussion guide. In each of today’s sessions, a different person will serve as leader.

A retreat planner should alert the whole group when about five minutes of the session remains. When time has fully expired, call for everyone’s attention to ask for insights, comments, or questions and respond appropriately.

**Break**

Plan a 15–20 minute break between discussion sessions, depending on the time available. Serve snacks and drinks. Invite those who are interested to take a quick walk together. Explore the amenities available at the retreat site you have chosen. Encourage everyone to get to know one or two other participants better.

*Consider giving each person who attends a Loving God’s Abundant Life ceramic mug* (Item #LGA4CMB) *to use now and to take home after the retreat as a reminder of the abundant life we enjoy in Jesus and his cross.*

Session 2: Abundant Life

Small-group discussion—30 minutes

**Key Scripture Verse:** *I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.* John 10:10
Each person needs:

- Copy of the discussion guide (page 13)
- Bible
- *Loving God’s Abundant Life Prayer Journal* (ITEM #LGA4GS)

This session will work in much the same way as session 1. Call participants back together and distribute the discussion guides and the *Loving God’s Abundant Life Prayer Journals* (ITEM # LGA4GS).

Remind everyone that the group leader is **not the teacher**. Instead, she is responsible for keeping track of time, making sure everyone has a chance to participate, and keeping everyone focused on the questions in the discussion guide.

A retreat planner should alert the whole group when about five minutes of the session remains. When time has fully expired, call for everyone’s attention to ask for insights, comments, or questions and respond appropriately.

**Lunch (optional)**

If you plan to eat lunch together, one of the retreat leaders should briefly explain the process for serving. Then invite group members to join in prayer, thanking God for the meal.

**Relaxing Together (optional)**

Large-group session—relaxation, entertainment

**Key Scripture Verse**: *A cheerful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones. Proverbs 17:22*

Read Proverbs 17:22 and invite everyone to join in the fun as you relax and enjoy some time growing together as sisters in Jesus. Then call the Entertainment Team forward, turn them loose, and let the fun begin!

You may use the time in several ways. Depending upon the facilities available to you, the setting of your retreat, the time of year, the weather outside, and group members’ interests and abilities, you may wish to offer options like these:

- Shoulder massages
- A YouTube Christian comedian
- A CD or DVD that will guide the group in relaxing; type “Christian relaxation” into your Web browser’s search engine
- A mission presentation or project
- Skits or a talent show
- Board games
- Aerobics, volleyball, basketball, softball
- Scrapbooking
- Quilting lessons or a quilting project
• A nature hike
• A manicure party
• Healthful recipes exchange

Closing Devotion

10–15 minutes

Begin your closing worship with a prayer of thanks and perhaps one or two songs or hymns of praise.

Read John 10:7–11 slowly and aloud. You might have two or three people read the same verses, each from a different Bible version. Ask participants to close their eyes as they listen. Ask that they listen for words that bring confidence, courage, joy, and peace.

Then repeat a worship chorus or hymn the group knows well and can sing along to.

Use this verse as a closing blessing:

*The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.* Romans 16:20

Before you speak it, remind participants that this blessing does not come from you, but that these are God’s words for God’s people! This is the desire of his heart for each person present. Then read it together, blessing one another in Jesus’ name. Or have one of the retreat leaders pray it over the group.

Thank participants for coming and share announcements.
Sample Schedules—

Loving God’s Abundant Life

Option 1: Saturday Morning Retreat

9:00  Arrival, greeting, relaxing
9:30  Session 1: Loving Life! (small-group discussion)
10:00 Break
10:15 Session 2: Abundant Life (small-group discussion)
11:00 Relaxing Together (whole-group activity)
11:30 Closing devotion
Noon Lunch (optional)

Option 2: Friday Evening Retreat

5:00  Arrival, greeting, relaxing
5:30  Session 1: Loving Life! (small-group discussion)
6:00  Light supper
6:45  Relaxing Together (whole-group activity)
8:00  Session 2: Abundant Life (small-group discussion)
8:30  Closing devotion
Session 1: Loving Life!

Key Scripture Verse: *I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.* John 10:10

1. (5 minutes) Consider the following common expressions. All use the word “life” or “living.” Add one or more of your own to the list if you can. When might you hear each of these expressions? In each case, what does the word “life” or “living” mean?

- “Is there life on Mars?”
- “That teacher really brings her subject to life.”
- “He lived a good life.”
- “Now, this is the life!”
- “The cost of living just keeps going up!”
- _________________
- _________________

2. (10 minutes) Like a beautiful diamond, God’s abundant life has many facets, each more lovely than the last! Each of the passages below points out a different facet of that life. Read the passages and describe the aspects of the abundant life God has given you in Christ.

- John 10:27–30
- Romans 6:1–4
- Romans 12:1–2

3. (10 minutes) Our worldly circumstances may be wonderful or dire, bright yellow or deeply gray, hopeful or bleak. Earthly circumstances cannot damage the new life we have received from Jesus. Tell about a time your new life in Jesus was especially meaningful to you, a time when it made your earthly blessings shine more brightly. Or talk about a time when that new life helped you overcome worldly challenges.

4. (5 minutes) Below, write a thank-you note to Jesus for the new life he made possible by his death on the cross and his resurrection. Pour out the joys of your heart. Then ask for any increased courage, confidence, or commitment you need to live your new life in ways that honor him. (You won’t be asked to share your words or thoughts, so feel free to be honest.)

< Designer: at this point we need maybe 6 to 8 lines for writing, if there’s
Dear Jesus,
Session 2: Abundant Life

Key Scripture Verse: *I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.* John 10:10

1. (5 minutes) Think of someone who lives an “abundant life.” It might be someone you know personally or a public figure you’ve read about or studied. In the space below, list all the things that make that person’s life “abundant” in your eyes. When everyone is ready, share your lists with each other. (To make it more interesting, you might read each list without naming the person. See if you can guess the name after you’ve heard the list.)

______________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________

2. (10 minutes) Now read John 10:10 from your Bible or from the box on this page. Remember, these are Jesus’ words. Read the questions below, then pause briefly for a few moments of thought before you begin discussing them.

• If Jesus had said only, “I came that they may have life,” this news in itself would have been glorious. Why?

• But our Savior added these four words: “and have it abundantly.” What additional blessings do these words add?

• How do you understand the “abundance” Jesus has brought into your life?

• If time allows, look at the words of John 10:10 and the surrounding verses in your Bible. Notice the contrast. Who is the “thief”? What goal does he have in mind? How do his purposes and Jesus’ purposes differ? What additional meaning does this difference add to your understanding?

3. (15 minutes) Turn to page 3 in your Loving God’s Abundant Life prayer journal and have a volunteer read it aloud. Complete the activity on pp. 4-5 on your own. Then take turns sharing what you have written with others in your group.
Session 2: Abundant Life
Continued...

4. (5 minutes) As you close, pray together. On the lines below, jot down specific things to ask of Jesus, especially changes in attitudes and actions that will help you treasure his abundant life more fully. Then ask one member of your group to pray aloud.

Dear Jesus, ____________________________________________
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