

Week 1: Matthew 1-12

Study Guide for the week of January 1-9, 2011

Personal reflection / journaling exercise

This week spend time reflecting on [Matthew 2:1-23](#)

This is both an encouraging and tragic story that is always difficult to read during the joy of the Christmas season. It is encouraging to see how God, speaking through dreams, protected the Holy Family from the evil machinations of the mad man, King Herod. It is tragic to imagine the evil that befell the innocent young boys and their families in Bethlehem. This all raises questions about the providence of God and the presence of evil in our world. List some ways that God has protected you or the people you love? Do you tend to be one that trusts in God's protection or do you find yourself often nervous of what could happen to you or those you love? How has it affected your trust in God when bad things have happened to you or those you love? How has going through difficult times strengthened your faith? When you see or read about the suffering that befalls some people, have you wondered where God is in that? How do you answer this tough question: "Why does evil happen to some, but others seem to be protected?" We also read this week of the time when Jesus taught the disciples to pray the Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6:9-15), which concludes with the petition, "Deliver us from evil." Do you most often pray that petition with confidence or worried pleading? What would it take for you to more strongly trust in God's protection? List some areas of your life that you would like to grow in your trusting of God's oversight and protection? Pray over that list and ask God to deepen your trust in His care for you and those you love?

Discussion starters

If you are leading a small group, may not have time for all of these questions. Pick the ones that will work best for your group.

1. How far back can you trace your family's genealogy? Any famous or infamous characters on your family tree?
2. *(This question will be asked each week at the start of the discussion on the Bible readings for the week.)* Was there something that jumped out at you, surprised you, encouraged you, or disturbed you from the readings this last week (or two)? Why?
3. [Matthew, chapter 2-4](#) Notice how often the Word of God is brought to bear on the events, both the Word that is in the Holy Scriptures (note all the Old Testament references) and the Word as direct revelation to Joseph and others. How does the Word of God function in your life?
4. [Matthew 1:18-25](#) How do you approach difficult decisions? What can you learn from Joseph in how he made a very difficult decision?
5. [Matthew 4:18-22](#) The calling of the first disciples as happening rapidly and their response were immediate. Have you had a time when you sensed that the Lord was calling you to do something? Is there a time when you responded to a call of the Lord immediately, or a time when you did not respond immediately and later you wished that you had? What tends to hold you back when responding to a call of the Lord?
6. [Matthew 5-7](#) In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus teaches about the contrasts between life in the Kingdom of God and life in the world. Identify and list as many contrasts as you can. Which contrasts surprise you? Which do you struggle with? Which are not problems in your life?
7. [Matthew 8:34](#) There were also groups of people who wanted to have nothing to do with Jesus (8:34). What was their reason? What makes people reluctant to want to have anything to do with Jesus?

8. Matthew 11:28-30 Is the yoke of following Jesus easy for you, or not? Is the burden light, or not? Why? What are your burdens today? Since Jesus invites us to let him take the greatest share of our burdens, how are you letting him do the heaviest lifting?
9. Matthew 12:33-37 Do you see people being divided into good people and bad people? Can you give an example of why you think as you do? What can be the danger for us of labeling who is good and who is bad?
10. How did you react to Matthew 12:46-50?

Caring Time

It is important to make time in your group to care for each other. Sometimes that happens during the discussion and sometimes it is best to end the time together with a question like this:

- In what specific way can the group pray for you this week?

Also encourage people in the group to get together outside of the group time to foster deeper friendships with each other. Remember that small groups is primarily about sharing life together. It has been said that the most important time in small groups is the time people connect outside of the meeting time.

Bible verse to memorize: Matthew 11:28-30