

Love Letters

Reading Through the Gospels



Reading Guide
Week #1

Matthew 1-6



NEW HORIZON
UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

Love Letters Week #1—Matthew 1-6

Welcome to Love Letters! We're reading the Four Gospels in the New Testament in the course of a semester. One chapter each day, Monday through Saturday, and catch-up on Sunday. Our goal is to grow in our love for God and others as we read. Top off your reading with participation in a *Love Letters* Small Group for conversation and reflection. Great personal growth as we follow Jesus!

Introduction to the Gospel of Matthew

The Book. Matthew is our first Gospel, and is also the longest with 28 chapters. It is the most ordered account of Jesus. It begins with the Genealogy (family lineage) of Jesus, and moves through His birth and entrance into ministry. It offers a broad view of His life, and great variety of His teachings and miracles. It includes detailed accounts of His suffering, death, resurrection, and ends with Christ's Commission to His followers. Because it was written with Jewish readers in mind, it is packed with Old Testament quotations.

The Writer. We believe this book was written by Matthew, ex-tax collector, and disciple of Jesus. Most scholars date the book as written between 50-70 AD.

As You Read. *Keep in mind—the Gospels were written primarily as stories, not text books.* Rather than simply offering data, the writers introduce characters, quote the characters, and provide vivid plots, action and drama. The reader is drawn into the experience, and is left to think, imagine, and believe.

○ MONDAY—MATTHEW 1

Consider. Much more than a historical record, Matthew begins by establishing important truths about the Person of Jesus. The rest of Matthew's story will build on and substantiate these claims.

Read.

- What do we learn about Who Jesus is by the following details in His genealogy: Son of Abraham; Son of David; Exile to Babylon; the inclusion of women in a predominately

male listing; the inclusion of prostitutes, sinful people, etc.?

- What character seems to be at the center of Jesus' birth story? Why do you suppose?

Reflect. What are the translations of the names "Jesus" and "Immanuel" (see your footnotes), and how do these names communicate God's heart to us?

○ TUESDAY—Matthew 2

Consider. Jesus came to save the world. However, His birth creates havoc in heaven and on earth, among angels, religious folk, common people, and Romans. It reverberates to other nations and even results in narrow escapes and the murder of infants.

Read.

- What do the events around Jesus' birth establish about the purpose of Jesus' coming?
- What critical insight about Jesus is given in v.15?

Reflect. How has the birth of Jesus in your heart brought about both blessing and hardship?

○ WEDNESDAY—MATTHEW 3

Consider. Today we encounter John the Baptist, who preaches the "The Kingdom of Heaven," calls for repentance, and baptizes both sinner and Savior. Jesus' ministry of love and grace seems to be preceded by a barbarian who speaks a hard message.

Read.

- To whom does John's ministry and message seem to be directed? What is it about His listeners that has provoked his sense of urgency?
- God is well pleased with Jesus long before Jesus preaches His first message or performs His first miracle. What about Jesus do you suppose pleased the Father?

Reflect. How have you experienced both the hard, sharp edge of the Gospel, as well as its unmerited, unconditional, loving grace?

○ THURSDAY—MATTHEW 4

Consider. Matthew has been involving another principal Character in his story. It has been the *Holy Spirit* directing Jesus' birth and baptism, and Who now leads Jesus into the wilderness and into Northern Galilee for ministry.

Read.

- What specific area of Jesus' life does the devil seem to be attacking and tempting?
- As He begins His ministry, what about Jesus and His message seems to captivate and draw followers?

Reflect. Jesus' disciples didn't receive a detailed explanation of Jesus' call before they committed. When have you stepped into God's call without knowing where it might lead?

○ FRIDAY—MATTHEW 5

Consider. Today we begin the "Sermon on the Mount." Scholars ponder whether Jesus actually taught all these things in one message, or if Matthew is simply offering us a collection of Jesus' teachings. Regardless, in previous chapters Matthew has attempted to establish Jesus' credibility in order that we might now read and consider Jesus' teachings.

Read.

- What is paradoxical about the nature of the promises of "The Beatitudes" (vv.3-9) compared to the promises in vv.10-12?
- As Jesus preaches concerning "The Law and the Prophets," what does He appear to be challenging in His listeners' hearts?

Reflect. The teachings of the Sermon on the Mount may be familiar to you. However, did a fresh reading today stir your heart in any particular way?

○ SATURDAY—MATTHEW 6

Consider. Whereas yesterday's reading challenged us on moral grounds, today's reading challenges our internal life—prayer, fasting, motivations, etc. One might consider yesterday's reading as challenging our "horizontal life"—our relationship with others. Today's reading challenges our "vertical life"—our relationship with God.

Read.

- What do the behaviors in today's reading have in common?
- There is a "secret" nature to the behaviors in today's reading (v.3, etc.). Notice the relationship between who we are in secret and how we appear to others in public.

Reflect. If your Heavenly Father knows what you need before you ask Him (v.8), why do you suppose we are called to a life of prayer?

Notes:



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