Walk | Read | Pray | Join | Commit

Matthew's Gospel Connect Group Resources: **Jesus – A Life**
Matthew Chapters 15-18

*The aim of this session is to explore: The difference the cross makes in our lives.*

**Recap** - You can recap what's going on in the second half of the gospel with this video - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GGCF3OPWN14 (Search: **Read Scripture: Matthew Ch. 14-28** on YouTube)

**COLLECT** – an ice breaker for your group
In this session we are going to see how the person and work of Jesus are inextricably linked. The following game helps introduce the concept that we can identify a person just by knowing the work they do.

**Think of a person. Without naming the individual you are to outline their work or their achievements while the groups attempt to guess the person you are thinking of. Try to use as few words as possible! Split into threes or try it as a whole group.**

**CHALLENGE** – today's main questions
In Matthew 15 particularly Jesus tells us what really matters to God and it's not a legalistic outward obedience. ***Using the passage to back up your answers, have a conversation about what God is looking for in us. Where do you get distracted?***

Jesus rebukes Peter (Matthew 16:21-23) strongly for trying to prevent him from going to the Cross. ***Why does Jesus respond this way?***

Although Peter knew Jesus' identity, he rejected the cross. However, without the cross we are still separated from God. ***On a daily basis, how much does the reality that you have a relationship with the Father through Jesus impact your life? How can you increase that reality?***

In 18:21-35 Jesus teaches about how we have been forgiven and therefore how we should forgive others. ***What challenges you about this passage? How easy do you find it to forgive those who have wronged you? How might this passage help motivate you?***

**CONNECT** – a chance to grow as community
Jesus' death on the cross and his resurrection means we have be rescued, forgiven, and brought into a living relationship with God for all eternity. It's the most amazing good news and a symbol of the victory of Jesus over our lives. **Spend some time discussing how this applies to you. It might be that there is an area of your life you need to put to death, it might be an area you want to see breakthrough, it might be a reminder of the reality of how much you are loved.**
**After this, spend a few minutes in silence as a group thinking about how the cross applies to you right now. Ask if anyone wants to share and then lead into a time of praying for one another in the light of what is shared.**

**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.]*

Connect for a moment with the reality that Matthew was a real person who once sat down to scribe this gospel with a particular Holy Spirit-inspired objective in mind. He wanted to communicate certain truths to his readers, that are primarily related to the person and work of Jesus.

Matthew repeatedly shows us Jesus is greater that anyone or anything: his power over nature, over the demonic and the devil, over sin and his power over sickness and ultimately, his power over death.

The teaching of Jesus and his miracles have revealed to us his identity but without his work we are simply left with 'good' or even 'remarkable' person. Thus far Jesus has chosen to not speak specifically about his death but as we get to these chapters Jesus begins to speak very clearly with his disciples about his death and resurrection. (cf. 16:21, 17:9, 17:12, 17:22).

Matthew is outlining that we don't just follow Jesus for his teaching and miracles. It means there is something he is going to do, namely die on a cross and be raised to life, that we need to embrace in order to truly be his followers. These chapters open that reality up for us. Here's a little synopsis of the four chapters;

**Chapter 15:** Jesus uses an objection to his ministry to teach about what really matters to God. Jesus rebukes the religious elite, the Pharisees and teachers of the law, who obsess about what people eat and don't eat and about endless empty ritual. He declares that their obsession with the outward is not pleasing to God, what's really important is what's going on in our hearts. In our hearts is where the real problem is and the cross is the solution we need. The story that follows of the Canaanite woman also serves to show that faith in him is what he is seeking, not outward ritual.

**Chapter 16:** The key highlight and indeed significant moment in this chapter is Peter's confession of Christ. It's clear that he understands the identity of Jesus as God's chosen king but when Jesus goes on to speak of his death, Peter rebukes him. Theologians tend to agree that this point marks a significant moment in Peter's journey with Jesus but not his conversion. That only happens once he encounters the resurrected Jesus for himself.

**Chapter 17:** In a passage which has significant parallels with Moses' mountain top encounters, we see Jesus revealed in a moment of transfiguration before Peter, James and John. God's voice once heard in Jesus' baptism speaks again to affirm Jesus' identity.

**Chapter 18:** Jesus then begins a series of teaching and parables beginning with teaching about humility using the example of a little child. There is then teaching that helps show the motivation for Jesus' work of reconciliation in the Parable of the Lost Sheep and the right response to God's forgiveness in the Parable of the Unmerciful Servant.