

## Praxis Discussion Questions 12.6.15

### Leader Prep Section

Take time before your small group meeting to prepare by reading through the questions and scripture passage so that you can select 4-5 questions that are best suited to your group.

Try to work through at least one question from each of the sections - Hook, Book, Look, Took in order to move from observation to application.

When possible spend time in prayer for each member of your group.

### Questions

#### **Hook - Ice breaker type questions to help make the transition into the study time.**

1. When something is covered by a shadow how does its appearance change?
2. How is our world different because of the impacts of the shadow that our sin has created?

### Background

This is the second week of the Advent season; a time set aside by the church to remember the birth of Jesus and anticipate his return. The book of Matthew is the first of the Gospels in the New Testament that tell the story of Jesus's birth, life, death and resurrection. This week we are looking specifically at how Matthew opens his telling of the story of Jesus. By starting with a list of names Matthew makes several things clear to his audience. First, Jesus is born into a story that is already in progress. Second, this story is centered around one family, albeit a large family. Third, this story is full of people who are more likely to end up on a most wanted list than they are to be a list of positive role models. Finally, this story creates the way for a happy ending for any who want to take advantage of it. If there are people or elements of the story that Matthew alludes to in his genealogy that are intriguing to you take some time to use the cross reference information in your Bible to read the stories together as a group to provide some context. Matthew is very specific about who he includes in the list and no one is there by accident. Ask yourselves why each person was included and what common threads might exist beyond the obvious link to Jesus.

Read Matthew 1:1-17

#### **Book - These questions are designed to get you into the text itself.**

1. Which of the stories referenced in verses 1 through 6 are you familiar with or find most interesting?
  - There are interesting stories around Abraham and his journey (Genesis 12-23, particularly chapter 20) to being the father of the nation of Israel.
  - Jacob's stealing of the birthright is in Genesis 27.
  - The story of Ruth and Boaz is found in the book of Ruth.
2. Why does Matthew choose to include the detail that Solomon's mother had been Uriah's wife?
3. Why do you suppose that Jesus's genealogy was traced through Joseph's line when he was not biologically Jesus's father?
  - In the ancient world genealogies were always traced through the father's line not the mother's. This is in keeping with the reality that Jesus was entering an old story that had been in progress for a long time with many customs and presuppositions in place.

4. The dividing lines that Matthew used to break up the genealogy were King David, exile to Babylon and the birth of Jesus. What is the significance of each of these moments in Israel's history?
  - David was the greatest of the warrior kings.
  - Exile to Babylon marked the end of Israel as a united and truly sovereign nation and was caused by their disobedience to God.
  - Jesus is called Messiah and enters the world to make a way for all who believe to be in right relationship with God once again.

**Look - These questions will take you on a deeper look at what the passage means for us today.**

1. How is our world similar to or different from the one Jesus entered?
2. If you were asked to rewrite the story of Jesus and wanted to capture the fact that Jesus entered a story already in progress how would you start it? Would you use a genealogy? Why?
3. When you tell the story of Jesus to people who don't know him where do you start and do you include any of the scandalous details as Matthew did?
4. Why is it important to understand the darkness of the original Christmas story?

**Took - These questions are focused on applying the big idea from the text to our lives.**

1. Sin is real and impacts everyone. How do you talk about this with your friends both those who believe and those who do not?
2. How do you avoid the temptation to edit out the unsavory details when telling the story of Israel and those who are part of Jesus's lineage?
3. How have people responded to the story when you include things like Jacob stealing Esau's inheritance and Judah sleeping with his daughter-in-law thinking she was a prostitute or that Mary was a single, unwed, teen when she got pregnant?
4. What is the good news in this passage for you?
5. What does this text make you want to pray?

Closing

Jesus came into the world to provide a way for all who believe to be in relationship with God the Father. It feels though that at times we are ashamed of his background and skim over the details. It is possible that the amount of imperfection and downright scandalous details might draw people in, because they do not think they have to achieve some sort of holiness on their own. God can, and in fact does, redeem all who believe based on his work and not our merit. Spend some time praying for one another to see the opportunities to share the story of the family Jesus was born into and what he came to offer a world that is full of brokenness and despair. Jesus is the light we all need in the darkest part of the year (and all the other parts too...).

Reminder: Jesus calls us to live fully human lives, therefore we must share what we know of him and the love he offers. The story began with goodness and care, which means our lives can have a richness that is both unexpected and beautiful.