

Five Mothers
Matthew 1:1-17
Small Group Guide

Opening question:

- What's something interesting about your family history? Was someone famous, infamous, or just really interesting? A particular event?

We've finished the Wisdom series (which may come in handy during the holidays!) and we are starting a three-part Advent series called "All in the Family."

TAKE TURNS READING MATTHEW 1:1-17

1. To understand why Matthew might have started with a genealogy, we need to understand the context of Israel, the Jewish nation, at the time. They were a conquered and occupied nation (by the Romans) and had not heard a word from God or His prophets for 450 years.
 - a. What is the longest that you or your family has waited for something that was really important? Describe the situation and the feelings involved.
 - b. What do you think would be your feelings if you were part of a conquered nation for your entire life and had never known the freedom of self-government? How hard would it be to remain hopeful?
2. In the first verse, what does "Messiah" mean? Why is that important, given Israel's background?
 - a. Abraham is mentioned in the first verse. What was his role in Israel's future (read Genesis 12:1-3 for reference)?
 - b. David is mentioned in the first verse. What was his role in Israel's future (read 2 Samuel 7:8-17 for reference)?
 - c. How are both of them connected with Jesus the Messiah from a spiritual viewpoint?
 - d. After waiting so long, how would the Jews react to discovering that Jesus was the answer to God's promises?
3. Pastor Josh said during his sermon: "I love what [Commentator William] Barclay says about these women. He says, 'If Matthew had ransacked the pages of the Old Testament for improbable candidates he could not have discovered four more incredible ancestors for Jesus Christ.' Not only are they women in a time when women didn't count, these ladies are racial outsiders, being hated Gentiles. They're sexual outcasts, all except Ruth. They are people who would be kept out of the Temple and out of God's presence because they weren't clean. They were connected to men who had made horrible messes. And yet Matthew starts his book, the Story of Jesus, and indeed the whole New Testament in this way."
 - a. Why do you think that Matthew started his story of Jesus this way?

- b. If a woman who pretends to be a prostitute (Tamar), and one who is a prostitute (Rahab), and another who is a foreigner (Ruth), and one who committed adultery (Bathsheba) can all be forgiven and be key ancestors of Jesus, what does this say about the criteria for joining God's kingdom and playing a role in it?
 - c. How does this new criteria make you feel, personally? Is there any part of your history that you feel God cannot redeem?
 - d. One other application of the grace of Jesus is that we all are on equal footing before God. Thus, we must treat all of our fellow believers equally. Are there any types of people you think you subconsciously judge or avoid? Be as honest as you can with your group.
 - e. How can we balance having the right to choose our own friends with a call to treat all people with respect and grace?
4. Again from Josh's sermon: "Matthew and Luke begin telling the story of Jesus with a family tree in order to tell us that the Savior of the world came at a particular time, in a particular place, to a particular family in history. The fact that they begin by situating Jesus in human history shows us that this is not just another fairy tale. It really happened!"
- a. What reaction do you have to this fact that God's promises have broken into human history in the form of Jesus?
 - b. Tim Keller has said, "Jesus is not just one more story pointing to an underlying reality; he is the Ultimate Reality to which all the stories point." What would be the natural consequences, then, of not believing this and/or acting on this truth, even as Christians?
5. Josh said in his sermons that from the genealogy of Matthew 1:1-17, we find three reasons for joy: 1) God keeps his promises, 2) God keeps his promises in ways that shatter our criteria, and 3) God's promises have broken into human history.
- a. What joy have you found during our study today?
 - b. Is there any sin, ancestry, or wounding event that is keeping you from experiencing God's joy? How can we support and pray for you?
 - c. Is there any challenge that you think God is giving you via this study?
6. **Share and Pray:** Among our usual prayer requests, let's pray that God will help us find the joy in the new criteria of grace that Jesus brought by dying on the cross in our place. And let us pray against anything that blocks this joy.