

# Out of Sight but Not Out of Mine

Bible Study • Leader's Guide

*Please provide a copy of this study, a Bible, and a hymnal for each participant.*

I was asked to write this study because I teach a class on becoming a volunteer respite caregiver. I wanted my dear sisters in Christ to look beyond the people on the church's prayer and shut-in list to see the other members behind the scenes who care for these people. I wanted them to see people in need in their communities.

Then, God put me in the crisis hopper when my husband had a detached retina. As I write this Bible study, my husband and I are primarily homebound, and I am a full-time caregiver. While I am thankful that this is only temporary, I now can relate on a deeper level to those who are caregiving and care-receiving. This Bible study helps us dig deeper into the Word to find our calling as the Body of Christ and to serve as a reminder that **all** Christians are included in this Body, whether they are gathered in one place or scattered in many homes.

It is easy to feel the unity of the Body of Christ when we worship together. In this Bible study, we will look at how to encourage unity when some members of the Body are isolated. If your church is like most, you will have several people listed as homebound. Often it is more than just one person who is being tied down in that home! Have you thought about those who are the caregivers to these people living at home? List all the women you know who were once active at church and now are isolated at home either caring for themselves or for a loved one. Keep these people in mind throughout this study.

**Opening prayer:** Father, as Jesus has bound us to You through His death and resurrection, open our eyes to have the kind of relationship with each other, as You desire us to have with You. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Read Ephesians 4:4–6.

**List all the phrases that start with the word “one.”**

**One body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one Baptism, one God and Father. You might wish to note that there are seven of these and the number seven has been recognized in Scripture as a number standing for perfection or completeness.**

**From where do we have unity or oneness?**

**From the Trinity — the Father who sent His Son; our Lord Jesus Christ; and the Holy Spirit, the Sanctifier, who gives us faith.**

**What does that unity look like among the women gathered for this Bible study?**

**Although the women gathered may differ in backgrounds and life experience, all have a desire to grow in the knowledge of the Lord and to serve one another. Common purpose gives unity. We listen to each other's concerns and pray for each other, encourage each other, and provide caring activities to help each other. We can also celebrate each other when we make a meal for someone or throw a shower, etc.**

**How is the unity of this group extended to those missing from the Bible study?**

**This is a question to stretch the group, some of whom may have never thought of the other women in the church, or even the women in their group, who are absent. During my recent caregiving time, I had to change my role from a leader to a participant and even miss a few of our Zoom (or virtual) meetings. In our group there are many women who have had to miss for many reasons. We send out prayer requests during the week, and those who were absent add theirs to the ongoing thread. We actually text people during the beginning of our meeting to see if they are coming and check on their health and well-being. We have contacted the church care team and let them know that if anyone is isolated at home, they can join our group via Zoom because we plan to continue to include members by Zoom even when we can finally meet in person, after the COVID 19 restrictions have been lifted. Maybe some in the group might decide to form a care team and visit the homebound or those needing extra care.**

In his letters, Paul gives very practical advice on how the Body of Christ can maintain unity and purpose. I teach a course on volunteer caregiving. It is meant for the general public, and the curriculum includes how to give physical and emotional care. However, as Lutherans, we know that care must also include caring for the soul. We often relegate this care to the pastor, because he rightly brings the Sacraments to these people. However, in the following passages we will discover that all Christians have the responsibility to care for the needs of the whole person.

**Read Ephesians 4:1–6 again. What fruits of the Spirit are found in this passage? (Refer to Galatians 5:22–23 to see a list of the fruits of the Spirit.)**

**Humility, gentleness, patience, love, peace (Ephesians 4:2–4)  
*the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control;* (Galatians 5:22–23).**

**What does bearing with one another look like to you?**

**These answers will vary. For some, bearing with one another looks like being patient, loving, forgiving, overlooking mistakes, being agreeable, and not being critical of the person who annoys you. For others, it might look like being humble and serving someone who is in need. For another, it might be holding that person up through a crisis or being proactive to try and prevent problems.**

During my time of caregiving, my group did many things — they were patient with my response to emails and phone calls; they texted me Scripture and words like “stretch, breathe, relax;” they gave me grace when I had to miss a meeting; sent cards; offered to shop or to make meals.

Read Colossians 3:12–17.

**What similarities do you see to the Ephesians 4 passage?**

**Have compassion, kindness, humility, meekness (gentleness), and patience to bear with one another. “To bear with one another” is to put on the love which binds all the other fruit of the Spirit together in perfect unity.**

**What instructions does Paul give us as we bear each other’s burdens?**

**Have compassion, forgive as needed, love, and be thankful. Strive for peace which will keep the unity of Christ. Do everything in the name of Jesus. Love each other and use the Scriptures. Clothe ourselves in the above fruit by forgiving each other and loving each other. Be thankful, immerse ourselves in the Word of God, and do everything in the name of the Lord.**

**Paul specifically mentions music as a way to encourage one another. What music might you recommend to the caregiver and care-receiver?**

**There is so much out there. Encourage each person to list their favorite comfort song; examples could include Blest Be the Tie That Binds, Beautiful Savior, What a Friend We Have in Jesus, Jesus Loves Me, Great Is Thy Faithfulness, Peace Like a River, or Amazing Grace. It depends on what type of music is meaningful to the particular individual, but songs about God’s love, care, and faithfulness may be especially encouraging.**

What came to my mind right away is the old familiar hymn “Blest Be the Tie That Binds” (LSB 649). Sing or read the first verse. There are so many thoughts to explore.

**Read Romans 12:3–13. As members of the same body, what gifts do you have that you could share with those who are homebound — both the caregiver and the care-receiver?**

**Some can lead an online Bible study, while others could do a study with an individual who is homebound. One could use their gift of mercy and encouragement to send cards or Scripture bookmarks. Another could contribute material things such as meals, activities, or provide gift cards for the caregiver to have some respite activities. Becoming prayer partners or making prayer shawls are additional ways of showing care.**

**How could you further explore ways to use gifts in the Body of Christ to the glory of God?**

**<https://www.lwml.org/program-helps-creative-crafts>**

- **Participate in online Bible studies.**
- **Call others in their network of people with disabilities, and sing to them.**
- **Send care cards.**

- **Write Bible studies.** (I knew a woman who led Bible Studies her whole life, and when she could no longer go out, she wrote many of her studies for the next generation!)
- **Make and send bookmarks with Scripture verses on them.**
- **Become a prayer partner.**
- **Make prayer shawls.**

Finally, read 1 Peter 4:7–11.

**What is the ultimate goal of this mutual serving of each other, whether together or separately?**

**As we love one another earnestly, using our gifts, we give glory to God. As we spread grace, understanding, and love to be Jesus to others, we show Jesus to a world who does not know Him. Another way to put it would be to say, “God is glorified through Christ, and love is experienced as God’s grace is administered.”**

## **Applying What We Have Learned**

Most of us have learned how to “visit” during the separation stage of the COVID-19 pandemic. Let’s take those skills and continue to build community among people who are absent from the physical assembly of church and Bible study, using the fruits and gifts of the Holy Spirit.

List all the activities that were shared during the Bible study that could be done by both the people who are able to get together and those who are not. This Bible study could be done on a visit with someone! Pick one or two activities to implement during the next month.

**Sing or read:** “Blest Be the Tie That Binds” (LSB 649, verses 2 & 3).

**Closing prayer:** Father, thank You for using Scripture to open our eyes to the needs of our sisters in Christ, both those who are present physically and those who are present in spirit. Give us the wisdom and courage to continually seek to bear one another’s burdens in practical ways. Right now, we lift up (name those who were mentioned by your group) who are now in caregiving and care-receiving roles at home. Move us to reach out to them with the Word of Your presence and peace. We pray this in Jesus’ name. Amen.

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