



Aging WITH Grace

FLOURISHING IN
AN ANTI-AGING CULTURE



*“The righteous flourish like the palm tree
and grow like a cedar in Lebanon . . .
They still bear fruit in old age;
They are ever full of sap and green.”*



Psalm 92:12, 14

LEADER’S GUIDE

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GETTING READY

The following suggestions should be adapted to your group, schedule, situation, and style.

- The purpose of this study is summarized in the title of the book: For women to think biblically about aging, to pray for grace to flourish spiritually in every season and circumstance of life, and to live covenantally as they help one another flourish in an anti-aging culture.
- This study may be used as a large-group Bible study followed by discussion groups, a small group, a Titus 2 discipleship group, or a one-on-one discipleship relationship.
 - It is not necessary for an older woman to teach this study, but encourage older women to participate. Their presence will bring their perspective to younger women and will encourage them as they share their life experiences.
 - The chapters in the book alternate between a *Thinking Biblically* chapter and a *Living Covenantally* chapter. Each set of chapters is connected. The *Living Covenantally* chapters illustrate the concepts in the *Thinking Biblically* chapters. Living covenantally flows out of thinking biblically. Another way to say this is that the renewal of our minds results in the transformation of our lives.

Bible Study Team

Thinking biblically and living covenantally involve more than preparing and teaching a lesson. A team approach will help communicate the covenantal nature of leadership/discipleship as the team works together to develop a vision for the study, and then pray, plan, coordinate, and implement the various elements of the study.

*There are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit;
and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord;
and there are varieties of activities,
but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone.
To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.*

I CORINTHIANS 12:4-7

SUGGESTION: Divide the various responsibilities among team members, but remember each element is a part of the whole and is for the common good.

The team may include someone responsible for the following duties, as well as any other responsibilities that are needed.

1. Greeter: Welcome women and provide name tags.

- If needed, recruit other greeters. Prayerfully consider ways to welcome women from the moment

they arrive—“Welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God” (Rom. 15:7).

- Follow up with those who attend with notes, texts or phone calls.

2. Refreshments: Schedule volunteers to provide snacks.

3. Community Building: This short segment should be carefully and intentionally planned and executed.

- Purpose: To give women an opportunity to learn to share their lives with one another—to live covenantally. Getting to know each other's stories and to care for and pray for one another are characteristics of covenant life.
- This is an essential element. A well-planned five- to ten-minute segment will set the tone for your entire study and can transform it from an academic atmosphere to a loving and safe place for women to study and apply God's Word.

- Ideas for this segment:

(1) The handout for the Introduction lesson will ask the women to pray about writing their story of flourishing or writing about an older woman and how they have seen her age with grace. The stories in the book are approximately 400 words, so women are asked to follow this pattern in writing their story. Ask women to volunteer to read their story for a Community Building segment. Schedule a story for each week.

(2) Beginning with the lesson for Chapter 1, it is suggested that each week you ask a volunteer to be prepared to read her summary of the lesson the following week as a review before studying the next chapter in the book. Make a handout with the following information and questions and give it to the woman who volunteers for the following week:

Please write a 3-minute summary of Chapter ____ and be prepared to share it during our Community Building segment next week. You may want to use some of the questions below or develop your summary in another way.

- List a few things from the chapter that were helpful to you.
- How did this chapter change or inform your thinking about aging?
- Write a prayer based on some of the scriptures in this chapter.
- How would you like for others to pray for you as you seek to apply the scriptures in this chapter to your life?

(3) If you have a variety of ages in your church, assign young women an older woman to visit and then write a story telling what she learned about how the woman is flourishing. These stories can be used in the Community Building segment or at your final lesson.

Suggested questions:

- What was life like for you as a young girl?
 - Tell me about your family?
 - When did you become a Christian?
 - What is something you have learned about the Lord that you wish you had known at my age?
 - What is your greatest fear or concern in this season of life?
 - What is your greatest joy?
 - Is there a scripture that is special to you?
 - Do you have a favorite hymn?
- All these ideas will provide opportunities for women to share their hearts and stories with one another. Each woman brings her own story. It may be buried until she feels safe enough to share. Hearing others share will help her feel this safety. Pray for this to happen.
 - **Important:** Ask them to take three minutes or less. Emphasize the importance of writing it and timing it, and then reading it so they stay within the allotted time. You may want to have women on the Bible Study team share first, so other women will see it demonstrated.
- • Plan ahead. Ask and schedule women at least two weeks in advance to give them time to pray and prepare.

4. Bible Study Leader

- The Lesson Plan is designed for an interactive study.

Pray for wisdom to balance teaching and discussion. Leading a discussion does not mean there is no teaching.

- Read the chapter, and then read the Lesson Plan.

Each Lesson Plan includes additional material to support or expand the information in the chapter. There may be more material than you need. Adapt the Lesson Plan to your group and schedule. Summarize the material you use in your own words.

- There is a lot of information in the *Thinking Biblically* chapters, but the *Living Covenantally* chapters will review and apply this information.
- Make copies of the handouts and the additional resources in the Appendix for the women or have them download copies at www.agingwithgrace.online.

You may want to provide notebooks and encourage women to keep the handouts. Include blank pages for women to record prayer requests and to journal.

- Encourage women to read the assigned chapter.

Many women are in seasons of life where they feel overwhelmed. Emphasize that reading the material in advance is not a requirement to attend. It is more important for women to feel loved and welcomed. Sometimes just getting there is all they can do. They need spiritual mothering. As they grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus, trust Him to give them the desire and discipline to prepare.

If most women do not read the assigned chapter, compensate by summarizing the material in the book and asking volunteers to read some paragraphs. This may mean you will not be able to use all the extra material in the Lesson Plan.

- Story

Each chapter concludes with a story. Discussing these stories will help women see what it looks like to age with grace, to flourish even in old age.

Aging with Grace – Ask an Older Woman, five-minute videos with each of these storytellers along with extended interviews (see Appendix IV) can be accessed at www.agingwithgrace.online. Share the short videos each week or encourage women to watch them.

Pray these stories will encourage older women to see the importance of spiritually mothering young women in the grace of aging.

5. Prayer

- Use the prayer time to encourage women to pray biblically, to use the words of Scripture to shape their prayers. The handouts include prayers from Scripture. The review questions ask women to use the Scriptures in each lesson to write a prayer.
- See Appendix 1 for a list of prayers from Scripture. You may want to make copies to give the women for their notebooks.
- Encourage women to share prayer needs based on applying biblical principles from the lesson. For example, use questions such as:

In light of what we have discussed, is there any specific way we can pray for you as you seek to apply these Growing in Grace principles to your life?

Has there been a specific way the Holy Spirit has enabled you to flourish recently? Let's celebrate His work in our lives by thanking Him.

Share other prayer requests and, where appropriate, ask: Can you think of a scripture we could use to pray for this person or situation?

- Have a prayer sheet each week with church prayer requests.

Other ideas: List a staff member, an elder, a deacon, a missionary your church supports, and each one's family. These prayer sheets can also be kept in the notebooks.

6. Each lesson includes

- A Preparation section with ideas for the entire team,
- A Lesson Plan for the Bible study teacher,
- A handout to be copied for the women.

7. Options

There are nine lesson plans, one for the Introduction and one for each chapter in the book, but this can be adapted to your timeframe. For example:

- For eight lessons, combine the Introduction and Chapter 1.
- For ten lessons, use the *Concluding Thoughts* from Sharon and Susan. Ask volunteers in advance to write their own concluding thoughts and to read them.

Plan a meal and share concluding thoughts.

Have an intergenerational panel and ask questions such as:

- What was most helpful to you from this study?
- What is one Growing in Grace principle that was especially helpful to you?
- What difference has it made in how you think?
- What is one way you will be intentional about living covenantally?

8. Follow-up

Team members follow-up by texting the women you prayed for or inviting them to your home for coffee and a time to share.

Pair the women, intergenerationally if possible, and ask them to get together on their own to discuss how the study has helped them think biblically about aging with grace and to share how they are walking it out (living covenantally).

→ 9. Appendix

- It is suggested that everyone on the team be aware of the resources in the Appendix. Go over these carefully and select ideas to use throughout the study.

→ 10. Additional Online Resources

- Promotional Tool: To help you spread the word about the study, we have created a short promo video with Karen Hodge, PCA Women's Ministry Coordinator, as well as an *Introduction to Aging with Grace* 10-minute video. Both can be used at women's events, on social media and in email promotions. You have permission to use it in any way that will help promote the study. Download the video at www.agingwithgrace.online.
- At www.agingwithgrace.online, you'll find *Aging with Grace – Ask an Older Woman* five-minute videos of the storytellers, extended interviews about aging, and downloadable *Aging with Grace* PDF handouts.

Suggested Format

1. Gathering, refreshments, opening prayer
2. Community Building
3. Bible Study
4. Prayer

If your group is large, you may want to divide into small groups for discussion and prayer with one of the Bible study team leading each group.



INTRODUCTION

PREPARATION

Bible Study Team

- Pray and plan together.

If you have the names of women who will attend the study, pray for each of them. You may want to divide the names so each team member is praying for specific women throughout the study. If your team is multigenerational, assign younger women to older and older to younger.

Have each team member select a scripture to pray for women who will participate in this study.

- Go over the responsibilities and schedule. Be sure everyone knows what she is responsible to do and how much time she has on the schedule.
- Since this is your first gathering, you may want to plan a brunch or dinner to give an opportunity for women to get to know one another.
- Look at the resources in the Appendix and determine what ideas would be effective for your group and who will be responsible to implement them.



• **Lesson Objectives**

- To gently draw women into the book by introducing them to the purpose, the authors, and two of the storytellers
- To use the discussion times to begin cultivating a welcoming atmosphere where women will feel loved and accepted to study and apply God's Word together
- To encourage women to read the assigned chapter and to write their own stories of flourishing, or to write about an older woman they have watched age with grace

Community Building Suggestions

- Have each woman on the Bible study team introduce herself, tell her responsibility on the team, then show one object that tells something about her—hiking shoes because she loves to hike, a cookbook because she loves to cook, etc. One object and one sentence are sufficient for this to move quickly. Then each one read the scripture passage she is praying for the women in this study.

If you have time, ask all the women to introduce themselves and to “pretend” they have one object that will tell something about them. If you have a large group, divide into small groups for this or ask two or three volunteers to share.

Note from Susan

I will never forget the time a new woman in our Bible study heard that the leaders had divided the group, and each prayed for specific women. She was so moved that a leader prayed for her by name that she wept. Community life deepened in our group.

Bible Study Teacher Suggestions

- This lesson covers the following material from the book: Foreword, Conversation with Sharon and Susan, Ruth's Story, Dianne's Story, A Note from the Authors
- Read the material in the book, and then read the Lesson Plan and adapt it to your group and schedule.
- Review *Aging with Grace – Ask an Older Woman* five-minute storyteller videos (found at www.agingwithgrace.online)
 - Susan Hunt, Sharon Betters, and Karen Hodge – Introduction to *Aging with Grace, Flourishing in an Anti-Aging Culture*
 - Dianne Balch – “What is the hardest challenge and greatest benefit of aging?”
 - Ruth Auffarth – “What two life disciplines helped prepare you for this season of life?”
- Decide if, or how, you will use one or all of these videos in this lesson. Encourage women to watch those you do not show and check out the extended interviews.
- The handout is at the end of the Lesson Plan. Make copies for the women or have participants download the handouts at www.agingwithgrace.online.

Prayer Suggestions

- See suggestions in the Getting Ready section.
- Read the quote from Elizabeth Prentiss on the handout. Mrs. Prentiss (1818-1878) was the author of *Stepping Heavenward*.
- You may want to divide into small groups for prayer requests.

LESSON PLAN

1. **Begin by asking the questions: What are your thoughts about the title of this book? Why do you want to study this topic?**

- Ask a few volunteers to respond or give small groups a few minutes to discuss.
- Refer to the opening page in the book and read Psalm 92:12, 14.

2. **Refer to #1 on the handout at the end of this Lesson Plan. Ask a volunteer to read this.**

- We all want to flourish. The book emphasizes that flourishing happens in community. Jesus gave us a great and glorious commission to make disciples. And in Titus 2 we see that some discipleship is gender-specific. We need to be disciplined to think biblically about aging and we need to see what the gospel looks like when it is applied to life. When we help others grow in Christ, they flourish and so do we.

3. **Refer to #2 on the handout and read the Scriptures responsively.**

- Jesus commissioned us to make disciples by teaching them to observe, or obey, all that He has commanded us. *All* covers everything the Bible teaches, including God's plan for aging. Note that He also gives us the provision to obey Him—He is with us.

Paul tells Pastor Titus that older women in the church are to disciple younger women. He does not give a specific age. We are all older than someone. Not all discipleship is to be gender-specific, but some discipleship does need to be woman-to-woman. Women are to be equipped to teach and train younger women. To teach involves sharing the gospel. To train means to show how the gospel applies to life.

In 1 Thessalonians 2:7-8, we have a description of Paul's approach to discipleship which combines teaching and training. He shared the gospel and his life with the Thessalonians.

Covenantal discipleship is informational (sharing the gospel) and relational (sharing our lives); it is also transformational.

Why was Paul willing to make the investment of sharing the gospel and his life with the Thessalonians? (Because they had become very dear to him) As Paul obeyed the Great Commission, he was transformed—his love for them grew, and he was motivated to share his life with them.

Fill in the blanks on the handout—informational, relational, transformational.

We do not know if those we disciple will be transformed, but loving others enough to invest in helping them flourish is evidence of the transforming power of the gospel in our lives. It is evidence of our flourishing.

As younger women ask older women to help them age with grace, and as older women tell their stories of God's grace, they help each other flourish, and covenant life in the church flourishes.

4. Foreword

- Karen Hodge talks about how Sharon and Susan spiritually mothered her and helped her flourish, and she encourages us to help each other look to Jesus. Flourishing happens in community with others who are cheering us on.

What are your reactions to Karen's challenge to "run with women in your church by studying this book together and helping one another divert your gaze from the worldly anti-aging culture and fix your gaze on Jesus"? How do other women help you stay focused on Jesus?

5. Karen's conversation with Sharon and Susan

Suggestion: If women did not get the book in advance, have three women read the parts of Karen, Sharon, and Susan. Discuss with questions such as:

What is one section of this conversation that is helpful to you?

What do you think are some evidences that we live in an anti-aging culture?

What is the over-arching theme of the book that Sharon and Susan want us to know? (Aging with grace is impossible without the transforming power of God's grace in us.)

6. Ruth's Story

What are some evidences that Ruth thinks biblically?

What are some evidences she lives covenantally?

What evidences of the transforming power of the gospel do you see in her life?

How are you challenged by her story?

7. Dianne's Story

Ask the same questions.

8. One of the things we will see in all the stories is the centrality of God's Word and prayer in the lives of the storytellers. We will also see an emphasis on praying biblically—using the words of Scripture to shape our prayers.

Refer to #3 on the handout and pray in unison.

Encourage the women to use this prayer as they study Scripture and as they read the book. Suggest they write it on a card and use it as a bookmark, so it is readily available when they begin reading each chapter.

#4 on the handout: After the women write their prayers, ask for one or two volunteers to read theirs. Be prepared to read yours if no one volunteers.

#5 on the handout: Encourage women to write a story and to consider reading it for the Community Building segment. Explain who is responsible to schedule these stories for those who are willing to participate. You may want to ask for a volunteer for your next lesson.

9. Conclusion

- Refer to the book: A Note from the Authors

Here the authors explain the context out of which they wrote the book.

You may want to read Sharon's comments, and then ask: What are your reactions to this? Does it comfort you to know she struggled with reconciling God's love and His sovereignty?

After Susan's comments ask: What are your thoughts about the Lord using the process of writing this book to prepare Susan for her husband's death? What are your reactions to the idea of grace being sufficient and grace being specific?

- Encourage the women to read Chapter 1.

Aging with Grace Handout

INTRODUCTION

1. **The purpose of this study is summarized in the title of the book:** For women to think biblically about aging, to pray for grace to flourish spiritually in every season and circumstance of life, and to live covenantally as they help one another flourish in an anti-aging culture.

2. Responsive Reading

LEADER: *Jesus said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Matt. 28:18b-20).*

WOMEN: *Older women likewise are to be reverent in behavior, not slanderers or slaves to much wine. They are to teach what is good, and so train the young women . . . that the word of God may not be reviled (Titus 2:3-5).*

ALL: *We were gentle among you, like a nursing mother taking care of her own children. So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God, but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us (1 Thess. 2:7-8).*

Covenantal discipleship is _____, _____,

and _____.

3. Prayer

Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.

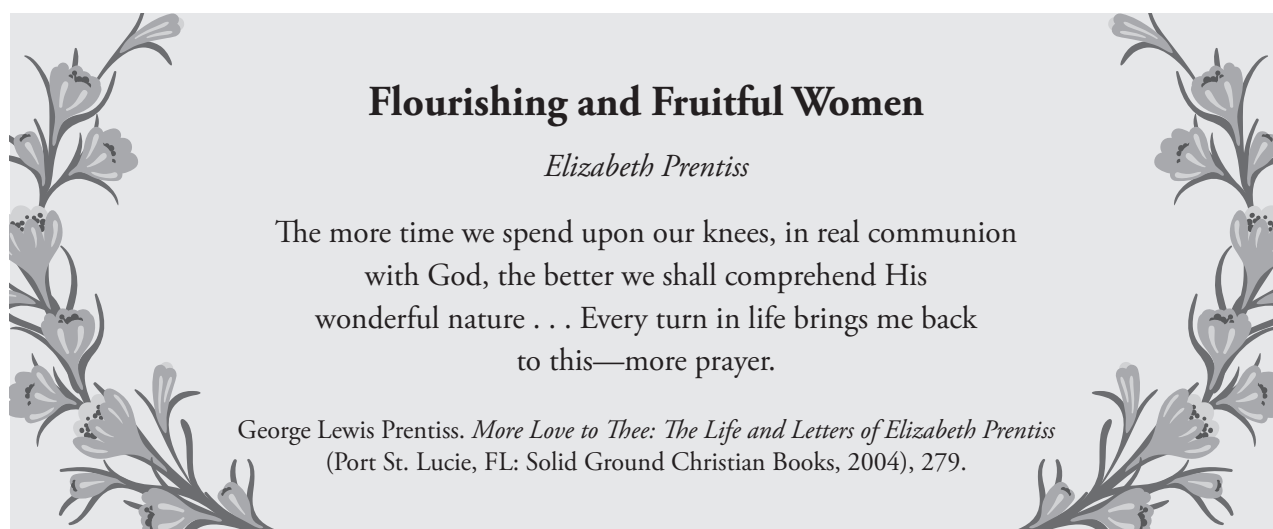
Make me to know Your ways, O LORD; teach me Your paths.

*Lead me in Your truth and teach me, for You are the God of my salvation;
for You, I wait all the day long.*

*You have made known to me the paths of life;
You will make me full of gladness with Your presence.*

Ps. 119:105, Ps. 25:4-5, ACTS 2:28

4. **One way we flourish is by learning to pray Scripture.** Select portions of Scripture on the handout and write a prayer.
5. **Pray about writing your own story** of flourishing or writing about an older woman and how you have seen her age with grace. The stories in the book are approximately 400 words. Follow this pattern in writing your story. Pray about reading it for a Community Building segment. If you write about an older woman, such as your grandmother, you may want to show one or two items that belonged to her such as her Bible or a favorite serving bowl. Below is an example of writing a story about someone else.



My Mother-in-Law

Jane Anne Wilson

I marvel at the eighty-something-year-old women who write books or continue to teach Bible studies. But what about the gifted woman who spends her years confined to her home because of physical limitations? What about the woman who cannot communicate though she was once a teacher and well-known speaker? What does flourishing look like for these women? My mother-in-law Janet Wilson daily shows me.

During a recent hospitalization, the nurse caring for Mom Wilson said, “This is a pleasant woman.” I responded, “Yup, that’s her.” Although she is physically immobile, and conversation is challenging because her hearing is so bad, others quickly see the essence of who she is. She is often described with words such as delightful, warm, and joyful, words that defy her circumstances.

Mom Wilson is pleasant, but there is nothing passive about her.

With the help of her devoted husband, she fights hard against her progressive degenerative multiple sclerosis. The soup cans she uses for her daily arm exercises sit by her chair as a reminder to all that even in her eighties she is still fighting to steward well whatever function her body has left.

She fights the spiritual battles against discouragement, doubts, frustration, and fear. Her pleasant disposition is a hard-won daily battle. When we visit, we consistently find her sitting in her chair with her large, well-worn Bible in her lap, mentally embracing the truths her limitations seem to scream against. The more her body betrays her, the more deeply she abides in her Savior’s love. She thinks biblically and she lives covenantally. Her face lights up with a warm welcome, and she wants to know about our lives. She works hard at listening. I can see her making mental notes of how to pray, and I know that on the next visit she will follow-up with questions. Her concerns are never about herself, but always about the interests of others.

Although I am inspired by her determination to stay as physically strong as possible, it is her spiritual strength that fills my heart with love and admiration. She is a spiritual giant to me. As I think of all the ways that I “do ministry” somehow it pales against her ever-deepening love for the Lord and others. My faith-filled mother-in-law shows me the way of flourishing, even in old age.

Jane Anne Wilson, wife of David and mother of four adult children, lives in Newark, Delaware. She serves on the women’s ministry leadership team in her church. Cuddling her three grandbabies, long walks with her husband, and family reunions are her favorite blessings.