



Walk | Read | Pray | Join | Commit

Matthew's Gospel Connect Group Resources: **Jesus – A Life**
Matthew Chapters 5-7

The aim of this session is to explore the question: what does your life look like when you start relying upon God as your 'Father'?

COLLECT – an ice breaker for your group

In twos and threes, each person has one minute to teach the others in their small group a helpful life skill they have learnt. It could be an easy method for cooking rice, or a way of always remembering someone's name. Gather everyone back together and find out if anyone has learnt something they will now be applying to their life.

This activity of receiving teaching introduces the key themes of the Sermon on the Mount, a sermon that continues to have a radical impact on our daily lives (if we apply it!).

CHALLENGE – today's main questions

The Sermon on the Mount contains a series of teachings in which Jesus unpacks the up-side-down reality of the Kingdom of God, and how the world shifts when we begin to call God 'Father'. ***Which verses and teachings stand out to you amongst these three chapters? Which are the most challenging to your discipleship?***

In the midst of the sermon (6:7-13), Jesus provides a framework for how his followers should pray, which we call the Lord's Prayer. It shows that Jesus was aware of the hardships and challenges we would encounter. ***Have you ever used this in your regular prayer life? What does it mean to you to call God 'Father' on the good days and the bad?***

London life can be busy, pulling us in many directions at once. In 6:25-34, Jesus tells us not to worry but to focus on the goodness of his Father. ***How much do you worry in an average week? What practical steps can you take to make God your priority?***

At the end of his sermon, Jesus gives a parable – a story with a strong metaphor – about what will happen to those people who hear these words (or read them) and don't put them into practice. ***What are the foundations you are building your faith on? When you read these teachings are you 'doing' them or just leaving them as written teachings?***

CONNECT – a chance to grow as community

The Lord's Prayer begins 'Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name'. Take some time to reflect: Jesus invites us to begin by addressing God as our dad, to approach him with rejoicing and celebration. By saying these words, we begin a process of realigning our whole selves with our Father and His joy.

Leave 15/20 minutes to pray for each other, that each member of the group can take new delight and joy in approaching God as 'Father'.



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CONTEXT AND CONTENT OF CHAPTERS 5-7 – relevant and helpful background information

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

A key to unlocking Matthew's gospel lies in understanding the context of the original Jewish audience he is writing for. Many elements that might first seem obscure or confusing will find new meaning when applied to a first century Jewish community: their history, their culture and their daily lives.

The Sermon on the Mount is the first of five chunks of Jesus' teaching on God's Kingdom that Matthew includes in his gospel. This structure is itself an echo of Moses' role as a central teacher in Israel's history: just as Moses taught the nation with five books (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy, which make up the Torah), Jesus offers new teachings to the nation in a five-fold pattern.

This link goes deeper than patterns and numbers. In isolation from a Jewish context, the Sermon on the Mount can be unpacked as little more than a series of pleasant teachings with some confusing lines thrown into the mix. One liners like 'Love your enemies' could certainly make the world a better place, the Lord's Prayer could be a useful prayer if you've run out of other ideas – but there's more to them. Jesus is questioning and challenging Israel's understanding of itself by unpacking that a new Kingdom has arrived, the promise God imparted to Abraham, that he would be made into a great nation that would bring blessing to all the peoples of the world (Genesis 12:1-3), is coming true in front of them.

Across the Beatitudes, the teaching and the prayer contained in these chapters, Jesus is declaring that the world can now be seen in a different way *because* he is here, saying and doing incredible things. Those who hear him are reminded of all that God's story has been building up to – made all the more obvious for Matthew's readers due to his structure and hints – and are invited to encounter a radical new way of living and understanding the world as it is now: the poor in spirit are blessed because the Kingdom of heaven belongs to them; love your enemies and don't judge others because – good news! – this is how God's justice works in the Kingdom; pray that heaven comes to earth, and then lead a lifestyle that shows that it's coming.

In isolation all these things will feel impossible to maintain, but they aren't idealistic, individualistic teachings – they're a blueprint to how Jesus lived his life, they're the rhythms of the life of God-with-us, they're a signpost to the nature of God. These chapters aren't just about how we should behave, they're key to Matthew's message of discovering the person of God in Christ, a message the world longs to hear. God's Kingdom is coming and it's a wonderful thing. More than that, we can call the God of this Kingdom 'Father' and approach Him as children. As we do that, as we do His will, we begin to see heaven here on earth.