

In Search of the King

Matthew 1–2

Group Discussion. Describe something you once strongly desired (for example, a car, TV, stereo or special relationship). When you got it, did it fulfill your expectations? Explain why or why not.

Personal Reflection. What are you currently waiting for or anticipating? How does it affect your thoughts during the day?

Read Matthew 1.

1. Considering the portrayal of Jesus as a heavenly king, why would Matthew include a lineage at the very beginning of his book?

2. In a dream, Joseph receives a visit from an angel (vv. 16–24). What comfort would the angel's message have brought to Joseph?

What anxieties might it have created?

3. Read Matthew 2. In this chapter Matthew portrays Jesus' initial reception by the world. Compare and contrast Jesus the heavenly king with Herod the earthly king.

4. There are many traditions and myths in church history about the Magi that may or may not be true. Drawing only from the information in this passage, what can we discover about them?

5. Describe the details of their search for Jesus.

6. How has knowing Jesus involved you in a search or journey?
7. How are the Magi different from the religious leaders in this passage?
8. Jesus was born during the time of King Herod (v. 1). From your reading of this chapter, what was Herod like?
9. On hearing of Jesus' birth from the searching Magi, Herod also begins a search for the newborn Christ. How does his search compare with that of the Magi?
10. The responses of the Magi and Herod are typical of the ways people respond to Jesus today. What factors might cause people to respond to Jesus in such radically different ways?
11. God is the unseen actor throughout the chapter. In what ways can we detect his behind-the-scenes actions (2:6, 15, 23)?
12. The Magi not only found Jesus but worshiped him and witnessed to the entire city of Jerusalem concerning his birth (2:2–3). In what ways has your search for the Lord resulted in your worshiping him and telling others about him?
13. Matthew's theme statement is found in the last three verses of the last chapter. Read 28:18–20. What is the theme?
14. Matthew wants us to see Jesus as a heavenly king. What attributes of a king do you see portrayed in these three verses?
15. How do you think this concern may have affected Matthew's writing throughout his book?

16. Skim chapters 1–4. Matthew has recorded the things Jesus taught and commanded his disciples to teach others. What did Matthew feel a disciple should know about the beginnings of Jesus’ ministry?

17. In chapters 5–7 we have a summary of the King’s laws. As you skim these laws, what responses do you have?

What does Jesus expect of his disciples?

18. In chapters 8–9 the miracles of Jesus play a dominant part. In what ways are faith and authority a part of this section?

19. In the midst of widening conflict and controversy, Jesus reveals his true identity to the disciples (10:1–16:20). How does he do this in 14:1–16:20?

20. What do you hope to gain from studying Matthew?

Spend time worshiping the King of kings. Then ask God to help you tell others about him.

Now or Later

It is helpful to get a perspective on how Matthew put his book together. An overview of Matthew also draws together seemingly isolated events and teachings into a meaningful whole.

Preparing for the King

Matthew 3

Group Discussion. Historically kings were the embodiment of authority. Royal figures today are more often media curiosities. Political figures are more familiar to us. What responses do you have when you read of visits of political authorities to your city? Why?

Personal Reflection. Appearing before a king was keenly anticipated, for it provided an opportunity to make a personal request. It also created anxiety—there might be an inquiry into personal conduct. Examine your heart. What requests might you make of God as the ultimate authority? What would you be anxious about?

In Matthew 3 John the Baptist is sent to prepare the way for the coming of the Lord. But his arrival required a very different kind of preparation. Read Matthew 3.

1. What are your initial impressions of John?

2. For Israel the desert was a place of both punishment and renewal (recall the wilderness wanderings). How does John's ministry convey both concepts (vv. 3–12)?

3. The religious leaders considered themselves children of Abraham (v. 9). According to verses 7–10, how were they abusing this privilege?

4. What are some ways Christians today abuse their rights as children of God?

5. John calls us to produce “fruit in keeping with repentance” (v. 8). Give examples of the kind of fruit you think he has in mind.

6. John and Jesus have ministries of baptism (vv. 11–12). How are their baptisms similar and different?

7. Why do you think John was hesitant to baptize Jesus (vv. 13–14)?

8. What does Jesus' willingness to be baptized suggest about him (v. 15)?

In what ways was Jesus' baptism different from other baptisms?

9. What significance do you see in the dove and the voice from heaven at Jesus' baptism (vv. 16–17)?

10. The coming of Christ either demands repentance or brings judgment. In what ways do you need to better prepare for his return?

11. Think of people around you who face rough places or valleys. How can you help them smooth out the rough places or fill in the valleys in preparation for Jesus' coming?

Ask God to give you the courage to speak boldly and the wisdom to speak perceptively about the ministry of Jesus Christ to friends and relatives.

Now or Later

John the Baptist communicates clearly that God expects fruit to be produced from a life of godliness. If you are working through this study in a small group, tell one another what fruit you see in each other. Let this be a time of affirmation and care.

If you are studying on your own, gently ask yourself the question, What fruit do I see in my life? Make a list of what you discover.

The Beginning of the Kingdom

Matthew 4

Group Discussion. Recall a time when you experienced something new—starting a new job, going to a new school, moving to a new community. Starting something new always brings testing and challenges. How do you respond when you face threatening obstacles or unexpected resistance?

Personal Reflection. Challenges and difficulties provide an opportunity to rely in new ways on God and his Word. Consider the challenges you are facing and place each one before the Lord. In your mind’s eye turn each one over to him and ask him what to do. Spend some time quietly listening for the wisdom and insight he will give you.

Read Matthew 4.

1. Look over the entire chapter to discover the locations mentioned. What do they tell us about Jesus’ ministry?

2. Prior to beginning his ministry Jesus must face testing and temptation (vv. 1–11). Look specifically at each temptation (vv. 3–4, 5–7, 8–10). What do you think Satan was trying to accomplish?

3. The prerequisite for Jesus’ ministry was his ability to resist temptation. What insights into Jesus’ character does this encounter with Satan provide?

4. What can you learn about temptation and how to resist it from Jesus’ example?

5. Verses 12–17 describe the transition from testing to ministry. What do they tell us about Jesus and his agenda?

6. Jesus moves into Galilee with a message about the kingdom of heaven (v. 17). One of Jesus' first functions as king is calling disciples. From verses 18–22, develop a brief description of what is required for “citizenship” in his kingdom.

7. Citizenship for the disciples meant leaving job and family, and following Jesus wherever he went. How has discipleship affected your life?

8. In verses 23–25 Matthew gives us a summary of Jesus' initial public ministry. Describe the people who came looking for Jesus.

9. Imagine the excitement of the first disciples as they watched Jesus healing and teaching among the crowds. Put yourself in their place and describe how you would feel.

10. In what way would you like to meet or experience Jesus in your own life?

Ask the Lord to allow you to share in the excitement of his message and ministry and to share with others.

Now or Later

Jesus preached the good news. Both his message and his presence were good news. Spend some time each day just sitting in the presence of the Lord. Perhaps you could sit in front of an empty chair and see him there in your mind's eye. Sit until you find yourself settling and quieting down.

The Law of the King (Part 1)

Matthew 5:1–6:18

Group Discussion. Have everyone in your group write several guidelines for your group's meetings. The guidelines could encompass content, time, meeting structure, components and more. Once you have shared these, discuss how each set of guidelines expresses the character of the person who wrote it. Consider too how the suggested guidelines would shape the character of the group.

Personal Reflection. Godly men and women in the Old Testament considered God's law a wonderful gift (as opposed to a burden or oppressive obligations). In your mind's eye receive the gift of God's law from him wrapped in colorful paper. Spend a few moments being thankful that he loves you enough to tell you what is best for you.

Read Matthew 5.

1. What responses do you have as you read Jesus' teaching on the law and relationships?
2. The Beatitudes describe the qualities Jesus requires of those who live as citizens of his kingdom (vv. 3–12). What would it feel like to be a member of a community of people who shared these qualities?
3. Each beatitude comes with specific blessings. In what ways could a community possessing such blessings be described as rich?
4. Jesus compares his followers to salt and light (vv. 13–16). What do these metaphors suggest about our role in society?
5. In the rest of chapter 5 Jesus discusses various misconceptions we might have about the Law (Old Testament Scriptures). Why do you think that Jesus stresses that he did not come to abolish the Law (vv. 17–20)?

6. Jesus' teaching on murder and adultery (vv. 21–30) differs from traditional understanding. How would it clarify and cleanse the way the citizens of his kingdom are to live?

7. In verses 31–37 Jesus provides instructions on divorce and oaths (legal relationships) that confront Jewish tradition. How do his changes confront the issue of duplicity?

8. In verses 38–47 Jesus teaches on enemies and evil people. How does Jesus' teaching shape the way his citizens respond to opposition?

9. Verse 48 summarizes the essence of what Jesus has been saying. What responses do you have to Jesus' high standard?

10. Read Matthew 6:1–18. Jesus shifts his focus from relationships to “religious obligations.” What do we learn about proper and improper motives from Jesus' examples about giving, praying and fasting?

11. Looking back on all you have read in the Sermon on the Mount, how are motives central to Jesus' teaching on both relationships and religious acts?

12. How does Jesus' teaching on motives address your experience of the Christian life?

Ask the Lord to work his character into your heart so that his light might shine from your life.

Now or Later

The Ten Commandments could be described as the beatitudes of the Old Testament. They are the introduction and summary of what God required of Israel as his covenant people. Turn to Exodus 20:1–12 and read over the first five commandments. How does each one express the character of God?

How might each one shape your character?

The Law of the King (Part 2)

Matthew 6:19–7:29

Group Discussion. It is often difficult to put off buying what we want till we can afford it. What internal and external pressures make it difficult to wait? When have you put off buying something you wanted because you knew it would be better to wait awhile? Why?

Personal Reflection. Earthly treasures are often more tempting than heavenly ones. We need to work on learning to see the riches of heaven with an inward eye. Picture a great pile of treasure waiting for you to use in “heart-satisfying” ways. Once you have it in view, how would knowing that it is waiting for you affect the way you would live out the rest of the day?

While the first section of the Sermon on the Mount focuses on inward motivations, the last half of it is focused on “upward” motivations. Read Matthew 6:19–34.

1. In 6:19–24 Jesus talks about treasures, eyes and masters. What common themes tie these verses together?
2. Worry is a dominant theme in 6:25–34. How can we escape worrying about such things as food and clothes?
3. What sorts of things do you worry about?

How might Jesus’ teaching help you?

4. The Sermon on the Mount tells what we must do to seek first God’s kingdom and righteousness (6:33). What does the little word first do to our understanding and application of his teaching?

5. Read Matthew 7. What is the difference between judging others and being properly discerning (7:1–6)?

6. In what ways have you seen relationships in the church hurt by Christians judging each other?

7. What would it feel like to live in a community that understood the difference between judging and discerning?

8. Jesus' laws for the citizens of his kingdom are extremely demanding. What hope does he provide for help (7:7–11)?

9. In the final section of the Sermon (7:13–27) Jesus talks about narrow and wide gates, good and bad trees, and wise and foolish builders. How do these metaphors work together to make a common point?

What reason are we given for obeying Jesus' teaching?

10. What distinguishes genuine prophets and followers from false ones (7:15–23)?

11. Putting Jesus' words into practice is the way to build a lasting foundation against the day of judgment (7:24–27). What will practicing Jesus' Sermon require of you?

Pray that God will give you the resources to live by the law of his kingdom.

Now or Later

Self-examination is an important spiritual activity. Examine yourself in a time of leisurely silence and reflection in the following areas: Divided loyalty or divine allegiance? Trust for or worry about daily provision? Careless behavior or cautious conduct? Foolish following or discerning reflection? Empty talk or a consistent walk? Endurance in times of difficulties or surrender to doubt?

What needs to change for you to live as a good citizen of the kingdom?

6

The Powers of the King

Matthew 8:1–9:34

Group Discussion. Consider the leadership of your (a) church, (b) place of employment or (c) city or town. How does the character of the leadership shape the “tone” and “feel” of each?

Personal Reflection. Think of someone in your life who has significantly influenced you. How did you come to respect that person?

Read Matthew 8:1–22.

1. In chapters 8–9 Jesus’ miracles occur in three groups, followed by a response. Describe how Jesus demonstrates his authority in 8:1–22.
2. Lepers were outcasts in Jewish society and were required to shout “unclean” wherever they went. What impresses you about Jesus’ encounter with the man in 8:1–4?
3. In your life, how has a relationship with Christ made a difference between feeling included in or excluded from meaningful contact with others?
4. Jesus is pleased with the centurion’s response (8:5–13). What makes the centurion a good model of faith?
5. In 8:18–22 we see how Jesus responds to would-be followers. From what Jesus says to them, what is he looking for?

What might Jesus say to you if you walked up to him today and volunteered to be a disciple?

6. Read Matthew 8:23–9:17. The disciples’ fear of the furious storm seems natural (8:23–27). What sort of faith is Jesus looking for in his disciples?

7. After what had happened to the demon-possessed men, the townspeople pleaded with Jesus to leave their region (8:28–34). Why?

8. What are some reasons today why people don’t want Jesus Christ around?

9. Jesus’ claim to have authority to forgive sins as he heals the paralytic (9:1–8) upset and assaulted the religious system of his day. How do you respond when you find someone competing with your authority or displacing you?

10. In 9:9–17 Jesus compares himself to a doctor and a bridegroom, and then discusses garments and wineskins. What is Jesus teaching us about his kingdom and its impact through these illustrations?

11. Read Matthew 9:18–34. Notice the problems over which Jesus displays power and authority in these verses. How might this picture of Jesus strengthen your faith in the challenges that you face?

Ask the Lord to strengthen your vision of his power in ways that deepen your faith.

Now or Later

Make a list or begin a journal of your prayer requests and the answers you receive. Pay attention to how this record of the Lord’s actions in your life provides rich fertilizer for a growing faith.

The Messengers of the King

Matthew 9:35–11:30

Group Discussion. If you were sent out to the local mall to spend the day telling people about Jesus and his message, what sort of experiences do you think you could expect?

Personal Reflection. Whether we like it or not, taking risks is an essential part of discipleship. Ask God to show you issues in your heart that keep you from following through.

Read Matthew 9:35–11:1.

1. Jesus has compassion for the crowds (9:35–38) who were “harassed and helpless.” How are people today similar to those Jesus cared for?
2. As a result of his compassion for the crowds, Jesus sends out the Twelve (10:1–15). Describe their mission.

What would it feel like to take on this mission?

3. Jesus warns the disciples that their compassionate ministry will not be warmly received (10:16–25). What will they experience?
4. In 10:26–33 Jesus prepares his present and future disciples for opposition. Why shouldn’t the disciples be afraid of those who oppose them?
5. Following Christ may strain family relationships and loyalties (10:32–39). Why should we risk such tensions?

What promises are made in 10:40–42?

6. Read Matthew 11:2–30. John appears to be experiencing frustration and second thoughts because of his imprisonment. What might (or perhaps has) given you frustrations and second thoughts about Jesus?
7. How would you describe the tone and feel of Jesus' reply to John (11:4–6)?
8. What does 11:7–19 tell us about John and those who heard his message?
9. In 11:20–30 Jesus denounces some people and offers a warm invitation to others. What causes his denunciations?
10. This section ends as it began, with an expression of Jesus care and compassion (11:28–30). In what ways have you found rest in your life by coming to Jesus?

Pray for the gift of rest and peace that come to those who respond to Jesus' invitation.

Now or Later

Although we don't always have to physically leave our families, nor do we always experience their rejection, Jesus Christ must always be first in our hearts. Close your eyes and picture each family member or person to whom you have intimate ties. Give each one to the Lord for his care and protection. Tell the Lord that he is first in your life. As you yield them to the Lord, notice your heart responses.

The Leaders & the King

Matthew 12

Group Discussion. Share an experience of leadership in which you encountered resistance. How did you feel, and how did you handle it?

Personal Reflection. Passive resistance, biting humor, spreading rumors and outright resistance are just four of the many ways to compete for or resist power. Which is your preferred style?

Read Matthew 12.

1. How would you describe the feel of this chapter?
2. Consider the ways that religious leaders attacked Jesus in verses 1–14. What was their strategy?
3. The first attack on Jesus is indirect; the leaders aim at the disciples (vv. 3–8). What is their charge, and how does Jesus answer it?
4. How are similar arguments used today to discredit Christianity?
5. The irony in the second assault of the Pharisees is that while Jesus is healing on the sabbath, the Pharisees are making plans to kill him, (vv. 8–12). How does Jesus' attitude toward people and Scripture differ from that of the Pharisees?
6. How have you been impacted by issues of religious authority?
7. In the first two conflicts Jesus embodies the Old Testament Scripture that Matthew quotes (vv. 15–21). Why is Jesus worthy to be followed?

8. In their third assault the Pharisees charge that Jesus' power over demons is demonic (vv. 25–37). If people believed the Pharisees, how would it affect Jesus' ministry?

9. Why might the request for a sign from the leader be met with such resounding condemnation at this point in the conflict (vv. 38–42)?

10. In verses 43–45 Jesus tells the Pharisees and teachers of the Law a story. What does it reveal about them?

11. Self-reform is futile because of the power of evil. What hope, if any, can there be for the leaders?

12. In our personal lives and in our churches, how can we avoid being like the Pharisees and the teachers of the Law?

What area of change in your life should you consider changing?

Ask God to teach you how to read and understand his Word so that you can live under its authority with integrity.

Now or Later

One of the ways we resist God is by finding excuses for avoiding Scripture reading or prayer. Keep a journal of times you “avoid” being alone with God. If you are in a small group, be prepared to share your findings with your group at a future meeting.

The Parables of the King

Matthew 13

Group Discussion. Share a few of your favorite authors and stories. Be sure to tell just what it is you like about them.

Personal Reflection. If you chose to tell the story of your life, what would you describe as the climax? How would God be seen in the plot?

Read Matthew 13.

1. What initial impressions do you have of the kingdom of heaven?
2. According to the parable of the sower, what responses does Jesus expect as he preaches his message about the kingdom (vv. 1–9, 18–23)?
3. How would this parable be a challenge to his listeners?

How does it challenge you?

4. How would Jesus' parables be the proper remedy for the spiritual people he is speaking to (vv. 11–17)?
5. Jesus has in mind the mixed nature of his crowd as he tells the parable of the wheat and weeds (vv. 24–30, 36–43). What lessons might this parable have for disciples and members of the church?
6. How would the parables of the mustard seed and yeast address the expectation that the kingdom of God was to be brought in by a mighty revolution against the military aggressors of Israel (vv. 31–35)?

7. The gospel of the kingdom continues to be a present power in the world through the ministry of God's Word and Spirit. What are the practical implications of the parables we have looked at so far for mission and evangelism?

8. The parables of the hidden treasure and the pearl teach the supreme value of the kingdom (vv. 44–46). How has the supreme value of the kingdom affected your use of resources?

9. This chapter concludes with a visit to Jesus' hometown. How do the people there compare with those described in verses 13–15?

10. How might familiarity with spiritual truth be an obstacle to spiritual insight?

11. Jesus wants his disciples to understand the parables. How have they enlarged your understanding of the kingdom of heaven?

12. Jesus also wants us to respond to what we have heard and understood. Throughout this chapter, what types of responses does he desire?

Ask the Lord to make you responsive to the mysteries of the kingdom of God.

Now or Later

The nature of spiritual blindness is that those who are blind don't know it. And the nature of sin is that none of us are immune. Begin each day this week by asking God to bring to mind areas of spiritual blindness in your life. At the end of each day note insights that come to mind. If you are in a small group, report what you discover.

The Revelation of the King

Matthew 14

Group Discussion. Consider a difficult time in your life. Describe what happened and how God used it to shape your character.

Personal Reflection. What is your first response when you are in difficult circumstances? How does your faith affect the way you handle crises?

Read Matthew 14.

1. In verses 1–2 Herod speculates about Jesus' identity. What leads him to believe that Jesus is John the Baptist (vv. 3–12)?
2. Herod, although a king, was a slave of people's opinion. In what ways do the opinions of others shape your behavior in general and your responsiveness to God in particular?
3. John the Baptist and Jesus were linked both by their families and their ministries. What clues might such a connection provide for Jesus' withdrawal to a solitary place (v. 13)?
4. Describe the circumstances, setting and people present during the feeding of the five thousand (vv. 13–21). How is this a test for the disciples in their knowledge of Jesus and his mission?
5. Herod and Jesus, the two kings, both serve banquets. What does each king's banquet reveal about his character and authority?

6. Imagine you are with the anxious disciples in the boat (vv. 22–26). Describe what you would see, hear and feel.
7. Peter’s experience is a vivid picture of faith and doubt (vv. 28–31). When are you most tempted to take your eyes off the Lord and to sink in doubt?
8. In verse 33 the disciples worship Jesus and declare, “Truly you are the Son of God.” What in this incident leads you to worship Jesus?
9. How can the disciples’ experience help you to trust Jesus the next time you are tempted to doubt?
10. Through these puzzling experiences with Jesus the disciples come to confess that he is the Son of God. What experiences have helped you understand more about the Lord?
11. What factors contributed to the difference in the recognition of the crowds (vv. 34–36) from the recognition of the disciples (v. 33)?
12. What experiences and insights have led you into a deeper worship experience of Jesus?

Spend a few minutes worshiping Jesus, the Son of God.

Now or Later

According to the glimpse into heaven in Revelation 4–5, the chief activity of heaven is the worship of God. Each day this week choose one thing that can be an inspiration to worship God. Perhaps one day it might be a sunset; next it might be the pleasure of a good meal.

Understanding the King

Matthew 15:1–16:20

Group Discussion. Ask members of your group two or three questions that will help you understand something new about their background and character.

Personal Reflection. If God were to ask several questions about your actions and thoughts this past week, what might he ask?

Read Matthew 15.

1. In verses 1–2 top religious leaders from Jerusalem oppose Jesus by attacking the disciples. What extensive steps does Jesus take to confront their accusation (vv. 3–20)?

2. How would you describe the tone of Jesus' response?

3. What religious practices in your life or your church might be in danger of becoming outward, empty forms?

How can you avoid this tendency?

4. Jesus is not only hard on the Pharisees, he is hard on the Canaanite woman who seeks his help. How would you explain the strange interaction between Jesus, the woman and the disciples (vv. 21–28)?

5. How was this woman the antithesis of the Pharisees in the preceding section?

6. Read Matthew 16:1–20. After Jesus heals the sick and feeds the four thousand, the religious leaders ask him for a sign from heaven (16:1). Why do you think Jesus refuses them (16:2–4)?
7. In 16:5–12 the disciples misunderstand Jesus' allusion to yeast. How is their misunderstanding related to a lack of faith?
8. There is a notable leap in spiritual insight in 16:13–20 as the disciples, who couldn't even grasp a simple figure of speech, suddenly through Peter declare that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God (16:13–17). How do you account for the sudden change?
9. What is the role of grace in spiritual insight?

How might that affect the way you study the Bible and listen to sermons?
10. How would you describe the tone of Jesus' response to Peter?
11. How will Peter's confession of Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God, unlock the entrance to the kingdom of heaven for others (16:18–20)?
12. Jesus' question to Peter is a question that the entire human race will have to respond to at some point. Who do you say Jesus is and why?

Ask Jesus to use you to be a means of spiritual insight for others.

Now or Later

Review Matthew 1:1–16:20. Summarize what you have learned about Jesus' law, power, character and mission. Then summarize what you've learned about the challenges of being a disciple of Jesus.

Stephen Eyre and Jacalyn Eyre, *Matthew 1–16: Discovering the King: 11 Studies for Individuals or Groups: With Notes for Leaders, A LifeGuide Bible Study* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Connect: An Imprint of InterVarsity Press, 2000), 8–44.