



# Reading Matthew with others

*A disciple maker's guide to following  
Jesus with Matthew workbook*

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## Making disciples?

Taking the responsibility to read the gospel of Matthew with others is nothing else than taking responsibility for being part of the discipling walk with another person. Doing this, is not rocket science and does not make you a helicopter pilot either. It is just plain ordinary ministry that all believers had been called for and very few have the courage to try. This little guide is a simple tool helping the facilitator of a discipling group to stay in the footsteps of Jesus and has a companion guide *Following Jesus with Matthew* that will help the disciples to stay on track as well.

## The setting

The idea of a discipleship group is that of a very informal gathering of a few friends in a relaxed atmosphere. The focus is not on academic knowledge as such, but on learning how to follow Jesus step by step by following in his footsteps. This we do by reading the text and in our imagination hearing the rabbi speak and see what he does. We do this one step at a

time. As we spend time with Him, we eventually begin to think more and more like Him and even will start doing as He did. This is what it means to follow Him.

## Presuppositions

1. You do not need to be a believer to start following Jesus. His disciples believed in God but knew very little about Jesus when they took the first step in walking in the dust of His footsteps. The only faith anybody would need is enough trust in Jesus that it would be worthwhile to become a little bit like Him. This is more or less how the twelve started out.
2. We take the text of the gospel of Matthew seriously. Therefore we read it as we would read any good literature from the beginning right through to the end. We do not run ahead and we do not dip into interesting sections only. Although the Bible study guide only highlights selected passages, the idea is that everyone will read the passages in between on his/her own. We recognise and follow up on quotations from the Old Testament, especially when Jesus quotes scripture because that was intentional and with a specific purpose. On the other hand

we do not drag the rest of the Bible in even if it could be interesting. Reading the rest can come later. For now we are following the Rabbi through the eyes of the author of this account.

3. We assume that the order in which Matthew arranged the material he collected is intentional and follows the pattern that Jesus followed when discipling the twelve. Interesting enough, the order closely fits what is described in 2 Peter 1 as what I call the curriculum for becoming a follower of Jesus. Other gospels may have other purposes in mind, but the gospel of Mathew's focus from beginning to the end is on disciple making within the context of the breaking through of the Kingdom of God.

So, in following Jesus step by step, hearing Him speak and seeing what He does then becomes not only the way in which you disciple a small group, it also becomes your training manual for disciple making. As you watch Him forming and shaping the attitudes and life practises of the twelve, you will do the same with those that He entrusted to you.

From now on you will have to have your Bible open in front of you and the guide *Following Jesus with Matthew* open next to it. What I am going to attempt is like training a dog to walk on

its hind legs – it can be done, but with difficulty! The very best way in which I could teach you how to disciple a group of friends would be for you to join a group that I am leading in such a way for the whole duration, at least for a year. You will learn from my approach, my moments of success and even more from my mistakes. You will be immersed in the dynamics of the group itself and will experience how the Holy Spirit surprises us time and time again. Actually there is no other way of doing it properly than this. Just like Paul had to rely on pen and paper to disciple disciple-makers over a distance, purely for practical reasons we will have to do the same even though it is second best. Therefore we will use paper and ink, e-readers and other media to bridge that gap. But be aware that there is a gap between reading and experiencing.

Therefore you have to be open and sensitive to what the Spirit is doing. In this way we can get an even better result – the Spirit of the Living Lord teaching you how to disciple within your own setting.

## The meeting

I would like to make it very clear that this disciple group is not a Bible study group, although we will work through the

gospel of Matthew and may discover many interesting facts. It is not a care group; although very often our personal and emotional needs may be addressed by Christ working through his gathered body. This is a group of people with only one purpose (for now) and that is to see what will happen when they follow Jesus step by step. Not all spiritual needs will be met and a very small part of Scripture will be covered. That means that much that is interesting or even compelling should be left for some kind of Follow up at a later stage. The implication is that this group will have a definite beginning and a definite end. Although that does not mean that some of the members could not continue to meet together for other purposes in the future, the commitment we ask for, if for the duration of this walk behind Jesus.

We will use two sections of Scripture that in some way expresses Paul's understanding of how the risen Christ disciplines through the members of a gathered group. This begins to answer the question: How do you disciple within another culture, different from the one in which Jesus lived?

## **Ephesians 4: 1-16**

From a thorough reading of these verses would like to remark that Christ disciplines the body in such a way that through the mutual interaction of the whole of the group, He will not only be present, but that His ministry towards the world will flow. These verses are worth much more than this solitary idea, but for our purpose this is vital. You as leader are not the only disciple maker, but through you and others, Christ himself will be present.

## **1 Corinthians 14: 26**

Usually *everyone* should have the opportunity to make a contribution in some way, *every* time. This is not primarily a teaching session, but an opportunity to hear what the Rabbi said and to see what he did and to take the next step following him. The group facilitator should be diligent in helping each one to respond and to be held accountable by the whole group in actually taking that next step. Be aware that the next step could be different for different people in different stages of their life.

We are not pooling our ignorance or babbling about personal pet spiritual issues. The questions to answer I every time:

- What does the Rabbi say?
- What does the Rabbi do?
- What is the next step he invited me to take?
- How am I going to give feedback to the group about my experiencing this next step?

It happened more than once that in one of the groups we were part of, that we would be stuck with a specific step in the way for a number of meetings before we would be satisfied that at least for now, we could continue. There is no race to finish within a certain amount of time, the only pressure on us is not to let Jesus walk ahead so far, that he disappears out of sight. My experience is that most of the time, he waits for us at precisely the right place.

Should you sing or pray or do any of the usual things when small groups of Christians get together? I do not know. The Lord will show the way.

## Material

Make sure that everyone in the group has a Bible as well as a copy of the Bible study guide. You could print it off in one go, hand it out page by page at the beginning of every meeting or

provide the links for download on a smart phone, e-reader or tablet. The Bible study guide is available in Pdf, epub, mobi and Kindle formats and can be downloaded at no cost whatsoever.

## Spirituality of a rabbi and his disciples

Deuteronomy 6:4 & 5 forms the hart of daily devotional practise of all devout Jews in Jesus times, and especially rabbis and their disciples would recite that at least at the beginning and the end of the day with passion and gusto. It was more than a declaration of faith, it was what the rabbi's understood as being born again.

*Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one.*

*Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.*

These words begin in Hebrew with the word "sh'ma" and are known as the *Shema* up to this day. This was the daily practise of all devout Jews and we have more than enough evidence that Jesus and his disciples followed the same practise. There was a huge debate amongst the rabbis about the interpretation of the 5 books of Moses and the way in which

this declaration of faith should be interpreted. The specific interpretation was called a rabbi's "yoke" and summed up his theology as well as spirituality.

When Jesus was asked about this he answered in Mat 22:37-40:

*"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.'*

*This is the first and greatest commandment.*

*And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'*

*All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."*

To share to some extent in the spiritual dynamics of Jesus and his disciples daily walk with each other and the Father, I often begin and end our sessions form with these same words.

We will stand and say it out aloud and with passion, just as Jesus and his disciples did together.

## The first cycle

Intro and 1. Instructions in Following Jesus with Matthew has much the same purpose as the previous section in this booklet. As the Bible user guide should be available to everybody in the group, this will be the group's reminder and will help them to set their own expectations.

The first cycle of training the disciples spans Matthew 1 to 10. It starts off with an account of how it happened that Jesus started making disciples and runs through the history of Jesus' people beginning with Abraham and culminating in the birth and life of Jesus. Although interesting and some parts well know, it is an introduction to the main section. Point to the genealogy that roots Jesus in Hebrew history, his birth and preparation in his encounter with John the baptizer and his experience when fasting in the desert. The details can be read privately. All of this culminates in the big picture of the Kingdom. ( [2. The big picture](#)<sup>1</sup>). This is where we start our journey as this gives context to what Jesus did and what may be expected of a disciple when we reach Matthew 10 and again at the end of the book in Mathew 28. The outcome of

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This is where the real Bible study starts!

this meeting is a little bit of an idealistic dream of what could happen if God's intentions for my community would really happen. As the next topic is much about the person's own response to the call to follow Jesus, this forms a necessary counterpoint to prepare for a series of experiences later on where the Kingdom becomes a practical reality here and now. But do not jump the gun – do not tell them why. It is enough that you know!

## What is a disciple?

The biggest hurdle to understand this passage is that it is well known and had been burdened by much theological reflection about salvation, making a decision for Christ and an everlasting commitment. Although an encounter with Math 4 could lead to all of those, the only requirement that the text asks is enough trust to take the first step. This was Jesus' first invitation, spiced with a hint of what could follow – something not one of the mostly teenagers that responded could have the slightest inkling of.

If you are using the electronic version of this guide, click on the excellent YouTube video about Jesus and the call to follow

him: In the Dust of the Rabbi Group Bible Study by Ray Vander Laan - [Faith Lessons Volume 6](#)

The outcome of this session should be willingness to take the first step. For believers that would be easy enough – give them the chance to think again. Non-believers should not be burdened with a final decision and affirmation about the meaning of the cross and resurrection at this point. When Jesus invited the disciples to follow, it was at this point a commitment to follow, nothing more yet.

## Upside down

If following a rabbi means that you should learn how to think like him, Matt: 5:1-16 gives a clear picture of not only how Jesus thought about life, but also gives a preview of the themes that we can expect in the next few chapters. The biggest hurdle at this stage is to get if the list of blessings is seen as a series of boxes to be ticked. On the other hand it is just as easy to get lost in the deeper philosophical meaning of the passage. The aim at this stage is to start to look at life from the unexpected angle that Jesus introduced here. In the next passages He will explain what he means in simple word

pictures and demonstrate it in a practical way. For now the upside down view would be the next step.

## Difficult people

The first area of life where Jesus applies His way of thinking about life is in the area of relationships and he works through a series of escalating levels of bitterness and animosity, concluding with the hated enemy. Within this context the enemy clearly was the hated Roman occupying army. They killed tens of thousands of Jews every year in the most brutal way, taxed the local population to death and it was quite understandable that these pork eating pagan oppressors should be hated actively by all. The prominent rabbis of Jesus' time agreed on that.

But Jesus had a different view of those whom we have the right to hate.

Jesus starts off with these quite ordinary relationships because in order to think about God the Father as he does, it is necessary to have a changed mind set, a different way of thinking, metanoia. We shall see in reading though the rest of the gospel how Jesus demonstrates this in his own life, how

the disciples would struggle with these issues in their own lives and how Jesus would come back to these same issues time and time again. Do not therefore expect all relationship issues to be fixed once and for ever right now. For now the mind switch to think like the rabbi does in the area of relationships, is the next step.

*The Kingdom of God is breaking through when peoples start to think about relationships the way Jesus does.*

## When you pray

Up to now Jesus had been guiding his disciples in thinking like him in relationships with the people they would meet every day as part of their normal interaction in the community where they lived: the friend, the troublesome person, the Roman soldier. By now they would understand enough about relationships to extend that to their relationship with God as Father.

Praying this prayer out loud as well as Jesus' version of the *Shema* most likely formed a major part of the spiritual discipline of Jesus and his disciples daily walk together.

Practising a lifestyle where God's agenda comes first, starts with my prayer life. The question I of course is how you are going to integrate this in the life of your small group of disciples walking in the footsteps of Jesus.

## Money?

An upside down understanding of life brings about a complete re-evaluation of money and the possessions it can buy. The biggest obstacle is not the amount of money you have, but the failure to think counter intuitively from a Kingdom perspective about money, irrespective whether you may have (too) little or (too) much.

Do not get the discussion bogged down in the issue of tithes or raising money for the church. Challenge your group with a vision of their community after the Kingdom has come. How will it look? How will resources be utilised? What will be the Kingdom approach?

See whether they will be willing to move from a personal application to a community approach.

## Become like Jesus

This is the end of the first cycle of helping the disciples to think like Jesus. It is also the right time for a new commitment to follow him Will you build your house on solid rock? Will you be able to enter the Kingdom by not only thinking like Jesus, but also doing like Jesus? The next section will be about putting this upside down theology in practise.

So this is a checkpoint of some sorts. Do you want to go on?

The unspoken invitation is to take the next step.

## Do as Jesus did

### **On the job training**

Now that the disciples started to think a bit like Jesus, enough building blocks is in place that they can begin to learn how to act, to minister like him.

As we page through chapter 8 and 9 we see something extraordinary. Jesus reaching out to:

- A man with leprosy. Jesus TOUCHES him and became ritually unclean immediately. This is the price Jesus is

willing to pay. It is as if he stretches out his hand in such a way that the disciples would see him TOUCH the unclean.

- A Roman officer's batman (servant). The hated enemy! Is THIS how a patriotic and religious Jew would have compassion on the enemy?
- Two demon possessed men – unclean again!
- The paralysed young man not first of all in need of healing but in need of forgiveness. For what?
- The despised tax collector who was rejected and hated by all. Unclean through handling Roman coins, a traitor to his own people and in cahoots with the corrupt Sadducees. Jesus EATING with him in his own house? Impossible? Or is it the upside down Kingdom lifestyle that Jesus is demonstrating here?
- Touching a dead girl and bringing her to life. Again unclean. Yes this is what you do, touching a dead body!
- Being touched by the woman with the issue of blood. Unclean again.

- Touching the blind and the mute.

**Question:** *What do these people have in common?*

*(Rejected, unacceptable people)*

By now the group would have noticed, Jesus going out of the way, TOUCHING the unclean, paying the price of uncleanness and showing the disciples in a practical way how to live the life of blessing that we read about in chapter 5.

For Jesus' disciples this practical application would probably have been the most difficult to stomach of everything up to now.

## The test run

Now it is time to do as Jesus did. He sent them out to people who will receive them by opening their homes, to their own culture and safely amongst people that they easily can identify with. But for the first time taking the risk of doing it on their own.

How will you do it?

The test run is of the utmost importance. This is where theory is set in practise. This is where the disciples reach out to the

need of the community in a meaningful way. Do not skip this development task, even if it takes some time to set up and do properly. Without this experience you cannot continue to the next stage.

Afterwards, evaluate by asking these questions:

- What is it that I was afraid of?
- What surprised me?
- What did the Lord teach me on the way?
- What did the Lord do through us?

## Phase 2

The rest of the topics follow the pattern now familiar to you. You will notice that the confrontation with the spiritual leaders of the day and even the crowds become progressively intense as the cross starts to loom. The cost of discipleship begins to become a painful reality and Jesus revisits the invitation to follow Him again and again. Work through these topics, but ensure that the disciples read the whole of the text and not only the topics listed. This may be hard work and slow going, but that is just fine. Spiritual maturity does not come in one day.

At the same time He prepares the disciples for a life of confrontation with authorities. How do you prepare young disciples for the difficulty and troubles that will come their way in the decades to come? By demonstrating and showing them how to. How to use Scripture, when to debate and when to keep silent, how to act when you are arrested and brought to court and eventually how to die.

Following Jesus means dying with Him and being resurrected with Him. Every disciple will confront that reality. And every disciple who got so far will hear the words: Go and make disciples, teaching them as I taught you.