

Matthew Volume 1

HEAD HEART HANDS

Unpacking biblical truths in a way that
impacts our hearts and changes our lives

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HEAD • HEART • HANDS

Head, Heart, Hands are Bible study notes written for young people. I'm grateful to a number of women half my age – Bethan Reynolds, Sarah Spanner and Clare Doughty – for helping me to write the studies in a way that hopefully resonates with some of the issues with which young women struggle. Special thanks are due to Clare, who has done endless amounts of editing while patiently sharing a tiny workspace with me. Luckily she wasn't there for the minestrone soup incident, when I killed my computer and thought I had lost all my files!

The reason this series is called *Head, Heart, Hands* came out of Jesus' teaching in Matthew's Gospel. He frequently criticises the religious leaders because 'These people honour me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me' (Matthew 15:8). We don't want to read the Bible just to fill our heads with knowledge so that we have all the right answers. We study with our heads so that we will love Jesus with our hearts. That will overflow into genuine loving actions with our hands.

As a response to this, the questions are organised to help us understand truth with our **head**, probe our **heart** to see whether and why we are far from Jesus, and turn to Jesus for forgiveness. Only then are we able to ask for the Holy Spirit's help to change our hearts so that we want to obey. The final question in each study will point us to see how this new desire can overflow into what we do with our **hands** (and lives).

A very powerful tool to help truth sink into our hearts and overflow into our lives is learning God's word. We see this most clearly in chapter 4 when Jesus fights the devil with the words of God. In doing this, Jesus was obeying the teaching in the Old Testament: 'I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you' (Psalm 119:11).

Hiding God's word in your heart is a very powerful way of living out the truth. This became very precious to me when I was struggling with depression. My head was often full of negative thoughts: 'I'm useless, worthless, rubbish.' Hiding God's word in my heart and remembering it when these negative thoughts came helped me to realise that such thoughts are not true. They are not how God sees me. I was able to replace these negative thoughts with true thoughts about God, from his word. That transformed me from the inside out.

Throughout the book there are suggested verses where you can **hide God's word in your heart**. Learn them to help you in the fight to think truth about yourself, others, this world and our God. I've been excited to see how all of us working on this project have creatively responded to this idea, using calligraphy, sewing, fabric, paper, song, poetry and paint to help the truth become part of our lives. I hope these truths will excite your creativity so you can respond in a way that is helpful for you.

◦ TO GET YOU STARTED ◦

I firmly believe that with prayer, hard work and a few helpful hints you can read and understand the Bible for yourself. Therefore in a sense I find it ironic that I'm writing Bible study notes that do much of this work for you. However, these Bible reading notes are not designed to spoon-feed you a daily dose of truth. Rather, my hope is they will help you get into the habit of looking carefully at the Bible verses to see what they say, thinking about what they mean and then probing into your heart to find out why you find them so hard to obey!

As you progress through the book, I will introduce to you a set of questions you can ask of any passage. We will see in Matthew 11:25–27 and 16:17 that we will never understand what God is saying through our own cleverness, but only through God revealing his truth to us. So fundamental to every study is that we pause and pray, asking God to help us understand what he is saying. Through the Lord's Prayer we will learn an outline for how you can start to pray. Then with a few helpful hints you will discover that some passages you can understand without the help of notes. I long that you will find this exciting and empowering, and that after a while you won't even need Bible study notes!

◦ FOR SHARING ◦

Throughout the Gospel of Matthew we see a repeated pattern – the disciples come to Jesus, they learn from him, then they go and tell others. Similarly these studies are designed not just for you to keep to yourselves but to share with others.

I became a Christian through my friend Cathy at secondary school. One day she said to me, 'I have become a Christian.'

To this I replied, 'I'd like to be one too. How do I become one?'

She fumbled, 'I don't know. You'll have to come to camp with me and someone there will be able to explain it to you!'

Instead of replying 'I don't know' to an interested friend, I hope that through these notes you could say, 'Would you like to read the Bible with me?' Find a quiet space and spend ten minutes together, reading the opening illustration, answering the questions, then finishing by reading aloud the prayer.

Come to Jesus, learn from him, then go and tell others. That's a great summary of Matthew that you can live out day by day.

◦ ALL ABOUT JESUS ◦

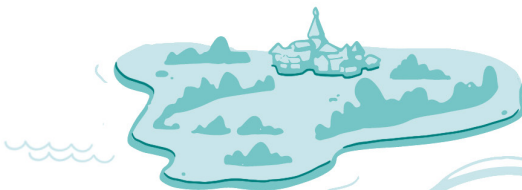
I'm convinced that Matthew's Gospel is a great place to start Bible readings because through it we learn some really awesome truths about how the two parts of the Bible – the Old and New Testaments – fit together.

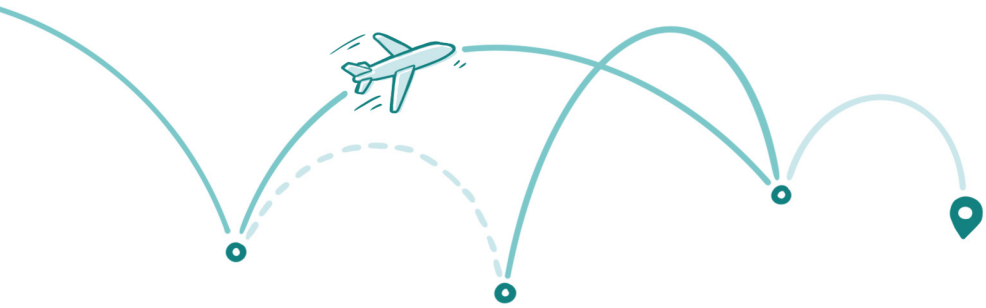
Above all, I hope that through the pages of Matthew you meet Jesus. You will see he is no ordinary man. From the very start we are told he is God with us, and the One God's people have been waiting for since pretty much the creation of the world. These are big claims. You need to look and see for yourself if there's any truth in them. Enjoy!



MAP OF Matthew

I think I'm a bit weird. On a recent flight to Istanbul I realised afterwards that while the rest of the plane were sitting back and watching a film, I was watching the map screen. Not because I'm incompetent and couldn't work the handset. By choice! I was fascinated because we travelled over at least ten different countries before landing in Turkey. (That is where Istanbul is, if you were one of the ones watching the film!) It was fascinating too because I could see what was on the map in real life below me: the busy cities of England, the open fields of Belgium, the stunning mountains of Austria, the beautiful coast of Bulgaria and finally the bustling port of Istanbul.





As we embark on our journey through Matthew's Gospel, let me give you a bit of a map to help you understand where we are going. Then as you journey through, you can look out of the window to see in detail the events unfolding. Hopefully the map will give you a bit of an idea of where we are, how it all fits together and where we are finally headed.

Matthew starts his Gospel by showing us how Jesus fits with the story God started in the Old Testament. That's why Matthew is such a great book to have at the start of the New Testament. Through it we really see how the Bible is one big story, all about Jesus. Matthew gives us lots of Old Testament Bible references that we can look up to understand this. You will see more of this in the studies entitled **Jesus fits the sketch**.

In chapter 4 Matthew introduces the **kingdom of heaven** – loads of the studies are on this theme. As Jesus the King comes, he is like the rising sun. This world (which Matthew describes as the kingdom of the world) has been a dark place ever since humans chose to turn away from God the King. Everyone in the kingdom of the world lives under the shadow of death – the punishment for turning from God the King. But then Jesus comes, calling people to join his kingdom, teaching and healing with amazing authority, all of which prove that he is the rising sun with power to

dispel the darkness. All the symptoms of darkness – sin, sickness and death – shrink back as Jesus the sun rises. The studies entitled **amazing authority** will show you in real life what it looks like when Jesus begins to dispel the darkness in his people's lives.

(Sneak preview: though we won't see it in this volume, the journey doesn't end here. One of Matthew's highlights later in chapter 27 is when we see how Jesus dispels darkness. He does it by his death. He swaps places with us, taking on himself on the cross the darkness of sin and death that we deserve. The sky goes dark for three hours. Then the sun rises again as Jesus finishes his work of saving people and rises again to prove its success.)

We have a stopover in chapter 10, where these notes end, when the disciples who have come to Jesus are sent out to tell others the amazing news of who Jesus is. He is the One God promised to send. He is the King of the kingdom with power to get rid of the darkness of sin and death. It's a good place for a stopover as it's a very similar destination to where Matthew ends his Gospel: 'Therefore go and make disciples ...' (28:19).

For those interested, a much more detailed visual outline of Matthew is available on the Internet from the Bible Project.¹

¹For this visual outline go to <https://thebibleproject.com/explore/matthew/> and click on the link to 'Matthew Read Scripture Poster'.

STUDY 1

JESUS FITS THE SKETCH

Pray, asking God to help you understand his word

Read Matthew 1:1, 18-23

One of my friends has a beautiful picture on her wall. It's a line drawing of a garden, with flowers, trees and paths marked out.



What I only realised recently is that it is the architect's plans of her garden. The picture is beautiful, but when I shifted my gaze out of the window to the garden, the reality is so much more stunning.

Matthew's Gospel is the first book in the New Testament section of the Bible. Matthew wants us to see that the first part of the Bible, the Old Testament, is like this architect's plans. It is beautiful (hence how many times he quotes it), but it is so much more stunning when you see what it is pointing to – the person of Jesus. Matthew shows us over and again in his Gospel how Jesus brings to life the old sketches.

When I became a Christian, I had only a *New Testament and Psalms* instead of a full Bible. That suited me perfectly. I saw the Old Testament as unnecessary and impossible to understand. Matthew wants us to see how wrong that thinking is. He repeatedly gets open his Old Testament to show us that Jesus was the One God promised to send. (This is the meaning of one of his names: 'Messiah'.) His coming was sketched out long ago, for example in Genesis in God's promises to Abraham, or in Samuel, Kings and Chronicles when God promised to send a King who would live forever. Jesus is not the beginning of a new story but the **climax**, the **best bit**, the **whole point** of the older story!

Why do you think Matthew starts his book as he does in 1:1?

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The next thing Matthew carefully records are the precise details of Jesus' birth. What did Isaiah sketch out about the promised One in the quote in verses 22-23? How does Jesus bring this sketch to life?

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Matthew repeats the essence of verse 22, 'to fulfil what the Lord had said', twelve times in his Gospel – what do you think he wants us to realise?

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GOD'S SKETCH IS NOT SOMETHING JUST TO BE LOOKED AT AND ADMIRIED

Matthew records these events to show us that Jesus' birth fulfils (literally, completes) the sketch in Isaiah. Isaiah also tells us that this baby will be called 'Immanuel', which means 'God with us'. God's great plan from the very beginning was to live with us, his people. Through our sin (more about this later!) we messed this up, but through Jesus' life, death and resurrection there is a way we can be with God and he with us. There's a way for us to have a part in God's great sketch. This is not just how Matthew starts his Gospel. Look at Matthew 28:16-20: this is how he ends it too. Jesus promises, 'And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age' (28:20).

God's sketch is not something just to be looked at and admired. As you read through the Gospel of Matthew, why not ask God to help you find your place in God's great sketch, brought to life in Jesus? Perhaps use the words below.

God, thank you that you have sketched out everything that will happen. It's interesting to see how Jesus fits with all that is written about him. Please help me to see how he makes sense of everything and to find my place in this great story. Amen.

You could pray a similar prayer each time you read the Bible, asking God to help you understand what he is saying to you through it.

STUDY 2 ↘

JESUS FITS THE SKETCH

The promises to Abraham and David

Pray, asking God to help you understand his word

Read Matthew 1:1–25

One member of our family is quite into tracing our family tree. They've been known to plan a holiday around visiting a graveyard, with the hope of gleaning missing information about long-lost ancestors off the gravestones! Here Matthew gives us Jesus' family tree. I know verses 2–17 look like exactly the sort of Bible passage we should skip over to get to the interesting bit. But there is gold in them – we just need to dig a little. Matthew has included some clues to help us see if Jesus fits the sketches of the One promised in the Old Testament.

Can you pick out the clues as to who Jesus is in verse 1?

Firstly, notice **Jesus is 'the son of David'**. God promised great King David (in 2 Samuel 7:11–16) that he would give him a son who would rule as King forever. When (spoiler alert!) Jesus dies, it looks like he's not the One promised. But at the end of the story, Matthew 28:6, you find the surprising plot twist that suggests he is the forever King.

YOU ARE TO GIVE
HIM THE NAME
Jesus
BECAUSE HE WILL
SAVE HIS PEOPLE
FROM THEIR SINS.

Secondly, we read Jesus is 'the son of Abraham'. In Genesis 12:1–3 God promised Abraham that he would bring blessing to **all the nations**. If Jesus is Abraham's son, could he be the One who brings the blessing to everyone, even those not in the Jewish nation?

Matthew has sneaked a few women into Jesus' family tree to help us answer this. He didn't need to include them. (In fact, he probably shouldn't have done! Women, in a genealogy? No way!) However, we'll see in this Gospel that women are important to Jesus, and right from the start we meet some pretty surprising ones. Two of them – Rahab and Ruth (v. 5) – were not part of God's Jewish people.

Why do you think Matthew has gone out of his way to add in these women's names? What is he hinting to us? Could he be bringing to life the promise sketched out to Abraham?

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Matthew wants us to see there is a place for people with messy lives in Jesus' family.

Is your life messy? In what ways have you ignored God and not lived his way? You could try to learn verse 21: 'you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins'. Try to recall this throughout the day, thanking God that we don't have to make ourselves perfect but can turn to Jesus to save us when we sin.

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We see something important here: Jesus is descended from women who are not part of God's people. That's not all ...

Another two women mentioned – Tamar (v. 3) and Uriah's wife (v. 6) – both ended up getting pregnant by men who were not their husbands. Hang on – make that three! Look at how Mary became pregnant in verses 18–19. Mary would have been the victim of all sorts of gossip and rumours! So Jesus is also descended from women who, to be polite, had 'pretty messy' lives!

Who is it Jesus has come for (v. 21)? Why is his name such good news for those with messy lives? Why do you think Matthew has deliberately included these women in Jesus' family tree?

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Thank you, God, that you long to bring blessings to all kinds of people, even those with messy lives. I can see that I have not lived your way when I

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Thank you that Jesus didn't come for perfect people but to rescue those who have messed up. Help me to read on to find out more about who Jesus is. Amen.

Notice that Jesus' family is not full of nice people with sorted lives. As you read Matthew, look out for more of these messy lives – he includes plenty of them! He doesn't need to Photoshop the characters in his Gospel because Jesus didn't come for perfect people, but sinners. A sinner is someone who has ignored God and not lived his way.

Study 3:

JESUS FITS THE SKETCH

Born in Bethlehem

Pray, asking God to help you understand his word

Read Matthew 2:1-12

I live in the centre of London. I regularly walk past Big Ben, and don't even look up. I know it too well. When we have friends to stay, their reaction couldn't be more different. As they don't know it at all, every little glimpse is so exciting, so magnificent, so iconic. They know so little yet see so much.

In this passage the Magi (wise men) are a bit like my friends. They know so little – they are not part of God's Jewish people. They don't know any of the clues the Jews have in the Old Testament about him. And yet they are so excited about the birth of this baby ... all because of a star. The Magi know so little about Jesus, yet they do so much to worship him.

Why have the Magi made such a long journey? Who are they looking for?

What do the Magi teach us about what it means to worship Jesus in verse 11? What does the clue in verse 6 say?

Do the religious leaders see that Jesus fits the promise? How would you expect them to respond?

The religious leaders know so much, yet they do so little. They have so much more than the star the Magi saw – they have all the sketches in the Old Testament promising a King who would be born in Bethlehem (like in Micah 5:2, 4, to name just one). Yet they won't worship Jesus. In fact, as the story goes on, it gets worse. By the end of Matthew we find the apathy of the leaders has grown into a settled hatred which culminates in the calculated murder of Jesus.

(In this passage, though, it is undoubtedly Herod who has the most extreme reaction to the birth of the new King – sneak a peek at 2:13-16 to see the lengths to which Herod will go to get rid of this child. He doesn't want a new King threatening his rule.)

Is it enough to know all the clues? What have the religious leaders missed about Jesus that the Magi have understood?

What do you get overjoyed about? Who would you give up everything for?