



Theme: The Wisdom of Christmas

"Putting the FUN in DysFUNCTION"

Weekly Memory Verses:

¹⁰ Through suffering, our bodies continue to share in the death of Jesus so that the life of Jesus may also be seen in our bodies. – 2 Corinthians 4:10

Meditation Moments for Monday, December 1 – Read **Matthew 1:1-2 and 16-17**. We might read this chapter of Matthew and think, "Not another list of names I can't pronounce!" If that's your first thought, Scholar N. T. Wright may help with these words from his commentary *Matthew for Everyone*: "It is important not to think this is a waste of time... in the Jewish world of Matthew's day, this genealogy was the equivalent of a roll of drums, a fanfare of trumpets, and a town crier calling for attention... Like a great procession, we watch the figures at the front, and the ones in the middle, but all eyes are waiting for the one who comes in the position of greatest honor, right at the end."

 Matthew's gospel, starting with this genealogy, was not the mere story of one person. It was the story of a new start for a hurting world distorted by the presence of evil, hatred and death. Scholar John Killinger writes: "As the original writing may be translated, the book of the *genesis* of Jesus Christ. Matthew was about to set forth the story of the new Genesis, the new creation of the world, and it centered in Jesus." How different would our world be if Jesus had never come?

 In Genesis 5 we find the descendants of Adam. The list depends on their ancestors for their meaning. Matthew, by contrast, lists not Jesus' descendants but his ancestors. Jesus is so pivotal for Israel's history that even his ancestors depend on him for their purpose and meaning. The apostle Paul wrote in Galatians 3:29, "If you belong to Christ, then indeed you are Abraham's descendants." This is **your** spiritual genealogy. Does that increase your interest?

Prayer: Lord God, every name in Matthew's list of Jesus' ancestors was important to you—and so is my name. Thank you for inviting me to be a participant in your story of restoring our broken world to the beauty you intended for it. Amen.

Tuesday, December 2 – Read **Genesis 12:1-7, Romans 4:2-9 and Hebrews 11:8-10.**

Abraham and Sarah were key Biblical figures as they were the first Israelites with whom God made a covenant. In Genesis, the extravagance of God's covenant promises is linked to images of the stars of the sky, the sand of the seashore and the dust of the earth. The main themes of Paul's reference to Abraham in Romans are those of faith and promise.

 By faith Abraham "went out without knowing where he was going." One of the most characteristic signs of the human desire to maintain control is an unwillingness to move forward until we can be sure of the outcome we desire, until we "know where we are going." Does Abraham's journey of faith strike you as foolishness or faith? When (if ever) have you had to take a step of faith in response to a divine calling without knowing for sure where you are going?

 Scholar Theodore Hiebert wrote in the commentary of the *Common English Bible* of God's Genesis 12:3 promise to Abraham, "Much later... when Israel and Judah had been conquered... these old promises gave a vision about who God's people might be again in the future." In what ways was the record of God's promise to Abraham not just ancient history, but a mission statement for Jesus? How is it a pointer to God's ideal for you as one of God's people, one of Abraham's spiritual descendants?

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, sons of Abraham, you wanted Abraham to care about blessing "all the families of earth." Plant that kind of heart in me, too, as I live into Abraham's heritage. Amen.*

Wednesday, December 3 – Read **Matthew 1:6, 1 Samuel 16:10-13, and 2 Samuel 7:8-9,**

16. David is mentioned many times in the Bible and is in many ways a man for all seasons. He is the most complex and multi-faceted human character in Scripture. His name in Jesus' genealogy evoked many sides of his life, with a clear air of royalty as David is the only person called king in this genealogy. He is seen as the representative king of Israel. Israel's royal dynasty was called the house of David in places like 2 Samuel 7:12-13, among others.

 In David's day, and much of the world today, shepherds had very low social status. David's father at first didn't even include him with his brothers as a potential king for Samuel's attention. Have you ever, either years ago or 10 minutes ago, felt that you're not valued, that the world needs nothing you can offer? How does the story of God choosing David, the left-out kid brother keeping the sheep, speak to your heart?

 One thread that ran through David's story was God's promise that his royal dynasty would last "forever," as we read in 2 Samuel 7:16 and 1 Kings 9:3-5. To human eyes, that promise failed. The Davidic line of kings could not and did not continue through and after the exile in Babylon. But Matthew traced Joseph's ancestry to David, as Luke did Mary's in Luke 3:23-38, especially verse 31. How was Jesus the only one who could and did fully make God's promise to David come true at last?

Prayer: *Jesus, Son of David, so much, globally and locally, tugs me toward hopelessness. Reinforce my ability to live in hope, in confidence that your good reign will indeed last forever. Amen.*

Thursday, December 4 – Read **Matthew 1:3 and 5, Genesis 38:24-26, and Joshua 2:8, 12-13, and 6:22-23.** Against all patriarchal tradition, Matthew included women in Jesus' genealogy. They were amazing women! N.T. Wright says in his commentary *Matthew for Everyone*, "He is about to tell how Mary, Jesus' mother, had become pregnant not through her fiancé, Joseph, but through the holy spirit. So, Matthew adds to his list reminders of the strange ways God worked in the royal family itself: Judah treating his daughter-in-law Tamar as a prostitute, Boaz being the son of the Jericho prostitute Rahab." Matthew's genealogy, if read aloud, must have triggered gasps.

 Tamar's story was told in a single chapter in Genesis 38. It may strike us as an embarrassing, offensive story based on the ancient custom that required a dead man's brother to help his widow conceive an heir. But Tamar's resolve to see that duty carried out helped to establish the Israelite tribe of Judah, in which Jesus was born generations later. How could Matthew see God's hand at work even through customs and actions that might not have reflected God's highest ideals?

 Rahab was a Canaanite woman who lived in Jericho. She defied Jericho's rulers and hid two Israelite scouts who came to the city before its walls famously fell in Joshua 6:1-20. Israel recalled her as the only person whose family survived the city's fall. Her son Boaz, we will see tomorrow, was King David's great-grandfather. By including her, Matthew made the point that Jesus was for all people, not just Israelites. How does that matter to you?

Prayer: *Lord God, Matthew saw the amazing way you weave our brief human lives into the wonderful pattern of your eternity. Guide me to value the part you offer me to play in that eternity. Amen.*

Friday, December 5 – Read **Matthew 1:5-6, Ruth 1:14-16, 4:13, 16-17, and 2 Samuel 11:2-5, 26-27.** Matthew added two more surprising women into his genealogy of Jesus. He did include Mary at the end of the list, and we'll read that tomorrow. He mentioned Ruth almost in passing. But Ruth was a Moabite, welcomed in Israel despite Deuteronomy 23:3 saying that "those people" couldn't belong to "the LORD's assembly." Matthew didn't even name Solomon's mother, who "had been the wife of Uriah," perhaps because the tragic story in 2 Samuel had made Bathsheba's name familiar.

 The book of Ruth contains no clue to its authorship. Ruth 1:1 tells us the setting is the time of the Judges, but its writing belongs to a later date. Ruth's story showed that Israel's God welcomed non-Israelites too. The people of Moab were ancient enemies of the people of Israel, so Ruth's willingness to live in Bethlehem, and the people's acceptance of her, are both unexpected and remarkable. How does that likely show why Matthew included her in Jesus' ancestry?



Hebrew historians didn't directly describe "motivation." But Bathsheba's story was about King David's guilt, not hers. There is no suggestion that Bathsheba intended to attract David's attention. The text gives no support to the idea that she was a seductress. It is more likely that this was a case of sexual assault and abuse of power since she would have no recourse to resist. Later giving birth to King Solomon, she continued David's royal line, which led to Jesus. How did Matthew's genealogy honor her innocence?

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, thank you that Matthew's genealogy subtly showed that even when we miss the mark, we cannot permanently derail your purposes. Thank you for working through people of every nation and gender to lead to Jesus. Amen.*

Saturday, December 6 – Read **Matthew 1:1-17 (but don't worry about pronouncing all the names correctly!** Hebrew genealogies were not for mere record-keeping. Like Matthew's, they often held symbolic messages. The division of the record of Jesus' family tree into three parts indicates that the establishment of King David's dynasty and the Babylonian exile were key events in Israel's history. Names such as Ahaziah, Joash, and Amaziah, have been dropped from the genealogy to fit into this three-part division of 14 names each. Scholar N. T. Wright summed up the message in *Matthew for Everyone*: "As though to emphasize that Jesus isn't just one member in an ongoing family, but the goal of the whole list, he arranges the genealogy into three groups of 14 names—or, perhaps we should say, into six groups of seven names. The number seven was and is one of the most powerful symbolic numbers, and to be born at the beginning of the seventh seven in the sequence is clearly to be the climax of the whole list. This birth, Matthew is saying, is what Israel has been waiting for two thousand years."



In our hurry-up world, our vision often narrows to the next hour, the next day, the next week. But God works on a much larger time scale. Matthew's genealogy pointed to God's time scale, not ours. As Pastor John Killinger wrote, "We can be sure there was nothing trite or dull about this list of names to the Jewish Christians. They knew stories about each person named. History to them was a web, a ladder, a series of interconnecting events, and now it led directly from Abraham to Jesus... Imagine God at work through all the centuries from Abraham to Jesus. Then imagine him at work from Jesus' day until ours. This is the story of a new creation, isn't it?"

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, the apostle Paul wrote in Galatians 4:4, "when the fulfillment of the time came, God sent his Son." You are the center point of our world's history. This Advent, I welcome you into my life and rejoice as you define my course as a member of your eternal family. Amen*