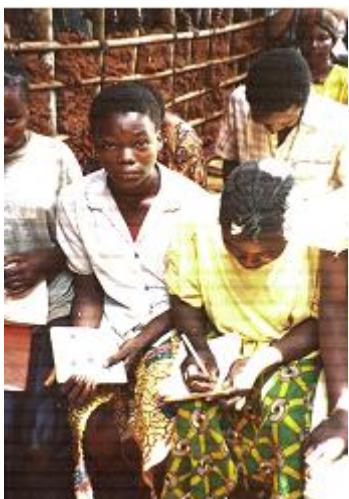

Bible courses for women¹

By Hanni Gruenig

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Getting people to read the Bible is one of the main goals of our work. But how to start women reading their Bibles when they have never done it before? And not only read but also understand and put it into practice in their lives?

In many countries in Africa, personal devotions are not common. Most people go to church and listen to what they hear there. I observed that many women who go to church regularly are not aware that the Bible gives answers to daily life questions, such as our relationships with others, how to handle money or how to become a happy wife and mother.



Working in a literacy project as a development specialist focusing on women's work, I had been looking for suitable Bible teaching material. I found it last year in Togo from the Association of Women for Literacy, Health and Economic Development (Association des Femmes pour l'Alphabétisation, Santé et les Activités Génératrices—AFASA). They translated an English Bible course into French. This course had already been successfully used in Ghana in several languages.

The course has topics that particularly interest women. It has twelve chapters each, treating themes such as "The happy woman," "The woman you have always wanted to be," "The creative housewife," "The praying woman," and many others. We used this course during three workshops (health and sewing), which were attended by women who had completed the literacy program.

To take this course each person needs to be able to read and write. The leader needs to be well prepared. She leads the discussion on each chapter, using a series of questions that are to be answered by reading Bible passages.

The women liked this course, and we had good responses. One woman became a Christian when she realized while studying this course that being a Christian does not mean going to church and doing good works. Instead she discovered that you can have a personal relationship with the Lord who forgives our sins. Another woman had become a Christian through the

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literacy program (the teacher gave devotionals before starting each class) and for her this course was a time where she got to know the Lord better. One pastor said when he heard about this course, "This is wonderful, now we will get better leaders in our churches. May God bless this work!"

We are also using this course in a Bible study group with Congolese women who are refugees in this country (Central African Republic). Recently one of these women was reading Philippians 2, 3 and 4. She stopped reading and said, "Impossible, this is impossible! ... The passage says that we should not do anything out of selfish ambition, but in humility, consider others better than ourselves. I can't do that!" She hadn't heard this passage before and became aware that she had a big problem in this area. She didn't even have a Bible at home. After the study she bought one and has now started reading it.

We would like to see this course being used on a wider level, in women groups, house groups, etc. A teacher's guide also exists in English but has not yet been translated into French.

Reference for Bible course:

"Le défi d'être une femme, et le ministère de femmes" by Alice Painter and Florence Yeboah; 1988 : Ghana.