



Walk | Read | Pray | Join | Commit

Matthew's Gospel Connect Group Resources: **Jesus – A Life**  
Matthew Chapters 1-4

*The aim of this session is to explore the question: what is God trying to communicate to this world through the life of Jesus?*

**COLLECT** – an ice breaker for your group

**Give each person a page of A4 paper and a pen. Instruct them to draw a line across the middle, horizontally. Where the line ends, label it 'today' and where it begins, 'birth'. Ask each person to write down between 5 and 10 points in that timeline that have been the most significant life events to date. In small groups of 3 or 4, talk through 2 or 3 of the main points of your journey.**

The book of Matthew is the most detailed and comprehensive account of Jesus' birth, life, teaching, death and resurrection. To start the series, if you can watch this video on the context of Matthew's gospel - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3Dv4-n6OYGI> (Search: **Read Scripture: Matthew Ch. 1-13** on YouTube)

**CHALLENGE** – today's main questions

For Matthew, it was essential for the reader to know that Jesus is the centre of God's vision. He is what the Old Testament was pointing towards and what the future is hinging on.

***What does it mean for Jesus to be at the centre of your life? What does this look like practically?***

In Matthew's Gospel, discipleship is a key subject. ***How would you define discipleship? What new habits do you need to take up or old habits do you need to drop to fulfil this definition?***

Jesus begins his ministry with 30 years in obscurity, a public baptism, time in the desert and with guidance by the Spirit. ***Do any of these stages fill you with fear or concern? Why do you think this is? How can you create space in your diary this year for more of that and seeking God through that?***

**CONNECT** – a chance to grow as community

At the beginning of the new year there is an opportunity to once again dedicate our lives afresh to God, planning in good rhythms and spaces of reflection in the diary for the year. Bill Hybels recommends a helpful pattern for leaving time for God: *Divert Daily, Withdraw Weekly, Abandon Annually*. Which of these do you currently do? Which don't you do and how can you plan 2019 so that you can embrace them this year?

*Leave 15/20 minutes to pray for one another and ask that our lives would be set apart for God to move in fresh ways through us in 2019.*



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### **CONTEXT AND CONTENT OF CHAPTERS 1-4 – relevant and helpful background information**

*[You may choose to read this as a whole group, or just use it as preparation to inform and facilitate group discussion.]*

Matthew's gospel is the most detailed and succinct account of Jesus' life, birth, teaching, death and resurrection. Whilst it may be suggested it is the least 'theological' and most 'biographical' of the four gospels, Matthew is trying to make an absolute theological claim throughout – it is Jesus who the Jewish people have been waiting for all this time, the fulfilment of the promises that God made to his people.

There are so many references to Jewish culture, festivals and rites of passage that it is clear the writer was brought up steeped in Judaism. There are also many references to major Jewish figures, with the author drawing a comparison to Jesus' life and theirs: consider Jesus' the exile to Egypt paralleling Moses' story, Jesus walking on water echoing Moses walking through the Dead Sea, the raising of the young girl and Lazarus drawing on the themes of the stories of Elijah and Elisha.

Matthew's gospel is also split in two parts, the first half (chapters 1-13) has Jesus in and around the Galilean countryside and the second half (14-28) in and around Jerusalem. In chapters 1-4 we find ourselves in Galilee.

The first chapter's main concern is Jesus' heritage. The writer wants us to know that Jesus' life and claim to be the Son of God was not a random one but makes total sense when looking at his lineage. In most bibles this genealogy is split into three chunks, helping us to see that the three main people in this family tree are Abraham, David and Jesus. This tells us that Jesus is not simply a new David leading people into freedom but a new Abraham, leading a whole new generation and father to all.

Chapter 1 also makes the audacious claim that this simple life, this child, this bundle in a manger is 'Immanuel', God with us. Think about that for a moment. God made flesh. God made vulnerable. God made himself into a life that has the ability to suffer, rejoice and relate. God. Made. Himself. Man.

Chapter 2 tells us three principal things: 1) Jesus came for the Gentiles too, 2) he is the fulfilment of prophecy and 3) he contrasts with any earthly king, leader or ruler and his Kingdom will be totally different to any before him.

Chapters 3 and 4 see the beginning of Jesus' ministry. We see him baptised, moving into the wilderness and leaving through the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Once again we see how Jesus is going to live his life: despite his background, he has come for all people, gentiles included – however, it will not be a comfortable time for religious rulers.

As we embark on this journey through Matthew, read with a notebook open. What is God saying to you personally through His word, about His Son, by His Spirit?