

MATTHEW

READING MATTHEW TOGETHER

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INTRODUCTION

Beginning this Lent, the journey towards Easter, we are studying Matthew's gospel together in 3 ways:

1. For 7 weeks daily reading a small chunk Monday–Saturday with an opportunity on Sundays to reflect on the week's readings.
2. Digging deep into key themes and passages when we meet as Cedar Groups (Cedar Groups are Bow Church's midweek small groups that meet to encourage each other as we live out our faith everyday).
3. Sermons in Sunday services which will also be released on the podcast.

A) HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

By yourself

Use the Daily Readings section to journey through Matthew starting on Monday the 12th February and ending on 31st March, Easter Sunday.

There are readings for six days of the week accompanied by reflection questions for you to think about on three topics: 'God', 'Self' and 'Response'. Overall, the reading and reflection could take between 10–15 mins but you may want to take longer. On Sundays there is no allotted reading so you can catch up on what you've missed or reflect on what you've already read that week. To help this process there are a couple of reflective questions. We suggest spending a minimum of 10 minutes on this practice but you could certainly take longer if you wanted.

If you are new to reading the Bible this guide will help you get started with regular reading and reflection. If you would like to go deeper into the world of Matthew see the 'Further Reading' section at the end of this introduction.

In Cedar Groups

This guide contains 7 sessions with questions for Cedar Groups to use when they meet. If you'd like to join a Cedar Group then email hello@bow.church or call 07908 416052.

B) HOW TO APPROACH THE BIBLE

Reading the Bible can seem daunting but it is the source of unmatched wisdom and authority for the Christian life. With this in mind, here is some advice for reading the Bible.

1. **Approach the Bible in prayer.** There are many ways to read the Bible. The assumption we start with here is that the Bible not just tells us about God but is a means of relationship with God. Reading the Bible will deepen a relationship with God by bringing us close to Jesus, the centre of the story. So a good way to tell if we are reading the Bible well is if we notice our lives becoming more like Jesus through our reading.
2. **Approach the Bible in humility.** We approach the Bible as the authoritative Scripture for the Christian faith, aware that our unique experiences of life will affect how we read and understand it but recognising that calling the Bible authoritative means our lives are under Scripture not Scripture under. The challenge is to wrestle with the Bible in such a way that we can bring our whole lives into line with how it calls us to live by God's grace.
3. **Approach the Bible in community.** Scripture was written in community, for community. It's important to read personally but also to receive preaching on a Sunday and to discuss and reflect in smaller groups. As we encounter Scripture both personally and in community, we get greater clarity on how the Holy Spirit is speaking to us today. This is why we suggest you join a Cedar Group as well as follow the daily reading guide.
4. **Apply the Bible carefully.** We then need to recognise with curiosity that the Bible is from a very different world to our own and is a diverse and rich collection of books, written and compiled over many different times. The collision between our world and the Bible's is not an obstacle to communion with God but rather an invitation to wrestle with the text, our world and our own lives from a humble position of curiosity and prayer, asking the Holy Spirit to speak to us as we read. As we try to apply the wisdom of the Bible to our lives today, it's good to ask if our interpretation of it leads us to greater love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, trust, gentleness and self-control: the fruits of the Spirit Paul sets out in Galatians 5:22-23. This is the kind of person the Bible says we are meant to be if we are following the story. If our interpretation leads us to live this way then it is probably revealing some of the wisdom of the Spirit. If it doesn't then it is probably not of the Spirit.

Have fun! Reading the Bible can be a challenge but it's ultimately a rewarding challenge. As you seek to plumb the depths of Scripture, you will grow to see Jesus more clearly and know more of the love of God for your life today.

C) HOW TO APPROACH MATTHEW

The Christian Bible is divided into two main sections: The Old Testament and The New Testament. The Old Testament is what happens before Jesus and the New Testament begins with the news of Jesus' life, death and resurrection. This news is told through four books known as "gospels" – carefully constructed accounts of Jesus' life. They are Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Matthew's gospel is the very first of these "gospels" and appears as the first book in the New Testament.

The gospels all have similarities and stark differences with one another. Think of someone famous today (Taylor Swift?) appearing in various photoshoots in different eras of their life. Sometimes dressed up in shimmering elegance, other times in casual wear to depict an authentic homely feel, at another point looking iconic in black & white. Each portrait demonstrates a different aspect of the celebrity but it's the same person all the time. The gospels work in exactly the same way. One Jesus but 4 depictions that together give a dynamic view of who Jesus and what the early church that worshipped him thought was most important to say about his life.

It's been calculated that a manuscript would have cost in today's money around £100,000 so nothing was done lightly but with careful consideration. Also, to be an early Christian came at great cost and many lost their lives for their proclamation that Jesus was Lord, so you simply couldn't get away with making things up or ignoring important information. It clearly mattered what was taken to be the authoritative account of Jesus' life. Therefore, we should feel confident in trusting that the differences between the gospels don't undermine the Bible's authority but strengthen it by giving us different angles from which to peer at the one at the centre of the story: Jesus Christ.

Although Matthew's gospel appears first in the New Testament, Mark is almost certainly the oldest gospel. It is short and sharp and full of action as the story rushes on apace. It's written in street Greek but purposefully and carefully curated to give an iconic depiction of Jesus. In that sense you could think of Mark as hip-hop.

Luke followed up his gospel by writing the book of Acts. Both often chime with our times. He has a lot to say about women, about those on the edge of society and the non-Jewish audience that was starting to make up more and more of the church. Luke also places a great emphasis on the Holy Spirit. The 20th Century saw the birth of the Pentecostal and Charismatic movements which saw a fresh movement of God's Holy Spirit. Luke's gospel, therefore, has a special resonance with our times.

John is deeply symbolic and complex, even leaning into Jesus' internal world: his thoughts and his prayers. John gives us complex images and lots of material unique to his gospel that demonstrate the full meaning of who Jesus is. The language and imagery sometimes has clear resonance from the non-Jewish world which shows the church's continued growth into new cultures and places. Its emphasis on deeply emotive accounts of people (think of the resurrection accounts of Jesus with Mary and Peter) and complex symbols, make John's gospel incredibly powerful.

But what about Matthew's gospel?

His original audience were early Christians. Don't imagine them in grand cathedrals but in homes. The first designated buildings for Christian worship weren't built until the middle of the 3rd Century. Instead imagine an eclectic group meeting around the dinner table, sheltering from the eyes of the watching Roman Empire which would be only too pleased to find a reason to crush a group like this with such radical ideas of justice and love.

It's clear he thinks his audience has a deep knowledge of the Old Testament. Matthew's gospel emphasises that Jesus was the fulfilment of Israel's hopes to be a blessing to all nations. For those of us who studied Isaiah we'll see lots of claims that Isaiah's prophecy is being fulfilled in Jesus. This means it's most likely his primary audience was a Jewish-Christian community in a time of transition as it learnt how to be a new kind of community with origins in the Jewish story but now extending to Gentiles (non-Jews). Acts 10 would be a good text to read in order to see what this was like. Peter, a Jew, needed revelation to see how God was not just renewing the Jewish community but through the Jewish community was beginning to fulfil the promise made to Abraham way back in Genesis: to be a blessing to every nation. The grace that Peter had received was now making a new people; one in Christ, from every tribe and tongue. The tension of a people wrestling with their past whilst forging a new future helps us to understand how Matthew presents Jesus as the fulfilment of the Old Testament.

As far as we can tell, Matthew's Gospel was probably written just after the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem by the Romans, in 70AD. Matthew's gospel is frequently referenced and quoted in the early church as authoritative by people such as Ignatius of Antioch, writing around 90AD.

We don't know for sure who Matthew was but an ancient reference means that from early on in Christianity, the figure of Matthew the Tax Collector, described in chapter 9, is thought to be the writer.

Three Themes

As you read and study, look out for how Matthew is telling his story. Especially notice how these three themes are developed:

1. Son of David – a new kind of king
2. Moses – a new kind of law
3. Immanuel – a new way that God is present in the world with his people

The Structure

Matthew's structure is very intentional. There are 5 sections sandwiched between an introduction and a conclusion. Each of the 5 sections has a story and then a block of teaching. Why 5 sections? This is linked to the Moses theme because the teaching of Moses was in 5 books (the first 5 books of our Bibles) known as the Torah which formed the Jewish people and describes the way of life that set them apart for God. The Torah was the authority of God in their community. Therefore, 5 becomes a natural way to structure important things. For example both Psalms and Proverbs, compiled long after Moses' books, were structured in 5 sections. This means that Matthew has structured his gospel in such a way to say that Jesus is redefining what the Torah now means by bringing a new teaching. There is more teaching in Matthew than in any other gospel but it is the stories around each section of teaching that helps us to make sense of what he's saying.

Introduction (1- 3) Genealogy, birth and baptism

Section One (4-7) Story: Temptation, begins ministry (4)
Teaching: The Sermon on the Mount (5-7)

Section Two (8-10) Story: 3 sets of 3 miracles (8-9)
Teaching: how to follow him (10)

Section Three (11-13) Story: How people are responding to Jesus (11-12)
Teaching: What's going on behind people's responses (13)

Section Four (14-20) Story: Clashing expectations about the Messiah (14-17)
Teaching: The upside down nature of the kingdom (18-20)

Section Five (21-25) Story: Clashing of the kingdoms in Jerusalem (21-22)
Teaching: Critique of the present and end of time (23-25)

Conclusion (26-28) Passover, Crucifixion, Resurrection and Great Commission

So what about us?

Not many of us will have Jewish roots so the vast majority of us are the product of Matthew's success in teaching the church what it was to become. We are the partial fulfilment of what's known as the great commission in Matthew 28:16-19:

"Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshipped him; but some doubted. Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

By reading Matthew with fresh eyes we are stepping further into the story but this is a story we now participate in. The next chapter of God's unfolding work is being written in the here and now with people like you and me with Jesus in the centre who says *"I am with you always, to the very end of the age."*

FURTHER RESOURCES

Use these resources if you want to dig deeper into Matthew's Gospel

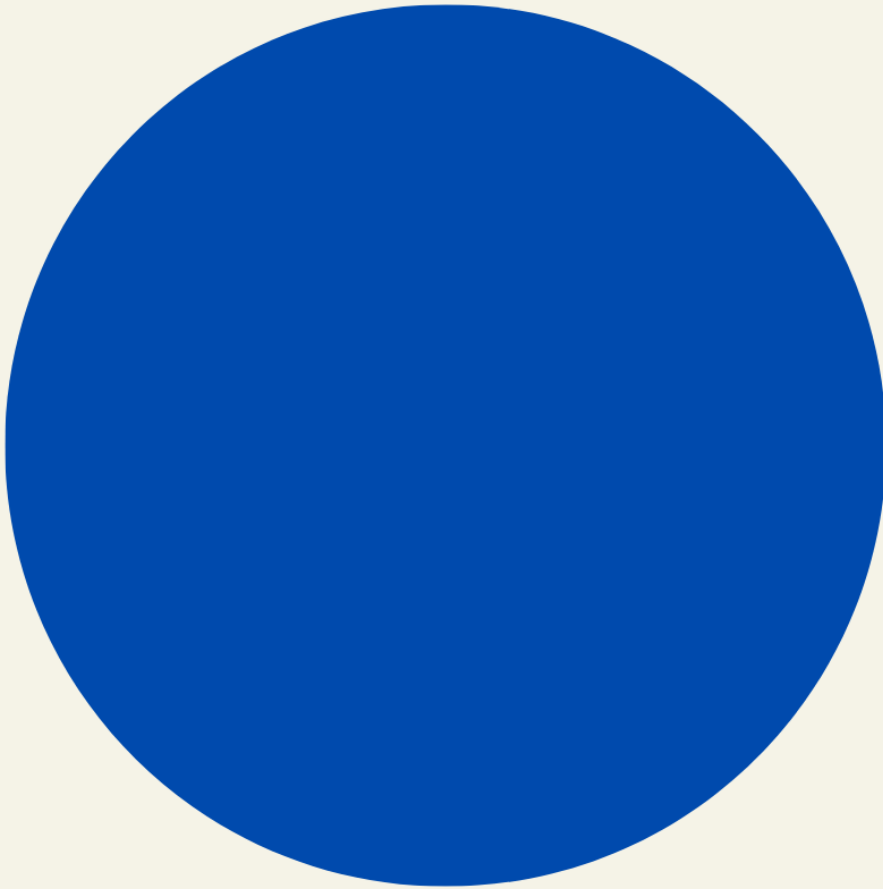
Online

[Bible Project.com](https://www.bibleproject.com) has [general resources](#) on Matthew's gospel and this year a special focus on The Sermon on the Mount (Ch4-7) with [videos](#) appearing [here](#) and a weekly [podcast](#).

Books

Meeting God in Matthew by Elaine Storkey. This is brilliant. Both deep and accessible. Start with this!

Matthew (Tyndale New Testament Commentary) by R. T. France. France has written a very important 1200 page commentary but this 400 page version, whilst saving some trees, is still incredibly deep and insightful if you really want to get into detail of the text.



DAILY BIBLE

READINGS

WEEK 1

Monday 12th February | Matthew 1-2 The Birth of Jesus

Tuesday 13th February | Matthew 3-4 Baptism & Temptation

Ash Wednesday | Matthew 6:1-18 Teachings on Giving, Prayer, & Fasting

Thursday 15th February | Matthew 5:1-16 The Beatitudes

Friday 16th February | Matthew 5:17-48 Teaching on the Law

Saturday 17th February | Matthew 6:19-34 Treasures in Heaven

WEEK 2

Monday 19th February | Matthew 7:1-14 Judging Others

Tuesday 20th February | Matthew 7:15-29 Wise & Foolish Builders

Wednesday 21st February | Matthew 8:1-17 Healing & Miracles

Thursday 22nd February | Matthew 8:18-34 Cost of Discipleship

Friday 23rd February | Matthew 9:1-17 Healing & Forgiveness

Saturday 24th February | Matthew 9:18-38 Ministry & Compassion

WEEK 3

Monday 26th February | Matthew 10:1-23 Instructions for the Twelve Apostles

Tuesday 27th February | Matthew 10:24-42 Not Peace, but a Sword

Wednesday 28th February | Matthew 11:1-19 Messengers from John the Baptist

Thursday 29th February | Matthew 11:20-30 Woes to Unrepentant Cities

Friday 1st March | Matthew 12:1-21 Lord of the Sabbath

Saturday 2nd March | Matthew 12:22-50 Blasphemy Against the Holy Spirit

WEEK 4

Monday 4th March | Matthew 13:1-23 Parable of the Sower

Tuesday 5th March | Matthew 13:24-43 Parables of the Weeds, Mustard Seed, and Yeast

Wednesday 6th March | Matthew 13:44-58 Parables of the Hidden Treasure, the Pearl, and the Net

Thursday 7th March | Matthew 14:1-21 Death of John the Baptist & Jesus feeds 5000

Friday 8th March | Matthew 15:1-20 Teachings on Purity

Saturday 9th March | Matthew 15:21-39 Healing a Daughter & Jesus feeds 4000

WEEK 5

Monday 11th March | Matthew 16:1-13: The Demand for a Sign and Bad Yeast

Tuesday 12th March | Matthew 16:13-28: Peter's Confession and Jesus Predicts His Death Pt 1

Wednesday 13th March | Matthew 17:1-3: The Transfiguration

Thursday 14th March | Matthew 17:14-22: Jesus Delivers a Boy & Predicts His Death Pt 2

Friday 15th March | Matthew 18:1-19: The Value of People

Saturday 16th March | Matthew 18:21-35: The Parable of the Unforgiving Servant

WEEK 6

Monday 18th March | Matthew 19:1-15 Marriage & Children

Tuesday 19th March | Matthew 19:16-28: The Rich Man and the Kingdom

Wednesday 20th March | Matthew 20:1-16: The Workers in The Vineyard

Thursday 21st March | Matthew 20: 17-34: Jesus Predicts His Death Pt 3 & Heals a Blind Man

Friday 22nd March | Matthew 21: Entering Jerusalem

Saturday 23rd March | Matthew 22: Clashing Kingdoms Pt 1

WEEK 7

Monday 25th March | Matthew 23: Clashing Kingdoms Pt 2

Tuesday 26th March | Matthew 24: The End of The World Pt 1

Wednesday 27th March | Matthew 25: End of The World Pt 2

Thursday 28th March | Matthew 26: The Plot, A New Passover & Jesus Arrested

Friday 29th March | Matthew 27: Crucifixion

EASTER SUNDAY

Sunday 31st March | Matthew 28:1-20: Resurrection & Great Commission

DAILY REFLECTION

Use these questions each day to reflect on the Daily Reading.

You might like to use a journal to note down your thoughts and responses to the questions.

As you begin ask the the **Holy Spirit** to speak to you.

GOD

What does this passage say about God?

HUMANITY

What does this passage say about us?

RESPONSE

What action is this passage calling you to take today?

WEEKLY REFLECTION

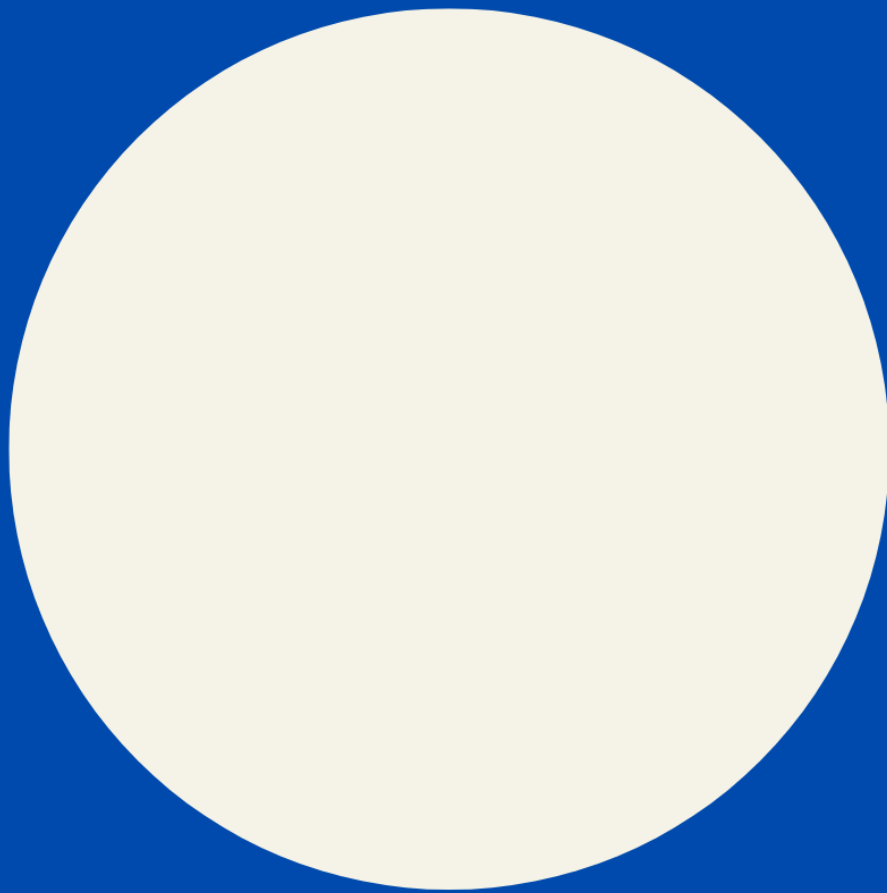
On Sundays there is no set reading from Matthew's Gospel but time to look back and reflect on the week's passages.

You might find the following task helpful. As you begin ask the the **Holy Spirit** to speak to you.

What questions have this week's readings raised for you?

What have you learnt?

Return to one passage that caught your attention and read it again slowly, asking what might God want to show you through it?



**CEDAR GROUP
SESSIONS**

CEDAR GROUP SESSIONS

The following 7 sessions are written for Cedar Groups to use during their midweek meetings. There are questions to help your group to go a little deeper with the text in conversation together but your leader might have additional questions or even take you to other sections of Scripture to help make sense of what you're discussing. Don't worry if you struggle to answer the questions. The bible is deep, with many layers and it takes a long time to get to grips with it all. Just focus on the bits you do understand and stay curious about what you don't.

You may not meet frequently enough to do all the sessions so your group leader will pick the sessions that seem most appropriate to you and may return to missed sessions later on in the year.

Be kind when sharing your views. Difference of opinion is vital for a healthy community: hold your views not as weapons for others to fear but as gifts for others to receive with gladness.

HOW DO I JOIN A CEDAR GROUP?

If you are reading this and want to join a Cedar Group, please email us at hello@bow.church or call 07908416052 and we will find one for you.

CEDAR GROUP SESSIONS

SESSION 1: ORIGIN STORY

PRAY

Open the session together in a time of prayer allowing for God to be at the centre of your time together.

READ: Matthew 1:1-17

DISCUSS

1. In 1:1 & 1:17 Jesus is described as the Messiah. What does this mean?
2. This list of names is Jesus' family tree, it's his origin story. Share how your family of origin has affected who you are today, as far as you are comfortable.
3. A surprising amount of the names listed here made major mistakes or were considered ungodly in one way or another. Why would they be included in Jesus' family tree and what does that tell you about the way God works?
4. What might the significance be of calling Jesus the "Son of David" and the "Son of Abraham"? You might find reading this booklet's introduction again helpful.

RESPOND

Decide together how this session will change the way you will live in the days and weeks ahead and close in prayer for one another.

CEDAR GROUP SESSIONS

SESSION 2: BAPTISM & TEMPTATION

PRAY

Open the session together in a time of prayer allowing for God to be at the centre of your time together.

READ: [Matthew 3:1-4:11](#)

DISCUSS

1. In what ways can we learn from John the Baptist?
2. Jesus' baptism, and the staggering words of affirmation from heaven, happen right at the beginning of his ministry, before he's done anything. Jesus lives and works FROM a place of affirmation rather than trying to live and work FOR affirmation. Is this true for you? Does your affirmation come from God?
3. What was achieved in Jesus overcoming temptation? Why was wilderness the setting?
4. Jesus is tempted in three fundamental ways. Firstly, whether his APPETITE – his desires – are met primarily in God. Secondly, his IDENTITY and that of his Father in heaven's is undermined when the Devil suggests Jesus' assert his authority. Thirdly, his AMBITION is tempted when the Devil offers him power at the most terrible cost. In which of these three areas are you tempted at the moment? How might Jesus' approach in fighting the lies of the Devil equip you to overcome temptation?
5. Notice that the baptism precedes the temptation and both precede his public ministry. What private preparation is God doing in you right now?

RESPOND

Decide together how this session will change the way you will live in the days and weeks ahead and close in prayer for one another.

CEDAR GROUP SESSIONS

SESSION 3: THE BLESSED LIFE

PRAY

Open the session together in a time of prayer allowing for God to be at the centre of your time together.

READ: [Matthew 5:1-12](#)

DISCUSS

Before the session or just before discussing, try and watch the YouTube Video "What Jesus Taught in the Sermon on the Mount?" by the Bible Project.

1. How do the Beatitudes challenge traditional notions of success, power and happiness and in what ways do the Beatitudes call believers to live counter-culturally?
2. What is the significance of Jesus stating, "for theirs is the kingdom of heaven," in each Beatitude?
3. Are you "Blessed" in any of the ways the Beatitudes describe?

RESPOND

Decide together how this session will change the way you will live in the days and weeks ahead and close in prayer for one another.

CEDAR GROUP SESSIONS

SESSION 4: PRACTICE

PRAY

Open the session together in a time of prayer allowing for God to be at the centre of your time together.

READ: [Matthew 7:24-29](#)

DISCUSS

1. Matthew 7:24-29 is the conclusion of the radical teaching of Jesus known as The Sermon on The Mount (ch 5-7). It talks about the priority of practice. Skim back over some of the challenging teaching. Which aspect do you find personally most challenging to live by?
2. Who comes to mind when you think of someone who has built their lives on the "rock" that is Jesus Christ? What is it about their lives that brings them to mind?
3. What habits and practices are you trying to establish in your life that will build on the solid "rock" and put into practice The Sermon on the Mount?

RESPOND

Decide together how this session will change the way you will live in the days and weeks ahead and close in prayer for one another.



SESSION 5: THE PARABLE OF THE SOWER

PRAY

Open the session together in a time of prayer allowing for God to be at the centre of your time together.

READ: Matthew 13:1-23

DISCUSS

1. What are the different types of soil mentioned in the Parable of the Sower and what do they represent?
2. How does this parable illustrate the varying responses people have to the message of the kingdom of God?
3. What can we do to cultivate a receptive heart, like the good soil, for God's Word in our lives?

RESPOND

Decide together how this session will change the way you will live in the days and weeks ahead and close in prayer for one another.

CEDAR GROUP SESSIONS

SESSION 6: THE CROSS

PRAY

Open the session together in a time of prayer allowing for God to be at the centre of your time together.

READ: Matthew 27:32-56

DISCUSS

1. How do different individuals respond to Jesus' death, including the centurion and the women watching from a distance (27:54-56)? What do their responses reveal about the impact of Jesus' crucifixion on those who witnessed it?
2. What significance do the darkness, the temple veil tearing and the earthquake hold in this context?
3. What does the cross of Christ mean for you today?

RESPOND

Decide together how this session will change the way you will live in the days and weeks ahead and close in prayer for one another.

CEDAR GROUP SESSION SNO

SESSION 7: THE RESURRECTION & GREAT COMMISSION

PRAY

Open the session together in a time of prayer allowing for God to be at the centre of your time together.

READ: Matthew 28:1-20

DISCUSS

1. How does Matthew's account of the resurrection (Matthew 28:1-10) confirm the reality of Jesus' resurrection from the dead? What specific details does Matthew provide to authenticate the resurrection event?
2. Who were the first witnesses to the resurrection according to Matthew's gospel and how does Matthew highlight the importance of eyewitness testimony in establishing the truth of the resurrection?
3. How does Matthew connect the resurrection of Jesus to Old Testament prophecies and promises and what significance do these connections have in affirming Jesus' identity as the promised Messiah?
4. What instructions does Jesus give to his disciples following the resurrection (28:16-20)? How does the resurrection empower and commission believers to carry out the mission of making disciples of all nations?

RESPOND

Decide together how this session will change the way you will live in the days and weeks ahead and close in prayer for one another.



