

Let's Talk About Jesus

RELATIONAL BIBLE STUDY

- Types of Small Groups
- My Journey with Small Groups
- One Way to Study the Bible
- Who's in Charge?
- How To Use These Bible Study Prompts

OLD TESTAMENT

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|-------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1. Genesis 12:1-3 | Let's Go |
| 2. Exodus 17:8-16 | Hands Up |
| 3. Exodus 29:35-46 | Every Day |
| 4. Numbers 16:1-50 | Turnaround |
| 5. 1 Samuel 3:1-21 | Can You Hear Me Now? |
| 6. 1 Samuel 5:1-12 | When God is a Problem |
| 7. 1 Samuel 14:1-23 | Outnumbered |
| 8. 1 Samuel 16:1-13 | Take a Good Look |
| 9. 1 Samuel 18:5-30 | Winner |
| 10. 1 Kings 16:29-17:7 | In Your Face |
| 11. 1 Kings 18:1-39 | Showdown |
| 12. 2 Kings 11:11-12:12 | Child King |
| 13. Esther 1:1-2:20 | Talk About a Beauty! |
| 14. Psalm 46:1-11 | Refuge and Strength |
| 15. Psalm 111:1-10 | Awesome |
| 16. Proverbs 22:6 | Train Up a Child |
| 17. Hosea 2:2-23 | Expressions of Love |
| 18. Joel 2:12-32 | A Good Cry |
| 19. Amos 5:18-27 | Worship That Makes God Sick |
| 20. Obadiah 1:2-18 | Oh Brother |
| 21. Jonah 1:1-17 | Going Down |
| 22. Jonah 2:1-10 | The Prayer of Jonah |
| 23. Jonah 3:1-10 | You're Gonna Burn! |
| 24. Jonah 4:1-11 | Live or Die? |
| 25. Micah 6:1-7:13 | Cause and Effect |
| 26. Nahum 3:1-19 | No Chance |
| 27. Habakkuk 3:1-19 | Powerful Hope |
| 28. Zephaniah 3:17 | God |
| 29. Haggai 1:9-15 | More |
| 30. Zechariah 8:9-23 | Promised Blessings |

NEW TESTAMENT

- | | |
|--------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|
| 31. Matthew 7:1-6, 15-20 | Judge Not |
| 32. Matthew 13:3-9 | Good Dirt |
| 33. John 4:1-42 | Well Done |
| 34. Acts 9:1-31 | Surprise! |
| 35. Galatians 4:1-31 | Trust Babies |
| 36. Galatians 5:1-26 | Free Spirit |
| 37. Galatians 6:1-18 | Cast Your Bread
Upon the Waters, and . . . |
| 38. Ephesians 2:8-10 | Gifts and More Gifts |
| 39. Colossians 1:1-29 | Feeling It |
| 40. Colossians 2:1-23 | Complete |
| 41. Colossians 3:1-17 | Dressing Up |
| 42. Colossians 3:18-4:18 | How to Live |
| 43. 1 Timothy 6:6-10 | Stuff |
| 44. Hebrews 1:1-3 | God Talk |
| 45. Hebrews 4:12-16 | Superpower |
| 46. 1 John 3:1-24 | Godly Families |
| 47. 1 John 4:1-21 | Love, Love, Love |
| 48. 1 John 4:7-8, 20-21 | Love God; Love Others |
| 49. 1 John 5:1-21 | Knowing |
| 50. 2 John 1:1-13 | A Quick Word |
| 51. 3 John 1:1-15 | A Good Word |
| 52. Revelation 10:1-11 | Heavenly Message |

PRAYING TOGETHER

- Popcorn
- Conversational
- Prayer List
- Topical
- Wow, Thanks, Help, These
- God is Great!
- Listening
- Highs and Lows
- Push and Pull
- Personalize a Verse
- My Takeaway
- Putting Myself in the Story

Types of Small Groups

The term “small groups” can create dread or delight, probably depending on a person’s experience or reports from others. Not all small groups are the same. Here are a few factors to consider with small groups.

Open or Closed?

An open group means anyone can join at any time. Advantages to this include fresh infusions with new ideas and enthusiasm. Disadvantages come from having to start over in terms of group building and trust.

Short-Term or Long-Term?

Short-term groups may meet once a week for a month or two. This provides a terminal point for those who can’t be present week after week for months or years. The purpose of the group may be reached in a short time. In contrast, a long-term group may meet once a week for months or even years. Usually there are some “breaks” such as holidays or vacation periods, but the group resumes and builds on its history to go deeper and broader.

Homogeneous or Diverse?

Simply meeting together automatically means people share at least one thing in common—they are present at the same time and the same place for a gathering. Most people find it natural to join with other like-minded people, whether that’s to share gardening ideas, a sports outing, a business venture, spiritual growth, or any number of other things. Some people prefer sameness while others gravitate towards diversity. Will your group be composed of young adults or basketball fans or social activists or techies who have an interest in spiritual things, too? Is it a men’s group or a women’s group or a youth group? If you find the only thing you share in common with others is Jesus, is that enough?! What happens when that gets tested?

Believers or Unbelievers?

Small groups seem to be a staple item with some believers. Why would a person who doesn't believe in Jesus even attend a small group of believers? Perhaps curiosity or crisis or an invitation or boredom or searching or obligation would be enough to draw them into a small group. Some groups actively pursue unbelievers while others, purposely or by default, don't even think of doing so. Some churches select only "true believers" in the congregation to form a more serious small group. Others purposely reach out to those not in a faith community to join a small group.

Narrow or Broad Age Range?

Small groups with young children either need to target the needs of the children or separate for age-appropriate discussions. Adolescents often desire time with peers to dialogue, test ideas and practice interaction as they mature beyond parent-dependence. Youth groups crave this provided they have enough skill or facilitators to enable them to interact. Young adults typically have the skills but often lack the consistency to maintain small group involvement. Station in life and levels of maturity influence one's desire to meet in a small group, as do simple logistics such as when and where to meet.

With these opposite pairs of small group considerations in mind, here are five typical types of small groups based on their primary purpose. Each of these has "growth" as its primary objective, but the type of growth varies.

1. Evangelistic

Be proactive to invite people to come to the group. As the group increases in size, split it into two groups and continue to grow. In the process of the group experience, invite people to accept Jesus as their Savior. Keep one chair in the group open as a reminder that everyone should invite someone to come fill the seat. Small group leaders are chosen from those who have experienced the small group and move into leadership roles, hopefully with some training.

2. Study

This appeals to cognitively-oriented people, with a specific learning objective. Often a group like this will tackle a book of the Bible and seek better understanding by utilizing study tools and discussion. Bible marking, cross-referencing, and even worksheets might be incorporated. Those with academic training may be especially welcomed or unwelcomed in such settings. An “aha” moment comes when participants learn something new or deepen their current understanding.

3. Community

Members of large churches often sense a lack of intimacy because of the size of their congregation. Small groups enable them to have deeper and longer conversations with a handful of people rather than flitting from one person to another or sitting in a worship setting observing what takes place on the stage. Homes provide a warm atmosphere where a spiritual topic initiates discussions that invite participation from everyone. Interaction, sharing, going deeper, and feeling tone provide markers of success.

4. Spiritual

An inner connection with God can be considered the primary purpose for this type of small group. While other small groups could be spiritual in their intent, this one makes it the all-consuming passion. More time could be devoted to prayer and listening for God's voice. Music and other art forms may count as much as Scripture or other sacred writings. Others in the group aren't as vital as the sensation of God's presence, but they are present because of the same desire.

5. Leadership

Good leaders first of all must follow. Some small groups begin with a single leader who desires to train others to do likewise. The primary leader may be teaching how to lead a small group of one's own, how to lead one's family, or even how to lead in various church programs. Often a more-experienced person passes on the perspective and wisdom of experience so others can forge a similar path from this mentor. The small group may consist of a core group of leaders-in-training who will minister from this nucleus. Some may enjoy being included in this elite group without actually venturing out to lead.

What are the characteristics of your group? Is this working or would you do better to make some changes? Small groups that aren't intentional about their purpose or how they do their small group usually drift into a predictable pattern anyway. How about your small group?

My Journey with Small Groups

During my teen years, the students at the academy I attended experienced a religious revival. We chose to meet together each week to study the Bible and to pray. Sometimes we did it as a large group of 40-50 youth, but usually we broke into smaller groups so there could be more interaction.

I was one of the younger students who followed the lead of the upper classmen. We continued for several months until the emotional high dissipated and eventually we stopped meeting as a large or a small group.

In college I joined a small group for the school term and even led a small group two years. I learned a lot, but I'm not sure other people benefitted. Would I ever know enough to be an effective small group leader?

After graduation I had the opportunity to be a youth pastor in California. The youth experienced a revival in spite of my role as their youth pastor. I simply went along for the ride. I saw God do amazing things through the youth and other youth leaders. The supernatural element proved to be real and something I could not program or contain. But I could experience it. And so could others.

As a graduate student in the Seminary, all of us were placed into mandatory small groups. Both the faculty and the students seemed capable of stymying God or opening the doors for a fresh infusing of the Holy Spirit. But only God could do the supernatural. We served as conduits—open or closed—but not controllers.

My ministry with young people also tapped into small groups. It seemed that I was learning how to lead others in the small group experience, but I also needed to be part of a small group for my own spiritual growth beyond my job. So we began a small group with other young married couples and a few single people.

Lyman Coleman became my guru of small groups. His Serendipity materials seemed simple and yet effective. I attended some of his training sessions and learned more. He explained a process of beginning with a question or statement that would “level the playing field” instead of ranking individuals in the group based on their Biblical prowess or years of experience.

A question like “What is your favorite flavor of ice cream” or “who makes your lunch on most days” didn’t have right or wrong answers. Being a pastor didn’t give me an advantage. All of us were able to start at the same point in the Bible study. This brought the arrogant down and the humble moved up. Then everyone had something to offer and God was able to speak through whomever God chose instead of only those pre-ordained.

These days I travel a fair amount and attend my home church only about once a month. I lack the continuity to grow much with such infrequent participation. So my wife and I co-lead a small group in our house once a week. We meet for about 10 weeks and then take a break. After the first two weeks we ask people to commit to being in the group for the 10-week cycle so we can build some trust and intimacy. After 10 weeks we break so people in the group can take a breather, exit gracefully, invite others to join the next round. We usually take the summers off since schedules fluctuate so much then.

Others have told us of benefits they receive. Frankly, I do this for personal reasons—I need it. I need a small group for spiritual growth, honesty, accountability, and commitment. It seems that others have similar needs and are willing to invest to make this happen. We need each other; we need God. So we come together regularly and make ourselves available by putting ourselves on the line and being open to God’s Holy Spirit to speak to us and lead us to live for Him.

Who's in Charge?

It's too easy for a talkative, sanguine, loudly confident person to railroad over anyone and everyone, destroying openness and the foundation of safety for people to truly share. But accepting what anyone says anytime as authoritative denies discernment and holds small group members hostage to the most dysfunctional members of the group.

Small groups need some agreed upon source of authority. I look to Scripture and an active Holy Spirit for this. Most people with a Christian background easily accept Scripture as authoritative—at least for discussions. We typically take a book of the Bible and read through one chapter a week, expecting God to speak to us personally and individually. We share our responses and reactions and help each other clarify what God might be communicating to us during this shared group experience.

We also rely on an active Holy Spirit. The same Holy Spirit who inspired the Bible writers hundreds of years ago is necessary at the current time to bring understanding and inspiration as we read the sacred Scriptures today. We expect a fulfillment of the promise, “Where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them” Matthew 18:20 (NKJV).

Such reliance of God's Holy Spirit frightens those who want control. I'm frightened to attempt to engage in Scripture without an active Holy Spirit. While I have a bent to scholarly study, openness to God matters far more than education or experience or intelligence. Frequently young children communicate God's message more than adults simply because of their openness to God.

We ask God to be present through the Holy Spirit. And then we look and listen for messages from God through Scripture. This leads to discussion and prayer and listening for impressions from God. We make personal applications based on the convictions the Holy Spirit places on us. Instead of telling others what they should do, we ask others to support us in faithfully living out the convictions the Holy Spirit brought to us and that we confess to the group. This feeds our prayers during the week and sparks our conversations when we see each other again.


How to Use These Bible Study Prompts

These Bible study prompts aren't magical. They follow a fairly simple pattern.

1. **Ice breaker to level the playing field.** Start with the provided statement or question that calls for an honest response without positioning one person ahead of another. There's no need for human experts when those in the group rely on the Holy Spirit to bring current inspiration to the Scripture passage for the small group study.
2. **Read the passage of Scripture.** Do this out loud by reading a few verses and make your way around the circle until the passage has been read. Different versions are welcomed throughout the reading.
3. **Fill out your response(s) to the Scripture reading.** You'll find 5-6 multiple choice questions related to the passage of Scripture. Sometimes you'll want to circle more than one response. Each one has the option "Other" in case none of those offered hits the mark. You'll find 2-3 open-ended statement or discussions towards the end of the two pages. The questions on both sheets simply provide the fodder for the discussion in the small group. You have permission to make copies of the study for the other members of your small group, but not to sell to others. Some prefer to type up their own prompts by editing what they find here. You certainly

have permission to do that. And others just give people their own booklet. These are available at AdventSource.org

4. **Use the responses from the sheet as a springboard to discuss the passage of Scripture.** Go ahead and work through the questions one by one, or invite someone to select any one of the questions and read their response(s). Offer the opportunity to further explain why they chose that response. Invite others in the group to give their responses and explanations as well. When the discussion seems adequately complete for that question, move on to another one. Continue until you complete the questions or until you reach your time limit. The questions are designed to be open-ended to spark discussion rather than closed with only one possible correct answer (which tends to limit or shut down discussion). There are other Bible study resources already available for that type of Bible study. These Bible study prompts spur discussion, if participants choose to do so.
5. **What you say and how you respond to others sets the tone for your small group.** Openness and even risk invite others in the group to move deeper in sharing. If you make fun of others or get into an argument, it will choke discussion and defenses will rise. Make your responses personal by giving your understanding and impressions sensed from God through this Bible passage. What needs to be removed from your life in order for you to experience God's blessings?
6. **Make personal applications.** Ask yourself how you could live out what God is directing you to do. Ask others in the group to support you in taking such action rather than just talking about it. Remember, you're applying this to yourself, not telling others what they should be doing.
7. **Pray.** As a group, spend some time to ask for God's power and action through your life to do what God has convicted you to do. Ask God how you can support others in their desire to live out what they have shared they believe God wants them to do. Take turns praying for yourself and for each other.



What's something special
that your parents passed
on to you?

Let's Go

 Read Genesis 12:1–3.

1. Would you like God to give you a direct message?
 - A. Yes.
 - B. No.
 - C. It depends on the message.
 - D. How would I know it was God?
 - E. God wouldn't send me a message.
 - F. I've asked for that and nothing happened.
 - G. I'm afraid it would mess up my life too much.
 - H. Other.
2. Where or when have you been challenged to leave your safe life in order to follow God?
 - A. Becoming a Christian.
 - B. Leaving home for college.
 - C. Starting a new career.
 - D. Going on a mission trip or being a student missionary.
 - E. Leaving my job to start a ministry I felt God had called me to.
 - F. Leaving an abusive relationship or situation.
 - G. Seeking revival.
 - H. Making a big financial decision based on faith.
 - I. Other.
3. How does Abram's name "Exalted Father" relate to God's message to him?
 - A. He had no children.
 - B. God's promise was for children—lots of them.
 - C. God asked him to leave his family for a future family.
 - D. God exalted Abram by calling him to be the start of God's people.

- E. Abram's name hadn't worked, so God offered a major revision.
 - F. Both required faith.
 - G. Both are BIG.
 - H. Other.
4. What blessings has God given you? How much have you passed these on to others?
- A. Financial.
 - B. Family.
 - C. Wisdom.
 - D. Opportunities.
 - E. Community building.
 - F. Messages from God.
 - G. God's presence.
 - H. Other.
5. How involved is God in your life?
- A. Mainly the big things.
 - B. Mainly the little things.
 - C. It's sporadic.
 - D. Everything.
 - E. God listens and watches, but it seems like I'm responsible for myself.
 - F. God intervenes.
 - G. God curses those who curse me.
 - H. Other.
6. How does God promise to Abram relate to us today?
- A. God wants to bless us.
 - B. It's for the Jews; not for us.
 - C. God's blessings are now for the USA.
 - D. God's blessings are now for Christians.
 - E. The blessings are spiritual rather than physical.
 - F. All Jews need to return to Israel.
 - G. It seems like the Jews are both blessed and cursed to this day.
 - H. Other.
7. What message(s) have you received from God?
8. To what extent has God's promise to Abram been realized?