

JESUS CHRIST

MATTHEW 3-9



TEACHER



SAVIOUR



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MATTHEW SERIES BREAKUP

DATE	IN SMALL GROUP	AT SALT CHURCH
8-12 Feb	Kick off the Year!	
15-19 Feb	Matt 5:1-16	Beginning: 17/3 (for 5 weeks)
22-26 Feb	Matt 5:17-48	
1-5 Mar	Matt 6:1-18	Grow & AGM: 5/3
8-12 Mar	Matt 6:19-34	
15-19 Mar	Matt 7:1-29	Bible Overview Course 15/3 (for 3 weeks)
22-26 Mar	Matt 8:1-34	
29 Mar - 2 Apr	Choose your own	Easter: 2/4 & 4/4
5-16 Apr	- Have a Break -	Hot Topics, Racism: 12/4

MATTHEW OVERVIEW

Who wrote this book?

Although there's no statement in Matthew's gospel itself about who wrote it (unlike Luke's gospel for e.g.), early Christian tradition unanimously agrees that it was Matthew - not just any Matthew, but the former tax collector who left everything to follow Jesus...

As Jesus went on from there, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax collector's booth. "Follow me," he told him, and Matthew got up and followed him. While Jesus was having dinner at Matthew's house, many tax collectors and sinners came and ate with him and his disciples. When the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" On hearing this, Jesus said, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick.

But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners." (Matt 9:9-13)

His name was Levi but Jesus changed it to Matthew which means 'gift of God'. Matthew probably wrote his book somewhere between 50-70 AD.

What's the purpose of this book?

This might feel like an odd question – surely the purpose of a gospel is to teach us about Jesus! However, Luke and John tell us the reason they wrote their gospels - for Luke, so believing Gentiles like Theophilus *'may know the certainty of the things you have been taught'* (Luke 1:4); for John *'these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name'* (John 20:31).

Matthew doesn't give us a clear statement like these about why he wrote his account of Jesus' life, teaching, death and resurrection. His purpose shines through though as we see the biggest themes in the book.

1. ***Who is Jesus:*** there's so many titles and descriptions of Jesus in this book. He's the Messiah / Christ, Immanuel (God incarnate with his people), the Son of God, King of Israel, Son of Man, Suffering Servant, Head of the Church, Lord of the universe.
2. ***Fulfilment:*** Jesus is the fulfilment of OT prophecy, expectations and even the Law itself. Matthew regularly writes things like this: *'All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet'* (1:22). Jesus agrees: *'Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them'* (5:17). God had spoken and made promises to His people in the past. Centuries later, Jesus arrives to fulfil all those promises.
3. ***Jews and Gentiles:*** Jesus is the end-point of all Ancient Israel's salvation hopes, but in Jesus salvation is now available to the Gentiles too - notice the difference between this statement: *'these twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: "Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel. As you go, proclaim this message: The kingdom of heaven has come near"'* (10:5-7) - and this statement: *'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations'* (28:18-19). Though Jesus comes to Israel, He is gathering a people for himself from all people-groups, and sends us to continue that mission.

4. **The Church:** The new people Christ forms is the Church. Matthew's gospel is in fact the only gospel that explicitly uses the word 'church'.

It's a new community of faith, that brings together Jews and Gentiles as 1 united people of God. The Church is built by Jesus: *'I will build my church'* (16:18), and is ongoingly sustained by him - Jesus tells us: *'where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them'*, and promises: *'surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age'* (18:20, 28:20).

5. **The Kingdom of Heaven:** much of Jesus' teaching is focused on "the kingdom of heaven". This is the realm where God's rule is acknowledged (so people enter the Kingdom or receive the Kingdom in Matthew), it is present right now (since God is sovereign over His world and all creatures ought to serve God their King) and yet it is coming (so Jesus teaches us to pray God's Kingdom will come).

It's an utterly radical Kingdom, where *'the last will be first, and the first will be last'* (20:16), and where those who're blessed aren't the wealthy and powerful but: *'the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven... those who mourn... the meek... those who hunger and thirst for righteousness... the merciful... the pure in heart... the peacemakers... those who are persecuted because of righteousness for theirs is the kingdom of heaven'* (5:3-10).

It's a Kingdom that makes 2 demands. The 1st demand is to enter it through Jesus: *'Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven'* (7:21), God's will being ultimately Jesus' invitation and command: *'Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest'* (11:28).

The 2nd demand is to follow the Kingdom's ethics. New birth leads to new behaviour, new life leads to a new lifestyle, as disciples of Jesus.

6. **Being a Disciple:** As the new people of God, we live as members of God's Kingdom on earth. God's love brought us into His Kingdom, and that love transforms how we live. The very thing it means to be a disciple of Jesus is to follow and obey him: *'Therefore go and make disciples of all nations... teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you'* (28:19-20). 1 important aspect of being Jesus' disciple is we'll make more disciples, by sharing the same news that saved us.

So summing it up, it seems Matthew's purpose in writing his gospel is...

A) To convince Jews that Jesus is their promised Messiah who brings salvation, and to convince Gentiles that they can share in this salvation.

B) Then it is for these new people of God (the Church) to know from Jesus' teaching what it looks like to be Jesus' disciple-making-disciples, and to be comforted by Jesus' promises that He is with us, in spite of the opposition we'll face for Him.

What's the structure of the book?

Matthew traces Jesus' life from birth to baptism, the start of public ministry, teaching, opposition, entry into Jerusalem, death and resurrection. He also includes 5 unique sections of Jesus' teaching. These are like a manual on discipleship, showing what a holistic life of obedience to Jesus looks like:

- Chap 5-7 - The Sermon on the Mount
- Chap 10 - Sending his disciples on Mission to Israel
- Chap 13 - A collection of 5 Parables about the Kingdom of Heaven
- Chap 18-20 - Teaching to Jesus' disciples and opponents
- Chap 24-25 - The signs of Jesus' coming and commands to be watchful

SERIES GOALS

As a result of this series we want all of us at Salt Church to:

1. Understand Jesus better, especially by how he fulfils the OT prophecies, expectations and Law.
2. Trust Jesus as the one who forgives our sins and fulfils the law for us, either for the first time or with renewed commitment.
3. Be challenged by Jesus' radical picture of life as his disciple and take active steps to live it more and more.

KICKING OFF THE YEAR • 3-7 FEB

DIRECTION: This'll be your first Small Group meeting for the year. So kick it off with something fun, like dinner together. And kick it off with something important: chat about what sort of Small Group you want to be. Flesh out some expectations together so your group can start well. Use the advice in chapter 2 of [Getting Started as a Small Group Leader](#) to work out how you'll have this convo. Below is a suggested way to do this. Beforehand you could print, or get everyone to download, the [Small Groups Infographic](#).

PRAY TO START: That this year we'd be a Small Group who help each other know God better and learn to love each other like God loves us.

LAUNCH: If you could spend 100 hours doing something this year, what would you spend those 100 hours on?

DISCUSSING EXPECTATIONS: We'll spend 100 hours together this year as a Small Group. As we kick off today, let's start by deciding what sort of Small Group we want to be so we can use those hours well.

Best place to start is the bible, so (either as a group or in pairs) read: **Hebrews 10:19-25, Ephesians 4:11-16, and Colossians 3:16-17**

- What are we meant to do for / to each other? Why?
- What might stop you from meeting together with us this year?
- How do these verses motivate you to overcome those obstacles?

Small Groups are slightly different at every church. So have a look at the [Small Groups Infographic](#) to see how Small Groups work at Salt Church.

- Is there anything that surprises you? That's unclear? That excites you?
- What are you hoping to get out of Small Group this year?

- The big reason we have Small Groups is so we can help each other know God better and learn to love each other like God loves us. There's tonnes of practical ways to do that, so let's chuck round ideas:

You could write this out on butcher's paper / a whiteboard / chrome cast to a TV, so everyone can see what you're discussing and agreeing to.

You might want to cover things like: a Facebook message group (can someone make a group to post on during the week?), attendance (let's plan to come each week), apologies (post on our Facebook page if you can't make it), meals (will we have dinner together? Just dessert? How often? Who's cooking?), prayer (do this as a whole group? Split into guys & girls?), participation (let's all share our thoughts when we're reading the bible so we can help each other grow), trust (we want to learn to trust each other so let's be real & take steps towards that), going away together (are people up for a weekend / overnight away? Who's organising?), etc.

FINISHING UP THE EXPECTATIONS CHAT: Once you finish talking about these ideas make sure you land it – otherwise you'll have a case of 'remember that great convo we had 1 week about our group' that everyone's since forgotten.

- Before you finish up, say back to the group: we've seen *this* is why we're meeting, *this* is the kind of group we want to be, and *these* are the big things we want from each other.
- Take a photo of your butcher's paper / whiteboard / screenshot and post it on your group's Facebook message group during the week, so people can have a visual reminder of it.
- As a leader, encourage and remind people of these expectations again over the next few weeks as your group starts to meet.

PRAY TO END:

1. Praise God for a new year where we'll grow to know Him better and learn to love each other like He loves us.
2. Pray for God's help to be an encouraging group, the kind of group that He and we want to be.

MATT 5:1-16 • 15-19 FEB

DIRECTION: Today we're launching into the Sermon on the Mount, probably Jesus' most famous sermon. It begins with the 'Beatitudes', statements about what a blessed happy life looks like, which show us the Kingdom's Values; the opposite of what our world values. Jesus then shares what Kingdom People look like: they stand out like salt, light, and a city on a hill. The radical life Jesus describes is enabled only by God – it's only God who can make us realise we are 'poor in spirit' (we have no spiritual life apart from him) and who can give us a 'hunger and thirst for righteousness', etc. So, Jesus *tells* his disciples how to live for Heaven *and enables* them to do it.

PRAY TO START: Ask for God's help to understand Jesus' teaching and to put it into practise.

LAUNCH: If you asked your friends who aren't Christians this question, what do you think they would say: 'I'd be much happier if I had...'

Read Matthew 5:1-20

OBSERVATION: *This is about getting an overview of what the passage says.*

- How many blessed people does Jesus describe?
- What do you think 'blessed' means in this passage?

MEANING: *This is about deciding what big idea/s the author is explaining to us*

- Do you think Jesus describes 9 different types of people - who will all be blessed differently - or is it 1 type of person with 9 attributes?
- Does this blessed person actually exist, or are they an imaginary ideal person? i.e. is this a sermon about what Jesus is like?
- **Look at 5:13-16.** What do you think is the point Jesus is making? Who do you think he's saying it to?

- If this was the only Bible passage you'd ever read on how to enter the Kingdom of Heaven, what fundamental mistake could you make?

That entry comes by our obedience instead of Jesus'. it is only God who can make us realise we are 'poor in spirit' (we have no spiritual life apart from him) and who can give us a 'hunger and thirst for righteousness', etc. So Jesus tells his disciples how to live for Heaven and enables them to do it.

APPLY: *This is about reflecting on how the passage impacts your life – your head (beliefs), heart (emotions) and hands (actions). There's lots of questions here, so just pick the ones that best reflect where your conversation has gone, i.e. if you spent most of the time on 5:13-16, ask more of those questions.*

ON 5:1-12

- How is Jesus' idea of what makes someone 'blessed' different to your unbelieving friends' ideas of what would make us happy? i.e. how would Jesus answer this question: 'You'd be much happier if you had...'
- Do you agree with Jesus, or do you find it hard to trust him about this?
- What would be great and what would be painful about living as this blessed person?
- Pick 1 attribute from the Beatitudes that stands out to you. How could this attribute be more true of you this week, this year?

ON 5:13-16

- Do you feel nervous about being salt / light / a city? Why, why not?
- What would be great and what would be painful about living like this?
- What might be holding you back from living this way more? How could you overcome that, with God's help?

ON ENTERING THE KINGDOM

- How does this passage keep us humble when we think about how we enter the Kingdom of Heaven?

PRAY TO END: Ask God to help us live for the Kingdom of Heaven, rather than chasing happiness in the places our world and unbelieving friends do.

MATT 5:17-48 • 22-26 FEB

DIRECTION: Christian scholars debate about what Jesus is doing here: is he making new laws or clarifying Old Testament (OT) laws? I (Geoff) think he's doing both: he shows what OT laws would've looked like if people did them wholeheartedly, but he also teaches us what *his* disciples need to live like... which is depressing as this list of laws is utterly unachievable for us. That's why 5:17-20 is so important: it shows us *how we become* Kingdom People. It's *achievable* for Jesus to be perfect like His heavenly Father. Jesus has come to fulfil the law, and give us his righteousness, a righteousness that far surpasses that of the Pharisees and teachers of the Law.

PRAY TO START: Pray for help to understand Jesus' teaching about the OT, and obedient, responsive hearts that want to put it into practise.

LAUNCH: Australia has lots of laws, but maybe we need more! If you were allowed to make a new law for Australia (or a State or Territory of your choice), what new law would you make?

Read Matthew 5:21-48

OBSERVATION & MEANING: Jesus gives and unpacks 6 laws here. Let's split into pairs, choose 1-2 of the 6 examples, answer these questions, and then share your answers with the whole group.

- V21-26: Murder (Ex 20:13, 21:12, Deut 5:17)
 - V27-30: Adultery (Ex 20:14, Deut 5:18)
 - V31-32: Divorce (Deut 24:1-4)
 - V33-37: Oaths (Lev 19:12, Num 30:2, Deut 23:21)
 - V38-42: Justice (Ex 21:24, Lev 24:20, Deut 19:21)
 - V43-48: Love (Lev 19:18, Deut 23:6, Ps 139:21-22)
- Can you find a place in the OT where this example comes from?
 - Has Jesus changed the OT Laws? How? Why?

People will probably have footnotes and cross-references in their bible that you could direct them to, or if they're stuck there's a list of references in brackets above.

Share answers back with the whole group

- Do you think Jesus is making new laws? Clarifying old laws? Or doing something else?
- What word would you pick to capture how you've gone at obeying these laws? E.g. failure, guilt, #nailedit

Read Matthew 5:17-20

OBSERVATION & MEANING: What does it mean that Jesus 'fulfils' the law?

- Why does someone's righteousness need to surpass the Pharisees and teachers of the law in order to enter the Kingdom of Heaven?
- If this was the only Bible passage you'd ever read on how to enter the Kingdom of Heaven, what fundamental mistake could you make?

That entry comes by our obedience instead of Jesus'. The Law, which was never fulfilled by anyone but Jesus, is fully fulfilled in Christians now. Because we're in Christ we're treated as if Jesus' righteousness is ours. Romans 8 is helpful here...

"Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus... For what the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the flesh, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering.... in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fully met in us..." (Romans 8:1-4)

APPLY: Jesus finishes this bit of the Sermon by calling us to 'be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect'. Take 1-2 mins on your own and work out some big ways and some little ways that you're imperfect.

PRAY TO END: Split into pairs (or into 2 groups of men and women if that's relevant) and share 1-2 of those ways you're imperfect – then give thanks to God for being your *Father* despite your imperfections, and ask God to help you grow to become more like Him.

MATT 6:1-18 • 1-5 MAR

DIRECTION: Jesus hates hypocrisy (check out Matthew 23!). But in these verses Jesus is concerned about a specific breed of hypocrisy: 'to practise your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them' (6:1), as opposed to doing righteousness to please your Heavenly Father. If someone is *this type* of hypocrite, they might enjoy life now but they'll have no reward from their Father in Heaven. Note there's lots of puzzling & interesting ideas in this section too. There's questions for some of these (e.g. what the reward is, fasting, etc.). Feel free to explore them if your group is interested, but then move on after a bit, so you can all see the big picture too.

PRAY TO START: Help us to understand what exactly Jesus is concerned about, and to be protected from being this kind of deadly hypocrite.

LAUNCH: What is hypocrisy? Does anyone have a funny example of hypocrisy that you've seen?

CONTEXT: *This is about seeing how this passage fits into the chapter and book*

- We're still looking at the Sermon on the Mount. What can you remember about it from the last 2 weeks?

Read Matthew 6:1-18

OBSERVATION: *This is about getting an overview of what the passage says.*

Break into pairs then share your answers with the whole group:

- Which phrases and words seem to be repeated in this section?
- What do you think they mean?

MEANING: *This is about deciding what big idea/s the author is explaining to us*

- What do you think 6:1 means? Why is Jesus so against this?
- What do you think the 'reward' from God is?

See also Matt 16:27, 1 Cor 3:14, Eph 6:8, Col 3:24, Rev 22:12

- What strikes you about Jesus' prayer?
- If 'your Father knows what you need before you ask him', why then would we pray? Why do you think God wants us to pray?
- Does 6:14-15 scare you? Why do you think Jesus would say this?
- If Christians should give to the needy (6:2), and should pray (6:5), do you think Christians should also fast (6:16)? Does 6:16-18 show us anything about *why* Christians might fast?

Some Christians think fasting ought to be practised by all Christians, based off verses like this that say 'when' not 'if' you fast. In terms of why we might do this, at the least this passage is saying fasting is about your relationship with God and living to please your Father. You'll be unlikely to get a very clear answer about fasting from this passage alone though, as there's much more to explore. So chat about it for a bit and then move on.

APPLY: *This is about reflecting on how the passage impacts your life – your head (beliefs), heart (emotions) and hands (actions).*

- If Jesus was speaking 6:1 to Christians in the Illawarra today what other examples might he add, where Christians are tempted to 'practise our righteousness in front of others to be seen by them'?

Perhaps things like boasting about which preacher or Christian podcast you listen to, which church you're part of, what your bible reading or prayer life is like, etc.

- How similar or different is Jesus' prayer to what you normally pray for? What might help you pray for big things like Jesus does here?
- How are you going at forgiving people who have sinned against you?
- Christians should seek to "live for an audience of one" – that is, we should live to please God alone. How are you going at doing that?
- Where would you like your relationship with God to be at the end of this year compared to now?

PRAY TO END: Praise God that we can pray to him. Ask for His help not to start being, or keep being, the kind of hypocrite this passage talks about, but to live to please Him alone instead.

MATT 6:19-34 • 8-12 MAR

DIRECTION: These are some challenging words from Jesus and yet at the same time are so comforting. We can be freed from the powerfully destructive love of money (1 Tim 6:10) by seeking Jesus' Kingdom first and treasuring him. In our fear and anxiety we can trust God to provide.

PRAY TO START: Help us trust you and value what you value Father.

LAUNCH: If you were given \$10,000, with no strings attached, what would you do with it?

Read Matthew 6:19-24

OBSERVATION & MEANING: What's the problem Jesus is dealing with here?

- Why is storing up treasures on earth so attractive?
- What do you think it looks like to 'serve money'? To 'serve God'?
- 'Treasures on earth' doesn't just mean financial wealth. What are some truly good things on earth we can be tempted to 'store up'?
- You can see what you love most by looking at what you treasure most (i.e. 'where you treasure is, there your heart will be also'). We all want to treasure Jesus most of all, of course. But we're growing in that. So...

What other things are you tempted to treasure?

What do you happily spend money on without even thinking about it?

What would you be devastated if you lost?

Read Matthew 6:25-34

OBSERVATION, MEANING, APPLICATION: Imagine you're hearing Jesus teach this for the first time. What could make someone nervous or anxious about what Jesus is saying?

- What exactly does Jesus promise here?

- If you were going to take Jesus' teaching in chapter 6 half-heartedly, how could you fake it?
- How does Jesus' promise in 6:25-34 free us from needing to fake it, or being anxious about obeying him wholeheartedly?
- What are you most afraid of? And don't say spiders – what are you *really* afraid will / won't happen?

PRAY TO END: Ask God to help you trust that He will give you everything you need, in whatever particular areas you're anxious about, and for His help to serve Him instead of money or whatever else might pull us away.

MATT 7:1-29 • 15-19 MAR

DIRECTION: We hate judgemental people, but we need to make judgements and decisions about people all the time. How do we do that with wisdom and love? Especially when there are dangerous false teachers and disciples in the world? Jesus finishes the Sermon on the Mount by teaching us to 'Watch out' for ourselves and others, and to put his words into practise.

PRAY TO START: Ask for wisdom to work out how to love people.

LAUNCH: Share a time when you (or someone you know) gave your view or your opinion, only to discover you were wrong.

Read Matthew 7:1-29

OBSERVATION & MEANING:

- For 7:1-6. What is Jesus saying we *should* do and *shouldn't* do?
Don't be judgemental – in the sense of being quick to make judgements about others – but do judge, in the sense of discerning or recognising what people are like.
- How do you feel about v6? Without naming names, who do you think might fit Jesus' description in v6?
- For 7:7-12, why might Jesus say this straight after v6?
We're all facing God's judgement, as those who 'are evil'. So we need our generous Father in Heaven to give us the good gift of opening the door to Heaven for us.
- For 7:13-14, Jesus speaks a truth that's hard to hear. In the context of the whole Sermon on the Mount, why is it important to understand that many people are heading to destruction?
It leads us to pray and proclaim earnestly to people that they will find righteousness in Jesus, instead of deluding themselves into believing they already have it.
- For 7:15-23, why might Jesus follow up saying many are heading to destruction by teaching about false prophets and false disciples?
These are not only people heading down the broad road, but are also dangerous to those following Jesus. We need to know how to spot them to be safe from them.

- Do you know people who used to claim to be Jesus' disciples, but eventually showed themselves not to be? Were there any clues that they weren't really following Jesus?

APPLY: How might your week look different if, at every possible chance you 'do to others what you would wish them to do to you' (7:12, ESV)?

- Think back across the whole Sermon on the Mount – what is the number 1 area you'd like to change so you're better putting Jesus' words into practice, 'like a wise man who built his house on the rock'?
- What steps would you take to do this?
- Think of 1-2 people you know who are currently walking through the wide gate and taking the broad road to destruction. Pray for God to save them, and for opportunities for the Christians in their life (including you) to show them the road to Christ, who leads us to life.

PRAY TO END: For those people who don't know Jesus. Plus pray for God's help in hearing and putting into practice Jesus' words: not just the words in this chapter and not just for this week, but every word for every day, until you finally enter the kingdom.

MATT 8:1-34 • 22-26 MAR

DIRECTION: Jesus who has just *taught* with authority now *acts* with authority. He shows us what the Kingdom of Heaven will look like as he performs miracles to heal and cast out demons. The Kingdom hasn't yet come in all its fulness (6:10, 8:29), but Jesus gives a taste of what it will be like in his actions here. Jesus also shows us he's the rightful ruler of the Kingdom – he can do all this because he's someone with authority and under his Father's authority, as the Centurion recognises (8:9).

PRAY TO START: Help us better understand Jesus, the Kingdom he brings, and to put our hope and trust in him while we wait for it to come.

LAUNCH: What's the most miraculous thing you've seen or heard about?

CONTEXT: *This is about seeing how this passage fits into the chapter and book*

- Jesus has just finished the Sermon on the Mount. How did the crowd react to it (7:28-29)? How did *you* react to it?

Read Matthew 8:1-34

OBSERVATION: *This is about getting an overview of what the passage says.*

- Which story from chapter 8 stands out to you most? Why?
- What things does Jesus have power and authority over in this section? Try to list them all.
- How (in what different ways) does Jesus show his power and authority?

MEANING: *This is about deciding what big idea/s the author is explaining to us*

- Why do you think Jesus does these things? What do you think is the purpose of Jesus' miracles?

He shows what the Kingdom of God is like – it's where health, order and God reign, rather than illness, disorder and satanic power. He also shows he's the rightful ruler of the Kingdom – he has authority, as the Centurion recognises (8:9). Finally, these miracles show the character of King Jesus (8:3, 8:16-17).

- What connection do you think there is between healing and faith here?

It looks like Jesus only heals those with faith, who trust in him (8:2, 10-13). But that's not exclusively true (8:14-16 no mention of faith, 8:26 disciples are rebuked for lack of faith). It seems clear that Jesus wants people to trust him (i.e. have faith in him), and the opposite and wrong response is to fear Jesus (8:26, 8:34).

- What response do you think Jesus wants from people? What do you think 8:19-22 means?

Jesus wants faith in him and for people to follow him wholeheartedly, to a higher priority than every other relationship and even at the cost of other good things.

- Does 8:26 mean that if the disciples had more faith they could've stopped the storm? Why, why not?

APPLY: This is about reflecting on how the passage impacts your life – your head (beliefs), heart (emotions) and hands (actions).

- Think about friends or family who don't yet know Jesus. Does asking them to do 8:19-22 feel like too much to ask? Why, why not?
- Should we expect to see (or do) now the same kinds of miraculous things Jesus did then? Why, why not?
- What's 1 thing you want God to fix or change in your life?
- How can you keep trusting God if he decides not to fix it now but later in your life, or only in the new creation when Jesus returns to finally bring God's Kingdom?

PRAY TO END: Praise God that Jesus brings a *good* Kingdom. Ask God to change or fix that thing, and for His help to trust Him and give thanks to Him whether He decides in His wisdom to do it or not.

CHOOSE YOUR OWN • 29 MAR-2 APR

DIRECTION: This weekend we'll celebrate Easter as a Church. So, take a break from Matthew and choose your own adventure this week.

If you're unsure what to do here's some options: you could skip forward a few chapters to read and reflect on Matthew's account of Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection, you could eat the Passover meal together in your Small Group, or you could write your own bible discussion (see notes below).

WHY 'CHOOSE YOUR OWN' WEEKS:

One downside of the way we unpack books at Salt is we move quick! You might have started a great chat in your group 1 week, but by the next we've moved on. This week is a chance to choose your own adventure – continue 1 of those chats or look at another topic / question / part of the bible your group wants to. Choose your own weeks can be great for your group digging into something that's puzzling, troubling or exciting them.

SOCIAL FUN TIMES:

If you haven't done a social / fun thing for a while you could use this week for that. See chap 5 & 6 of [Getting Started as a Small Group Leader](#) for tips on how to use these to grow your group, so you get more out of them.

DO YOUR OWN BIBLE DISCUSSION:

Alternatively, if you want to continue a previous discussion or dig into another topic / question / part of the bible here's how you could do that...

Getting Ideas:

A week before this, let your group know there's a 'choose your own' week coming up. Collect ideas, like a topic / question / part of the bible they want to explore. Vote to find the most popular 1 & get prepping.

Getting Prepped:

Brainstorm where in the bible the topic / question comes up. Or for a part of the bible, read it a bunch of times to work out what it means. Ask your coach & other leaders if they know good places / what the passage means.

If you feel more confident you can read up on the topic in a systematic theology / commentary (there's a bunch upstairs at 275 Keira St to borrow). If you're keen to learn more about the skill of creating studies, check out the book *Writing a Small Group Study* by Richard Sweatman.

Packaging a Discussion:

1. Use the COMA method: we often use it in these Bible Discussion Notes; it stands for: Context-Observation-Meaning-Application.
2. Use the 'Swedish Method', where you read the passage together & ask:
 - a. What stands out to you?
 - b. What's a question you have?
 - c. What do you think the big point is?
 - d. What's one thing you want to do in response?
3. Or just read the passage & ask 'what do you reckon?' & see where your discussion takes you.

NEED HELP?

You don't have to have all the answers or be the expert to be a Small Group Leader, so don't stress out for this week. Just get people into God's word & let Him teach & transform us by His Spirit. Your Small Group Coach is always available & ready to give you help too.



Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock.

Matthew 7:24