



RELATIONAL BIBLE STUDIES FROM **MATTHEW-ACTS**

God With Us

SMALL GROUP BIBLE STUDIES

CREATED BY **STEVE CASE**



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God With Us is a set of Relational Bible Studies from the New Testament books of Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, and Acts—one chapter at a time.

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Dedicated to Marit Case

Spouse, pastor, therapist, RBS leader and co-leader

Incredible Dutch woman!

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Relational Bible Studies: What Are They?

A Relational Bible Study is a small group Bible study that depends on the active presence of the Holy Spirit when the group reads Scripture and utilizes “Scripture prompts” as a tool to receive God’s messages for them to live today.

Frequently Bible studies have a teacher and a student/learner, with the teacher instructing the student/learner. But with Relational Bible Studies, everyone is a student/learner, and God is the teacher. One person can facilitate the experience, but that person must be open to God’s messages coming from anyone in the group.

Instead of coming to the Bible study with a topic or agenda already in mind, the focus is on listening for what God communicates to us right now in this passage of Scripture. For example, a study on the first chapter of Matthew doesn’t come looking for verses on Christ’s second coming, what happens when a person dies, or how to treat one’s body as the temple of God. It doesn’t ask questions like, “How can I improve my prayer life?” or “What is the best way to deal with someone who gossips about me behind my back?” Bible studies already exist for questions or topics like this. For a RBS, participants come to the Bible with one question: God, what is your message for me right now in this passage of Scripture?

For those who want more structure and expect a definitive result by the end of the study, a RBS might not be the best method to use. For those wanting to connect with God and commune with him, a Relational Bible Study might be the best avenue to do so.

People with more Bible knowledge, years of life experience, or a take-charge style in groups could easily get frustrated by being just a member of the group instead of being the expert or the leader others must look to for authority. That place belongs to God. Frankly, if God doesn’t “show up” during the Relational Bible Study, the whole thing will be nothing more than a chat session, a lecture, or trying to come up with the “right” answer the leader wants others to affirm. It’s risky to release control to God. If God doesn’t “show up,” would you be able to do the Bible study with your own skill and experience? For a Relational Bible Study, God’s presence makes all the difference in the world.

Bible knowledge remains important. Bible application needs to be practical and personal. Being responsive to God might be the most important result of participating in a Relational Bible Study.

The materials in this book have been created, field-tested with different groups, revised, and put online as a free download available at RelationalBibleStudies.org (A special “Thank you” to people who have donated to Involve Youth for this to be available). Some people prefer a hard copy, so that led to the publication you have in your hands now.

How To Do A Relational Bible Study

While individuals can do these on their own, Relational Bible Studies were originally designed for a small group to interact with the Holy Spirit and each other through reading the Bible, being sensitive to promptings from the Holy Spirit, and sharing those promptings with the group for their engagement as well. We recommend seven steps for this process.

7 Steps

1. Invite the Holy Spirit to guide the group study.

This completely depends on the Holy Spirit. Otherwise, it's just a chat session, a friendly gathering, or an instructional seminar. Relational Bible Studies are not dependent on a skilled leader or Bible scholar or super saint. The Holy Spirit can speak through anyone in the group.

2. Use an opening question that will "level the playing field."

An opening question introduces the topic, but more importantly, the question doesn't make one person in the group more of an expert than anyone else—no totem pole positioning. For example, instead of asking, "How often do you read the Bible?" ask, "Would you prefer to read the Bible at the start or the end of the day?"

3. Read the passage of Scripture.

Read this aloud. Go around the circle and read a paragraph or so—a few verses. Take turns until you have finished the passage. The Holy Spirit is the crucial presence that connects you and your small group to God through the Bible—God's Word. The same Holy Spirit that inspired Bible writers years ago is essential to inspire your reading now.

4. Take some time to answer the Bible prompts individually.

After reading the Bible passage, spend some time reflecting by using the Scripture prompts. Mark your responses individually. You might choose more than one answer. After individual reflection (5-10 minutes), you're ready for small group discussion since you've thought about it some and listened for impressions from the Holy Spirit.

5. Discuss some of the questions with the group.

You can begin with the first question or any of the others. Ask for people to give their responses. The questions are geared for more than one possible response rather than a yes/no or true/false quiz. The questions move from the passage of Scripture toward personal application. Take turns. After one person gives input, invite others to give theirs as well. When discussion ceases, move to another Scripture prompt.

6. Identify what the Holy Spirit's message is for you right now.

Be sensitive to what God is communicating to you throughout this experience. It might have come during the opening prayer, the reading of Scripture, your individual responses to the prompts, or during the discussion. What is the Holy Spirit's message to you right now, and how can you live it out this week? Apply this to yourself rather than telling others what they should do. Share with the group what the Holy Spirit's message is for you. This might be different for each person in the group.

7. Close with a time of prayer.

Pray for one another in the group, asking for the Holy Spirit to continue with each person as they seek to live out this week the message they received. Add whatever other prayer messages you'd like. Go around the circle or use conversational prayer. Encourage participants to continue in silent prayer when there are moments in which no one is praying out loud. Close with a hearty, "Amen."

Notes

THE BOOK OF _____

Matthew

A Family Like Mine

OPENING QUESTION

Name a relative you are proud of. Who's a relative you're not so proud of?

READ **Matthew 1:1–25.**

1. Why are genealogies important?

- A. It provides identity.
- B. To maintain a pure blood line.
- C. They provide boring spots—a good excuse to not read the Bible.
- D. It lays out a frame of reference for how people relate to each other.
- E. To give practice at reading names you'd usually never attempt.
- F. I don't think genealogies are important.
- G. To make it clear who are Jews and who are Gentiles (the "in" group and the "out" group).
- H. To expose the good and the bad in your family line.
- I. Other.

2. Why do Abraham and David get singled out for "Jesus the Messiah"?

- A. They are clearly the two who are most important.
- B. It's more likely Americans will pronounce their names correctly.
- C. God promised Abraham a son, and Jesus is God's promised son.
- D. David was an example of rising from a humble beginning to be king.
- E. The others in the genealogy did too many embarrassing things.
- F. All Jews, from kings to commoners, wanted the Messiah to be King.
- G. Jesus is the ultimate Jew (Abraham) and the ultimate king (David).
- H. They're just better known than the rest.
- I. Other.

3. Who would you have kept off the list in the Matthew 1 genealogy?

- A. The names I can't pronounce.
- B. The kings who were wicked (like Ahaz, Manasseh, and Amon).
- C. No one—keep them all there.
- D. The women; especially these women.
- E. Those after the Babylonian captivity really don't matter.
- F. Amminadab and Zerubbabel—the A & Z tongue twisters.
- G. Judah (*see Genesis 38*).
- H. Jesus.
- I. Other.

4. What is the significance of three sets of 14 generations (vs. 17)?

- A. The Jews were really into the symbolic meaning of numbers.
- B. The total is 42, used in other parts of the Bible (*Rev. 11:2; 13:5*).
- C. It's a coincidence that the genealogies came out this way.
- D. The genealogies were actually altered some to make it 3 x 14.
- E. The number 14 is the symbolic name of David, so Jesus = David.
- F. The number 3 is the symbolic number for God, so Jesus = God.
- G. It divides Jewish history based on three significant events.
- H. This is a bunch of "ooga, booga" and not truly significant.
- I. Other.

5. What seems odd about the lead up to the birth of Jesus in Matthew?

- A. No mention of the angel appearing to Mary (*Luke 1:26-38*).
- B. No mention of the miraculous conception of John (*Luke 1:5-25*).
- C. With all the Messiah hype at that time, this story seems too crazy.
- D. A virgin conceiving.
- E. God becoming a human.
- F. God going through a 9-month gestation period and becoming a baby.
- G. Joseph believing a dream to explain Mary's pregnancy.
- H. Joseph married Mary, but waited to consummate their marriage.
- I. Other.

6. Why was Jesus called "Immanuel"?

- A. "Immanuel" means "God is with us."
- B. No one else had ever been called by that name.
- C. People associated this word with "Messiah."
- D. It fulfilled the Old Testament prophecy of *Isaiah 7:14*.
- E. He just looked like an "Immanuel."
- F. He was named after his father.
- G. Two reasons: Jesus really was God; and he came to be with us.
- H. Other.

7. How is Jesus able to "save people from their sins" (vs. 21)?

8. Why might God have chosen to bring Jesus into the world in this way?

Good News or Bad News?

OPENING QUESTION

When was the last time you heard some really good news?

READ **Matthew 2:1–23**.

1. Why weren't the religious leaders as concerned as others about the star and the newborn king of the Jews?

- A. It really wasn't that big of a deal.
- B. They had already checked out the star and "the newborn king."
- C. They expected God would tell them about the Messiah before telling anyone else.
- D. Jewish religious leaders have always been quite mellow.
- E. To protect themselves from Herod's erratic responses.
- F. The word about the star came from Gentiles.
- G. They hadn't seen the star, even though it was right over their heads.
- H. They weren't looking for a Messiah.
- I. Other.

2. Why did the wise men go to Jerusalem first before going to Bethlehem?

- A. They got lost.
- B. You had to get a visa in Jerusalem before moving on to Bethlehem.
- C. That's where the star took them.
- D. Herod brought them in.
- E. They wanted to join forces with the religious leaders.
- F. They expected the newborn king to be at the temple in Jerusalem.
- G. Jerusalem had a great coffee shop they had heard about.
- H. This was another way God told about the Messiah's arrival.
- I. Other.

3. What was Herod up to with his involvement with the wise men?

- A. No good.
- B. He really did want to see the baby king.
- C. He reveled in the showdown to outwit foreign wise men.
- D. Herod had a nickname: "Hospitality Herod."
- E. Herod suffered from paranoia regarding power and control.
- F. Word of a newborn king would pose an immediate threat to Herod.
- G. Judea didn't need the hype of a newborn king for the Jews.
- H. Other.

4. How many wise men were there?

- A. Three.
- B. Four.
- C. Not many.
- D. Not enough to fight Herod and his crew.
- E. Nobody knows.
- F. They've been named: Melkon, Balthasar, and Gaspar.
- G. Think about it: 3 gifts (3 wise men).
- H. Other.

5. What is the significance of Jesus fulfilling Old Testament prophecies?

- A. He must have been the Messiah.
- B. It was just luck/coincidence.
- C. Matthew twisted Old Testament verses to fit Jesus.
- D. It wasn't obvious enough for people to see it when it happened.
- E. The entire Old Testament has a focus on the coming Messiah.
- F. There were lots of Old Testament prophecies that weren't fulfilled.
- G. It pays to study the Bible.
- H. Jesus is the fulcrum of the entire Bible.
- I. Other.

6. Why didn't God protect Jesus from Herod and the soldiers?

- A. He did.
- B. God didn't see it coming.
- C. There's another unnamed force at work in this story.
- D. God used dreams and night travel.
- E. The real question is why didn't God protect all the other boys.
- F. The death threat on Jesus mirrored the death threat on baby Moses.
- G. It prefigured that Jesus one day would be killed by Roman soldiers.
- H. Other.

7. In what ways did God communicate in *Matthew 2*? How does that compare with the ways God communicates today?

8. What gifts have you given Jesus? What will you give him now?

Preparing the Way

OPENING QUESTION

What is something strange that you've eaten?

READ **Matthew 3:1–17.**

1. Why did John the Baptist go to the wilderness to preach?

- A. He didn't have money to rent a building in town.
- B. John lived in the wilderness; it was his home.
- C. It created more of a spectacle by drawing people to the wilderness.
- D. He hadn't been ordained, so he couldn't preach in the synagogues.
- E. He needed a river to do all of his baptizing.
- F. Nobody knows.
- G. That's where John had received his training from God—in nature.
- H. He wanted a break from his father's priestly training.
- I. Other.

2. What was John the Baptist's message?

- A. Turn or burn.
- B. God loves you.
- C. What is your spiritual heritage?
- D. Live a simple life instead of following cultural norms.
- E. Wake up! You're too complacent for these monumental times.
- F. You need forgiveness and cleansing.
- G. God's kingdom is at hand—here it comes!
- H. Turning hearts of parents to children and vice versa (*Malachi 4:5-6*).
- I. Other.

3. How is the Seventh-day Adventist Church similar to John the Baptist?

- A. It's not.
- B. SDA's don't favor traditional education.
- C. Called to give a message of warning prior to the Advent of Christ.
- D. A miraculous beginning.
- E. Diet and dress/appearance that seem strange or odd.
- F. More and more people come to hear about it.
- G. Baptism by immersion.
- H. Actively prepare the way for the Lord to come to earth.
- I. Other.

4. What are good ways to prepare a straight path for Christ's coming?

- A. Be a good example for others to be just like you.
- B. Love others the way God has loved you.
- C. Regularly ask God to change you to not be crooked.
- D. Invest in road construction equipment.
- E. Talk a lot about Christ's Second Coming.
- F. Have a strange diet and wear strange clothes (like Elijah).
- G. Don't create waves (or pot holes).
- H. Other.

5. Why did Jesus go to John to be baptized?

- A. Jesus wasn't quite as perfect as many people make him out to be.
- B. It was his first opportunity to meet his cousin.
- C. Jesus modeled what each human needs—forgiveness and cleansing.
- D. He was sick and tired of working in the carpenter shop in Nazareth.
- E. Jesus was curious, like so many other people.
- F. To give John's followers an opportunity to follow Jesus.
- G. It was time to start his earthly ministry.
- H. Other.

6. What happened after Jesus' baptism?

- A. A dove came and landed on his head.
- B. John called Jesus "The Lamb of God who removes the world's sins."
- C. Disciples started to follow him.
- D. All heard God's voice: "This is my Son, in whom I'm well pleased."
- E. Satan quit his assault on Jesus.
- F. Jesus received the support of angels.
- G. Jesus became more popular and John became less popular.
- H. Other.

7. What happened after your baptism?

8. What happens after a person is baptized with the Holy Spirit and with fire (*Isaiah 1:25; Isaiah 4:4; Hebrews 12:29*)?

Launch

OPENING QUESTION

What amazes you about a rocket launch?

READ **Matthew 4:1–25.**

1. Why did God launch Christ's ministry by sending him to the wilderness?

- A. God likes the wilderness.
- B. No interruptions as Jesus transitioned from carpenter to Christ.
- C. So Jesus would succeed where the Israelites had failed.
- D. There were lots of angels there.
- E. That's simply where Jesus was after being baptized by John.
- F. That's where Satan was, and it was time to engage.
- G. God started Jesus encountering wild animals before wild people.
- H. It just seemed like a good idea at the time.
- I. Other.

2. Why did Jesus fast 40 days and 40 nights?

- A. His focus on launching his ministry left him no time to eat.
- B. That's how long Moses fasted (*Deut. 9:7-11, 18*).
- C. Jesus didn't have the Pathfinder honor for wild edible plants.
- D. To overcome physical temptations.
- E. To be holy (fast and pray).
- F. That's about the longest humans can survive without food.
- G. It matches the time preparing to enter Canaan (*Num. 13:25-14:4*).
- H. To match his time on earth after his resurrection (*Acts 1:3*).
- I. Other.

3. What are the main tests in Satan's temptations found in *Matthew 4*?

- A. Appetite.
- B. Choosing self over God or others.
- C. Lying (or fibbing—not quite as bad as lying).
- D. Doubting God's previous statements.
- E. Taking the easy way.
- F. How well a person knows the Bible.
- G. We have to take care of ourselves.
- H. Ego.
- I. Other.

4. Why did Jesus leave Judea when Herod arrested his cousin John?

- A. If he stayed, it would have led to his death prematurely.
- B. This brought back bad childhood memories of fleeing another Herod.
- C. Jesus needed to check with his mother back at home.
- D. In order to launch his ministry outside of Judea.
- E. He figured John could take care of himself.
- F. Jesus never wanted to be accused of nepotism.
- G. Jesus could recruit better disciples around the Sea of Galilee.
- H. Other.

5. How did calling four fishermen launch Christ's ministry (vs. 18-22)?

- A. He wouldn't have to worry about being without food anymore.
- B. "Calling" a young man was what rabbis did, so no more carpentry.
- C. Once he started, others had to be added.
- D. Fishermen were rabbinical rejects; Jesus chose rejects as disciples.
- E. The fathers would be upset about losing their free laborers.
- F. It broadened Christ's base of support by tapping into another trade.
- G. It turned out to be a questionable choice on Christ's part.
- H. Other.

6. Why did so many people follow Jesus?

- A. He was very good looking and charismatic.
- B. All of the healings.
- C. Christ's teachings.
- D. They believed Jesus was the promised Messiah.
- E. There really wasn't anything else to do.
- F. The potential for breaking free from Roman occupation.
- G. Christ's call for repentance and the coming kingdom.
- H. Other.

7. What are three temptations Satan would use on you? How would you respond to each one?

8. Which best describes how you relate to Jesus: Disciple or Follower or Observer? Explain.

Try This!

OPENING QUESTION

How did you learn how to ride a bicycle?

READ **Matthew 5:1–48.**

1. Who is the target audience for the “Sermon on the Mount”?

- A. The masses who followed Jesus.
- B. The religious leaders of Christ’s day.
- C. Christ’s disciples.
- D. Sinners.
- E. Believers.
- F. Unbelievers.
- G. Children and young people.
- H. Americans.
- I. Other.

2. Why do Christians give such prominence to “The Beatitudes”?

- A. They are a lot easier than the 10 commandments.
- B. They are more challenging than the 10 commandments.
- C. The “Sermon on the Mount” can be summed up by “The Beatitudes.”
- D. They make a nice wall hanging or poster.
- E. They’re super important.
- F. These capture the essence of Christ’s new kingdom.
- G. They are nebulous so it’s easy to give assent without doing much.
- H. Our world would be completely different if people practiced these.
- I. Other.

3. Where have you seen verse 16 occur?

- A. In my own life.
- B. It’s usually showing good deeds for personal credit.
- C. I don’t observe people praising my “Father in heaven.”
- D. Nowhere.
- E. Now here.
- F. In service settings.
- G. At church.
- H. At Christian concerts.
- I. Other.

4. What makes verses 23-24 so difficult?

- A. I don't offer sacrifices at a temple altar.
- B. I don't sacrifice.
- C. If I make a commitment to God, I'm not going to have it interrupted.
- D. There are too many people who "have something against me."
- E. I would spend too much time seeking reconciliation.
- F. It's usually the other person's fault, not mine.
- G. I don't find this to be difficult.
- H. Other.

5. Looking lustfully (vs. 28) is as bad as:

- A. Having physical sex with that person.
- B. Having emotional sex with that person.
- C. Looking at pornography online.
- D. Going to a strip club.
- E. Participating in a bachelor's party or a bachelorette's party.
- F. Lying.
- G. Skipping personal devotional time.
- H. Other.

6. What is a good way to "love your enemy"?

- A. Spend a lot of time with them.
- B. Heap coals of fire on their head by serving them gladly (*Rom. 12:20*).
- C. Recommend they serve on the church board.
- D. Pray silently for your enemy.
- E. Pray out loud for your enemy.
- F. Pray for God to change your heart, and then expect it to change.
- G. Submit to God whatever made that person your enemy.
- H. Other.

7. Paraphrase Matthew 5:48.

8. Which verse in Matthew 5 do you find most challenging?

Praying Worry Away

OPENING QUESTION

As a child, who worried about you more: a parent or a sibling?

READ Matthew 6:1–34.

1. What does it mean to give your gifts in secret (vs. 4)?

- A. Do it anonymously.
- B. Don't be bragging about it.
- C. Give up your IRS tax deduction.
- D. Use gift cards.
- E. Don't let your left hand know what your right hand is doing.
- F. Turn over your donation funds to someone else to choose for you.
- G. Cast lots to determine the amount and recipients of your gift(s).
- H. Never have your name mentioned or engraved because of a gift.
- I. Other.

2. Who taught you to pray?

- A. Nobody.
- B. I've picked up little things here and there.
- C. My parents taught me this while I was growing up.
- D. Jesus.
- E. I had to teach myself.
- F. I'm probably doing it all wrong.
- G. I've learned what to do and what not to do by observing others.
- H. I could use some help.
- I. Other.

3. Why did Jesus repeat the forgiveness theme in vs. 14-15?

- A. It's super-important, so it needs repeating for emphasis.
- B. Most people won't take it to heart in the heart of "The Lord's Prayer."
- C. Jesus forgot he had already mentioned it.
- D. Some of his listeners weren't listening very well right then.
- E. The context changed.
- F. Jesus wanted forgiveness to be a major activity in His Kingdom.
- G. His mother had told him to do so.
- H. It summarizes everything else in the Sermon on the Mount.
- I. Other.