

THE INTERPRETATION BIBLE STUDIES LEADER HELPS

MATTHEW

The IBS Leader Helps are designed to facilitate group study by providing lesson plans for the ten units in each of the Interpretation Bible Studies. These lesson plans utilize a variety of interactive methods, which have been chosen for the express purpose of engaging participants in the learning process.

Each participant in the group should have a copy of IBS study book and should make a commitment to do the assigned preparation for each session.

The sessions are planned for one hour. If the time allotted is shorter than an hour, it will be necessary to be selective about the activities, choosing those which are most appropriate for your group.

Leader Preparation

Read the Gospel of Matthew in its entirety before beginning to teach. It is important to familiarize yourself with the book's overall content, so you can see how the individual passages fit into the larger scope of the book.

Skim through the whole study book to discern its flow. This is especially helpful if there are multiple teachers, in order to prevent leaping ahead into the next lesson.

Prepare the room ahead of time. For informal discussion and ease of sharing, a semi-circular arrangement of chairs works best. Position yourself as one of the group, instead of setting yourself apart as "the authority."

Secure necessary teaching aids. A newsprint easel is an invaluable asset. Be sure to have markers and masking tape if you wish to display the sheets for future reference. A map of Palestine in New Testament times is very helpful. Check the teaching suggestions for other necessary materials, such as hymnals, paper, pencils, art materials, and so on.

Prepare necessary handouts. A folder for each participant's handouts is helpful, but not essential.

Keep the key idea firmly in mind. Make sure all activities point participants towards this goal.

Pray for God's guidance. Prior to making preparations for the session, allow time to pray for each participant and for yourself.

Unit 1: The Lineage, Birth, and Naming of Jesus Christ (Matthew 1:1–25)

Key Idea: We begin to understand who Jesus is by learning about his ancestors, and how God worked through them.

Advance Preparation

Prepare a copy of a “Key Terms Test” for each participant by listing the terms on p. 3 of the study book, minus the definitions. Leave space for participants to write in definitions of the terms.

List the following questions on separate sheets of paper for two research groups. Leave enough space after each question for the recorder to write the group’s answers:

For Group 1: Genealogy

- What three things does Jesus’ genealogy tell us about who he is? (See p. 9 of the study book.)
- What does the genealogy tell us about Jesus as an expression of the old? (See p. 10.)
- What does it tell us about Jesus as an expression of the new and unexpected? (See pp. 10–11.)
- Who are the women named in the genealogy?

For Group 2: Joseph

- What do we learn about Joseph from Matthew’s account? (See vs. 18–25.)
- If Joseph was not Jesus’ real father, why is his story important? (See p. 14 of the study book.)
- What does Joseph’s story teach us about “righteousness?” (See pp. 13 and 16.)

Provide slips of paper and pencils for the closing activity.

Opening (10 minutes)

1. Prayer

Pray this prayer in unison or offer one of your own:

Lord, as we come together to study your Word,
open our ears and our hearts so that we may hear your voice speaking through its pages,
offering us guidance and strength for our daily walk. In Christ’s name, Amen.

2. Brainstorming

Ask participants to brainstorm aloud as a group answers to these questions: “What do you know about the Gospel According to Matthew? How is it different from other Gospels?” List their answers on newsprint. Tell them that at the end of the study, these comments will be reviewed to see if new insights have been gained. (Save the newsprint for use in the last session.)

Presentation (15 minutes)

3. Introduction to Matthew

Briefly review the information in the Introduction (pp. 1–7 of the study book) by summarizing what the author says about the authorship, the audience, and the purpose of the Gospel. Then distribute copies of the “Key Terms Test.” Ask participants to give a brief definition for each term. When all have finished, ask them to check their answers with the chart on p. 3 of the study book.

Exploration (20 minutes)

4. Bible Research Groups

Divide the participants into two groups: “Genealogy” and “Joseph.” Distribute to the groups the prepared sheets of questions (see Advance Preparation). Ask each group to choose a recorder to write down the group’s findings. After the groups are done, have them share their findings with the other group.

Response (10 minutes)

5. Word Cluster

On a sheet of newsprint, write the word “Righteousness” and draw a circle around it. Draw a series of other circles clustered around the first circle. Ask participants to think of a righteous person and name words or short phrases that characterize that person. Write these words in the remaining circles.

Closing (5 minutes)

6. Silent Reflection

Invite participants to reflect on this question: “Which of the characteristics of righteousness do I need to allow God to strengthen and develop in me?” Have them write their answers on a slip of paper. Suggest they keep the slip in their Bible as a reminder.

7. Prayer

Pray this prayer from Psalm 119:40–41:

See, I have longed for your precepts; in your righteousness give me life.
Let your steadfast love come to me, O LORD, and your salvation according to your promise.

8. Assignment

Have the participants read Unit 2 and Matthew 3:13—4:11. Ask them to identify contemporary equivalents of the three temptations.

Unit 2: The Baptism and Testing of the Messiah (Matthew 3:13—4:11)

Key Idea: The baptism and testing stories reveal the kind of Messiah Jesus is.

Advance Preparation

Prepare 3x11-inch name cards from poster board or manila paper. Punch holes in each end of the cards and attach yarn long enough to go over the head. On the cards, print the following names: Narrator, John the Baptist, Isaiah, Jordan region resident, Pharisee, Sadducee, Jesus, Voice from Heaven, Tempter, and Angel. Other participants may represent Jerusalem citizens and Judeans. Prepare small slips of paper (5x2-inch) for the written prayers.

Opening (5 minutes)

1. Prayer

Use this prayer or another of your choice:

Loving God,
 you nurture and guide us like a father and mother.
 We pray for the families of this congregation,
 and for all Christian families everywhere.
 Give them strength to honor you in their homes,
 and to love and serve each other.
 Help all who have been baptized in your name
 to live in peace and unity
 as sisters and brothers in the household of faith,
 and to serve others in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

(From *Book of Common Worship*, Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993, p. 417.)

Presentation (20 minutes)

2. Pantomimes

Distribute the prepared name cards to participants. As the narrator reads the stories, ask the participants to pantomime the action of these passages.

- *The baptism: Matthew 3:1–17*. Characters: Narrator, John the Baptist, Jerusalem citizens, Judeans, Jordan River citizens, Pharisee, Sadducee, Jesus, Voice from Heaven
- *The temptation: Matthew 4:1–11*. Characters: Jesus, Tempter, Angel

At the end of the pantomimes, ask: What new insight did you gain about these stories as a result of this exercise? Did you notice anything you never noticed before?

Exploration (15 minutes)*3. Group Discussion*

Discuss the following questions. Put the participants' answers on newsprint.

- Why did Jesus want to be baptized in spite of being without sin?
- Who is Satan? What do we know about him from scripture?
- Read Matthew 4:3. What was the meaning of the first temptation? What scripture did Jesus quote to answer it? What is a contemporary equivalent of this temptation?
- Read Matthew 4:5–6. What was the meaning of the second temptation? How did Jesus answer it? What is a contemporary equivalent of this temptation?
- Read Matthew 4: 8–9. What was the meaning of the third temptation? How did Jesus answer it? What is a contemporary equivalent?

Response (10 minutes)*4. Writing Prayers*

Distribute the prepared slips of paper. Ask each participant to choose one of the contemporary equivalents of the temptations and write a brief prayer about that temptation.

Closing (5 minutes)*5. Praying Our Prayers*

Allow time for silent prayer, then close with a prayer of your own.

6. Assignment

Have the participants read Unit 3 and Matthew 5:1–5. Ask them to list three blessings God has given them and three challenges they face.

Unit 3: The Sermon on the Mount, Part One (Matthew 5:1–5)

Key Idea: The Sermon on the Mount connects righteousness with obedience.

Advance Preparation

Gather an assortment of Bible dictionaries, theological word books, and concordances from your church library, public library, or pastor's study. Some suggestions are found on p. 47 of the study book. It is helpful to make copies from such books of the definitions of the following terms so that each person may do research. The terms are: *beatitude*, *blessing*, *poor in spirit*, *mourning*, and *meekness*.

Opening (5 minutes)

1. Prayer

Use this prayer or one of your own:

Bless us, O God, and nourish us in our spiritual poverty;
 Bless us, O God, and strengthen us in our grief;
 Bless us, O God, and teach us the beauty of true humility. Amen.

Presentation (10 minutes)

2. Mini-lecture: Introduction to the Sermon

Make a brief presentation summarizing the information in the study book on the basic themes of the Sermon on the Mount and its setting (pp. 29–32).

Exploration (25 minutes)

3. Word Study

Divide the participants into five groups. Using resource books such as Bible dictionaries and theological word books, as well as the study book, have them define these terms:

- Beatitude
- Blessing
- Poor in spirit
- Mourning
- Meekness

Reconvene and have each group discuss its findings.

Response (15 minutes)*4. Listing Blessings and Challenges*

Refer to question 1 on p. 37 of the study book, and have participants share their blessings and challenges with one other person.

Closing (5 minutes)*5. Litany of Thanks*

Create a simple litany of thanksgiving by asking participants to name a blessing after the phrase: “For the blessing of” When the blessing is named, the group responds in unison, “We give you thanks, O Lord.”

6. Assignment

Have the participants read Unit 4 and Matthew 5:6–12, 17–20; 6:5–14. Ask them to find a picture (from a magazine, newspaper, church bulletin, and so on) that illustrates one of the beatitudes in 5:6–12. Have them bring it to the next session along with their favorite prayer or book of prayers.

Unit 4: The Sermon on the Mount, Part Two (Matthew 5:6–12, 17–20; 6:5–14)

Key Idea: The Sermon on the Mount teaches that righteousness is the response to God's initiative.

Advance Preparation

Prepare small slips of paper, writing on each a single verse from the scripture passages in Unit 4. Prepare copies of the Question Sheet as follows:

QUESTION SHEET

- What does *righteousness* refer to in Matthew 5:6?
- What two qualities does *merciful* include?
- What is *seeing God* a metaphor for?
- What does the Hebrew word *shalom* mean besides absence of conflict?
- What persecutions are referred to in Matthew 5:10–12? Who persecutes Jesus' followers today?

Opening (5 minutes)

1. Prayer

Ask for a couple of volunteers to read their favorite prayers, or open with one of your own.

2. Sharing Books

Ask participants who brought books of prayers to comment briefly on them.

Presentation (10 minutes)

3. Scripture Reading

Hand out slips of paper indicating one verse of the scripture passages in today's unit. Ask participants to read the verses aloud.

Exploration (20 minutes)

4. Question and Answer

Give each participant a copy of the Question Sheet (see "Advance Preparation") and allow them time to write out the answers. When all have finished, ask: What new discoveries did you make about these beatitudes?

Response (15 minutes)*5. Picture Reflections*

Ask participants to share the pictures they brought and comment on how each illustrates the beatitude. Ask: What new insight was gained through these pictures?

Closing (10 minutes)*6. Prayer*

Close with the Lord's Prayer.

7. Assignment

Have the participants read Unit 5 and Matthew 8:18–27; 15:21–28. Ask them to write their own definition of the word *disciple* and bring it to the next session.

Unit 5: Would-Be Disciples and a Lesson about Discipleship
(Matthew 8:18–27; 15:21–28)

Key Idea: Being Jesus’ disciples involves costly loyalty.

Advance Preparation

Cover part of a wall with two or three sheets of newsprint. At the top, write “A DISCIPLE IS. . . .” This will be your graffiti board. Provide an assortment of markers in different colors.

Cut long strips of paper from newsprint sheets, about four inches wide. Provide for each participant a handful of crayons of at least four colors.

Provide hymnals that contain “Jesu, Jesu, Fill Us With Your Love” or “They Cast Their Nets in Galilee.”

Opening (5 minutes)

1. Graffiti Board

As participants enter the room, ask them to write their definitions of *disciple* on the “graffiti board” you have made with newsprint sheets.

2. Prayer

Use this prayer or one of your own:

Dear Lord,
 You have called us to be your disciples
 and we want to follow in your steps.
 But often our faith is too small,
 and we falter and stumble.
 Give us courage when storms beset us and the way is dark,
 Give us faith when we don’t understand,
 Give us patience to endure.
 Make us your own. Amen.

Presentation (20 minutes)

3. Hearing Scripture in a New Way

Read aloud the two stories from Matthew 8:18–27 and 15:21–28 slowly and with expression. Then ask participants to make drawings or doodles on their strip of paper representing the action in the stories. When they have finished, ask for volunteers to re-tell the stories from their doodlings.

Exploration (15 minutes)*4. Comparing Stories*

Using question 1 on p. 60 of the study book, compare the two stories.

Response (15 minutes)*5. Completing Sentences*

Ask participants to complete the sentence: “Being a disciple of Jesus means I” Have them share their responses with one other person.

Closing (5 minutes)*6. Praying a Hymn*

Sing or read aloud the words to one of these hymns: “Jesu, Jesu, Fill Us With Your Love” or “They Cast Their Nets in Galilee.”

7. Assignment

Have the participants read Unit 6 and Matthew 16:13–28. Ask them to be prepared to share a turning point in their life of faith.

Unit 6: Peter's Confession and Jesus' Passion (Matthew 16:13–28)

Key Idea: Peter's confession and Jesus' prediction of his passion marks a turning point in the Gospel.

Advance Preparation

Provide hymnals that contain the hymn "When I Survey the Wondrous Cross."

Opening (5 minutes)

1. Prayer

Pray this prayer or one of your own:

Loving God,
 to turn away from you is to fall,
 to turn toward you is to rise,
 and to stand before you is to abide forever.
 Grant us, dear God,
 in all our duties your help;
 in all our uncertainties your guidance;
 in all our dangers your protection;
 and in all our sorrows your peace;
 through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

(Prayer of Augustine of Hippo, 354–430 A.D.; reprinted from *Book of Common Worship*, Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993, p. 23.)

2. Nicknames

Ask participants: "If Jesus could give you a nickname, what would it be?"

Presentation (20 minutes)

3. Role Play

Ask two participants to role play Peter and Jesus in the scene in vs. 13–28, reading their words from scripture. The rest of the class represents the disciples. Afterward, invite the group to share what they were feeling as they represented the characters.

Exploration (20 minutes)*4. Question and Answer*

Have the group address the following questions:

- Why was Peter's question foundational?
- Why are these two passages a turning point in the Gospel?
- What did Jesus mean by the keys of the kingdom? (See pp. 62–63 of the study book.)
- What did he mean by self-denial? (See p. 66.)
- What did he mean by cross bearing? (See p. 66.)

Response (10 minutes)*5. Sharing in Twos*

Have each participant share with one other person a major turning point in their life of faith.

Closing (5 minutes)*6. Praying a Hymn*

For your closing prayer, sing or read aloud “When I Survey the Wondrous Cross.”

7. Assignment

Have the participants read Unit 7 and Matthew 19:27—20:16. Ask for a volunteer to research the meaning of *parable* and make a brief presentation to the class at the next session. Suggest this person consult a Bible dictionary, as well as the resources suggested on p. 72 of the study book.

Unit 7: Rewards and Grace (Matthew 19:27—20:16)

Key Idea: Sacrificial discipleship is rewarded, but not always in the way we expect.

Advance Preparation

Provide hymnals with the hymns “O Jesus, We Adore Thee” or “Hope of the World.”

Prepare a tray of assorted objects for the parable writing exercise. For example, you might have a living plant, a light bulb, a mug or cup, an apple, a band-aid, a pen, a perfume bottle, a pitcher, and so on.

Arrange six chairs in the middle of the circle or at the front of the room.

Make copies of the following handout for step 4:

PARABLES OF JESUS IN MATTHEW

Going before the Judge (5:25–26)
 The Two Houses (7:24–27)
 The Children in the Marketplace (11:16–19)
 The Return of the Unclean Spirit (12:43–45)
 The Sower (13:3–8)
 The Tares among the Wheat (13:24–30)
 The Mustard Seed (13:31–32)
 The Leaven (13:33)
 The Treasure (13:44)
 The Pearl (13:45–46)
 The Seine-net (13:47–48)
 The Lost Sheep (18:12–14)
 The Unmerciful Servant (18:23–35)
 The Good Employer (20:1–16)
 The Two Sons (21:28–32)
 The Wicked Husbandmen (21:33–44)
 The Great Supper (22:1–10)
 The Guest Without a Wedding Garment (22:11–14)
 The Budding Fig Tree (24:32–33)
 The Burglar (24:43–44)
 The Servant Entrusted with Supervision (24:45–51)
 The Ten Maidens (25:1–13)
 The Talents (25:14–30)
 The Last Judgment (25:31–46)

Opening (10 minutes)

1. Prayer

Read in unison or sing the words of “O Jesus, We Adore Thee.”

2. Reflection on a Hymn

Ask: What words in this hymn speak of rewards? What words speak of grace? List the participants’ responses in two columns on newsprint.

Presentation (15 minutes)

3. Mini-lecture: What Is a Parable?

Ask the person who volunteered to explain what a parable is to make a brief, five-minute presentation.

4. Brainstorming

Ask the participants to try to name the parables of Jesus in Matthew. Put those named on newsprint. Then, as a checklist, distribute the handout you prepared ahead of time.

Exploration (15 minutes)

5. Discussion

Have one of the participants read the parable in Matthew 20:1–16 aloud. Ask: “What challenge do you think Jesus was trying to present in this parable? What is its challenge to us?”

Response (15 minutes)

6. Creating a Parable

Show the participants the tray of objects you have prepared. Ask them to select one object and write a parable about grace based on it. Share the parables aloud.

Closing (5 minutes)

7. Prayer

Close with a prayer of gratitude for the unmerited grace we receive from God.

8. Assignment

Have the participants read Unit 8 and Matthew 22:1–14. Ask them to write down one issue this parable raises.

Unit 8: The Parable of the King's Wedding Banquet (Matthew 22:1–14)

Key Idea: God's grace toward us needs to be met by our committed response.

Advance Preparation

Collect as many commentaries as you can from your church library, public library, or minister's study. Bring these to the class.

Prepare a poster or sheet of newsprint with the outline of a simple figure. Have colored markers available.

Opening (5 minutes)

1. Prayer

Ask one of the participants to lead the group in prayer.

Presentation (15 minutes)

2. Reading Scripture

Read the scripture, with participants taking turns verse by verse. Ask: "What issues does this parable raise?" List their responses on newsprint.

Exploration (20 minutes)

3. Commentary Research in Small Groups

Divide the group into as many clusters as you have commentaries. Ask someone in each cluster to read aloud the section of the commentary that covers the parable in Matthew 22:1–14. The task of each cluster is to list two or three insights gained by reading and talking together about the commentary material.

4. Sharing Insights

Gather the whole group back together to share the insights they gained.

Response (15 minutes)

5. Selecting Wedding Garments

Read aloud question 3 on p. 82 of the study book. On the prepared poster or newsprint drawing, write the names of the wedding garments that today's Christians should wear.

Closing (5 minutes)*6. Prayer*

As a closing prayer, read aloud the benediction in Hebrews 13:20.

7. Assignment

Have the participants read Unit 9 and Matthew 26:47—27:26. Ask them to write down three nouns that describe what is happening

Unit 9: The Betrayal and Trial of Jesus (Matthew 26:47—27:26)

Key Idea: Jesus’ trial represents the ultimate confrontation between Jesus and Israel’s leaders.

Advance Preparation

Provide copies of the following “Open Book Test” (step 3) for each participant, as well as paper and pencils.

OPEN BOOK TEST ON THE BETRAYAL AND TRIAL OF JESUS

- a. Who accompanied Judas to Gethsemane?
- b. What did Judas call Jesus instead of the term “Lord” used by other disciples?
- c. What does Jesus’ response show about the kind of Messiah he is?
- d. What was the reaction of the disciples to his arrest?
- e. Where did the armed men take Jesus?
- f. What was the accusation against Jesus by the two witnesses?
- g. Why does high priest think Jesus is guilty of blasphemy?
- h. What character trait of Peter is revealed in the denial story?
- i. Who did the priests and elders turn Jesus over to?
- j. Why is Judas suddenly seized with remorse?
- k. What do you think Pilate’s motive is in v. 17?
- l. What action did Pilate take regarding Jesus?

Opening (10 minutes)

1. Prayer

Use a prayer of your own, or ask one of the participants to pray.

2. Reviewing the Assignment from Last Session

Ask participants to share the nouns that describe Matthew 26:47—27:26.

Presentation (20 minutes)

3. Open Book Test

Give each participant a copy of the “Open Book Test” and ask them to find the answers in Matthew 26:47—27:26. When all have finished, read the questions aloud and ask for the group’s findings.

Exploration (10 minutes)*4. Discussion*

Discuss question 4 on p. 90 of the study book.

Response (15 minutes)*5. Reflection and Writing*

Have the participants write a brief reflection on question 3, found on p. 90 of the study book. Have them begin, “If I had been at Jesus’ trial, I would have” Ask for several volunteers to read their reflections to the group.

Closing (5 minutes)*6. Prayer of Confession*

Pray this prayer (or another of your choice) in unison:

O Lord,
In your mercy forgive what we have been,
help us amend what we are,
and direct what we shall be,
so that we may delight in your will
and walk in your ways,
to the glory of your holy name.
Amen.

7. Assignment

Have the participants read Unit 10 and Matthew 27:27—28:20. Ask them to complete this sentence in writing: “I experience God’s presence with me when”

Unit 10: Jesus' Death and Resurrection (Matthew 27:27—28:20)

Key Idea: Only through the resurrection can we understand how the crucifixion was a triumph.

Advance Preparation

Make arrangements to show the crucifixion and resurrection portion of a video on the life of Christ or to have a display of pictures of the crucifixion and resurrection set up gallery style. Make a tape of the hymn “Were You There When They Crucified My Lord?” and be prepared to play it. Have pens and paper available for each participant.

Opening (5 minutes)

1. *Praying a Hymn*

Ask participants to sing softly while taped music plays “Were You There When They Crucified My Lord?”

Presentation (20 minutes)

2. *Visual Images*

Show the crucifixion and resurrection scenes from a video of the life of Christ, or set up a display of pictures of the two events. Ask participants to watch the video or examine the pictures, and jot down words describing the emotions portrayed in the visual images. Ask: How did these images make you feel?

Exploration (15 minutes)

3. *Reflecting on Scripture*

Ask participants to read Matthew 27:27–56 silently and prayerfully. Then, using question 1 on p. 99 of the study book, have them identify examples of irony in the passage. Record their responses on newsprint. Also have them name the persons identified in the resurrection story (27:57—28:20). Add these names to the newsprint as well. Ask: What do the actions of these people tell us about them?

Response (10 minutes)

4. *Sharing the Homework Assignment from Last Session*

Have participants share their assigned sentence completions (“I experience God’s presence with me when . . .”) with two other persons.

Closing (10 minutes)*5. Review*

Review the comments made by the group on Unit 1 (saved on newsprint from session 1). Ask: What new insights have you gained through this study?

6. Prayer

Close with sentence prayers of thanksgiving for the study.