

καὶ ἰδοὺ φωνὴ ἐκ τῶν οὐρανῶν λέγουσα·

And behold, a voice from heaven said,

οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ υἱός μου ὁ ἀγαπητός,

"This is my beloved Son,

ἐν ᾧ εὐδόκησα.

with whom I am well pleased."

Live for his kingdom...

9 studies on Matthew 1-7

before you begin...

Read the introduction pages at the start of your first study together. That way we will all be on the same page! Then do *the study*. Ensure there is enough time to dig into the *interact* section of the study. If people in your group prepare it will make light work of these parts. Make sure there's still plenty of time to *pray* at the end! Sounds like a lot of work... don't worry—it's a great thing to be spending our time on!

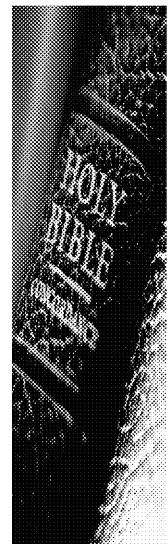
Here are a few tips to help your small group grow together:

Pray... prayer is the place to start for our groups and we should do it even when we are not meeting together. We should pray that under God's strength our group would grow in its love for God and each other. Pray for the relationships within the group and the witness of the group to the church family and to those outside the church.

Participate... it's so great when people feel comfortable discussing their faith with other believers. Don't feel like you don't know enough to say something - all input is great for group life and the group is a great place to get your questions answered. Likewise, make sure you allow space for other people to participate in the group, especially quieter members! Sometimes silence feels painful and we feel like we need to fill it—but maybe if the more talkative among us wait—somebody might fill that silence for us.

Prioritize... it's really important to meet together with other Christians regularly, listening to God's word, praying together and sharing our lives. Not only is it the sort of thing we want to prioritize to ensure we're standing firm in our faith—but turning up each week is a huge encouragement to others too.

Prepare... this will make the study a more fruitful experience for everyone. You'll know the questions you need answered and you might be able to share some new insight you've had with the group. It doesn't take long—but it can make a big difference to the life of the group.



Live for his kingdom...

Matthew's gospel was regarded by the early church as the most authoritative and earliest of the gospels. As time progressed commentators agreed that it was written after Mark and possibly (but not certainly) after Luke. The theory is that it was probably written sometime before AD 70. This is because it has lots of warnings about the Sadducees and the Sadducees no longer existed as a center of authority after AD 70. The reality is we cannot be sure. It is quoted in other ancient literature by around AD 110, which gives us a latest possible date. A best guess could probably be around the 60s.

It is unwise to specify too precise an occasion and purpose for Matthew. We can certainly say he is writing about Jesus, but after that we need to tread carefully! Commentators offer a range of purposes for Matthew: he is writing to instruct and teach believers sound truth about Jesus and the way to live as a follower of him; he is writing to provide apologetic and evangelistic material, especially to win the Jews; he is writing to encourage believers to keep on witnessing in a hostile world; and he is writing to encourage a deeper faith in Jesus the Messiah, the anointed King of God.

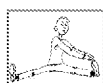
There are five main speeches in Matthew ending at 7:28, 11:1, 13:53, 19:1 and 26:1. We will be looking at the first one this term. The first discourse is all about the new King and the way of his new kingdom. While the first seven chapters are filled with good news about the kingdom of heaven, they are also filled with a radical redefinition of what it means to be part of it.

As we move through the first seven chapters of the book we should see that Jesus is the Messiah, God's anointed King. But, hopefully, each of us will hear the radical call from God to live for him. A lot of Matthew's readers thought being part of God's kingdom was a matter of birthright or looking good enough on the outside. In these first seven chapters Jesus says that being part of the kingdom of heaven is a matter of believing in the King and having a heartfelt conviction to live in obedience to him. If you struggle to *live for his kingdom* in this way, the first seven chapters of Matthew are a gift from God for you.

1 life will never be the same (1:1-17)



The credible claim of the Gospel is that Jesus is the Messiah, God's long time coming King, the one he promised would rule over all the earth and redeem his people.



Who are the interesting characters in your family line that who have influenced who you are today?



Read Matthew 1:1-17

1. Pay close attention to the words that introduce Jesus' family line in verse 1. The exact phrase 'a record of the genealogy of' only appears 3 times in the entire Greek Bible: Genesis 2:4, Genesis 5:1 and Matthew 1:1. What, if any, is the significance of this?
2. Why do you think Matthew refers to Jesus as 'the son of David, the Son of Abraham' (read Gen 22:15-18; 2 Samuel 7:12-16 to help understand the significance)?
3. For those familiar with God's dealing with his OT people, what is significant about the three eras the genealogy has been divided into (see Gen 12:1-3; 1 Kings 1:11-13; 2 Kings 24:20-25:21) ?
4. Verses 1 to 6 are an accurate progression of Abraham to King David in the Old Testament, but the second list contains a problem. There are 3 kings missing in verse 8 and 1 missing in verse 11. How do you explain this problem?
5. Critics claim that the genealogy is fraudulent because it includes women (other middle eastern genealogies from the period don't). How would you explain the inclusion of the women?
6. Verse 17 says there are 3 lots of 14. The last list only has 13 generations. How would you explain this?
7. *The word 'Christ' is often translated in the Bible as 'his anointed'. Hannah is the first to refer to 'his anointed' in 1 Samuel 2:10. After the first mention of 'Christ'/'his anointed' by Hannah, the image of the 'Christ' continued to develop in the scriptures to be the title that God's end time king would bear (see psalm 2 in particular).*

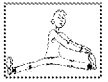
With this in mind, write a summary of the claim Matthew is making about Jesus in this genealogy.

2

a true child of God (3:1-17)



Those who have faith in the true Son can be called true children of God.



What makes someone a son or a daughter of someone else?

warm-up



Read Matthew 3:1-17

study

1. The desert is a bit of a theme in this part of Matthew (3:1 and 4:1). What role has the desert played in the history of God's people?
2. Why does Matthew say 'the kingdom of heaven is near' and not something else... like 'the kingdom of God is here'?
3. The quote in verse 3 is from Isaiah. What role does John play, according to Isaiah?
4. While baptism had been a ritual cleansing for the Jews for some time, it is thought that John is the first to call for confession and repentance as part of the process (v6 and v 11). The Pharisees took exception to the idea that they would need to confess or repent; they didn't like John's additions to the ritual. But John says there's an even more significant version of baptism to come... what will this greater baptism involve?
5. What was John's main criticism of the Pharisees and Sadducees (verses 7 to 10)?
6. John was reluctant to perform his baptism of confession and repentance on one so much greater than him (how do you think he'd heard of Jesus?). But Jesus insisted it was proper to 'fulfill all righteousness'. What do you think this means?
7. As God speaks in verse 17, he uses a flood of words he's used before (Exodus 4:22, Psalm 2:7; Isaiah 42:1). What are we being told about Jesus?



interact

8. Do you consider yourself part of the kingdom of heaven? What gives you/anyone the right to consider yourself/themselves part of the kingdom?

9. Are you producing fruit in keeping with repentance? How could you be better at this?

10. Today, through faith in Christ, we are called sons of God (Gal 3:26). What will it look like for us to be less like the Pharisees and Sadducees and more like Jesus?



prayer

What can we pray in response to what we have learned?

What can we pray for each other?

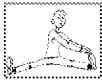
What can we pray for our community?

What can we pray for our world?

3 obedience and reward (4:1-11)



As the true Son of God, Jesus acted in complete obedience to his Father's will. It was hard, but God saw to it that he was cared for in the end.



What would be the most tempting thing you could imagine ever facing?

warm-up



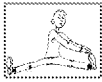
Read Matthew 4:1-11

1. Last week we saw that the desert was a theme in this part of Matthew. Here we see the desert, forty periods of time, hunger and temptation. What does all this tell us about Jesus (see particularly Deuteronomy 8:1-5)?
2. What is the primary goal of the tempter according to verse 3? How has his tempting fared in the past?
3. What is Jesus choosing/foregoing as he quotes Deuteronomy 8:3 to the tempter? How will he use bread in the same way later on in Matthew?
4. In verse 7 tells the devil is tempting Jesus to test the Lord to by throwing himself down. Jesus doesn't do it. Yet, later on he will, in a sense, 'test' God by undergoing the crucifixion and hoping for the resurrection. Why does Jesus do one and not the other?
5. What does the third temptation tell us about the role of the true Son of God?
6. We see angels here in verse 11, and again in chapters 26:53 and 28:2-5. What do the angels do and how do they point to a greater reward for Christ's obedience?

4 the citizenship test (5:1-16)



The kingdom of God belongs to hearts hungry to see God's will done in their life and in their world. These are the ones who understand that only God's King can satisfy their hunger.



Which people should be allowed to have access to Australia?

warm-up

Read Matthew 5:1-16



There is a growing sense that Jesus is the one who will bring in the long awaited kingdom of God pictured in Isaiah 61. His bloodline, his baptism, his ability to endure temptation, his restoration of the sick have all led to the people thinking 'maybe this is it'. And so we see in verse 1, there are crowds of people following him, hoping to gain access to the coming kingdom... whatever that may be!

study

1. In verse 3 Jesus says the 'poor in spirit' are the ones who have access to the kingdom of heaven (both now and in the future). What does he mean by the 'poor in spirit' (think through the characters that lie ahead in Matthew)?
2. What kind of mourning is verse 4 talking about? How are those in verse 4 similar to those in verse 6?
3. What does verse 5 mean by 'meek'? How is this tied to verse 7? Who will show them mercy?
4. John the Baptist redefined what it means to be a son of God in chapter 3. How does being 'peace makers' equate to being sons of God?
5. 'Righteousness' in Matthew often means 'proper conduct before God'; it basically means imitating Jesus! What does righteousness result in, according to Jesus?
6. How would you sum up the character traits required to gain access to the kingdom?

In verses 13 to 16 Jesus makes it clear that while the kingdom may belong to some of his listeners, it's not time for them to bunker down behind closed doors and wait for the angels to arrive. Like salt, they have a role in stopping the decay of the world. Like light they have a role to play in overcoming the darkness. Their right hearts will have to be matched by right actions in the world so that people might see the light and be saved. For the next two chapters Jesus won't hold back as he tells them exactly how their actions should be the overflow of their hearts.



interact

7. Consider the cravings of your heart. How much do you hunger for righteousness in your own life and in the world around you? Is there a way to be more hungry?

8. How does Jesus satisfy the cravings of your heart?

9. Discuss how you can help each other to stop being so comfortable with your sin.



prayer

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What can we pray for our community?

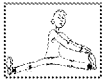
What can we pray for our world?

5

pursue perfection (5:17-48)



Jesus says the whole Old Testament points to him and to his teaching. If we understand truly what it means to be sons of God we will pursue the perfection his teaching demands.



When have you undertaken something that ended up being a lot harder than you thought?

warm-up



study

Read Matthew 5:17-48

1. What does Jesus mean by ‘the Law or the Prophets’? What does he mean when he says he has come to fulfill them?
2. What does this mean for the way we read parts of the Old Testament about:
 - the sacrificial system?
 - the clean/unclean regulations?
 - the promised land?
 - the commandments?
3. Why does Jesus single out the Pharisees and the teachers of the law as the ones our righteousness needs to surpass to enter the kingdom of heaven?
4. Notice the way Jesus starts each of his teachings (verses 21, 27, 31, 33, 38 and 43). He’s saying ‘you thought it meant you had to do this, but I’m telling you it demands something far greater’. In verse 48 he clarifies that the scriptures demand nothing less than perfection. How can anyone enter the kingdom of heaven?
5. What are the consequences of anger and how are we to deal with it?
6. Divorce is heaped in with adultery here because in the first century divorce inevitably led to remarriage which, other than the exception here, is adultery. What are the consequences of adultery and how are we to deal with it (for more see Matthew 19)?
7. Verses 33 to 37 present a bit of a problem. What the OT clearly commands (Deut 6:13), Jesus clearly forbids. How is he fulfilling the law and the prophets here?
8. Rather than retribution, what is Jesus calling for in verses 38 to 47?

Jesus isn’t telling his followers they can’t enter the kingdom of heaven until they consider themselves perfect. He’s already told them very clearly in 5:3 to acknowledge reality. But as sons who call on the Father (and not all do), they are expected to pursue perfection.



interact

9. How does this part of the Bible make you feel toward Jesus?

10. How might we be tempted to dress our Christianity up on the outside/legalize our faith without making the radical changes the kingdom of God demands?

11. Do you think Christians take the pursuit of perfection seriously these days?



prayer

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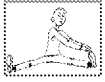
6

blow your own horn (6:1-18)



the point

If all of the Old Testament was pointing to Jesus and not to our own ability to be right with God, then all of our actions should point the same way—to Jesus not ourselves!



warm-up

Would you frame your Australia Day award and put it on the wall in your front foyer? Why/why not?



study

Read Matthew 6:1-18

1. How is verse 1 consistent with what we read in 5:16?
2. What is the problem with giving publicly in the hope of praise (you're still giving)?
3. What kind of reward is verse 4 talking about?
4. It's important to note that Jesus isn't condemning public prayer here, but the motive behind it. What are the two ways of praying Jesus is condemning in verses 5 to 8?
5. Notice in verse 9 Jesus doesn't say 'this, then, is *what* you should pray:', rather he says 'this, then, is *how* you should pray:'. It is possible to blow your own horn praying the Lord's prayer! Who does this prayer teach us we should be seeking the glory of and who does it teach us we should be acknowledging the weakness of?
6. According to verses 14 to 15, what attitude lies behind praying 'how' Jesus teaches us to pray?
7. Fasting in the OT and NT was means to foster self-humbling before God. It is often viewed as a form of Christian self discipline but is always condemned when done with hypocrisy. Is there a place for fasting today?



8. Matthew 8:4, 14:23, 16:20, 17:9, and 26:39-42 tell us that Jesus wasn't seeking praise for himself from men, but was simply doing the will of his Father. How did his Father reward him and all those who follow him?

9. In the last 2 studies we have seen that we should strive for perfect obedience to the Father, not for our own glory, but for his glory. What are some of the acts of obedience that you do now that are for your glory? How can you make sure you continue to be obedient but give all the glory to your Father in heaven?



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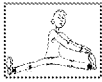
What can we pray for our world?

7

loyalty and trust (6:19-34)



Jesus calls his followers to be undivided in their commitment to him and in their trust of him—he will demonstrate to them he is committed to and trusting of his Father.



Are you the kind of supporter that switches teams or voter that swings between parties? Why?

warm-up



Read Matthew 6:19-34

1. To be loyal to God we must stop storing up treasures for *ourselves* on earth. How do you store up treasures for your *yourself* on earth?
2. How will our loyalty to God effect the direction of our eyes and the work of our hands?
3. Whether you have lots of food and clothing or little, the answer to verse 27 is ‘no-one’! If worry cannot change our future circumstances, why do we do it?
4. Jesus is not asking us not to work here, birds don’t sit around with their mouths open waiting for food to fall from the sky... they look for it. But, there are times when there is no food, and there are times when the clothes wear thin. What does Jesus expect his disciples to do in those situations if they are not to worry?
5. What is Jesus commanding and promising in verse 33?
6. What might be the ‘trouble’ of each day that Jesus disciples would face that is sufficient cause for them to not look beyond the present?



interact

7. Where does your loyalty lie? With God, or with money? Discuss.

8. How do you approach the task of following Jesus today, trusting him with everything today, instead of worrying about your plans for tomorrow?



prayer

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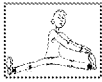
8

you need help (7:1-12)



the point

The scripture is clear: the kingdom of heaven demands sincere selflessness. It seems impossible, but Jesus says pray and God will make it possible; he takes care of his children.



warm-up

When was the last time you were forced to admit you needed help?



study

Read Matthew 7:1-12

1. The Bible seems clear that some kind of judging is okay (John 7:24; 1 Cor 5:5, Gal 1:8-9, Phil 3:2, 1 John 4:1). What kind of judgment is Jesus condemning here?
2. What kind of judgment does Jesus endorse?
3. What is Jesus warning his disciples against in verse 6 and how does it fit in with the surrounding context?
4. Jesus has just spent two chapters laying down some difficult challenges to his disciples. If they want to enter the kingdom of heaven, the road is hard! He now turns and talks about prayer. A lot of people have used this passage to say if you pray hard enough about anything (car/house/healing) and with enough faith, you'll get it. But why, after his challenging sermon, is Jesus now exhorting his disciples to pray?
5. What does Jesus mean in verse 12 by 'sums up'?
6. What is the connection between Jesus being the fulfiller of the Law and the Prophets (5:17) and the summing up of the Law and the Prophets as 'doing unto others as you would have them do to you'?



interact

7. How can you get better at judging yourself before you judge others?

8. How much of your day to day prayer life is asking God that you will live the righteous life his word demands? How can we help each other to get better at praying about these struggles?

9. Jesus exemplified the kind of sincere prayer that was needed for obedience to the Law and the Prophets (Matthew 26:42). Spend some time praying that the Lord will get you through this week living the righteous life he demands.



prayer

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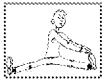
9

take the King's way (7:13-28)



the point

Living a life in submission to the teaching of Jesus will not be easy and it will not be the choice of the majority. But submitting to the King's authority will be our refuge in the end.



warm-up

Give an example of a physical journey you've taken where you intentionally chose the hard way...



study

Read Matthew 7:13-28

1. There are 4 opposites in this passage: the narrow gate and the wide gate, the narrow way and the broad road, destruction and life, and the many and the few. What is the meaning of them?
2. False prophets teach/encourage people to enter through the wide gate and take the broad road. What does Jesus have to say about how we can recognize these people and what will become of them?
3. If verses 15 to 20 deal with false prophets, verses 21 to 23 deal with false followers. How will false followers be discerned from true followers?
4. It is unlikely that the claims of verse 22 will be false. It is more likely that they will be insufficient. What will be sufficient on that day?
5. Who does Jesus say will be doing the judging (see also Psalm 6)?
6. As Jesus talks about the wise and foolish builders, the storm he alludes to is the day referred to in verse 22. What does he explicitly say will be the key to weathering the storm on that day?
7. Skim through Matthew 8:9; 9:6, 8; 10:1; 21:23-24, 27; 28:18. Then read Psalm 2. What kind of authority are the crowds beginning to notice here?



interact

8. Share some of the difficulties associated with walking the narrow path (i.e. choosing to live each day with Jesus as your King).

9. A huge part of the teaching of Jesus in the last 7 chapters is that living in submission to him is what counts—not mere talk and external appearances. How can we remind ourselves of Jesus’ authority and the importance of living for his kingdom?



prayer

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