



BLESSINGS *of* THE KINGDOM

JANUARY BIBLE STUDY 2024 • ADMINISTRATIVE GUIDE

January Bible Study: The Event

January Bible Study (JBS) plays an important role in Southern Baptist life. It is a concentrated, in-depth study of God's Word. Each year the first full week of January is set aside on the Southern Baptist denominational calendar for JBS. However, many churches find that for a variety of reasons (busy schedules, weather patterns in some regions, other church emphases) they need to move this annual Bible study to a time more suited for their needs. Some churches provide studies for all age groups in the church, while others provide JBS only for adults. Age-appropriate preschool and children groups can be provided using materials that support the overall theme of JBS.

The 2024 JBS resources feature six chapters of study. A teaching plan for each chapter is included in the Leader Guide, enabling churches to use JBS in small groups, or on Sunday or Wednesday evenings.

January Bible Study: The Benefits

Providing a focused study of God's Word is always a healthy practice for any church. While your church may experience only some of these benefits (depending on the approach your church takes), no doubt you will reap some of these benefits:

- reinforces the priority of Bible study as a new year begins,
- an opportunity to involve the entire family in coordinated Bible study,
- involving unchurched families in a short-term study who may in time become involved in your ongoing Bible study ministry,
- Pastors can preach and/or teach in-depth from one book of the Bible or portion of a Bible book,
- fosters transformation in learners as they are drawn into a study of God's Word,
- encourages learners to become lifetime students of God's Word.
- affords an opportunity for members to hear some of the best Bible teachers in the church or area share,
- children nurtured in their spiritual journeys as they observe the priority their parents place on studying God's Word,
- Sunday School teachers and other Bible study leaders given the opportunity to be learners, receiving spiritual refreshment,
- relationships (old and new) built as people participate in Bible study.

January Bible Study: The Options

January Bible Study can be done in many different ways. Some churches study the Bible book or passage over a weekend, while others may meet in groups for several weeks. Some churches provide study sessions for small groups, while in other churches all adults meet in a large setting. However, when you look at all the variations, four major approaches emerge: small group, seminar, retreat, and sermon series.

The Small Group

With this option, churches create small groups (or use established small groups) to conduct JBS. These groups may meet in homes, apartment complexes, lunch/break rooms, or on the church campus. Some encourage their Sunday night or Wednesday evening groups to use the study. A leader or facilitator is recruited and prepared for each specific group. In most cases, once the group begins the study, the group members are set. In some settings small groups are made up of ministry leadership teams. With this approach a group that oversees a specific ministry of the church (women's ministry, men's ministry, missions, etc.) participates in a small-group Bible study that helps them better fulfill their ministry's purposes.

The small groups approach gives versatility and a forum in which discussion about the Bible passages being examined can take place. It can also give fresh life to Sunday or Wednesday evenings.

These groups can be an extension of a Sunday School class (could have multiple groups from the same class: for example, one group for women and another for men) or can be across class lines. The way a church conducts JBS can help build a Sunday School class or foster new relationships, depending on your goals for the event.

One potential weakness of this approach is dealing with children. If the groups meet in homes, plans are needed for children of participants. If no provision is made, then participation may be limited. Also, this approach may not allow your best leaders to participate as a learner since they will likely be recruited to lead study groups.

The Seminar

In this approach all adults (and possibly students) are led by a master teacher. This master teacher may be the pastor, a gifted teacher within the church, or a gifted guest teacher. Usually, everyone is in one room listening to a series of presentations on the Bible text. The seminar series may take place over a weekend, on successive Sundays or Wednesdays, or all in one day (usually Saturday or Sunday). While some discussion and other learning activities may be included, this approach is usually dominated by lecture.

This approach allows everyone to benefit from the expertise of a gifted communicator, usually a guest pastor from another area or a professor. If it is a professor, it gives the congregation exposure to the institution, with the teacher being an ambassador. It also gives those who normally lead Sunday School or other groups the opportunity to be learners. Having only one leader also simplifies recruitment and room scheduling.

However, gifted presenters may be few and far between in your area and are sometimes scheduled months in advance. Your location and budget may limit leader choices. Whomever you enlist, budget an appropriate honorarium.

Another limitation is that the larger the group, the less the possibility of dialogue. While not all seminars are large, the format itself tends to limit discussion.

The Retreat

The retreat approach is a style that falls somewhere between the seminar and the small group. Retreats usually take place away from home and could be led as a seminar, small-group study, or a mix of both. Retreats are usually scheduled for a Friday evening and Saturday.

This approach makes it possible for people to get away from their normal routines and give focused attention to studying a Bible book. This approach works especially well for young adults without children, college students, single adults, and empty-nest adults. Relationships can be fostered in the process as well. Depending on where you are located, many retreat centers are available during the winter months that would normally be booked in the summer months.

Childcare, travel costs, room costs, and being able to get away can limit participation for some. Weather may also be a factor in your area. The threat of snow always impacts participation even at the last minute. For some, getting away after a busy holiday season that included travel may have less appeal than meeting in the church facilities or a home.

The Sermon Series

With this approach the pastor or a guest presents a series of sermons based on the Bible passages featured in JBS. He may do so as a Sunday morning or evening sermon series, or as a combination (preaching both Sunday morning and evening). The Personal Study Guide functions as a resource for those wishing to do personal study.

One major advantage to this approach is that no additional time is required of the congregation. They are already planning to meet for the scheduled worship services. If the series is preached on Sunday morning, this also means in most churches that the largest group will hear these sermons.

However, the expectations for the learner are greatly decreased with this approach. Additional study is optional, and opportunity for discussion of the truths examined is minimal. The JBS event also runs the risk of being just another sermon series, losing the sense of concentrated Bible study.

A Preaching Guide with suggestions for preaching through the JBS passages is included on the digital download and in the Leader Guide. If you are using small groups for JBS, the sermon ideas can provide a means of supporting the small group studies.

Which option is best for me?

The answer to this question lies in what you hope to accomplish and the resources you have available. Take some time to write three or four goals you want to reach as a result of conducting a JBS. Look at your goals and the approaches identified, paying specific attention to the advantages and disadvantages of the various approaches. Weigh the advantages and disadvantages in light of your goals and make your decision based on that evaluation. You may decide to use multiple approaches to best involve the identified target groups.

January Bible Study: The Planning

The key to a successful JBS is early planning. Early planning will maximize your church's potential for impacting members of your congregation and for reaching the community as a whole. January Bible Study needs to be a priority for your church and among your leaders. By placing it on the calendar early, you will ensure that JBS receives the attention it deserves. You may need to block out the week before and the week after JBS. By not planning other events that compete for people's time and energy, you will show people you value their personal time and thereby encourage them to attend JBS.

How you plan will be dictated by the approach you select. In most cases the sermon series will require minimal planning. The other three approaches will require more, and you will need to address similar issues with each. To maximize your planning process for JBS, here are the issues you will need to address:

1. Develop a countdown planner.

As you process the best way to cover the details, a countdown planner may be helpful. Typically, such a planner includes each major action step preceding the event and a due date. Also, it can include information about who is responsible for taking care of each detail. The countdown planner can help you see the tasks to be done in light of the overall plan. Consider using the Planning Worksheet included at the end of this guide (a digital version of the Planning Worksheet is included on the digital download so you can create your own customized Planning Worksheet).

2. Enlist a January Bible Study coordinator.

Like Vacation Bible School, JBS is a short-term study. By enlisting a person to serve as the coordinator, you will accomplish several things. First, a committed layperson may have more time available to plan the JBS. Second, this coordinator will involve other people you may not know well enough to enlist. 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 JBS, the more who will attend.

You want to be confident of this person's administrative abilities. The coordinator should certainly be committed to Bible study in his or her own life and in the life of the congregation. Also, this person will need skills in dealing with volunteers. In all likelihood, this person will also serve as the leader of the planning team described in the next step.

3. Enlist a January Bible Study planning team.

This team is comprised of the pastor, minister of education (or appropriate staff member), JBS coordinator, and a leader representing each age group (preschool, children, student, and adult). This team assists the coordinator in planning, promoting, conducting, and evaluating your church's JBS. (Some churches may choose to use their Sunday School planning team or Bible study ministry team for this purpose.) Encourage this team to explore creative ways to promote and conduct JBS. The enthusiasm generated by this team will be contagious to the entire congregation.

4. Identify your target audience(s).

One must identify the different audiences JBS could reach. If you want to reach people who have not been attending, 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 planning team will need to determine where, when, and how many JBS opportunities you will provide. Consider the needs of different people as you discuss 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, and special needs groups can benefit in many ways from Bible study. Each group should be considered as potential audiences. Identifying the audiences will help you make strategic decisions when considering the approach(s) and time.

5. Select the dates and a schedule for January Bible Study.

The next step is to select dates that will best suit your target groups. Again, early planning is important. Generally speaking, you'll need three to four months to plan a successful JBS. Many churches select the date(s) during annual planning. This provides ample planning time.

In selecting the date, know your target audience(s) and your church, and plan accordingly. Select dates and times that best meet the needs of your audience(s) and provide the best use of church leaders.

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. Once you have set the dates, you can determine the actual target dates for each action outlined in your Countdown Calendar.

6. Determine the budget.

Since JBS is considered a part of Sunday School, the event will most likely 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 Personal Study Guides for each person expected to participate
- You may also want to consider charging fees to offset some expenses like purchasing Personal Study Guides and facilities costs if meeting away from the church campus.

7. Order January Bible Study materials.

Carefully identify all the materials you will need to conduct your study. Remember that the teaching plans will call for learners to use their Personal Study Guides. The best practice is to order one adult Personal Study Guide for each person expected to attend. Order the materials early and distribute leader materials as soon as possible (a best practice is to provide the resources when recruiting that person). The resources can be ordered at Lifeway.com/JBS or through Customer Service at 1-800-458-2772.

8. Secure meeting locations.

Consider age-appropriate rooms as you begin to make room assignments for the study time. Preschoolers will be much more comfortable in the same location they use for Sunday School and other Bible study times. If you choose the option of holding your JBS on consecutive weeknights, 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 plenty of space for activities. As stated earlier, adults can work well in a large room, such as your fellowship hall. This larger room could accommodate tables for use in note taking as well as allow ease in serving snacks or refreshments and provide a natural context for small group discussion. Make sure each room allows leaders to use age-appropriate teaching resources as desired.

Communicate the assigned room numbers to your leadership team and include the room numbers in your JBS promotional materials. Directional signs are also helpful when learners arrive for JBS.

9. Enlist study leaders.

The success of JBS will rely on the study leaders. As you pray about leaders to enlist, seek to provide the best possible leaders in all areas of JBS. Remember, early planning is important in all areas of preparation for JBS. However, it is particularly important in enlisting faculty. When going outside the church for your leader or leaders, make sure you contact the person well in advance of the event. This will ensure your church's JBS is included on the leader's calendar as well as in your church budget.

10. Provide team training.

Many associations and/or state conventions provide training events for JBS. 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, determine who will lead this training. 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 need to not only review the content but also how to use the materials most effectively.

11. Enlist additional volunteers.

Enlist additional volunteers to assist with preparing and serving refreshments, leading fellowship activities, providing transportation, greeting, keeping records, and distribution or selling of materials. A personal invitation to these individuals will assist in helping your JBS run smoother and also increase your attendance. Enlist these helpers several weeks prior to the study, making sure you provide them the needed training to succeed in their assigned tasks.

January Bible Study: Getting the Word Out

On the digital download, you will find files that will help you promote JBS 2024. You have permission to reproduce these items for use in your church. 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 constraints. 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 appropriate individuals.

First, you will find clip art files for creating your own flyers, church Web site announcements, PowerPoint® announcement slides, and bulletin announcements. These clip art files and presentation backgrounds are all in JPEG format. (Note: You can use this same background set to create presentations for the teaching sessions.) If your church uses PowerPoint® slides to promote events, contact the appropriate individuals and enlist them to develop promotion slides for use well in advance.

The best form of promotion is word of mouth. Use the clip art included on the digital download to develop mini-posters (half sheets) that can be easily distributed. You may want to create a business card that can be distributed as well. These cards can be purchased at most business supply stores, and templates can be downloaded from the Internet (instructions are usually included in the packaging of most card sets). Provide the printed business cards to church members to use for inviting their friends, coworkers, neighbors, and relatives.

January Bible Study Promotional Poster masters are also included on the digital download. These files are in PDF format (various free PDF readers can be downloaded from the Internet—search for “PDF Free Reader”). You can print these posters on 8 1/2 x 11-inch paper or scale it up to 11 x 17-inch paper (set the page size using “Print Setup” or “Page Setup” under the File menu). Consider displaying the 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.

A poster contest in the Children’s Sunday School Division can also help build excitement for JBS. Ask those who work with children for their help in organizing this contest. If they agree, provide the necessary materials (poster boards, markers, etc.). 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. Display all posters in the hallways of the church.

Note to pastors: Never underestimate your influence in promoting JBS. You have the power of the pulpit and the ear of the people. Use your influence to encourage attendance.

January Bible Study: After the Event

After the event you may want to take some additional steps to complete this year's study and to ensure success at future JBS events. Here are several actions to consider:

- Keep good records during JBS. The records of attendance and enrollment in all age groups become the "eyes and ears" of next year's JBS planning team.
- Search for prospects for your church and ongoing Bible study groups. How well you promoted your JBS outside the walls of your church will determine the number of prospects who attend. Retain prospect information received at registration and make sure this information is placed in the hands of the appropriate leader or teacher. Encourage the assigned Bible study group to contact prospects.
- Let your team of teachers, leaders, and volunteers know how much you appreciate their ministry. Recognize those who have served in any way in JBS. Send letters of appreciation to all volunteers and teachers to let them know how much their hard work helped make JBS a success. Make the letters as personal as possible. Place a list of all volunteers in the church newsletter.
- Evaluate JBS. Look at what worked well and what did not work well. Make notes and plans for next year. Make sure the information gleaned from the evaluation is in an accessible place for use in next year's preparation.

January Bible Study: The Resources

Personal Study Guide (For Ordering: Product Number 005842155)

The Personal Study Guide includes commentary and activities that encourage application. Jonathan T. Pennington wrote the Personal Study Guide. He is currently Professor of New Testament Interpretation at Southern Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky. He is also the Spiritual Formation Pastor at Sojourn East and regularly speaks and teaches in churches all over the country.

He earned a BA in history as well as a teaching certificate from Northern Illinois University. He received the master of divinity degree from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School (Chicago), where he also taught Greek for two years as a NT Fellow.

He holds the PhD in New Testament studies from the University of St. Andrews, Scotland (in St. Mary's College), where he wrote a thesis entitled "Heaven and Earth in the Gospel of Matthew" under the supervision of Professors Richard Bauckham and Philip Esler. He has published a wide variety of books, articles, and Greek and Hebrew language tools.

Kima Jude is a member of The Oaks Baptist Church in Grand Prairie, Texas, where she leads the women's ministry, and her husband Barry serves as pastor. Kima has a bachelor's degree in journalism from Marshall University and had an early career as a newspaper reporter followed by a freelance writing career. She has written for several Christian publications, including Lifeway's January Bible Study and several Explore the Bible group plans. She is employed full-time at a local university in the Dallas-Fort Worth region directing foundation relations and writing proposals. She and her husband are the parents of four young adult children and three young grandchildren. She looks forward to helping them discover the wonder of the Bible.

The Personal Study Guide can be used in multiple settings. More material is provided than a leader can use in a teaching session, allowing the leader to select learning activities that best meet the needs of each group. Providing the Personal Study Guide can take the pressure off the leader so he or she can focus on the more meaty issues of the study. The Personal Study Guide also provides a way for the learner to gain additional insights, reflect on the truths emphasized, record notes and questions, and study beyond the scheduled session times.

The Personal Study Guide is also available in digital format as an ePub using the Lifeway Reader and can be purchased from Lifeway.com (product number 005842156).

Leader Guide (For Ordering: Product Number 005842157)

The Leader Guide includes expository notes and teacher helps. Kima Jude wrote the teaching plans. The expositor's notes were written by Argile Smith wrote the expositor's notes for this resource. Argile serves as pastor of Parkway Baptist Church, Biloxi, Mississippi. He's a graduate of William Carey College (BA) and New Orleans Baptist

Theological Seminary (MDiv, PhD).

The teaching plans are designed for six one-hour sessions. Electronic copies of both of these files are available on the digital download included with the Leader Guide (leaders can customize the teaching plans and integrate the expository notes desired into their teaching notes).

The Leader Guide provides a teacher with everything he or she needs to lead a small group, seminar, or retreat. The pastor developing a sermon series will find the expository notes especially helpful.

On the inside back cover of the Leader Guide, you will find a code redeemable for the digital download. This is the same digital download mentioned earlier in the promotion section. In addition to the clip art and poster masters, you will find other helpful tools.

- PowerPoint® support—Slides featuring the photos included in the Personal Study Guide have been provided for creating computer generated presentations.
- Preaching Planning Guide—Sermon ideas are provided that could be used to promote, support, or supplement the event. If the studies are being conducting in small groups, the pastor may find these helpful as support.

Web Resources

Additional resources can be downloaded from www.Lifeway.com/JBS.

Ephesians

WHO WE ARE IN CHRIST

January Bible Study 2024 • Planning Worksheet

☐1. January Bible Study Coordinator Enlisted

Complete By: _____

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

☐2. January Bible Study Planning Team Secured

Complete By: _____

Who is responsible: January Bible Study coordinator

Tip: Include a churchwide leader (pastor, minister of education, or Sunday School director) on the team.

☐3. Target Audience(s) Identified

Complete By: _____

Who is responsible: January Bible Study planning team

Tip: Think "outside the box" and outside your church. Use this as a means of reaching the unchurched of your community.

☐4. Dates and Schedule Determined

Complete By: _____

Who is responsible: January Bible Study planning team

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

☐5. Budget Established

Complete By: _____ (six months prior)

Who is responsible: January Bible Study planning team or church stewardship committee

Tip: Consider alternate ways of covering costs including potential fees. Look for ways to provide for guests to attend without a fee.

☐6. Leader Materials Ordered

Complete By: _____

Who is responsible: January Bible Study coordinator

Tip: Order a Leader Guide and Personal Study Guide for each teacher.

☐7. Meeting Areas Secured

Complete By: _____

Who is responsible: January Bible Study planning team

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

☐8. Study Leaders Enlisted

Complete By: _____ (five months prior)

Who is responsible: January Bible Study coordinator or age-group representatives on the January Bible Study planning team

Tip: Give your regular preschool and children's workers the opportunity to attend an adult group by enlisting others to teach these groups during January Bible Study.

☐9. Study Leaders Trained

Complete By: _____ (four months prior)

Who is responsible: January Bible Study planning team

Tip: Check with your association or state Baptist convention about training available.

☐10. Additional Volunteers Enlisted

Complete By: _____ (three months prior)

Who is responsible: January Bible Study coordinator or age-group representatives on the January Bible Study planning team

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

☐11. Promotion Begins

Complete By: _____ (two months prior)

Who is responsible: pastor, January Bible Study planning team

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

☐12. Group Member Resources Ordered

Complete By: _____ (six weeks before the event)

Who is responsible: January Bible Study coordinator

Tip: Order a Personal Study Guide for every anticipated participant. Making the study guides available prior to the event serves as another way of promoting the event.

☐13. Event Conducted

Event Dates: _____

Tip: Be prepared to lead a group or secure a substitute as a contingency.

☐14. Event Evaluated

Complete By: _____ (two weeks after last session)

Who is responsible: January Bible Study planning team

Tip: Establish a means for passing on the evaluation to next year's planning Team

