



Precious and Dearly Loved



A Retreat Planning Guide
Alison Zeller

*The vision of CTA is
to see Christians highly effective
in their ministry so that Christ's Kingdom
is strengthened and expanded.*



Precious and Dearly Loved

A Retreat Planning Guide
Alison Zeller



His Message. Your Mission.

© 2018 CTA, Inc.
1625 Larkin Williams Rd.
Fenton, MO 63026
www.CTAinc.com

Permission to make photocopies or reproduce by any other mechanical or electronic means is granted and is intended for use within a church or other Christian organization, but not for resale.

Scripture quotations are from the King James Version of the Bible.

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 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: PDL18DR. Or write to Editorial Manager, Dept. PDL18DR, P.O. Box 1205, Fenton, MO 63026-1205.



Contents

Notes and Helps for Retreat Leaders

Getting Started	4-6
Planning for Small-Group Sessions	7
Icebreakers	7-8
Session 1: Positively Precious	9
Session 2: Lavishly Loved	10
Evening Devotion	10
Time for Friends and Fun (Activities, Games, or Projects)	10-11
Breakfast	11
Session 3: Perfectly Protected	12
Food and Friendship	12
Reflection and Prayer	12-13
Lunch	13
Session 4: Continually Kept	14
Session 5: Enthusiastically Empowered	15
Break	15
Closing Devotion	15-16
Sample Retreat Schedule	17

Participant Handouts

Session 1: Positively Precious	18
Session 2: Lavishly Loved	19
Session 3: Perfectly Protected	20-21
Reflection and Prayer	22
Session 4: Continually Kept	23-24
Session 5: Enthusiastically Empowered	25
Notes for Next Time	26

Getting Started

This guide will help you plan a simple two-day retreat for women's groups in your congregation or Christian organization. While intended for groups from 5 to 35 participants, the material can be adapted for larger or smaller groups. In addition, these materials assume a schedule of Friday evening through Saturday afternoon (see page 17). By adjusting the schedule a bit, you may shorten or lengthen the retreat to meet the needs of your group.

To shorten it, complete only as many sections as is feasible at the retreat site. Then use the rest of the materials on consecutive Sunday mornings or during a midweek women's Bible study.

To lengthen it, consider spending more time on each of the five sessions. Or add more activities (for example, additional speakers, more time for group worship, extra crafts or activities, more elaborate projects, additional recreation time, or a prayer labyrinth activity).

Details, Details

If you and your group are new to retreat planning, a few key resources will walk you step-by-step through the details. Ask for recommendations at your local Christian bookstore. Visit www.pinterest.com and search "retreat ideas" or "retreat planning." And, log on to your favorite online bookseller and type "Christian retreat planning" into the search engine. Your exploration is bound to pay off. On the other hand, if you have personally participated in a few retreats or have planned them previously, you will probably be able to think through most aspects of the retreat planning process on your own.

In either case, you'll likely want to nominate specific individuals or small teams to arrange the following:

- **Prayer** for all participants before, during, and after the retreat. Some retreat planners ask the friends and family members of participants to write encouraging notes ahead of time, expressing their love for the participant and their commitment to pray for that person during the retreat. If participants do not find out about it until they receive and read their note (perhaps as they check in on the first day), the impact can be powerful. In any case, recruit a prayer team and give them a list of specific requests before, during, and after the retreat.
- **Finance and Accommodations.** Choose an inviting setting at a nearby retreat center, hotel, bed-and-breakfast, lakeside condominium, or private residence. If possible, avoid meeting in your church building. Usually, the main point of a retreat is to get away for a fresh perspective; that implies that a setting as familiar as your own church fellowship hall likely will not serve you and your guests very well. This team and the program team will need to work together on budgeting because speaker fees and facilities will likely be your biggest expenses. See CTA's website for a simple form on which you can create a budget. Type "retreat budget" into the search box at www.CTAinc.com.
- **Transportation** or carpooling to the location, if appropriate.
- **Hospitality**, including welcoming participants as they arrive, arranging chairs and tables in the meeting room (unless your facility will do this for you), and distributing goodies. This group will put together welcome packets, including information about the facility at which you are staying, the facility's emergency phone number, amenities (for example, walking paths, a prayer chapel), and other pertinent housekeeping details.

Welcome packets should also include a name tag, a copy of the retreat schedule, copies of each discussion sheet you plan to use, and other informational items like a flyer introducing the speaker who will lead one or more presentations. Check out the free resources for *Precious and Dearly Loved* to find theme art and other materials that will help you create a coordinated look and feel for your retreat. They are available in the Resource & Idea Center on CTA's website.



While you are handing out welcome bags, also consider including an activity or two at the registration table. This will set the stage for your retreat and draw participants into the theme as they arrive. Browse through Pinterest and you'll find a number of craft ideas that draw inspiration from God's love. You could also create a reproducible adult coloring page with the retreat's theme verse or a fill-in-the-blank sheet of Bible verses about God's love in Jesus. Explore the possibilities and select one or two options.

- **Snacks and Meals**, if the facility you've chosen doesn't offer them. If meals aren't provided, you might plan to order pizza, bring in sandwiches, or have a meal catered.
- **Publicity and Promotion**. Make your advance publicity even easier by using the free, downloadable resources CTA has provided for *Precious and Dearly Loved*. You can download the theme art and add it to all your publicity. Just visit the Resource & Idea Center at www.CTAinc.com/FREE.
- **Program**. This may involve coordination of a guest speaker, if appropriate in your case; 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. To thank the leaders, you may consider packing the *Precious and Dearly Loved* tote bag with a variety of gifts—a ceramic mug or travel mug, manicure set, notepad and pen set, wristlet, and cell phone power bank. You may also consider giving retreat speakers a small gift like the *Precious and Dearly Loved* spa gift set. See the items on page 6, your CTA catalog, or the CTA website at www.CTAinc.com for details.
- **Mission Project**. Plan to publicize your project several weeks before the retreat. Consider coordinating it with your theme. For example, *Precious and Dearly Loved* encourages participants to delight in the blessings and promises that come from living as precious, dearly loved children of our heavenly Father. Your group could share our Savior's love with children who need it most—sewing blankets, collecting toys, or making care packages for children in the hospital; holding a diaper drive; donating formula and baby food to a homeless shelter; or collecting children's books for the local library.
- **Entertainment**. This may include creating skits, rounding up board games, enlisting the talents of a massage therapist or manicurist, or contributing other ideas for lighthearted activities. (See "Time for Friends and Fun" on pages 10–11 for more details.)
- **Leadership** for craft or project activities, mealtimes, and devotions. You will also need one go-to person who is willing to oversee the details listed above and answer questions as they arise from volunteer workers and potential registrants.

Goodies and Retreat Favors

The Hospitality Committee should order one devotion book from *Precious and Dearly Loved* for each participant. It's available in both ESV and KJV (see your CTA catalog or www.CTAinc.com for details). **Everyone who attends will need a copy of the devotion book. The content is integral to the program and discussion.** Everyone will also need a *Precious and Dearly Loved* bookmark and pen set. These will be useful at the retreat and will provide a keep-sake reminder of your event for many years to come.

In addition, the Hospitality Committee should create a "goodie bag" of inexpensive, themed gifts for each person attending. A gracious benefactor might want to pick up the cost. Otherwise, build the expense into the retreat fee. (See the Retreat Budget Spreadsheet in the Resource & Idea Center at www.CTAinc.com/FREE for help as you plan.) CTA offers a number of *Precious and Dearly Loved* themed products appropriate for this purpose:





• Travel Mug
PDL18MG



• Jumbo Bookmark
PDL18JBK



• Car Air Freshener
PDL18AR



• Gift Bag with Tag
PDL18GB



• Notepad & Pen Set
PDL18PP



• Manicure Set
PDL18MS



• Spa Gift Set
PDL18GBX



• Cell Phone Power Bank
PDL18TL



• Wristlet with Booklet
PDL18WR



• Ceramic Mug with Gift Box
PDL18CMB



• Tote Bag
PDL18TB

- Customizable mug <240307053>, compact mirror <170507054>, and cosmetic bag <290507055> from Custom Connections (visit www.CTAinc.com/CustomConnections)

All items are value priced and fit with almost any budget! If you have a limited budget, consider offering two or three gift sets as door prizes instead of giving goodie bags to all participants. You could draw names, tape a note under "winning chairs" or a "winning lunch tray," or award prizes to several people based on "personal statistics" like the person who traveled the farthest to attend, the person whose suitcase is longest or widest or most likely to burst, or the person whose birthday is the closest, and the like.

Another idea is simply to arrange a variety of themed gifts on each table, perhaps in pretty baskets, and invite the women to choose one or two items they would especially like to take home.

Planning for Small-Group Session

Starting on page 18, you'll find a participant discussion guide for each of the retreat sessions. You will need to make copies of the discussion guides for each participant. Although copies are designed in full color, don't worry if you have only a black and white copier—they'll still look inviting.

Throughout the five participant discussion guides, you'll find Bible references without the verses printed out. There are two reasons for this. First, it saves space in our design (and paper for you when you print them out); second, it allows the guides to work seamlessly for you regardless of what Bible translation your participants are reading. Simply ask participants to bring their own Bibles or Bible phone apps along with them, and discussions should move smoothly.

Remember, each participant will also need a pen, bookmark, and copy of the devotion book *Precious and Dearly Loved*.

When you're ready to begin the first session, invite participants to form small groups (3–6 participants per group). Group formation may be random (for example, assign group numbers on a first-come, first-served basis as participants arrive at the registration table). Or, you might let participants form their own groups or consider assigning participants to groups based on preexisting friendships. In any case, make sure that guests who have come by themselves are welcomed into an appropriate group.

As each session begins, someone in retreat leadership should distribute the discussion guides for that session, help form or reorganize the small groups as necessary, and call attention to the "time budget" for completing the activities as suggested in each discussion guide.

Each small group will need a discussion leader to guide the group through the questions and keep track of the time. Other group members carry responsibility for listening carefully to one another's comments and adding thoughtful, helpful responses themselves. Be sure to point out that the discussion leader is not the "teacher." Everyone needs to work together to make each session spiritually worthwhile and personally meaningful. Invite all group members to share this responsibility, taking turns from session to session. Or designate small-group discussion leaders ahead of time, checking in with each of them to make sure they are willing to serve in this way.

When time allotted for each session has expired, you should call for everyone's attention; ask for insights, comments, or questions; and respond appropriately. If you have a leader whose insights and Biblical knowledge the participants will respect, and if that person feels comfortable leading discussion without prior preparation, consider letting her preside over all 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 relief 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.

Icebreakers

To help everyone get acquainted and energized, consider starting the retreat with an icebreaker or two. Here are some possibilities. You may find more online by searching for "Christian Retreat Icebreaker Games."

Secret Identity

Invite participants to write five things about themselves on a note card. Collect all the note cards and shuffle them. Then, draw a card and read it aloud to the group. The participants can guess who wrote the card. Whoever guesses correctly picks another note card and reads it to the group. Continue like this until all of the cards are gone.



Trading Places

No equipment or advance preparation is needed for this activity. If your group is large, split up to form groups of about 10. Sit in a circle and ask each person, in turn, to name who she would be if she could be somebody else. Ask each woman to describe the reason behind her choice, too.

What's in Your Purse?

Before the retreat, make a list of items the participants may have in their purses and assign a point value to each. Unexpected items should be worth more points. For example, a wallet might be one point and a passport would be 10 points. Your list could include items like a picture of a husband or boyfriend, gum, a kid's toy, stamps, sunglasses, a tape measure, and the like. (You can also find premade lists with a simple Internet search.)

During the game, have each woman unpack her purse and tally up her score. Then, as you go around the room to see who has the most points, ask each woman to identify the funniest or most uncommon item in her bag. You can learn a lot about each other this way!

Session 1: Positively Precious

Small-group discussion (45–60 minutes)

Each person needs . . .

- A copy of the discussion page (page 18)
- A Bible or Bible app
- A copy of *Precious and Dearly Loved* devotion book
- A *Precious and Dearly Loved* pen and bookmark set



If you have preassigned small groups, announce them and ask participants to gather in those groups. Or give participants freedom to form their own groups, with three to six women in each.

As you begin this session, distribute the devotion books and the *Precious and Dearly Loved* pen and bookmark sets. Participants will use the pens to jot down responses to the questions in their discussions. They can use the bookmarks during the conversation to mark Bible passages they find especially helpful or comforting.

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. Each session, a different person will serve as leader.

Remind participants of the importance of confidentiality and ask that they commit to keeping comments made in their groups confidential. Also ask that participants refrain from giving advice unless they are asked for it.

When there are about five minutes left in the session, you should note this for the whole group. When time has fully expired, call for everyone's attention. Ask for insights, comments, or questions and respond appropriately.

Session 2: Lavishly Loved

Small-group discussion (45–60 minutes)

Each person needs . . .

- A copy of the discussion page (page 19)
- A Bible or Bible app
- A copy of *Precious and Dearly Loved* devotion book
- A *Precious and Dearly Loved* pen and bookmark set



Have participants sit close to the others in their small group as they did for Session 1. If you did not preassign leaders, ask the groups to choose a new leader. Remind everyone that this person is not the teacher. During each session of the retreat, a different person will serve as leader to keep the conversation flowing and to track the time.

Tell the small-group leaders they may begin the discussion, based on the handout for Session 2, when the members of their group are ready.

Again, remind participants of the importance of confidentiality and ask that they commit to keeping comments made in their groups confidential. Also ask that participants refrain from giving advice unless they are asked for it.

When about five minutes of the session remain, you should note this for the whole group. When time has fully expired, call for everyone's attention. Ask for insights, comments, or questions and respond appropriately.

Evening Devotion

Whole-group session (15 minutes)

Reconfigure chairs, if necessary, for the group devotion time. Before you begin, you may want to distribute take-home gifts or draw for door prizes.

If possible, find a way to include praise music, hymns, or other music your group will find meaningful during devotional times. Group singing will especially enhance your time of worship. Ideally, a praise team, guitarist, or pianist will provide accompaniment. However, many groups will do just fine with a CD player or a smartphone and speakers. Have the songs you plan to use cued up ahead of time. Make sure everyone has access to the words you will sing.

For the devotion, a retreat leader can use the free Ministry Message "Precious and Dearly Loved," found at www.CTAinc.com/FREE. (Click on **Ministry**, then **Women's Ministry**.)

Time for Friends and Fun

After the evening devotion, encourage the women with the words of Proverbs 17:22. God wants us to be cheerful and full of joy in his name! It's good for us! Our fellowship with one another strengthens our faith and renews our spirits. With that in mind, invite everyone to spend the rest of the evening relaxing and enjoying the planned activities. Call the Entertainment Committee forward, turn them loose, and let the fun begin!

Depending on the facilities available to you, the setting of your retreat, the time of year, the weather outside, and the group members' interests and abilities, you may wish to offer options like these:

- Shoulder massages, pedicures, manicures, or other spa treatments
- Skits, a talent show, or karaoke
- Baking cakes or decorating cupcakes, followed by a recipe exchange
- Movie night with ice cream sundaes
- Hiking, biking, aerobics, volleyball, badminton, softball
- Board games
- A CD or DVD that will guide the group in relaxing (Type "Christian relaxation" into your Internet search engine.)
- A mission presentation or project, especially one tied to the *Precious and Dearly Loved* theme and the mission you have adopted for this retreat
- A Christian life coach, therapist, or other type of speaker equipped to share tips on communication, relationship building, or other topics of women's interest

Breakfast

If all or most participants arrive for breakfast at the same time, a leader may want to ask the group to join in prayer, thanking God for the meal. An impromptu prayer of thanks would be appropriate, or use a prayer you may have found online or in a devotion book.

As breakfast is wrapping up, remind participants to bring a Bible, their copy of *Precious and Dearly Loved*, their pens, and their bookmarks to today's sessions.

Session 3: Perfectly Protected

Small-group discussion (45–60 minutes)

Each person needs:

- A copy of the discussion pages (pages 20–21)
- A Bible or Bible app
- A copy of *Precious and Dearly Loved* devotion book
- A *Precious and Dearly Loved* pen and bookmark set



Use the same small groups you formed last evening, adjusting as needed for latecomers and those who may have left early.

Once more, remind participants of the importance of confidentiality and ask that they commit to keeping comments made in their groups confidential. Also ask that participants refrain from giving advice unless they are asked for it.

When about five minutes of the session remain, you should note this for the whole group. When time has fully expired, call for everyone's attention. Ask for insights, comments, or questions and respond appropriately.

Food and Friendship

Set aside 30 minutes or so for snacks and social time. Encourage participants to explore the facility in which you are meeting. They may visit the bookstore, library, or chapel if one is available; take a walk with a friend; or simply sit and chat. Linger longer, if time is available.

Reflection and Prayer

Individual activity (60 minutes)

Each person needs:

- A copy of the handout from page 22 of this guide
- Paper to jot down ideas, draw, journal, write letters, or make prayer lists

After the midmorning snack has been cleared away, distribute the participant handout from page 22 in this guide and explain the individual reflection activity, following these main points:

- The next 60 minutes belong to each participant individually and to Jesus.
- Participants should use their time in any way they believe will draw them closer to Christ.
- The ideas on the sheet are only suggestions; if participants have a better idea, they are welcome to use it. Participants know themselves and what they need. They should feel free to trust the promptings of the Holy Spirit and their own instincts.

- If they begin an activity that doesn't seem to work for them, encourage them not to abandon it immediately. However, if after 7–8 minutes it still does not feel comfortable, encourage them to try a different approach.

Lunch

One of the retreat leaders should invite group members to join in prayer, thanking God for the meal. An impromptu prayer would be appropriate, or use a prayer you may have found online or in a devotion book.

Session 4: Continually Kept

Small-group discussion (45–60 minutes)

Each person needs:

- A copy of the discussion pages (pages 23–24)
- A Bible or Bible app
- A copy of *Precious and Dearly Loved* devotion book
- A *Precious and Dearly Loved* pen and bookmark set



If you did not preassign leaders, ask the groups to choose a new one. Remind everyone that this person is not the teacher, but will serve as a facilitator.

Once more, remind participants of the importance of confidentiality and ask that they commit to keeping comments made in their groups confidential. Also ask that participants refrain from giving advice unless they are asked for it.

When about five minutes of the session remain, you should note this for the whole group. When time has fully expired, call for everyone's attention. Ask for insights, comments, or questions and respond appropriately.

Session 5: Enthusiastically Empowered

Small-group discussion (45–60 minutes)

Each person needs:

- A copy of the discussion page (page 25)
- A Bible or Bible app
- A copy of *Precious and Dearly Loved* devotion book
- A *Precious and Dearly Loved* pen and bookmark set



If you did not preassign leaders, ask the groups to choose a leader, reminding them to share leadership and restating the idea that this person is not the teacher.

One last time, remind participants of the importance of confidentiality and ask that they commit to keeping comments made in their groups confidential. Also ask that participants refrain from giving advice unless they are asked for it.

When about five minutes of the session remain, you should note this for the whole group. When time has fully expired, call for everyone's attention. Ask for insights, comments, or questions and respond appropriately.

Break

Plan a 15–30 minute break midway through the afternoon. Consider repeating the options you offered during this morning's snack time. Those who will lead the closing worship can use this intermission to rearrange chairs and set up instruments, if necessary.

If you will use song sheets or hymnals during the worship time, distribute them as participants reenter the room. Or prepare the slides you will project with words to the hymns or songs you will use. (Note that you might want to use art from the free PowerPoint presentation CTA has made available for *Precious and Dearly Loved* found at www.CTAinc.com/FREE.)

Closing Devotion

Whole-group session (15–20 minutes)

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

Then invite everyone to listen as you read page 63 in *Precious and Dearly Loved*, stopping before reading the prayer in the final paragraph. Give participants a few minutes to think about it and jot down notes in response to the question: **As you leave this retreat setting, what do you most want to remember upon returning home? What will you want to remind yourself of next week or next month?** Encourage participants to choose something that will remind them of their calling as precious and dearly loved daughters of our King.

After everyone has had time to write, ask volunteers to share what they have written. You might plan a few responses ahead of time and offer them first to get the discussion started. When other participants begin to volunteer, be sure to thank each person for her comments.

After several volunteers have shared, repeat a worship chorus or hymn the group knows well and can sing with heartfelt adoration.

Then pray the prayer in the final paragraph of page 63 in *Precious and Dearly Loved* and speak the words of 2 Corinthians 13:14 to bless the group.

Thank participants for coming and share any necessary housekeeping reminders.

Sample Retreat Schedule—Precious and Dearly Loved

Sample Retreat Schedule—Precious and Dearly Loved

(Note: Adapt this schedule to your time frame and location. Then print a copy for each retreat participant.)

Friday

- 6:30 p.m. Arrival, unpacking, relaxing
- 7:00 p.m. Icebreakers
- 7:15 p.m. Session 1: Positively Precious (small-group discussion)
- 8:00 p.m. Break
- 8:15 p.m. Session 2: Lavishly Loved (small-group discussion)
- 9:00 p.m. Evening Devotion (whole-group session)
- 9:15 p.m. Time for Friends and Fun (whole-group or small-group activities)

Saturday Morning

- 8:30 a.m. Breakfast
- 9:30 a.m. Session 3: Perfectly Protected (small-group discussion)
- 10:30 a.m. Food & Fellowship
- 11:00 a.m. Reflection and Prayer (individual activity)
- Noon Lunch

Saturday Afternoon

- 1:15 p.m. Session 4: Continually Kept (small-group discussion)
- 2:15 p.m. Break
- 2:45 p.m. Session 5: Enthusiastically Empowered (small-group discussion)
- 3:45 p.m. Break
- 4:00 p.m. Closing Worship (whole-group session)
- 4:15 p.m. Departure





Session 1: Positively Precious

1. *About 10 minutes* Tell the group about a special gift you've received or a memento you have kept over the years—something that may not look like much to somebody else, but it means the world to you.
 - What were the circumstances when you received it?
 - What memories does it spark?
 - What makes it so valuable to you?
 2. *About 10 minutes* Read the devotion "Most Precious" from pages 8–9 in *Precious and Dearly Loved*. Or, follow along as a volunteer from your group reads it slowly and thoughtfully aloud.
 - As a group, list two or three main points from the devotion.
 - In the main verse, Exodus 19:4–5, God refers to caring for the Israelites. Read the last paragraph of the devotion. Talk about the people and situations that tried to separate God's people from his care.
 - One (huge!) stumbling block for the Israelites was their sin and rebellion. They built a golden calf and worshipped it. They failed to trust in God's provision. They rejected Moses time after time. And, their grumbling was nonstop! In the face of this, why did God continue to love and care for them?
 3. *About 15 minutes* At times, even individuals with the strongest faith question their value in God's eyes. We ask ourselves, "Have I gone too far this time? Will he stop caring for me?"
 - Tell about a recent situation that made you think, "I'm just not good enough." (Share only what you can share comfortably.)
 - Does your rebellion and sin ever cause you to question your value in God's eyes? Why do you suppose guilt often creates these kinds of questions?
 - Which less-than-desirable traits would you most like to hide from God? (*Share only as much as you are comfortable sharing.*)
 4. *About 10 minutes* In reality, how does God see you? As a dearly redeemed child and a treasured possession! Why does he see you that way? Because of Jesus! Look up the following Bible verses to learn about some of the other traits and characteristics that our Savior sees in you. Then, pause to ponder what all of this means. What comfort do you have in knowing all of your sins are covered by the righteousness of Jesus?
 - Isaiah 1:18
 - Romans 8:14–17
 - 2 Corinthians 5:17
 - Colossians 1:21–22
 - Hebrews 10:14
 5. *About 5 minutes* You know that because of Jesus, you are God's treasured possession. As Paul writes, "The God of love and peace shall be with you" (2 Corinthians 13:11). How does that affect how you see and serve others?
 6. *Closing:* Silently, reread the Bible verse on page 8 and the last paragraph of the devotion. Then, in the space below, write an ending to the prayer starter printed at the bottom of page 9. When you finish, pray your prayer individually, remembering that God is glad to hear the prayers of his dearly loved children.
-
-
-



Session 2: Lavishly Loved

1. *About 10 minutes* Take turns describing the person in your life whom you love the most. It could be your mother, spouse, child, or best friend. There are no right or wrong answers.
 - Why do you have such a deep love for this person?
 - How does this love affect you? Have you ever loved so much it hurt? screamed because you knew the person was making the wrong choice? cried because you loved the person so much?
 - How far does your love go? Tell about a time when you went above and beyond for the person you love.
2. *About 25 minutes* Silently read the devotion “Lavish Dimensions of God’s Love” from pages 20–21 in *Precious and Dearly Loved*. Or listen as a volunteer from your group reads it slowly and thoughtfully aloud. When you’re finished reading, focus on the main Bible verse, Ephesians 3:14–19.
 - What are the four dimensions of God’s love for us? Take a moment and consider the size of that love. As the author says, it’s mind blowing!
 - Think back to your opening discussion about the love you have for others. How does that compare to God’s love for you? You go to great lengths for those you love, but consider how far God went for you in sending his Son, Jesus, to be your great Redeemer. In what other ways does his love trump our love? What words would you use to describe his love?
 - In these verses, Paul mentions the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. They are all at work in our lives, bringing us the love of God. List the actions and qualities of each as described in this passage.
 - What does it mean to be “rooted and grounded in love”? How does that show up in your life?
3. *About 5 minutes* 1 John 4:19 says we love “because he first loved us.” Imagine your life without your heavenly Father. If you didn’t know him, how would it impact your love for others?
4. *About 10 minutes* Even though we know God and trust in Jesus as our Savior, our human minds still cannot fully grasp the fullness of God’s love for us.
 - Think back on your life. Tell about a time when you thought you knew all about God’s love. To what new lengths did he go to show you even more about what his love is like? Were you surprised by the depth of his love? Explain and share your thoughts with the group.
 - Tell about the things that build you up in God’s love and help you come to a richer understanding of that love. Think about things like daily devotions, listening to praise music, or . . .

Closing: Grab a partner and reread the last paragraph of the devotion together. Then, read the prayer starter and go to your God in prayer. Praise him for the width, length, height, and depth of his great love, a love that he pours out to you through his Son and the Holy Spirit.



Session 3: Perfectly Protected

1. *About 10 minutes* Have you ever lived a day without worry? Probably not. Fear and anxiety are part of every woman's life. Take a moment to jot down five of your worries and share with the group, if you feel comfortable.

- After listening to each woman in the group, point out some specific fears that were mentioned more than once. Why do you think those fears are so common?
 - How do you try to control or avoid your fears? Do your methods work?
 - Have you ever successfully overcome a fear? Explain.
2. *About 15 minutes* Silently read the devotion "Protected and Worry-Free" from pages 34–35 in *Precious and Dearly Loved*. Or listen as a volunteer from your group reads it slowly and thoughtfully aloud.
 - Imagine Maggie beyond this devotion. What is her life like? How do you imagine her interactions with friends and family? What about her faith life?
 - In this fictional life, it seems that Maggie is paralyzed by her fears. If you'd like to share, tell about a time when you felt the same way. How did the fear manifest itself in your life—trouble sleeping, ulcers, depression? If your fears made you powerless, then who or what was holding the power?
 - Does fear serve a purpose in your life? Is there "good" fear and "bad" fear? Explain.
 3. *About 20 minutes* In Psalm 27, David shows that he has a lot of worries on his mind—enemy armies, rejection, abandonment, eternal life. But, in sharp contrast to his fears, he knows that God provides a sanctuary. Read the psalm as a group with each woman reading two or three verses as each of you feels comfortable. Then, consider how David's words of fear and comfort apply in your life.
 - Think of just three words you could use to summarize how David approaches his fears. Compare those words to the words you used to describe Maggie earlier in this session.
 - In the first verse, David describes "my light" and "my salvation." God sent Jesus to be *your* Savior. He died on the cross for *you* because he loves *you*. He promises *you* never-ending grace, mercy, and eternal life in heaven. How does this give you hope in the face of fear? Does being reminded of this personal, intimate relationship with your Savior take any of your fears away? What fears remain?
 - Go back to the list of fears you made at the beginning of this session. Read them one more time and then, next to each fear, write down one of God's "fear antidotes" listed in Psalm 27. God had the answer to David's fear—he didn't remove all of his obstacles, but he provided faith, hope, and comfort in times of trouble. Your Savior offers the same saving comfort to you today.
 - Do you fear your children being kidnapped? Read Psalm 27:5. God is with them wherever they are. He will set them out of reach on a high rock.
 - Do you fear being alone? Read Psalm 27:10. You have God's promise that he will hold you close.

- Do you fear cancer will cut your earthly life short? Read Psalm 27:4. Even if it does, you will live in heaven eternally with Jesus.
- Read the final verse of Psalm 27. David says that we should wait on the Lord. Easier said than done, right? In what ways—short-term and long-term—does God seek to protect you from fear? Do you ever doubt or reject this protection? Explain.

4. *About 5 minutes* When you stand up to the fear that Satan puts in your heart, what do you get?

- In your mind, what is the opposite of fear? Explain.
- In your life today, what percentage of your time do you spend in the darkness of fear? What percentage do you spend confidently trusting God? What changes can you make so that you spend more time standing in the light of Jesus?

Closing: As you prepare to close this session, write a one-sentence ending to the prayer starter at the bottom of page 35. When everyone is ready, tighten up your circle so you can all hear one another and pray together. Move around the circle from person to person, each adding the one-sentence ending she has written. The last person to pray may add an amen.



Reflection and Prayer

60 minutes individually

The next 60 minutes belong to you and the Lord, who calls you his precious and dearly loved daughter today and every day. Use the time available in whatever way(s) you believe will draw you closer to Jesus. The suggestions below are just that—suggestions. Feel free to use one, two, all, or none of them.

If you have a better idea, use it instead. You know yourself. You know what you need. Trust the instincts of your heart and your Savior's direction. If you start down one path and find it's just not working, stop and try a different activity. In short, enjoy your freedom in Jesus. This is your time to be alone with your Lord. Make the most of it!

- Take a prayer walk—indoors or out. If a chapel is available at the retreat center, consider spending time in the stillness there. Be sure to have your *Precious and Dearly Loved* devotion book with you. Use the Scriptures in it to shape your thoughts and prayers.
- Refer to one or more of the readings from *Precious and Dearly Loved*. Journal and pray about them. Write out key Scripture verses, considering each individual word in each verse. Listen to the truths the Holy Spirit is impressing on your heart. Respond to the Lord's words of challenge and his words of promise as you write out your response.
- Illustrate your faith. Dive deeper into one or more of the ideas you've encountered so far during this retreat and create an artistic expression of it. Draw a few sketches or create a mini poster to remind you how God's love is at work in your life.
- Write a letter or jot notes for yourself as you meditate on the lyrics of a hymn or popular Christian song that focuses on the love of God for you in Christ Jesus.



Session 4: Continually Kept

1. *About 5 minutes* How well do you remember events of the past? Next to each item listed below, write the year (and day, if you remember) it happened. When you're finished, share a vivid memory from one of these events with the group.
 - Your first sleepover party
 - Your first breakup
 - Your high school graduation
 - The day you moved out of your parents' house
 - Your most memorable romantic date
 - Your worst fight with a friend
 - Your first promotion at work
2. *About 20 minutes* Silently read the devotion "No Collection Record" from pages 46–47 in *Precious and Dearly Loved*. Or listen as a volunteer from your group reads it slowly and thoughtfully aloud.
 - What new insights do you glean as you listen? Together with your group, list them.
 - Sometimes, seemingly small wrongs hurt us deeply. A comment from a stranger at the grocery store, the first-date anniversary your husband forgets, or the angry words from your three-year-old—talk with your group about the small things that really get to you. Why do things like this hurt so badly?
 - Why do we hold on to the ways others have hurt us in the past? Talk to your group about potential reasons and offer specific instances from your past, if you feel comfortable.
 - We get hurt deeply and often keep a record of wrongs, but what is different about God's reaction to our sins? Is he hurt by our sins—the big ones or the little ones?
3. *About 10 minutes* Read Ephesians 2:8–9 together as a group. Grace! What a wonderful gift of God to know that we are saved by his undeserved favor toward us in Christ, and not by our works. God keeps no checklist of successes or failures, good deeds or sins. When it comes to your salvation, he looks only to the perfect life Jesus lived and the death he died on the cross for you.
 - What does this reassurance of grace mean for your feelings of guilt? What does it mean for your feelings of sinful pride?
 - Without the grace of God and faith in his promises, what would your life be like? Have you ever tried to live that way? Explain.
 - God doesn't keep a record of wrongs and our good deeds cannot win salvation, so are we free to live however we choose? In other words, is there a point to how we live our lives?
4. *About 15 minutes* The end of the devotion focused on Colossians 3:12–13. Go back and read it now.
 - This verse instructs us to forgive each other just like God has forgiven us for Jesus' sake. What stands in the way of us more freely forgiving those who hurt us? What makes forgiveness difficult? What could make it easier?
 - We are "holy and beloved" (verse 12). Does knowing this change how you live your life? Does it change how you respond to the wrongs of others and the hurt they cause? In what ways?
 - This passage describes a new lifestyle that is ours because of our Savior's gift of forgiveness. List the qualities

of this forgiven-and-free lifestyle that are described in the Bible verse and add a few ideas of your own, too. What is the most difficult part of this lifestyle for you?

5. *About 5 minutes* On your own, think about the records of wrong you are keeping and the grudges you hold deep in your heart. What would it take for you to let go and forgive?

Closing: Silently, reread the last paragraph of the devotion. Then, in the space below, write an ending to the prayer starter printed at the bottom of page 47. When you finish, pray your prayer individually, remembering that the Holy Spirit is at work in your heart creating peace and joy.

Session 5: Enthusiastically Empowered

1. *About 10 minutes* Invite each woman in your small group to tell about a recent victory or accomplishment. This could be anything from getting caught up on laundry to tutoring her teenager though geometry to running a marathon. Talk about the struggles you had to overcome and share why your accomplishment meant so much to you.
2. *About 20 minutes* Silently read the devotion “Enthusiastically Run” from pages 58–59 in *Precious and Dearly Loved*. Or listen as a volunteer from your group reads it slowly and thoughtfully aloud.
 - Wow! What did you think about Diana Nyad’s story? Share your thoughts with the group.
 - The main Bible verse of this devotion is Hebrews 12:1–2. Reread the verses with your group. What do they mean?
 - When your endurance fades, how do you cope? What are some of the crutches you use to hold yourself up?
 - Jesus has overcome the world and all of its struggles! We have victory through him! What are the most important benefits that come with this victory?
 - Jesus had to die in order to ensure victory for us. That sounds counterintuitive to most nonbelievers. How might you explain his sacrifice in the simplest terms?
4. *About 5 minutes* We share our Savior’s victory with all believers. We can celebrate together! What is your favorite way to support and encourage other believers? What is the best way other Christians can support you in the race?
5. *About 10 minutes* Many times, situations seemingly end in failure and defeat. Diana Nyad actually attempted to swim from Cuba to Key West, Florida, four times before she succeeded on her fifth try.
 - Consider people in the Bible who faced defeat but gained victory through God’s plan of salvation in Jesus. Briefly discuss the following with your group:
 - Rebecca was barren.
 - Paul spent years in prison.
 - Peter denied Jesus three times.
 - Daniel was thrown into a den of lions.
 - Jonah was swallowed by a giant fish.
 - In the face of defeat, what is your hope? That God would take the situation out of your hands? That he would give you wisdom to overcome defeat? That he would use defeat to teach you? Or . . . ?
 - In the final Scripture verse of the devotion, we read about the “crown of righteousness” we will receive from God in heaven. What sustains you as you wait to receive that crown? What’s your motivation to keep going in the face of failure and defeat? Explain.

Closing: God is at work within your life right now—Jesus’ victory is yours every day! With that love in mind, use the prayer starter at the bottom of page 59. Pray individually or with a partner.

[illegible]