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# The Resource Page

... creative and practical ideas

Brought to you this month  
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## Relational Bible study: A transformative process

**A**s a Bible study teacher, I have the privilege of engaging with challenging and life-giving subject matter that has the potential to lead persons to a vital, personal, dynamic love relationship with the Living Christ.

As a curriculum writer and teacher, I made decisions about a style of teaching I like to call "relational Bible study." Early on, I decided I would not present myself as a dispenser of truth so that I could be the authority and others my followers. I would, instead, facilitate learning, involving adults in a shared process in which they and I were invested in the common goals of encountering God through the scriptures.

I want the persons in my classes to know me and to know that I know the difference between facts and my opinions and my interpretations. Often, I "own" a bias or a prejudice when I am teaching. While I admit my point of view, I often remind others there are many ways to look at the same truth.

It is important to me to develop relationships with the people who are entrusted to me. I want to know them and not just pop in on Sunday morning, lay my pearls of wisdom on them and forget about them until the next week. Jesus himself called his followers first into a relationship with him, and he taught to their needs because he knew them.

Having sat through too many dry and boring classes in my lifetime, I have an almost pathological fear of boring others, but beyond that fear is a conviction that the scriptures contain what is life-giving, life-changing, transformative, liberating and empowering. If the power of the Living Word is operative in my own life, that power will be communicated to the persons entrusted to me. If nothing is happening with me at a soul level, it is not likely anything will happen through my teaching. It is up to me, the facilitator, to put myself in a permanent learning mode if my teaching is going to have a chance of changing lives and setting people free.

Increasingly, laypersons and ministers of education have become dependent on technology to do their work for them. Popping a CD in a player, filling the blanks in a workbook and relying on a "star" teacher to turn the students on deprives teachers in local churches of a living encounter with the scripture that comes from studying the lesson, researching commentaries, exploring truths and wrestling with hard passages.

### Principles of relational Bible study

- Bible study is intended to nurture and enhance one's relationship with God, self and others.
- Learning includes dialogue, shared discovery, interaction and *koinonia* that develops among class members and the facilitator.
- The shared process of exploring and discovering life-giving truths and principles within the scriptures impacts, nourishes and strengthens individual faith and one's relationships.
- No one person dispenses truth or provides "the answer" or "the solution."
- Learners ask of every passage: What does this scripture say about God; to me and about me; and about my relationship with God, myself and others?
- High value is placed on sound biblical scholarship and intellectual study and on the effort to incorporate the truths of the Bible into everyday life.
- The aim is to enter into the scriptures and to experience the presence of God, to gain both head and heart knowledge and to grow in faith because of the study.
- The discovery of truth is ongoing, dynamic, open-ended and life-changing, and happens when persons "lend their minds" and hearts to each other in the learning process.
- Learners and facilitators share responsibility for what happens in the teaching/learning time, entering into a covenant relationship with each other in which each will be changed by the process.

### Preparing for relational Bible study

- *Study the text.* Read good commentaries. Consult the experts. Read. Read. Read.
- *Seek the central truth of the text.* Ask, seek and knock until the truth of the passage reveals itself to you. Apply the truth in a way that affects people where they are.
- *Read the culture.* Read newspapers and popular magazines. Listen to the music people are listening to. Go to the movies. Learn what people are interested in. Learn about things you don't understand. Reflect on things you don't agree with. Listen to different opinions.
- *Learn about your students.* Know their needs and longings. Hear their stories. Seek to understand who they are. Care about them. Spend time with them. Let them know you.
- *Love God and know yourself.* Nurture your relationship with God. Question your motivation in teaching. Examine your strengths and weaknesses, your need for support, and how you learn from your mistakes.
- *Develop your teaching methods.* Seek new ways of presenting the material. Learn from master teachers. Vary your introductions and closings. Ask open-ended questions. Enlist help in the places you are not strong.
- *Plan for success.* Engage with the church staff. Cooperate; keep them informed; check things out with them. Decide on a teaching format (lecture, small groups, combination). Choose a setting that fits your format. Publicize well. Enlist helpers. Make the setting appealing, inviting, warm and friendly.
- *Manage the details.* Anticipate challenges, but plan and organize the details of the process to set things up to succeed. Enlist help with the details (classroom set-up, materials, preparing coffee, sign-up, etc.).
- *Do your part and trust the rest to God.* Let the "reward" be the creative process of working with the most important material in the world in a way that heals, transforms, liberates and empowers God's children. **BT**

THE RESOURCE PAGE is provided by the Congregational Life office of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship in partnership with *Baptists Today* and for those dedicated lay leaders working in the educational ministries of local churches. This month's page was written by Jeanie Miley, an author, retreat leader and Bible study teacher from Houston, Texas. Resource Page Archives are now available at <http://www.thefellowship.info/Resources/Church-Resources/Baptists-Today-resource-page>.