



Joy beyond Agony

EMBRACING THE CROSS OF CHRIST

Jane Roach

A TWELVE-LESSON BIBLE STUDY

Jane Roach has produced a classic Bible study on the true meaning of the cross of Jesus Christ. Her stimulating study questions, insightful commentary, and use of the powerful poetry of classic hymns of the faith along with her very meaningful and Christ-exalting prayers will serve as a great resource for individuals and Bible study groups seeking to dig deeper into the meaning of the sacrifice made on the cross of Christ. I am happy to endorse and recommend *Joy beyond Agony*.

—**J. Carl Laney**, Professor of Biblical Literature, Coordinator for Israel Study Programs, Western Seminary, Portland, Oregon

Joy beyond Agony is an excellent resource that puts the biblical truth of what Christ has accomplished for Christians on bold display. True to the Scripture and challenging in every degree, Jane Roach's approach is accurate in content and elegant in design. You'll surely benefit from the thoughtful questions and the opportunity to reflect on what the suffering Savior did for us.

—**Allen R. Taha**, Pastor, Trinity Presbyterian Church (PCA), Boerne, Texas

Jane Roach's book on Jesus' crucifixion and cross takes us to the very center of our faith. Roach reminds us that the cross, which was a scandal in Paul's day, is still scandalous today. At the same time, we see that the cross is our only hope and our greatest joy. In the cross we find both the provision for our sin and the pattern for our lives. Roach's work is biblically rooted and devotionally

powerful. Readers will be encouraged and challenged by this wonderful treatment of the cross.

—**Thomas Schreiner**, James Buchanan Harrison Professor of New Testament Interpretation (1997), Associate Dean of Scripture and Interpretation, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Kentucky

I highly recommend this Bible study by Jane Roach. It is thorough, doctrinally sound, and speaks to the subject that is central in Christianity but often ignored in churches and Christian publications today—the Cross of Jesus Christ. Jane Roach has taught the Bible for many years and she has taught well. This book is no exception and I see it best used in group Bible study although it could certainly be helpful as a personal daily devotional.

—**Rosemary Jensen**, Founder and President, Rafiki Foundation; former Executive Director, Bible Study Fellowship International

A wonderful tool to introduce the inquirer to the most important person who has stood in human history, who through his life and death brought life out of death and hope for our world. I commend this study tool to any and all readers. It is well written, pedagogically sound, theologically insightful, practically relevant, and personally penetrating. What a useful tool for personal and group Bible study.

—**John Hannah**, Department Chair and Research Professor of Theological Studies, Distinguished Professor of Historical Theology, Dallas Theological Seminary; Adjunct Professor, Redeemer Seminary, Dallas

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P U B L I S H I N G

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To my friend and mentor, Rosemary M. Jensen,
who taught and showed me the importance of
the cross of Christ and who opened doors for me
to know my Lord and serve him.

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Foreword

THE CROSS HAS ALWAYS been an offense and a scandal to the world, but Christians grasp that it is their only hope. The Jews expected that when the Messiah came he would destroy the Romans and make the Jews the leaders of the world, and then the world would be at peace. On the other hand, the Greeks were convinced that intellectuals would explain the meaning of life. Once the perfect philosophy was formulated, the masses could live according to the wisdom of philosophers.

Christians proclaimed that the world would be transformed only through a man who was crucified. Do you see how bizarre that must have sounded to people two thousand years ago? We are used to the message of Christ crucified because of Christian tradition. But imagine that you had never heard of the cross before. Imagine if someone said today for the first time, “A man who was executed by the political authorities in a small Middle Eastern country is the savior of the world.” People instead expect that if God were going to reveal himself to the world, he would do so with power, so that his presence would be unmistakable. His victory over the world would be dramatic, decisive, and easy, and everyone would fear his great power.

Scripture teaches that God chose to bring salvation through a Galilean peasant who was crucified during the Passover feast, and God quietly raised him from the dead (not in the sight of the whole world) three days later. In the second century a Jew by the name of Trypho had a debate with Christian apologist Justin Martyr; Trypho said to Justin during the debate, “Prove to

us that he [the Messiah] had to be crucified and had to die such a shameful and dishonorable death, cursed by the law. We could not even consider such a thing” (*Dialogue with Trypho* 90.1).

The Greeks expected a saving message to be intellectually deep and accessible only to the clearest and most profound thinkers. The wise would hear such a message and say, “This is what we intellectuals have always been seeking. This is brilliant.” But early Christians proclaimed, “God has chosen to save his people through a man whom he has crucified and raised from the dead.”

In this wonderful book, Jane Roach reminds us of the centrality of the cross. Here we have a biblically faithful exposition of what God accomplished in Christ on the cross. But the book isn’t only biblically faithful; it is also devotionally rich, for Roach draws us into worship, meditation, and application. Behold the man who was crucified and risen, and be changed forever.

Thomas R. Schreiner

Preface:

The Greatest Gift

WHAT KIND OF GIFT is most precious to you? I am moved by gifts that involve love and sacrifice of time, effort, or money. A gift that costs the giver something expresses immeasurable love. A member of my church, Bette Brasher, is alive today because her husband gave her one of his kidneys. But sacrifices are not limited to life-and-death situations. Perhaps someone missed an important celebration to sit with you while you were ill or to bring you a meal. My brother-in-law built me a wooden nativity set to match the one he made for my sister's grave.

The greatest gift of all is the Lord Jesus Christ, the unique Son of God, becoming our Savior from the penalty, power, and ultimately the presence of sin. I learned about this gift as a child. My church concentrated on the cross of Christ as preparation for celebrating Easter. Each year I anticipated reading of Jesus' passion, which would help me to remember his death and celebrate his resurrection.

As I progressively understood it more deeply, the celebration of his death and resurrection, whether on Resurrection Sunday or through participation in the Lord's Supper, became increasingly personal and glorious. Yet the familiarity of the narrative led me to gloss over it without much thought. I needed a fresh look at the truth of the cross of Christ and the Christ on the cross.

As I looked deeply into my Savior's death, I wanted to give this message to others who need the peace and hope it provided me.

Sadly, there is a growing trend in the church today. The cross of Christ is forgotten in lieu of celebration. However, without the cross, there is no cause for celebration; we are still dead in our sins (John 1:29; 3:16; 8:24). Ignoring the cross robs the celebration of Christ's resurrection of its true meaning—God's affirmation that his servant finished his work of redemption (Isaiah 52:13–53:12). Digging deeply into the events and significance of Christ's cross can be simultaneously challenging and comforting. May you embark on this journey for the joy of growing in the knowledge and love of our Savior.

Acknowledgments

GOD GAVE ME a love for the cross as a child and deepened my understanding of it over the past forty years. My husband, Jim, and my pastor, Dr. Allen Taha, have prayed for me, encouraged me, and believed that God wanted me and would enable me to write this book. Bible Study Fellowship provided invaluable instruction and life application of the cross. Shirley Mills, my BSF coworker, told me ten years ago to write about the cross and faithfully kept the idea before me. Carla Northington, a longtime friend, provided her home for me to teach this study. BSF teaching leader and writer Ava Pennington provided invaluable coaching for publishing. My kind friends Debra Butts, Karen Smith, and Gloria Gartland read and reread the manuscript, offering valuable ideas and corrections. God providentially caused my path to cross with friends whose stories are included. I am grateful for their willingness to include their experiences of enduring pain and agony for the joy of following our Savior. The women attending the Bible studies at Cordillera Ranch in Boerne, Texas, and at my church, Trinity Presbyterian in Boerne, diligently studied the cross, discussed their discoveries, submitted to God's life-transforming applications, and faithfully prayed for me. They taught me as I watched them embrace the cross. Tracy Taha, Chad Swanson, and Pat Macfarlane were kind to help with author photos and videos. Thank you, Amanda Martin and Aaron Gottier from P&R, for your timely help, instruction, and encouragement. To God be the glory for faithfully leading me each step of the way.

Introduction: Digging Deeply

AS YOU BEGIN this Bible study, it is helpful to set spiritual goals—daily Bible study, focused prayer, growth in knowledge, love, patience, and so on. What are your expectations for your spiritual growth and your use of your time? Write them down and refer to them daily, asking God to help you attain them.

Lurking behind our goals and best efforts are our past failures in keeping up with them. These are the kinds of things that agonize us in our Christian life.

- We face the continuing struggle to love the unlovely people in our lives. Remembering how you have experienced God's love when you have been unlovely is a motivation to persevere with others.
- We groan over the lack of self-discipline in daily Bible study and prayer. Scheduling a regular short time each day will have a higher yield over time than trying to do too much. The questions in each chapter will help you begin.
- We start our prayer list without addressing the one eternal God with praise and adoration. Our prayers focus on our felt needs rather than on our spiritual growth and the eternal good of others. Write a few short sentences

that express appreciation for one attribute of God (who he is) and one act of God (what he has done through Christ). You can begin a new habit of prayer by speaking them aloud to God before presenting your needs to him. Remember to include the needs of others, perhaps presenting them to God before your own needs.

- We find ourselves captive to empty pursuits that gobble up precious time we could have used to read, pray, write a note, make a phone call, serve God, or help others. Identify your empty pursuits and begin to replace them one by one with something that honors God and helps others.
- We go to church expecting others to meet our needs while being oblivious to the body language and facial expressions that shout out the pain of another. We ignore the call for help with the activities of our church, begging for a later time that is more convenient. I have never found that God called me to something convenient. God calls us to die to ourselves in order to give life to others. He calls us before we think we are ready so that we will depend on him. The next time you attend church, ask God to open your eyes to see or hear about the needs of others. Trust him to help you reach out to them.
- The guilt of secret sins and the fear of discovery or rejection may hang over us. Jesus died so that we do not have to live with guilt and fear. Admitting your guilt and fear to God is the first step toward freedom from them.
- We may suppress the truth of our sin and think we are basically good. Yet we know the agony of wounding the spirit of another with unkind words, looks, or actions. We disrupt relationships that take a long time to restore.

We hurt others by ignoring them. Confession of sin is a gift from God that provides assurance of forgiveness and cleansing (1 John 1:9).

No matter how shameful your past, how dreadful your present, or how hopeless your future seems, there is a way to break out of the frustration of life as you know it and to live with joy and eternal purpose. Jesus said, “I came that they may have life and have it abundantly” (John 10:10). Jesus endured the agony of his earthly life and cross by anticipating the joy of his completed work through his death, resurrection, ascension, and exaltation (Hebrews 12:1–2). We are called to follow Jesus’ example of running with endurance the race God sets before us. Although the pain and sorrow that are part of our race cannot compare to his agony, we, like Jesus, must run with our eyes fixed on the finish line. We press on, anticipating the surpassing joy of the abundant life in his kingdom today and our glorification forever.

Each lesson focuses on some aspect of Jesus’ cross that reveals the joy beyond the agony he endured for us. We will consider the gospel accounts along with Old Testament prophecies and promises and New Testament explanations and applications. Each lesson uses beautiful poetry expressed by gifted hymn writers to help us understand the cross. You can hear the tunes at www.cyberhymnal.org or YouTube.

When you read the words of “O Teach Me What It Meaneth” (Lesson 1), you understand that Lucy Bennett knew something of who Jesus was and what he did for her. She longed to know more. She wanted to plumb the depths of his person and work on the cross. Study the suggested hymn as you answer the questions. Put the ancient poetry into prose and vocabulary you

can better understand. When you study Shakespeare, you read the language of his day. The same is true for hymn writers of the past who provide a great foundation on which to build. A friend recently told me that she appreciated the hymns when she began to study the Bible. She found herself exclaiming, “That’s in the Bible!”

May your study of Christ’s life in the Scripture and hymns help you to grow in your knowledge of him and his exceedingly great love for you. “O Teach Me What It Meaneth” might be your prayer as you begin each lesson and answer the questions for personal study and discussion. Writing your insights in the space provided below each question will cement them in your mind and heart. You will find deeper blessing if you complete your personal Bible study before reading the accompanying commentary. It is God’s Word, not mine, that gives life!

The Bible has many declarations about believers in relation to the cross of Christ. (When the New Testament uses “I” [or “we”] as an object of God’s redeeming love, it means one who believes, not every human being.) John wrote,

In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. (1 John 4:9–10)

Paul declared, “I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me” (Galatians 2:20). The truth is that Christ lives in me. My obligation is that I no longer live by my own

strength; I live by faith in the Son of God.¹ As you embrace Jesus' cross by faith, you will begin to understand the joy that is set before you now and forever. Believers in Christ are assured of his presence now and confident that we will be glorified with him in eternity. This hope provides purpose, strength, and comfort for the agony of sorrow and suffering we may encounter.

1. See Steve Green, "Embrace the Cross," on *A Journey of Faith: Steve Green Live in Concert*, Steve Green Ministries, Inc., 2012, compact disc.

LESSON 1

Overview: Joy beyond the Agony of the Cross

Let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. (Hebrews 12:1–2)

Truth

Jesus endured the cross for the joy set before him, calling and empowering us to follow him.

Hymn: "O Teach Me What It Meaneth"

O teach me what it meaneth
That Cross uplifted high,
With Thee the Man of Sorrows,
Condemned to bleed and die.
O teach me what it meaneth,

That sacred crimson tide,
The blood and water flowing
From Thine own wounded side.

O teach me what it meaneth
For I am full of sin;
And grace alone can reach me,
And love alone can win.
Teach me that if none other
Had sinned, but I alone,
Yet still Thy blood, Lord Jesus,
Thine only must atone.

O teach me what it meaneth,
Thy love beyond compare,
The love that reacheth deeper
Than depths of self-despair.
Yes, teach me, till there gloweth
In this cold heart of mine,
Some feeble, pale reflection
Of that pure love of Thine.

O infinite Redeemer!
I bring no other plea;
Because Thou dost invite me
I cast myself on Thee;
Because Thou dost accept me
I love and I adore;
Because Thy love constraineth,
I'll praise Thee evermore.

—LUCY ANN BENNETT, 1908

Opening Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, we bow before you as the only Savior from sin and the Lord of life. Teach us what it means to live by faith in you, the Son of God. Teach us how to embrace your cross so that we may also begin to understand the joy that awaits your followers in this life and for all eternity. We approach the subject of your sacrificial death in our place and on our behalf with gratitude and with the desire to understand it. While the narrative of the cross may be very familiar, we realize there is much we have not considered about it and we have much to learn. Teach us what it means so that we may worship you more rightly and be changed by the understanding you will give us. May our love for you increase as we realize the extent of your love demonstrated in the cross. For your glory. Amen.

Background

Who was, or is, Jesus? Throughout history his name has inspired hope, compassion, and, in some cases, horrendous acts in the misuse of his name. People today use his name to worship God but also to curse God and others. God declared that the name *Jesus of Nazareth* is above all other names and that every knee in heaven, on earth, and under the earth will one day bow at the mention of it (Philippians 2:9–11).

Many books claim to reveal Jesus. However, the Bible is the chief revelation of Jesus' person, life, and ministry. Jesus was a Jew descended from Abraham and David. He lived two thousand years ago in the region of present-day Israel. The Bible records the following facts about Jesus:

- his miraculous birth to a young virgin by the power of the Holy Spirit
- his sinless life that demonstrated his perfect obedience to God the Father
- his announcement of the coming of God's kingdom, which would usher in a new relationship with him as King
- his public ministry of preaching and teaching about the kingdom of God
- his claims to be the Son of God, who was equal with God the Father
- his miraculous signs authenticating his claims to deity
- his conflict with the hypocritical religious leaders who feared losing their power
- his brutal, unjust crucifixion, death, and burial
- his bodily resurrection from the grave three days after his death
- his ascension to the right hand of God, where he reigns in glory
- his coronation as reigning King
- his role as High Priest who prays for his people
- his future return as Judge and King to initiate the new heaven and earth

Jesus' message is called the gospel, or "good news." Through belief in his death in our place and on our behalf, we have our sins forgiven and are reconciled to God. When we are united with him in his resurrection, God gives us a new life so we can live for him. The details of Jesus' death on the cross will help us know how to respond to his claims and work.

It is impossible to consider Jesus' life, message, and claims without responding to them. Was Jesus truly the Son of God? If

not, then C. S. Lewis said he was a liar or madman.¹ However, if Jesus' claims are true, then to ignore him is the epitome of folly. Christianity proclaims that Jesus is exactly who he claimed to be. Because he is the Son of God and the only Savior from sin, we can be assured of forgiveness of past sin and guilt, power over sin in the present, and hope for the future removal of the presence of sin.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. What new thoughts about Jesus did you learn from the background section?

1. See C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (1952; repr. New York: HarperCollins, 2001), 52.

2. What response do Jesus' life and claims demand today? What do they demand of you?
3. What do you hope to gain from this study? The hymn "O Teach Me What It Meaneth" may generate some thoughts for you.

Commentary

The world today is into “brands” or visual identities. Individuals, organizations, and businesses spend time, effort, and money creating a logo and mission statement to communicate their values and practices. A brand should be simple and distinctive. What is the “brand” of Christianity? What sets Christianity apart from other world religions or religious beliefs?

When you see the cross, you do not think of Hinduism, Islam, Buddhism, or any other religion. You think Christ, Christian, and Christianity. Paul said it clearly:

For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, and not with words of eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power. For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. . . . We preach Christ crucified . . . Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. (1 Corinthians 1:17–18, 23–24)

The cross is the central message of Christianity. Without it, there is no resurrection, ascension, Pentecost, or eternal life.

To be branded with Christ’s cross is not to wear a gold or silver cross around your neck, on your ears, or in your lapel. Those are only reminders of the brand. To be branded with the cross means to embrace and live by what the Bible says about the death of Christ on the cross and what it means for you.

The cross was no accident. Jesus was no victim. His cross was planned before the foundation of the world. It was his set purpose for coming to earth as a man. He came to die. Listen to what the Bible says about his commitment to the cross:

When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem. (Luke 9:51)

Why would he do that?

And taking the twelve, he said to them, “See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written about the Son of Man by the prophets will be accomplished. For he will be delivered over to the Gentiles and will be mocked and shamefully treated and spit upon. And after flogging him, they will kill him, and on the third day he will rise.” (Luke 18:31–33)

Jesus spoke these words before the cross. Jesus knew all the things written about him. He knew the Old Testament. Knowing what lay ahead, he set his face, determined to go to Jerusalem. Why would he do that?

No one takes [my life] from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father. (John 10:18)

This is not suicide. Jesus alone had such God-given authority over his death and resurrection. No one else can truthfully make this claim.

Jesus also told us what it meant to follow his example of living in light of God’s eternal purpose:

Then Jesus told his disciples, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his

life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul? For the Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay each person according to what he has done.” (Matthew 16:24–27)

He did not aim to have a great job, make a name for himself, earn a lot of money, or change the world by worldly methods. He would claim his kingdom by dying on a cross.

The Christian life is a paradox. We have to die to have life, give up to win, lose everything to save it, suffer to gain glory, experience sorrow to have joy. Were you raised to think like that? This is totally opposite to the way the world thinks or teaches. Sadly, it is also not what some churches teach or some professing Christians believe.

How then are we to live as Christians? The Bible charges us to follow Jesus.

Let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. (Hebrews 12:1–2)

What did Jesus endure on the cross? What does it mean that he despised the shame? We will answer these questions and keep before us the truth that death was not the end for Jesus. He was raised, exalted to the place of highest authority. He returned to the eternal glory with his Father that he had enjoyed in eternity past before he came to earth to be a true man. He endured the

pain and suffering of dying in our place, on our behalf, because of the joy that he knew lay ahead.

Jesus took our place when he paid the penalty for our sin on the cross. Jesus' example shows us what it means to take up our cross. How often do you read the accounts of the last week of Jesus' life or hear them preached in your church? Perhaps you could tell the story; but it is possible to be very familiar with it and yet miss its intent. Following Jesus includes a sacrificial life of joy that prepares us to reign in glory with him. He has shown us how that is possible. He endured the agony of the cross because of the joy of being exalted at God's right hand and being reunited with him as he had been in eternity past. He also had joy in anticipating his redeemed people who would spend eternity with him, see him in his glory as God, share his glory, and reign with him.

Unlike Jesus' suffering, some of our agony is the result of our own sin, some the result of the accumulation of sin's consequences down through the ages. Hopefully some pain is the result of our testimony of Christ and the witness of our lives, which others will not like. Jesus is exalted at the right hand of God because he accomplished the work God gave him to do as a man. That work was to come to earth and buy back the people whom God had given him as his own but who were alienated from God by sin. We who believe in Jesus as our Savior are those people. We are the reason he came, and we are the reason he could go back to his Father in victory. He bought us back for God by dying in our place. The hope we have is that we will spend eternity glorified with him and that he is present with us now—by his Spirit, in his Word, and as we gather together.

The hope of glory is the "carrot that dangles before the hungry horse." The Christian focus gives proper perspective

to the hills and valleys of life on earth. The joy that awaits us strengthens us for the agony of life.

Before reading further, do you have the assurance from the Bible that you have been reconciled to God by Jesus' death on the cross? If so, what thoughts have stirred your heart to love, worship, and serve God? If not, please ask God to give you such assurance as you proceed with the Scripture, hymns, questions, and commentary in this book.

Closing Prayer

O Lord Jesus Christ, teach me what it means that you were uplifted high on the cross . . . that you, the Lord God Almighty, would be the Man of Sorrows, condemned to bleed and die . . . that your sacred blood had to flow from your side on that cross. Teach me because I am full of sin; only your grace can reach me and only your love can win salvation for me. Teach me that if I were the only one who had sinned, your blood would still have been required to atone for my sin. Help me understand my sin and what was needed to atone for it. Use the cross, your agony on it, and your joy in that agony to help me understand it more fully. Then help me to demonstrate more completely what it means to follow you. In your name, Lord Jesus, the only Savior and Redeemer. Amen. (Based on "O Teach Me What It Meaneth")

THE CRUCIFIXION IS FULL OF PARADOXES.
SHAME BECOMES GLORY. DEATH ENDS IN VICTORY.
AGONY CANNOT OVERCOME THE HOPE OF JOY.

In twelve lessons Jane Roach takes us to different aspects of the cross, showing us what the crucifixion meant to Jesus—and what it can mean to us. Why was it necessary? Why did Jesus embrace it? And how do we take up our crosses and follow him?

Through Bible study, application questions, commentary, testimonies, and hymns, learn what the cross shows us about our Savior, and discover the hope and joy it gives us as we face life's struggles.

“Behold the man who was crucified and risen, and be changed forever.”

—Thomas R. Schreiner, from the Foreword

“This Bible study is thorough and doctrinally sound, and it speaks to the subject that is central in Christianity but often ignored in churches and Christian publications today: the cross of Jesus Christ. Jane Roach has taught the Bible for many years, and she has taught well. This book is no exception.”

—**Rosemary Jensen**, Founder and President, Rafiki Foundation

“A wonderful tool to introduce the inquirer to the most important person in human history. . . . I commend this study tool to any and all readers. It is well written, pedagogically sound, theologically insightful, practically relevant, and personally penetrating.”

—**John Hannah**, Professor of Historical Theology, Dallas Theological Seminary

JANE ROACH was Director of Training for Bible Study Fellowship for more than twenty-five years. She currently teaches two Bible studies, assists the Texas Hill Country Bible Conference, and directs women's ministries at her church.

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