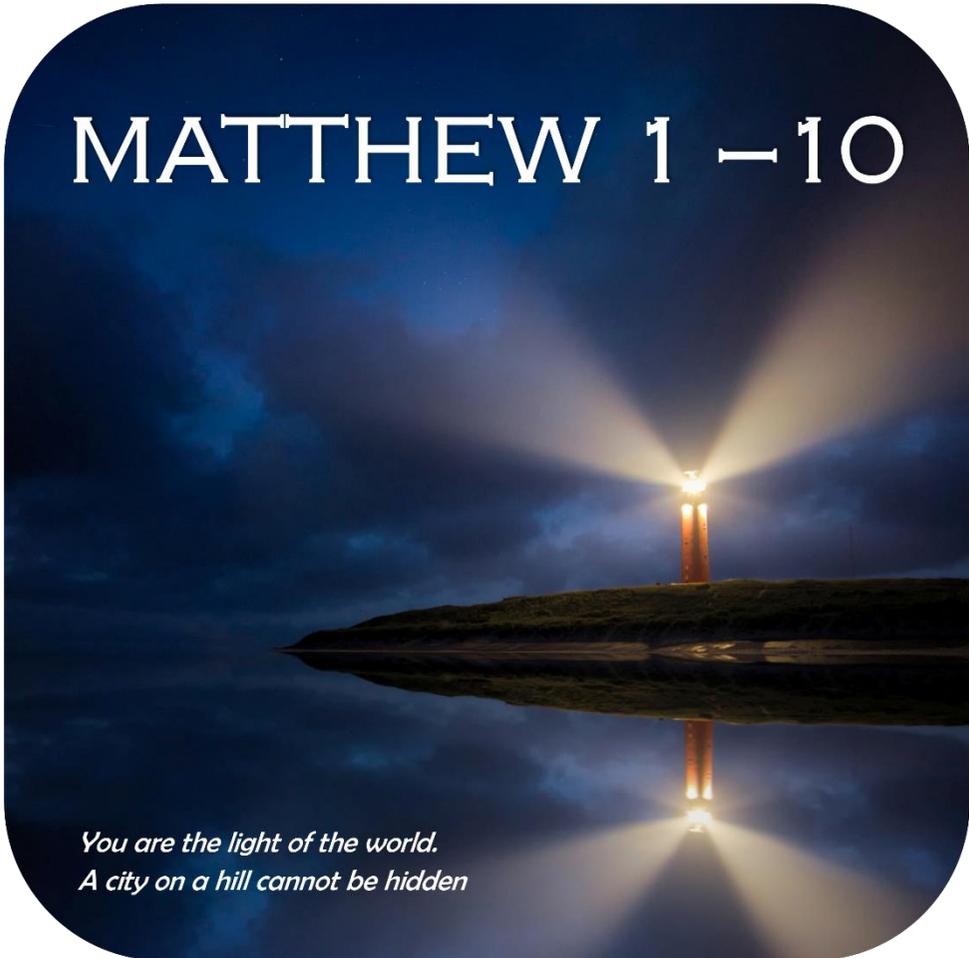


MATTHEW 1 – 10



*You are the light of the world.
A city on a hill cannot be hidden*

KINGDOM OF GOD

(11 BIBLE STUDIES)

EXAMINATION
BIBLE STUDIES

CONTENTS

Contents	page 02
Getting the most out of these studies	page 03
Introducing Matthew	pages 04-05
Study 1: Matthew 1-2 – Beginnings	pages 06-07
Study 2: Matthew 3:1-4:22 – Preparing the Way	pages 08-09
Study 3: Matthew 4:23-5:16 – Kingdom Living	pages 10-11
Study 4: Matthew 5:17-48 – Fulfilment of the Law	pages 12-13
Study 5: Matthew 6:1-18 – Religious Hypocrisy	pages 14-15
Study 6: Matthew 6:19-34 – Kingdom Perspectives	pages 16-17
Study 7: Matthew 7:1-29 – Putting into Practice	pages 18-19
Study 8: Matthew 8:1-17 – The Authority of Jesus	pages 20-21
Study 9: Matthew 8:18-9:13 – Discipleship and Identity	pages 22-23
Study 10: Matthew 9:14-38 – Faith and Compassion	pages 24-25
Study 11: Matthew 10:1-42 – Stepping out in Mission	pages 26-27
Memory Verses	page 28

THE SMALL PRINT

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Your Commitment

I would encourage you to make a commitment to attending your group regularly. I realise that sometimes there are things that get in the way, but do prioritise studying the Bible with other. This will involve sacrifice, and effective use of your time, but I really believe that in doing so you will get the most out of studying the Bible and praying together in your small group.

Your Contribution

What you put into the group is going to determine what you get out of the group. I encourage you to contribute honestly to the discussion and workings of the group. I understand people come from different backgrounds with unique personalities & life experiences. But, we all have a big part to play, so I encourage you to be fully present and take ownership of your group.

Your Preparation

These materials are primarily for use in preparing and/or leading group discussions, but they will also be useful in keeping your thoughts together in one place. The materials provide you with the passage so that you can identify and highlight recurring themes and note down your own thoughts and questions. Also, the materials include questions designed to provoke thought, and help you reflect on what the passage meant, both at the time it was written, and also what it means for us now.

I would encourage you to make good use of these materials, as doing so will help you contribute and get the most out of the group discussions. The materials are, however, only “tools” – they are there to help you, and not to restrict you, or force you to think in a certain manner. I want to see God speaking to you through these passages, and if the questions or notes don't help you, simply don't use them!

I have also included within these materials an introduction to the book. Make of this what you will, but I hope that it is helpful in getting you started with these studies!

Your Leadership

Here are some useful pointers in how to lead your Bible study group. Be aware that included in this study guide are more questions than you can possibly ask and/or answer in one session. They are not designed to be used rigidly, and there will rarely be a need to ask every question! Make sure that you spend some time praying at the start and ensure you read & re-read the passages as much as possible. In relation to the passages, then consider the suggested questions with an open mind. There is rarely “a single right answer” and I would encourage you to share your thoughts with your group.

Where appropriate I have also included a number of quotations from relevant Christian literature, most of which are readily available online if you want to do further thinking or study. My prayer is that as you study together you would grow to love Jesus and experience Him more deeply.

I would appreciate your feedback and suggestions on how to make these materials even better!

*Steve McClure
Spring 2019*

INTRODUCING MATTHEW

Matthew is a brilliant example of how hopeless it is to read the NT without understanding the Old. Right from the start of the gospel we can see that we are stepping into the middle of a story that has been going on for some time. As we move into these New Testament books I want to focus on what we can learn about them from looking at the beginning and end of each book, as this often an illuminating way of seeing what is going on. In Matthew's case the start of his gospel tells us several key things.

First of all, it is a second Genesis: a second beginning - the word genealogy links us back to Genesis, where genealogy is more than simply a family tree. It is a family story. Matthew wants to tell us where Jesus came from, how he fits into God's story and what it means to be those who follow Jesus as his disciples. To do that he gives us a family tree. The royal line of the kings of Judah, all the way back to Abraham. It a condensed form of history. Matthew was most likely writing to Jewish Christians, who knew their OT, and as they read these names they would immediately think of all the stories represented. Those stories give context and meaning to Jesus' life. Jesus, like many of these names (think especially of the stories behind the women mentioned in Matthew 1), is born in circumstances that others will question. His earthly father, Joseph, responds in obedience to an angel and takes Mary as his wife, despite knowing that the child will not be his. All this happens to "fulfil" what God has spoken in the past. This word fulfil is vitally important for Matthew's gospel - and it is important for us to think about because we often get the wrong end of its meaning. Often we think of fulfilled prophecy as being about someone long ago in the past predicting in detail a particular aspect of Jesus' life.

That sounds simple enough and there are sometimes elements of that going on, but it runs into problems when you read Matthew's gospel. When Isaiah spoke about a virgin (or young woman) conceiving he seems to be talking about an event close at hand (see Isaiah 7), when Hosea speaks about 'out of Egypt I called my son' he is speaking about the Exodus. Micah is speaking about a kingly figure coming from Bethlehem it is true, but there is not much else in the passage that would link to the other events of Jesus' birth. If we stress too much that Jesus' fulfilling the OT is about his life being predicted in detail beforehand it begins to feel like Matthew is wrenching a lot of these events out of their OT contexts. The remedy to this is to change our focus somewhat. It isn't that the OT has within it a collection of randomly distributed texts that predict different aspects of Jesus' life. Instead it is that these texts speak of particular patterns in Israel's story that Jesus lives out in his life and gives fresh meaning to. So when Matthew quotes Hosea speaking of Israel's exodus out of Egypt, but Matthew wants us to see that Jesus is experiencing Israel's story in his own life all over again. This is especially important to see in Matthew's gospel. For Jesus is the son of David - the King promised, and the Son of Abraham - the perfect Israel who will bring the fulfilment of the promises to Abraham - blessing to Israel and to the nations. Israel had failed in their mission - the descent of the names into obscurity in Matthew's genealogy in chapter 1 shows that - they didn't enjoy God's blessing, and they didn't bring God's blessing to the nations. Matthew wants us to see that Jesus succeeds where Israel failed.

Jesus is tempted in the wilderness, but unlike Israel he stands firm. Jesus calls to himself 12 men who will form the foundation of a renewed Israel - not replacing the old, but fulfilling all that it was supposed to be. Jesus teaches on the Mount, and the gospel continues with stories of his teaching and healings. The teaching emphasises the importance of persistence and faithfulness in following Jesus. Matthew's gospel gives us lots of Jesus' teaching, but still gives 1/4 of his gospel to the last week of Jesus' life and his teaching in that week. Jesus' death is the culmination of the gospel, the event to which everything else has been leading. The resurrection is told very briefly (only Mark has less detail). The two Mary's go to the tomb - but meet an angel who tells the women not to be afraid, but to go and bear

witness to the disciples that they should go to Galilee where Jesus will meet them as he promised. The soldiers are bribed to say that the disciples stole the body - a fairly implausible explanation for the change we see later on in them. The gospel closes with Jesus meeting the 11 (Judas is no more, after his betrayal and suicide) and they worship him (although some doubted - a reassuring aside in some ways, even the 11 disciples who saw the risen Christ still fell prey to doubts). Jesus meets them and gives them the 'great commission'. It is worth pausing on this. Here Jesus sends his disciples, the nucleus of a restored Israel out to bless the nations. Jesus disciples will be the start of a people who, because of what Jesus had done would be able to share his blessing with all nations. Jesus says:

*¹⁸ Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age. **Matthew 28:18-20***

The start here is key. Jesus has all authority over heaven and earth. He is the King. It is therefore right to go and make disciples. Everyone should bow the knee to Jesus. His claim is universal, and absolute. The key command here is "make disciples". To do that they will have to go, but you could almost paraphrase it "as you go, make disciples of..." A disciple is a learner. One who learns what Jesus said and seeks to follow him. Rabbis in Jesus' day had disciples who followed them around, saw how they lived and tried to imitate them. So Jesus' disciples are to follow him and seek to live like him. Matthew's gospel gives us the resources to follow Jesus when we open it up and read how he lived and what he taught. The disciples are to make disciples of all nations - God's blessing is going out to the whole world. Jesus has authority over the whole world, and the disciples are to go to the whole world. No-one is excluded, all are invited to come and learn from Jesus and follow him. They are to be baptised in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit - notice how name is singular here. Father, Son and Holy Spirit are one. This is one of the earliest pointers to the Trinity. And they are to be taught to obey all Jesus' commands. We are not simply to be taught what Jesus said, we are to be taught to obey it. This goes with Jesus' words in chapter 7 - the wise man is the one who hears Jesus' words and puts them into practice. This is hard work. It isn't easy. But it is what we must seek to do. Jesus' words are the foundation of life.

Finally the disciples are assured that as they go out on God's mission in His world Jesus is with them, to the end of the age. We who follow in their steps have this assurance too. As we read Matthew's words, as we seek to obey them, and as we seek to show others their importance and meaning we will know that Jesus is with us always, even to the end of the age. So read Matthew, and read it paying particular attention to Jesus' words and teachings, read it paying attention to how Jesus wants us to live. Read it with the assurance that even when it seems like an impossible task these words of Jesus in the middle of the gospel are true:

*²⁸ "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." **Matthew 11:28-30***

It is worth saying here that 'easy' means something like 'well fitting'. As a carpenter Jesus knew about making yokes for oxen. Jesus' yoke is one that fits. Not always in a way we would choose, but always in a way that is best - and following him is always the way to find rest for our souls. If we feel weary and burdened then perhaps it is time to ask if we need to come back to the one who crafts well-fitting yokes and ask him what it is he would have us do.

Mark Arnold (<https://rozandmark.wordpress.com/2019/04/18/matthew-discipleship/>)

INTRODUCTION: Matthew begins his gospel about Jesus with a genealogy setting the scene for the way that he would go on to show how Jesus was the one promised in the Old Testament who would fulfil all of the Messianic promises. In this study we look at Jesus' birth and His early years before He started His public ministry.

SETTING THE SCENE: What do you know about your own origin story or your family tree? What influence does our lineage make to who we are and who we become? As the people of God waited for the promised Messiah what do you imagine that they were expecting (or not expecting) of Him?

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GENEALOGY (1:1-17): Why does Matthew begin his gospel with a genealogy? What do you notice about the people included in this genealogy? To what extent are the inclusion of Jacob (v2), Tamar (v3), Rahab & Ruth (v5) and David (v6) something of a surprise? How does this encourage you?

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A BABY IS BORN (1:18-26): Keeping in mind the context, how big a scandal was it for Mary to be found pregnant out of wedlock (v18)? What is your reaction to Joseph's plan to divorce her quietly (v19)? In what ways does the Angel's intervention change all of this for Joseph? Why does Matthew feel the need to spell out that Joseph did not consummate the marriage until Jesus was born (v26)?

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What can we learn from the descriptions given to Jesus here: i.e. conceived by the Spirit (v20), He will save His people from their sins (v21) and He will be called Immanuel (v23 & Isaiah 7:14)? What do these descriptions tell us about the kind of ministry that Jesus would go on to have among us?

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HEROD AND THE MAGI (2:1-12): What do we learn about the Magi (wise men) and why they came to see Jesus (v1-2, 9-12)? How does Herod's reaction to news of Jesus' arrival contrast with that of the Magi (v3-8)? What does Micah's prophesy help us see about Jesus' identity (v6)?

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Despite hearing the prophesy how do you understand Herod's refusal to believe (v8 & 12)? What is the significance of the gifts brought by the Magi (v12)?

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FLIGHT AND RETURN (2:13-23): How does Matthew explain the fulfilment of the prophecies in Hosea 11:1 (see v15) and Jeremiah 31:15 (see v18)? Why does Herod go to such lengths to try and have Jesus killed? Was there a time when you also refused to believe? What lengths did you go to?

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Following Herod's death an angel directs Joseph back to Israel: what impresses you about God's care for Mary and Joseph and how these things work together to also fulfil Old Testament prophesy (v23)?

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DRAWING IT TOGETHER: In what ways do you see God at work behind the scenes orchestrating all that was happening? How does Matthew's account help you to believe that these things really happened and that Jesus really was the promised Messiah?

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IDEAS FOR PRAYER: Thank God for the way that He was working in this story to bring about His purposes and fulfil all that had been said of the Messiah. Thank God too for your own part in this ongoing story and ask Him to continue to work in and through you for His glory and your good.

MEMORY VERSES: MATTHEW 1:21-22

STUDY 2 – MATTHEW 3:1-4:22– PREPARING THE WAY

INTRODUCTION: These chapters herald the arrival of King Jesus through the ministry of John the Baptist. They also show us the preparation (baptism and temptation) behind and beginnings of Jesus' public ministry. The Jesus we encounter is every bit the King but not as we might have expected.

SETTING THE SCENE: Imagine that you were part of the advance team sent to prepare the way for the state visit of a particular head of state: what kind of preparations would need to be made? What similarities and differences are there between such a visit and that of King Jesus?

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JOHN THE BAPTIST (3:1-10): What do we learn about John the Baptist in these verses and what do you think attracted people to John the Baptist who was ministering in the wilderness (v1-6)? In what ways did John fulfil Isaiah prophecy which Matthew quotes here (v3 and Isaiah 40:3)? Why was John so blunt and cutting in how he addresses the religious leaders (v7-10)?

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BAPTISM WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT (3:11-12): How do you understand John's contrast between his *baptism of water for repentance* and Jesus' *baptism with the Spirit and fire* (v11)? When do you think such a baptism takes place? What is the significance in the treatment of the wheat and the chaff (v12)?

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JESUS' BAPTISM (3:13-17): Why was it important for Jesus to be baptised (v13 & 15)? Why do you think John felt otherwise (v14)? How do you think the descending dove and the voice from Heaven would have (a) encouraged Jesus and (b) been a witness to those watching? In what ways was Jesus similar and/or different to one of you being baptised?

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IN THE WILDERNESS (4:1-2): What do you think were Satan's intentions as came to Jesus to tempt Him? Do you think the Spirit was anticipating Satan's efforts as He led Jesus into the desert? What have been the key wilderness moments for you when Satan has tried to tempt you also?

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THE NATURE OF TEMPTATION: How would you describe the nature of the three temptations (v3-4, 5-7 & 8-10)? What can we learn from Jesus about how to deal with temptation? Specifically what do you see as the role of the Word of God in combating such temptation?

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BEGINNING MINISTRY (4:12-17): What was it that caused Jesus to begin preaching *Repent for the Kingdom of God has come near* (v17)? How was Isaiah's prophecy (from Isaiah 9:1-12) fulfilled through Jesus? What do we learn about what will characterise Jesus' ministry?

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CALLING THE DISCIPLES (4:18-22): Matthew says little about the calling of the disciples in his gospel (see also 9:9-13): what can we learn from what he does say here about the calling of Peter, Andrew, James & John? What do you think it was that made following Jesus so attractive? What does Jesus mean when He promises to send them out to fish for people (v19)?

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DRAWING IT TOGETHER: What inspires you about the picture of King Jesus that Matthew is developing here? How does this Jesus motivate you to follow and to serve Him?

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IDEAS FOR PRAYER: Thank God for sending Jesus, His Son to our world for our sake. Ask God to help you to make a strong commitment to follow Jesus and continue the work He began amongst us.

MEMORY VERSE: MATTHEW 3:17

Happy are you humble poor. A heavenly kingdom is yours
Fortunate are you mourners, for you will know comfort
How rich are gentle folk inheriting the earth.
Are you hungry for what's right, rejoice, for you'll be full!
Happy are you who show mercy, for you'll be shown it too
How wonderful if your heart is pure. God is your intimate friend
As for you who reconcile differences. You've a special gift from above
Blessings abound even if you're persecuted, accused of all sorts of rubbish
Start dancing, be glad. You won't be shortchanged.
You'll party in heaven with prophets who've gone before
Paraphrase of Matthew 5:1-11 by Annie Forester, 2015

INTRODUCTION: This passage is the beginning of Jesus' most well-known teaching block. It's an incredibly challenging section that is very hard hitting. In this section we have Jesus' beatitudes as well as His teaching that we are *salt* and *light*. The kind of distinctive life described by Jesus is quite inspiring and if lived should lead others to glorify God.

SETTING THE SCENE (4:23-5:1): What is the significance of these three key elements of Jesus' ministry (repeated in Matthew 9:35)? What was it about Jesus that caused so many people to flock to him? What strikes you about the context in which Jesus delivers the so called *Sermon on the Mount*? What do you imagine it would have been like to be a part of this?

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BEING BLESSED: What do you think it means to be *blessed* (alternate words could be *happy*, *fortunate*, *privileged*)? Who and what would our society today normally refer to as *blessed* and how are they rewarded? How does this compare with the teaching of Jesus?

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BEATITUDES (5:2-12): Why do you think Jesus taught the beatitudes? In your own words how would you describe each of the beatitudes (see also Annie Forester paraphrase)? Which stand out most to you? What do you think a community truly characterised by these qualities would look like?

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How does Matthew's account compare to that of the other gospels (see Luke 6:17-26, 14:34-35, Mark 9:50)? Why is this teaching so significant for us if we want to follow Jesus?

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THE BEATITUDES LIVED OUT: What examples are there in the Bible of each of the Beatitudes lived out in practice (for example see *poverty of spirit* in Luke 18:13)? Which beatitude do you find most difficult to demonstrate in your own life?

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SALT OF THE EARTH (5:13): Why does Jesus compares us to everyday salt? What's the purpose of salt and what does that say about our corresponding role in society (Col 4:5-6)? What did Jesus mean when He said that *if salt loses its saltiness...it is longer good for anything*? What steps might we take to live more distinctive (flavoursome & preservative) lives amongst those who do not yet know Jesus?

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LIGHT OF THE WORLD (5:14-16): Why do you think that Jesus also compares us to light and a city on a hill? Why might people want to hide their light under a bowl? Have you experienced others coming to glorify God through your witness for Jesus? Why or why not? What light do Ephesians 5:8-14 and 1 Peter 2:12 shed on these verses?

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DRAWING IT TOGETHER: What implications do these things have for us as we reach out to our friends (think through what we say, our work, and how we treat one another)? Have we seen people warm to God as a result of things which we say and do? If not why not?

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IDEAS FOR PRAYER: Think through how our lives measure up to Jesus' teaching about Kingdom Living. Pray for one another as we seek to live radically different and transformed lives among those who do not yet know Jesus and that we would see people glorifying God through our witness.

MEMORY VERSE: MATTHEW 5:16

STUDY 4 – MATTHEW 5:17-48 – FULFILMENT OF THE LAW

INTRODUCTION: Jesus now speaks about the law and how He had come to abolish it but to fulfil it (v17-20). What follows is a series of teaching blocks helping it to look beyond the requirements of the law to its original intensions. Jesus helps us to look beyond outward conformity to inner transformation.

SETTING THE SCENE: Can you think of areas of your life where you have adopted certain standards but at some point lost sight of why you did so? What is the difference between outward conformity (adhering to certain rules or standards) and inward transformation (heart change)? Which is easier?

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FULFILLING THE LAW (v17-20): What do you think Jesus means by *the Law* and *the Prophets*? Jesus acknowledges a high view of Old the Testament right down to the *smallest letter* and *least stroke of a pen*: in what sense do you think that Jesus came to *fulfil the Law and the Prophets* (v17)?

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FULFIL OR ABOLISH? How can we reconcile Jesus' teaching about *fulfilling* without *abolishing* the law with passages such as Mk 7:17-23, 10:1-18? Compare the following views;

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1. *Division of the law* (division of the law into moral, civil and ceremonial)
2. *'Fulfilment' as 'confirmation'* (confirmed in Jesus' perfect life and then in Spirit filled believers)
3. *Jesus is the fulfilment* (the detailed but provisional prescriptions of the Old Testament have been superseded and is now fulfilled in the arrival of that to which it pointed)

MURDER (v21-26): How do you respond to Jesus claim anger at a brother is also guilty of murder and subject to judgement (see strong references to court and the fires of hell in v22)? Why is swift reconciliation so vital (v23-25)? What culture shift was Jesus trying to enact both then and now?

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ADULTERY (v27-30): Once again Jesus likens adultery with what we do in our hearts: what are the implications about the potential to commit adultery in our hearts? How can we guard against this (Job 31:1 or Proverbs 5)? To what extent should we take Jesus' command to *gouge out an eye* or *cut off a hand* literally? What does it mean for you to take sin seriously in your daily walk with God?

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LEGAL RELATIONSHIPS: DIVORCE AND OATHS (v31-37): Jesus makes a strong statement here about divorce and its implications: what is your response to this (see also 19:3-9)? How can we invest positively in our marriages so that they have a better chance of lasting the course?

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Why does Jesus appear to be opposed to making oaths of any kind (think about what the purpose of oaths might have been)? What steps can we take to ensure that our *Yes means Yes* (James 5:12)?

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LOVING OUR ENEMIES (v38-47): What was God's intention through this law of retaliation, *an eye for an eye* (Exodus 21:24) and how does Jesus reinterpret it? In what ways was (and still is), the instruction to love your enemies totally counter cultural? Why is this so hard to put into practice?

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DRAWING IT TOGETHER (v48): In what ways does this final verse sum up the core message of what Jesus has been saying to us in this passage? Is it possible to be perfect? Why or why not?

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IDEAS FOR PRAYER: Think through the ways in which Jesus' teaching has challenged your attitudes in these areas. Share and hold each another accountable for any decisions and/or actions that you need to make or take over the coming weeks.

MEMORY VERSE: MATTHEW 5:20

STUDY 5 – MATTHEW 6:1-18 – RELIGIOUS HYPOCRISY

INTRODUCTION: Jesus continues the Sermon on the Mount and now turns to the subject of religious hypocrisy. Jesus addresses our giving, prayer and fasting. In each case Jesus encourages us to look to God for our reward rather than look for the affirmation of others.

SETTING THE SCENE: In what ways are we guilty of being hypocrite's (see definition below)? Why are motives so important in assessing our outward behaviour? Why do you think that the affirmation of others matters so much to us?

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"Hypocrisy is defined as the condition of a person pretending to be something he is not, especially in the area of morals or religion; a false presentation of belief or feeling" (www.thefreedictionary.com).

GIVING TO THE NEEDY (v1-4): How do we reconcile Jesus' word in 5:16 (about letting our light shine before men so that they may see our good deeds with Jesus' teaching here about not doing our *acts of righteousness* before men, to be seen by them (v1)?

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REWARD: Why, if we seek to be seen by others, does Jesus say that we have received our reward in full (v2)? How might God reward what is done in secret (v4)? What might it look like to *not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing*?

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PRAYER (v5-14): How does Jesus' teaching on prayer contrast to the prayers of the hypocrites? Is Jesus saying we should always pray secretly? Why or why not? In what ways might God's knowledge about what we need before we even ask encourage us not to babble like the pagans (v7-8)?

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How would you describe the various elements of this prayer in your own words? To what extent should or shouldn't the Lord's Prayer serve as a model or template for our prayers today? At what times have you made use of this prayer? What might be the benefits of doing so?

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FASTING (v16-18): The implication of v16 is that Jesus assumes that His disciples will fast: should we still fast today? If so, how often should we fast and what should we fast from (v16-18)? What is your experience of fasting? In what ways has the discipline of fasting been helpful and/or a challenge?

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WHAT WE DO IN SECRET (v4, 6 & 18): Given all that we have studied, how do you now understand the link between what we do in *secret* and our resulting *reward* (see the repeated phrase in v4, 6 & 18)? What steps do you need to take this week in these areas and to ensure your motives are good?

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DRAWING IT TOGETHER: What would be the modern day spiritual acts or activities in which we are tempted to be hypocritical either openly or more subtly? How does Jesus' parable of the Pharisee and Tax Collector (Luke 18:9-14) illustrate His teaching here about hypocrisy?

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IDEAS FOR PRAYER: Talk about your experience of giving, praying and fasting; sharing of your strengths and weaknesses. Talk also about the danger of religious hypocrisy and pray for one another that you would be able to guard against it in your daily lives.

MEMORY VERSE: MATTHEW 6:1

STUDY 6 – MATTHEW 6:19-34 – KINGDOM PERSPECTIVES

INTRODUCTION: It is hard to shake our natural tendency to worry about anything and everything. This is especially true in the area of money and wealth but Jesus tells us not to store up treasures on earth (which don't last) but rather store up treasures in heaven (which do last). Again this is very practical teaching that takes us right to the heart of the matter.

SETTING THE SCENE: What do you tend to worry most about? What is the root cause of those worries and what do they tell us about what is important to us? Why is the accumulation of wealth and possessions so endemic in our society?

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TREASURES (v19-21): How do you understand Jesus' teaching about the difference between storing up *earthly treasures* and treasure in heaven (v19-20)? What are the consequences of these two opposing pursuits? In what ways can you identify with Jesus' declaration that the things we treasure reveal where our hearts lie? What steps might we take to begin to store up treasure in Heaven?

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HEALTHY EYES (v22-23): In what sense is the eye, the lamp of the body? What is Jesus trying to say here through His illustration about health and unhealthy eyes? Why does the state of our eyes determine whether our body will be full of light or full of darkness?

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TWO MASTERS (v24): How do you respond to Jesus' claim that *we cannot serve two masters*? Is Jesus too strong here in saying that we will hate or despise the one and love or be devoted to the other? Why or why not? In what ways have you seen this demonstrated in your own life or in others?

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THEREFORE DO NOT WORRY (v25): What impact will the priorities and choices we make regarding 'treasures' and 'masters' (v19-24) have on our ability to live free from worry? How would you define "worry"? What is the difference between being 'concerned' and being 'worried'?

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THE NATURE OF WORRY (v26-34): How do you feel about Jesus' command 'do not worry' which He repeats in v25, 31 & 34? What do you think causes people and more specifically you to worry? In what sense does worry demonstrate a lack of faith (v30)?

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NOT TO WORRY (v26-34): How do the following reasons that Jesus gives help you not to worry: (a) other things are more important (v25), (b) God looks after the birds and the flowers (v26, 28), (c) it doesn't achieve anything (v27), (d) If you worry you're behaving as if you do not know God (v30) and (d) Remember who God is and what He knows (v26, 32)?

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SEEK FIRST HIS KINGDOM (v33-34): What do you think it might look like to seek *first* His Kingdom and His righteousness (v33)? How can we learn to stop worrying about tomorrow (v34)?

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DRAWING IT TOGETHER: What difference would these Kingdom perspectives have on our lives if we truly embraced them and put them into practice? What else the Bible has to say about worry and trusting God (e.g. Proverbs 3:5-6, Romans 8:28-39, Mark 6:45-56 & John 14:1-4)?

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IDEAS FOR PRAYER: Talk about some of your own struggles with worry, storing up treasures on earth and trying to serve more than one master. Pray for one another that you would increasingly learn to trust God rather than spend time worrying.

MEMORY VERSE: MATTHEW 6:33

STUDY 7 – MATTHEW 7:1-29 – PUTTING INTO PRACTICE

INTRODUCTION: In the final part of the Sermon on the Mount Jesus focuses on our response. He tells us not to judge one another and to ensure we enter through the narrow gate. He warns us against those who are not genuine in faith and encourages us to put into practice His teaching as He distinguishes between foundations built on the rock and those on the sand.

SETTING THE SCENE: Why do you think it is so easy to be hearers and not doers? What steps might we begin to take to put into practice all that we have been learning from Matthew? Can you give examples of times when God's blessing when you have put His commands into practice?

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JUDGING OTHERS (v1-5): In what ways do we judge one another? What reasons does Jesus give as to why we should not judge one another and why is it hypocritical to think this way? What is the difference between judging and discernment or thinking critically?

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DOGS AND PIGS (v6): What kinds of people do you think Jesus is referring to as 'dogs' and 'pigs'? Why do you think Jesus makes this statement in the context of judging others? Some have taken this to argue against evangelism: do you agree or disagree? Why?

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ASK, SEEK AND KNOCK (v7-12): What holds us back from asking, seeking or knocking (v7-8)? How does Jesus' argument about the comparison between our earthly Father (who gives good gifts) and our *Heavenly Father* encourage us to be bold and persistent in prayer (v9-11)?

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What are the implications of doing to others as we would have them do to us and why does this sum up the Law and the Prophets (v12)?

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NARROW AND WIDE GATES (v13-14): What are the main differences between the narrow and the broad gates? How is this metaphor reflected in the society around us? Why do you think that so many people enter through the broad gate?

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BY THEIR FRUIT (v15-23): What can we learn about who will enter the Kingdom of Heaven? In what sense does the 'quality of fruit' reveal the 'quality of the tree'? What does Jesus mean by saying that every tree that does not bear fruit will be thrown in the fire?

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WISE AND FOOLISH BUILDERS (v24-27): What are the differences and similarities between the wise and foolish builders and their houses? What does it look like for us to build a solid foundation on the rock rather than a foundation of sand?

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DRAWING IT TOGETHER (v28-29): Matthew records that the crowds were amazed by Jesus' teachings: what do you think so impressed the crowds? What else is required of those would enter the Kingdom (See also Matt 5:3-10, 5:19-20, 18:3, 19:14, 23, 21:31 and 25:34)?

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IDEAS FOR PRAYER: Talk about your experiences of relationships with others, what has been encouraging and what has been less helpful. Pray that you will be able to contribute positively in all of your relationships and that you would build firm foundations on the rock.

MEMORY VERSE: MATTHEW 7:24

In response to a criticism that he did not care for the Sermon on the Mount, C.S. Lewis replied, "As to 'caring for' the Sermon on the Mount, if 'caring for' here means 'liking' or enjoying, I suppose no one cares for it. Who can like being knocked flat on his face by a sledgehammer? I can hardly imagine a more deadly spiritual condition than that of a man who can read that passage with tranquil pleasure."

God in the Dock, Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1970, pg 181-182).

STUDY 8 – MATTHEW 8:1-17 – THE AUTHORITY OF JESUS

INTRODUCTION: Having finished the Sermon of the Mount, Jesus comes down the mountainside but the crowds follow Him. Soon Jesus is presented with significant need and what follows in this passage is a series of healings: the leper, the centurion's servant, Peter's mother-in-law and the demon possessed. In all of these encounters we see the authority of Jesus over sickness and evil spirits.

SETTING THE SCENE: What is the importance of miracles in the Bible? When do they happen and for what purposes? Should or shouldn't we expect miracles to happen today? How would you respond to people who argue that healing is our right and that a failure to be healed is due to our lack of faith?

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FOLLOWING JESUS (v1): Why do you think that such large numbers followed Jesus down the mountainside? What did it take for you to follow after Jesus and what would you say holds others back from doing the same (see also John 20:29)?

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HEALING THE LEPER (v2-4): What can we learn from the way that the leper (who would have been viewed as unclean and subject to Old Testament laws – see Exodus 13) approaches Jesus and asks Him to make him clean? What was required of the leper in order for him to be healed?

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What impresses you about Jesus' response to the Leper and the immediacy of the healing? What difference would being healed have made for the Leper? Why do you think that Jesus tells the leper not to tell anyone but instead to go and show himself to the High Priest (v4)?

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THE CENTURION'S FAITH (v5-10, 13): Why do you think the Roman Centurion comes to Jesus on behalf of His suffering servant (v6)? How do you understand the Centurion's reluctance to have Jesus come back with him and his faith that Jesus could just say the word (8b)? What impresses Jesus so much about the Centurion that He says He hasn't found *anyone in Israel with such great faith* (v10)?

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SUBJECTS OF THE KINGDOM (v11-12): How do you understand the reason that Jesus says these things about who will enter the Kingdom of God? What do you think we should take from the imagery Jesus uses to describe those thrown out into darkness?

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MANY HEALINGS (v14-16): After the previous accounts, why do you think that Matthew also includes this account of how Jesus heals Peter's mother in-law? In what sense are the words of Isaiah 53 (quoted in v17) fulfilled in what Jesus does here?

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DRAWING IT TOGETHER: What do we learn from this passage about the authority of Jesus? How would you compare and contrast the different people Jesus meets in this passage, the different ways that they encounter Jesus' authority and any impact He has on their lives?

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IDEAS FOR PRAYER: Share together about how this passage challenges your faith and how you respond to the authority of Jesus. Pray that God would help you to trust in Him who has authority over all sickness, death and suffering. Thank God that He is able to immeasurably more than we could ever ask of imagine (Ephesians 3:20).

MEMORY VERSE: MATTHEW 8:10

STUDY 9 – MATTHEW 8:18-9:13 – DISCIPLESHIP AND IDENTITY

INTRODUCTION: This is the 2nd set of miracles in chapters 8-9 and includes Jesus calming the storm, restoring the two demon-possessed men and healing the paralysed man. We now see that in addition to power over sickness, Jesus has power over nature and claims to have power to forgive sins.

SETTING THE SCENE: Who is the most extraordinary person you have met and why? If Jesus is who He says He is what kind of things would you expect to be true of Him? In your experience to what extent has Jesus lived up to such expectations?

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THE COST OF DISCIPLESHIP (8:18-22): How do you respond to what Jesus says to those who declared that they wanted to follow Him? Did Jesus want to put them off following Him or just warn them about what it will cost them to do so? If it was you that had met Jesus, what do you think that Jesus would have said to you (see also Matt 10:37-39)?

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LEARNING FROM JESUS' MIRACLES (8:23-9:8): Scan over the next three miracles Matthew records in 8:27, 8:28, 9:2-3 & 9:6-8): what do these accounts teach us about who Jesus is? Why do you think that it is so important for us to have deep and lasting convictions about who Jesus is?

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CALMING THE STORM (8:23-27): What do you imagine it would have been like to have been in the boat? Why does Jesus accuse His disciples of having *little faith* and being *so afraid*? What sort of faith do you think He was looking for? When have you found it difficult to trust Jesus amongst the storms life brings our way? How did this incident impact on the disciples (v27) and how does it speak to you?

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DEMON-POSSESSED MEN (8:28-34): Jesus now crosses over to the region of the Gadarenes where He encounters two demon-possessed men: what do you notice about how they address Jesus and the authority He appears to have over them?

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Why does Jesus grant the demons request to enter the herd of pigs? Why do the towns-people plead with Jesus to leave their region? For what reasons do people not want Jesus around today?

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THE PARALYSED MAN (9:2-8): For what reason did Jesus tell the paralysed man that he was forgiven before he healed his physical condition? How can we reflect Jesus' concern for the man's spiritual needs in the way that we carry out God's work in the world? Why did the teachers of the law accuse Jesus of blaspheming (v3)? How do you respond to Jesus having power to forgive sins?

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CALLING MATTHEW (v9-13): What would be today's equivalent of Jesus calling a tax collector to follow Him and then having dinner at his house? How do you understand Jesus teaching about His mission in terms of the healthy, the sick, the righteous and sinners?

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DRAWING IT TOGETHER: What were the priorities of those Jesus encounters in this passage: (a) the wannabe disciples who wanted to follow Jesus, the scared disciples in the boat, the towns-people after the healing of the Demon-possessed men and the fuming Jewish leaders upset by Jesus words

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IDEAS FOR PRAYER: Share together about (a) how you respond to the cost of being a disciple and (b) what storms you have been facing in recent months. Pray for one another, that you would develop a deeper conviction about the identity of Jesus and that God would fill you with praise and worship.

MEMORY VERSES: MATTHEW 8:19-20

STUDY 10 – MATTHEW 9:14-38 – FAITH AND COMPASSION

INTRODUCTION: This passage includes the third batch of miracles (the dead girl, the bleeding woman & the blind and the mute) followed by Jesus' observation of the need all around Him. Jesus had compassion on the crowds and told the disciples that the Harvest was plentiful but the workers few.

SETTING THE SCENE: What kinds of things do people in your generation demonstrate a strong sense of faith in? What kind of impact does faith have on how we live?

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FASTING (v14-17): How do you understand Jesus' teaching about His Kingdom and its impact through what He says about the 'bridegroom', 'garments' and 'wineskins'? In what way do these illustrations answer the question from the disciples of John about why Jesus' disciples didn't fast?

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FAITH OF THE SYNAGOGUE LEADER (v18-26): Matthew's description here is a brief account of Jesus' encounter with the synagogue ruler (called Jairus): what do we learn here about this man and his belief in Jesus? To what purpose do you think that Matthew includes this abbreviated account (see greater in detail in Mark 5:21-43 or Luke 8:40-56)?

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DEALING WITH INTERRUPTIONS (v21): What causes the woman to come to Jesus and interrupt His journey to Jairus' house? Why does Jesus emphasise that it's her faith that has healed her? How do you think Jairus would have felt during this encounter: (a) coming to Jesus for help, (b) experiencing the interruption of the woman and (c) when his daughter was healed?

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FAITH OF THE BLIND MEN (v27-31): Why do you think the two blind men follow Jesus and cry out *have mercy on us, Son of David* (v27)? What is Jesus' purpose in asking them if they believed that He could heal them? Why does Jesus heal them *according to their faith* (v29)?

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THE MUTE AND DEMON-POSSESSED MAN (v32-34): How do you understand the contrasting reactions of the crowd and the Pharisees to the healing of the mute and demon-possessed man? What is your experience of seeing contrasting response to Jesus and His Kingdom?

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HARASSED AND HELPLESS (9:35-36): Why do you think that Jesus describes the crowds as *harassed and helpless* and like *sheep without a shepherd*? In what ways are those around us like these people and how can we show a similar compassion for them?

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THE HARVEST IS PLENTIFUL (9:37-38): In what sense *was* and *is* the harvest plentiful and the workers (or labourers) few? What do you think characterises a *worker*? How can we pray for and be involved in sending such workers? What does it mean for us to be workers?

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DRAWING IT TOGETHER: What qualities of a transforming faith do we learn about in this passage? To what extent do you believe that Jesus can do such things in your life? What might it mean for you to have Jesus' compassion on those around you and to begin praying for workers?

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IDEAS FOR PRAYER: Talk about all that we learn here about Jesus and why we can trust Him. Ask God to grow your faith in Him and to raise up workers through the investment of your lives.

MEMORY VERSES: MATTHEW 9:37-38

STUDY 11 – MATTHEW 10:1-42 – STEPPING OUT IN MISSION

INTRODUCTION: In chapter 10 Jesus sends out His disciples to proclaim that the Kingdom of Heaven was near. He gives them clear instructions about how to deal with people's responses as He prepares them for opposition. It is clear that Jesus wants them to trust Him to make an impact as they go.

SETTING THE SCENE: Think of some kind of mission you have been a part of: what was the outcome and what were the factors that contributed to the success or failure of that mission? To what extent is taking risk a necessary element of stepping out in faith?

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THE MISSION (10:1-8): What do you think it would have been like to have been part of this mission team that Jesus commissioned? Why do you think that Jesus sends His disciples on this mission? Why was this mission specifically to the *lost sheep of Israel* rather than to the Gentiles only?

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INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE MISSION (v9-15): Do any of the Jesus' instructions surprise you and why? What principles should or shouldn't we draw from this account and apply to our own evangelism (i.e. what was cultural and what still applies today)?

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WOLVES IN SHEEP'S CLOTHING (v16-25): Jesus tells His disciples to expect opposition from three packs of wolves; false religion (v17), the state (v18) and the family (v21). What do you think it will take for us to stand firm in spite of such opposition? What does Jesus mean when He says that a *student is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master* (v24-25)?

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PREPARED FOR OPPOSITION (v26-33): What further reasons does Jesus offer here for why the disciples had no need to be afraid? What have you experienced of the Father's care which Jesus says is far and above that of the sparrows (v29-31)? How does knowing that nothing is ever outside God's will (v29) prepare us for difficult times? What kind of opposition have you faced for being a Christian?

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TAKING UP OUR CROSS (v34-39): How do you respond to Jesus' words about His coming to bring a sword rather than peace (v34-37)? What does it look like to *take our cross* (v38)? What practically do you think Jesus meant when He spoke about what it might mean to find or lose our lives (v39)?

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ENCOURAGEMENT OF REWARD (v40-42): How do you understand Jesus' encouragement here that loyalty to (and indeed everything done for) Jesus will be rewarded (v40-42)? What do we know about what these rewards might be? What opportunities might you have during the coming week to offer someone a cup of cold water (or equivalent)?

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DRAWING IT TOGETHER: In view of the divisiveness of the gospel (v21, 34-36), opposition (v17,18,21) and the cost of following Jesus (v37-39), how would you convince someone who is not yet a Christian that it is all worthwhile?

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IDEAS FOR PRAYER: Talk about your experience of what it means to be a wholehearted disciple of Jesus. Pray for one another as you work out the mission that God has given to you, as you seek to stand firm under opposition and as you make the daily choice to carry your cross and follow Jesus.

MEMORY VERSES: MATTHEW 10:38-39

MEMORY VERSES

STUDY 1: MATTHEW 1-2 – BEGINNINGS

²¹ She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.' **Matthew 1:21-22**

STUDY 2: MATTHEW 3:1-4:22 – PREPARING THE WAY

¹⁷ And a voice from heaven said, 'This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.' **Matt 3:17**

STUDY 3: MATTHEW 4:23-5:16 – KINGDOM LIVING

¹⁶ In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven. **Matthew 5:16**

STUDY 4: MATTHEW 5:17-48 – FULFILMENT OF THE LAW

²⁰ For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven. **Matthew 5:20**

STUDY 5: MATTHEW 6:1-18 – RELIGIOUS HYPOCRISY

'Be careful not to practise your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven. **Matthew 6:1**

STUDY 6: MATTHEW 6:19-34 – KINGDOM PERSPECTIVES

³³ But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. . **Matthew 6:33**

STUDY 7: MATTHEW 7:1-29 – PUTTING INTO PRACTICE

²⁴ 'Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. **Matthew 7:24**

STUDY 8: MATTHEW 8:1-17 – THE AUTHORITY OF JESUS

¹⁰ When Jesus heard this, he was amazed and said to those following him, 'Truly I tell you, I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith. **Matthew 8:10**

STUDY 9: MATTHEW 8:18-9:13 – DISCIPLESHIP AND IDENTITY

¹⁹ Then a teacher of the law came to him and said, 'Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go.' ²⁰ Jesus replied, 'Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.' **Matthew 8:19-20**

STUDY 10: MATTHEW 9:14-38 – FAITH AND COMPASSION

³⁷ Then he said to his disciples, 'The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. ³⁸ Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.' **Matthew 9:37-38**

STUDY 11: MATTHEW 10:1-42 – STEPPING OUT IN MISSION

³⁸ Whoever does not take up their cross and follow me is not worthy of me. ³⁹ Whoever finds their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life for my sake will find it. **Matthew 10:38-39**