

STUDY QUESTIONS

Sharon Ely Pearson

The Gospel of Matthew was perhaps the favorite of the early church, offering a carefully crafted account of Jesus' birth, mission, and passion. It is neatly organized for teaching purposes. Following the infancy narrative, baptism, and temptation of Christ, which connects Jesus to the Hebrew Scriptures, Matthew presents many accounts of Jesus' teaching, healings, and missions. The best known, the Sermon on the Mount combines his blessings and teachings that convey his radical message.

Introduction

This study guide is meant to accompany each chapter as a path to go deeper and reflect upon the themes and ideas that the author offers through his overview of Matthew. The questions and reflections will invite you into a conversation about how we connect with the theological themes and motifs that Matthew is sharing with his audience of almost two thousand years ago and how it can have significance to our own understanding of what it means to be a follower of Christ.

The Gospel of Matthew was written between CE 75 and 95. Clues within the book suggest it was written after the Romans destroyed the Jerusalem temple in CE 70. The debate over the authorship of Matthew hinges on the similarities seen in the gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Matthew has included most of Mark (along with sources from Q and L), though the stories are shortened to leave room for original material, consisting mostly of Jesus' teachings. Its author is an unknown Christian, probably of Jewish background writing for Jewish Christians, possibly of Antioch in Syria. At the time, the

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Christian Jewish community was caught in a struggle between their understanding of Jesus as the Messiah and traditional Judaism that was trying to retain its identity after the destruction of the temple.

In Matthew's "good news" you'll not find as much dramatic action as in Mark, or as many spotlights on compassion as you'll read in Luke. But you'll discover the most complete record of what Jesus taught and how his teachings grow out of Old Testament scriptures.

As you begin this study of Matthew, consider the following:

- Why you are engaging in this study of the Gospel of Matthew?
- What have your previous understandings been of this period of time in the early church? Do you go into this study with any preconceived notions? If so, jot them down before reading.
- What do you hope to learn and discern for yourself in this study?
- What was the world like at this period of our world's history? How is it different to today's world? Similar?

Before studying each chapter of this book, portions of Scripture may be suggested to read ahead of time. The passages may not be sequential, as if you are reading the gospel from start to finish, as Yieh explores Matthew from a thematic viewpoint, moving back and forth through the chapters of this gospel. You may also wish to have a map of North and Central Palestine circa CE 30, as well as of the Roman Empire at the time of Paul's journeys. These can be found in the appendix of most study bibles. As you read Matthew, follow Jesus' journeys by looking at the significant places on the map and note what happened at each location.

Chapter One: A New Gospel

The first chapter begins with Dr. Yieh discussing the purpose of eulogies in relationship to the purpose of the gospels in the New Testament. As with any eulogy, we also learn something about the speaker as well as the person sharing their understandings and relationship of the deceased—in this case the Risen Lord. Begin by reflecting on your own relationship with Jesus and the gospels:

- When you hear Jesus' name mentioned, what stories, if any, from childhood to you remember?

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- What was the context from which your memory comes? Church? Sunday school? Home? A children's bible? The movies? A sermon?
- What do you believe is the purpose of a eulogy?
- If you were to write a eulogy for Jesus, what would it include? How would you personalize it as someone giving it at His "memorial service"?

Yieh contrasts two viewpoints as to what the gospels are: (a) history and (b) faith. He shares an overview of the types of methods used to read Scripture as well as a comparison of the Synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke).

- What do you believe the gospels are? Do believe along the lines of the historical scholars or those feel faith interpretation must be included?
- What is the purpose of the gospels if they are seen as eulogies of Jesus?
- What is the difference between narrative criticism and redaction criticism of research when studying biblical texts?
- What's the difference between the Synoptic gospels?

The gospel of Matthew has a particular purpose and spin on Jesus' mission and ministry. During your reading of Chapter One, read Galatians 2:11–14 and Acts 13:1–3.

- Describe Mark's portrayal of Jesus and the focus of his gospel. What is the purpose of Matthew writing yet another account of Jesus' life?
- Why does Matthew follow the literary pattern of ancient biography for classical heroes and philosophers in telling the story of Jesus?
- How is ancient biography different than today's biographies?
- How would imitating Jesus (in the early church as well as today) enhance one's spiritual character?
- Why does Matthew accentuate the eschatological warning throughout his gospel?
- Do you agree with Yieh's descriptions of moral and spiritual complacency in the face of nationalism as a focus for Matthew? How might this be similar today?

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Chapter Two: Jesus Christ, the Son of God

We begin reading Matthew by setting the stage of who Jesus is. Before beginning, jot down some understandings of who you believe Jesus was (or is) and how you come to these conclusions.

Read Matthew 1:1–2:23

- What is the purpose of listing Jesus' genealogy in Matthew (and its difference from Luke's)?
- Why is Matthew so careful to provide Jesus with impeccable credentials? What would the relationship to David and to Abraham have meant to Matthew's Jewish audience?
- What is important about the birth of Jesus according to Matthew? What seems most significant about the visit of the wise men from the East?
- What does viewing God as active and intentional in human history mean to us today?
- What does it mean to "save his people from their sins"? Who are his people? In what sense do you think of Jesus as Savior?
- As the star directed the magi, what directs you to Jesus? What gifts would you like to offer Jesus? What do they symbolize?

Read Matthew 11:1–15; 16:13–20; 21:1–11, 23–27; 27:32–37, and Psalm 110

- In Matthew 11:3, John the Baptist poses the central question of Matthew's gospel: Is Jesus the Messiah? Restate Jesus' answer in your own words. Why would John have recognized this in an affirmative reply?
- What are the credentials of the Messiah?
- To what does Jesus appeal to convince people of his authenticity?
- In what ways does Peter's confession clarify the issue of Jesus' identity? How would you answer the same question today?
- What kinds of feelings do you have when you contemplate proclaiming Christ publicly?
- Do you agree with Yieh's statement: "Except through Jesus no one can understand God, and only those whom he has chosen will be able to receive revelation"? Why or why not?

After noting that Jesus is the new Moses (*read Exodus 1:1–2:25 and 19:1–20:21 for comparison*), Yieh describes Jesus’ mission as twofold—to reveal God’s will and to demonstrate God’s love.

- How did Moses exhibit this? Where is the connection with Jesus?
- Why is Jesus’ teaching ministry so important to Matthew?
- How does the church today continue to proclaim and teach God’s mission as Jesus proclaim it?
- What do you consider the important qualities of a teacher?
- Does a teacher need authority? Why or why not? In today’s world, where do teachers get their authority?
- What is the difference between wisdom and knowledge?
- Yieh states that Matthew had three purposes in depicting Jesus as a teacher of God’s will who is itinerant, authoritative, wise, and exemplary. Which is most important to you—didactic, polemic, or pastoral?

Chapter Three: The Teachings of Jesus

In this chapter we will focus on the specific teachings of Jesus. His teaching may be summarized in one key idea: “righteousness, which is considered the ticket, task, and goal of God’s kingdom.” If possible, read the stories in a variety of translations of the Bible, such as the NRSV, The Message, and the Common Bible.

Read Matthew 5

These chapters make up the material known as the Sermon on the Mount, one of the most familiar collections of Jesus’ teaching. Though the sermon probably represents fragments of Jesus’ teaching that were recalled by oral tradition, the gospel writer has organized them carefully.

- The beatitudes have been interpreted either as divine comfort or spiritual discipline in the history of the church. How do you read and interpret them?
- According to the Sermon on the Mount, what are some of the qualities of discipleship?
- What are the characteristics of the kingdom of heaven?
- To us, the word “heaven” may suggest the next world. To Jews it was more a synonym for God because the Jewish tradition

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avoids naming God directly. What does the image of the “kingdom of God” mean to you?

- How do the values represented in the Beatitudes stand in contrast to values of past ages in Christianity? In today’s conventional attitudes and behavior in our society?
- How could acting on these values—or with these attitudes—effect change in our world?
- In what ways does your own Christian community provide salt (flavor, zest) and light (direction, clarity) to the larger community? For whom are you “salt” and “light”? Which people are “salt” and “light” for you?
- Do you agree or disagree with the statement that the Sermon on the Mount “applies only to religious life and church community”?

Read Matthew 6

Jesus’ teachings now turn to religious duties and personal piety. Almsgiving, prayer, and fasting are central themes and it is here that we are given “The Lord’s Prayer.”

- What does righteousness and piety mean to you? How are they similar or different?
- Compare Matthew 6:9–13 with Luke 11:1–4. How are they similar? Different?
- How many times does Jesus tell us not to be anxious? In what ways does anxiety distract us from our true priorities? How does it prevent us from seeing clearly? How does anxiety relate to being overly concerned with laying up “treasures on earth”?
- Is it possible to make money and love God at the same time?
- In what ways do we understand fasting, almsgiving, and prayer as necessary “acts of devotion” or “good works” for people today?

Read Matthew 7

Throughout the Sermon on the Mount we note a dual emphasis: righteousness (right relationship with God) that implies a right relationship with other people.

- Why does Jesus require victims to forfeit their legal right to seek reasonable compensations from their persecutors (“An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth”)? How difficult is it

for you to give up the principal of fair judgment for one of nonjudgment?

- What is your reaction to Martin Luther's view that nobody could fully obey the laws of Christ as set out in the Sermon on the Mount because they function not as a "rule" but as a "mirror," reflecting back to people their sin and deficiency?
- What are some of the "narrow gates" you have chosen in your own life? How did these choices help you to grow in understanding yourself? Other people? God?

Read Matthew 10 and Acts 15

The disciples are to mirror the actions of Jesus described in Matthew Chapters 9 and 10. Like Jesus, they are to work without pay, travel light and trust local hospitality.

- List some of the elements of the task of discipleship discussed in 10:1–15. What personal qualities would equip an individual to undertake this task? Compare your list with Matthew 5:3–11.
- How broadly are the first-century missionary instructions to be applied? What general principals do they suggest for the Church today? For your own life?
- How do we understand inclusivity in the church and mission today?
- Why does Jesus order his disciples to travel light?

Read Matthew 13

Jesus teaches in parables, telling story after story to illustrate the nature of God's kingdom.

- What are the reoccurring images found in these parables?
- What reactions to his teaching does Jesus encounter?
- In what ways is faith itself a help in deepening our understanding of Jesus?
- How is it possible to see and hear the truth without being able to understand it? What things in our lives prevent us from hearing God's word in meaningful ways?

Read Matthew 18:1–35

Jesus' fourth discourse continues his teachings on leadership, humility, and forgiveness.

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- Why is the first quality of church leadership humility?
- Why should leaders promote reconciliation at all cost?
- What is the difference between being “childish” and “childlike”? What childlike qualities do you think Jesus has in mind? What are some ways to reclaim these as adults? How can children in our families or communities help us in this endeavor?
- Why do people leave our church communities? What kind of “shepherding” might they need before they are ready to return?
- Why is forgiveness important in the Christian community?

Read Matthew 24–25

In the fifth and final discourse of his gospel, Matthew presents Jesus’ teachings about the future. Much of the language is drawn from the Old Testament apocalyptic writings that depict the ultimate destruction of evil and triumph of good.

- What is your response to Jesus’ description of “wars and rumors of wars” and all kinds of natural disasters as “birth-pangs”? When there is chaos in our lives, how do we typically respond? How does believing that chaos is the stuff of new beginnings help us to avoid discouragement?
- What does 24:14 suggest we should be doing while in the midst of multiple wickedness, wars, famines, etc.? Who does Jesus expect to preach the gospel throughout the world? How well does today’s Church bring Jesus’ message of peace to the world?
- What can we learn from all of Jesus’ teaching that applies to our own lives?
- Yieh mentions several recent points in history (September 11, the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the Nickel Mines tragedy in Pennsylvania) as points to explore God’s justice and God’s mercy. How should we respond to evildoers and our enemies today?

Chapter Four: Jesus’ Opponents

This chapter focuses on the variety of persons and groups who might be perceived as enemies or opponents to Jesus, including the established religious leaders of the day. Read the portions of Matthew and other scripture in which these “characters” show their hostility:

- King Herod the Great (Matthew 2:1–18)
- The Devil (Genesis 3:1–7; Matthew 4:1–11)

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- Pharisees and scribes (Matthew 9:9–13; 15:1–20; 16:1–12; 23:1–36)
- Chief priests and elders (Matthew 21:23–46)
- Herod Antipas (Matthew 14:1–2 and Luke 26:6–15)

The ongoing dispute between Jesus and the Pharisees accelerates in Matthew 15:1–20. Serious charges are beginning to be made as Jesus and his disciples continue to violate the tradition of the elders (the body of interpretation that developed around the written law and was transmitted orally by rabbis over generations).

- Why are the Pharisees a major source of opposition and hostility to Jesus' teachings, seeing him as a threat to the Temple authorities?
- Yieh paraphrases Jesus' teaching as, "The law is a gift from God to benefit God's people in emergencies. One should not forget human plight while keeping the divine law." Where is this true today?
- Do you believe Jesus "baited" the Pharisees and others in authority by challenging them with his parables, frustration, and anger?
- What does the term "hypocrisy" mean to you?
- How is Matthew apologetic, polemic, and didactic in showing the confrontations between Jesus and the Pharisees?
- Why is Jesus continually being challenged by others in Matthew?
- Why does Jesus refuse to identify where his authority comes from?

Read Matthew 21:28–22:14 and Isaiah 5:1–7

Jesus resumes his teaching by telling three parables about the judgment of Israel.

- Compare the parable of the wicked tenants with the parable of the vineyard in Isaiah. What are the differences? Similarities?
- Which of the three parables in this portion of Matthew speaks to you most clearly about the need to respond to God's call? In what ways can you apply its teachings to your spiritual situation?
- In what ways do we do violence to the servants that God sends to the Church (vv. 34–36)? In what ways do we do violence to Jesus, God's Son (vv. 37–39)?

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- In what ways does God’s invitation come to people today?
What is the role of the Church in issuing the invitation?
In helping those who respond to be “properly dressed”
for participation?

Read Matthew 26:1–56

The first sixteen verses of Matthew 26 serve as a prologue to the fast-paced narrative that follows. While Jesus calmly states the time and manner of his death, the chief priests and elders nervously plot to bring it about.

- What significance do you see in the setting (house of Simon the leper) for the story of Jesus’ anointing? How does it contrast with the setting for the dignitaries’ plotting (vv. 3–5)?
- What motives might Judas have as he decides to collaborate with the chief priests? How do you think he feels when he accepts the money? How do you suppose he justifies his action?

Read Matthew 26:57–27:50

Matthew describes Jesus’ trial in three parts: (1) a night session of the Sanhedrin in the high priest’s palace, (2) a brief morning session, and (3) the trial before Pilate. It results in his crucifixion, with many of his opponents playing a role in his journey to the cross.

- How would members of the Sanhedrin expect one who claims to be the Messiah to behave? What kind of Messiah does Jesus’ behavior suggest? What do you think of Jesus’ method of dealing with his accusers? Does his silence indicate strength or weakness? Why?
- How do you feel about Pilate’s final claim of innocence? How is avoiding participating in a decision similar to or different from actively taking one side or the other? In what way is this an example of “the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak”?
- Yieh does not believe Matthew’s story of the trial can be used to support anti-Semitism, despite what many interpreters in history have believed. How do you understand these passages?
- What three groups mock Jesus while he is dying on the cross? What is the significance of their insults?
- What would have been the outcome if Jesus had come down from the cross? Do you think he was genuinely tempted to

do so? Why or why not? In what ways did his experience in the wilderness with the Devil (tempter) prepare him for this moment?

Chapter Five: Jesus' Followers and Disciples

Yieh begins this chapter with comments about what it means to be a Christian in a culture that is becoming more secular, especially in Europe and North American.

- What does it mean to you to be a Christian?
- What makes a Christian different?
- Why does anyone want to be a Christian?
- How did you become a Christian?
- Yieh says followers of Jesus exhibit three characteristics: love, humility, and faith. Who do you know that possess these? Do you?

“Discipleship is a holy calling that comes with the privilege of relating to Jesus, learning from him, and hearing his promises, but it is a journey of love that leads to the cross.”

- What is the definition of discipleship given in the text?
- Why does Matthew use numerology throughout his gospel, especially in choosing twelve disciples?
- Why does one choose to follow Jesus? What is the call that cannot be ignored?
- What is the cost of being a disciple of Jesus?
- Do you agree or disagree? Why?
- How would you define discipleship?

Read Matthew 4:18–20; 14:22–17:27; 19:13–30; 26:30–75

In Matthew's gospel, Simon Peter is a leader among the disciples, the “rock” of faith on which Jesus' church is founded. In 16:18–19 (found only in Matthew) we have the basis for the tradition of apostolic succession, and the Roman Catholic doctrine that Peter was the first of the bishops of Rome, head of the Church universal.

- How would you describe Peter as a follower of Jesus?
As a disciple?
- What do you think Peter is thinking as he follows Jesus to the palace? What conflicting emotions might he be experiencing?

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- In what ways can you identify with his conflict between his desire to follow Jesus and his instinct for self-preservation? How do you deal with such conflicts?
- Why do you believe the role of Peter is featured so prominently in Matthew's gospel?
- How has the church interpreted Jesus' saying about Peter's authority?
- What can Peter teach us about discipleship?

Read Matthew 26:1–27:9

We have no story of the call of Judas Iscariot, but he plays an important role as the disciple who betrays Jesus.

- What motives might Judas have as he decides to collaborate with the chief priests? How do you think he feels when he accepts the money? How do you suppose he justifies his action?
- Why was Judas disillusioned with Jesus, while the other disciples did not seem to be (at least according to Matthew)?
- Why do we have such different impressions of Peter and Judas, neither of whom behaved very admirably under pressure? What makes the difference? Why did one weep bitterly and the other give in to despair?
- The *Gospel of Judas* portrays a different view of why he betrayed Jesus. What do you feel about this new view of Judas? Why does Yieh disagree?

Read Matthew 28:16–20

The Great Commission invites every person to step out of the observing crowd to follow Jesus and answer his call to become his disciple.

- In what ways do we demonstrate our loyalty to Jesus? In what ways, small or large, do we reject Jesus?
- Do you place yourself as one who hears and observes Jesus from a distance, a follower of Jesus who confesses him as Lord, or one who is chosen and called to follow Jesus by making disciples of others for Jesus?
- What can we learn from Matthew's stories about Jesus' followers and disciples?
- How can discipleship be both a call and a gift? How is it a call? How is it a gift?
- How do you fit into the Great Commission?

Chapter Six: Jesus' Church

Matthew's readers are members of a particular faith community in Antioch in the late first century. There are insights we can learn from this early church as it learned the story of Jesus for our church today.

Read Matthew 16:13–20 and 18:1–14

The word “church” is used to refer to an organized community of people who follow Jesus.

- Who is Jesus to his community of followers (the church)?
What is their mission?
- How does this community differ from that of the synagogue of which many of his followers come from?
- What was Matthew's community like? How is this church like (or different) than the denominational churches today?
- Look up “The Church” in An Outline of the Faith (the Catechism) in *The Book of Common Prayer*, p. 854. How is this similar (or different) to the church in Antioch?
- Compare the four symbolic pillars on which the church stands that Yieh describes with The Nicene Creed (BCP p. 358–59) and The Apostles' Creed (BCP p. 96).
- Does the church live out these pillars today? If so, how? If not, why not?
- Who are the littlest in our society today?

Read Matthew 18:15–35; 22:34–40; 25:31–46

The church is a community of love, forgiveness, and reconciliation.

- Why is forgiveness important in the Christian community?
How are persistent offenders dealt with in your church community? How difficult do you find it to confront another with wrongdoing? Why do you think Jesus suggests this approach in 18:15–18?
- Rabbis of Jesus' day taught that one should forgive three times for the same offense, but not a fourth time. How does Jesus' reply to Peter's question change this principle? How do you reconcile verse 22 with verse 17? Where do you experience the tension between the need to forgive and the need to discipline?
- What does it mean to forgive “from the heart” (v. 35)? What wisdom do you see in the folk adage “forgive and forget”?
What wrongs against you would you like to forget?

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- How does the combination of “love of God” and “love of others as of self” provide the link between religious faith and ethics (behavior)?
- What other actions toward “the least of these” would you add to Jesus’ list? What other “least” individuals might you add? Why?
- What are some of the tasks that Jesus has entrusted to the church? What sort of work are we to engage in while waiting and watching for the *parousia*?

Read Matthew 28:1–20

- What is the mission of the church today? (Refer to “The Church” BCP p. 855).
- In what ways do you see American society becoming more secularized, postmodern, and diverse in terms of a “culture of disbelief”?
- How should the Church make its perspectives and positions known to the society—by words of persuasion and deeds of charity or tradition and coercion?
- Do we still need the church? What should the church look like? What are the church’s purposes?
- Which is more important, the end of history or the process of Christian living?

Concluding thoughts:

- What are the most significant insights you have gleaned from reading the Gospel of Matthew?
- How different are you for having engaged in this study?
- How has your understanding of being a disciple of Jesus changed?
- What does Matthew 28:20 mean to you? How does knowing God is with you impact your life? How do you share this impact with others?

Sharon Ely Pearson is the Christian Formation Specialist for Church Publishing Incorporated with an MACE from Virginia Theological Seminary.