



# Sermon Growth Guide

NOVEMBER 28, 2021

*THE FAMILY OF GOD // "FAMILY TREE"*

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**November 28, 2021**

**Family of God – Family Tree**

**Matthew 1:1-17**

**Key Verse:** Matthew 1:1

“This is the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah the son of David, the son of Abraham.”

**Big Idea:** Jesus breaks the barriers of genetics by inviting you into His family by faith.

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## Foundations

We don't preach genealogies much. It's just a list of names, right? But take a look at some of the people in the family line of Jesus: Abraham, Isaac and Jacob – Rahab, Ruth and Boaz – David. Jesus isn't fairy tale. God entered into a real family line, into human history.

Jesus, fully God and fully man, was born into a bloodline, but He breaks down the barrier of genetics by declaring that the true and forever Family of God is the Family of Faith. We belong to God by faith! Just like Jesus' bloodline, the Family of Faith is comprised of the full range of human personality and circumstance. Our family tie is not through ethnicity or nationality or moral merit, but through our common thread of true faith.

You belong in God's family. Do you believe that? The Apostle John writes, “Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.” To believe is to have faith. Through faith in Jesus, you and I become children of God, co-heirs with Christ.

Consider augmenting your group time this Advent using this year's Advent Devotional, which ties into our series on *The Family of God*. Blessings as you share your lives with one another and point one another to our true and eternal family.

## Understanding God's Word

Together, read Matthew 1:1-17.

What can we learn from reading Matthew's genealogy? Why is it important that Jesus has a genealogy?

What do we learn in verse 17? Do you find significance in the given generational blocks (theocracy / prophets (14) > kings (14) > failure of the kings/nation (14) > Messiah)?

## Applying God's Word

Jesus breaks the barriers of genetics by inviting you into His family by faith. This Advent, what practices can you implement in your own life (and with others in your household if applicable) to deepen your faith in Jesus? Help one another cultivate a heart of anticipatory joy this Advent. How can those in your Life Group be a helping hand to you this Advent?

## Witnessing God's Word

John writes, “yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God,” (John 1:12). Perhaps the most marvelous thing this Advent is you, as an ambassador and fellow family member of God, have the opportunity to help someone near you receive Christ this season. Discern together your next step of witnessing to the grace of God in Christ.

Well, here we are. Just like that we have entered Advent. This is a season of awe and expectation. We journey to the manger once again—to behold the miracle of Immanuel, God with us. Our passage today is perhaps one you've not heard out loud. Honestly, it's one I kind of rush over. It's 17 verses of genealogy: names, names and more names. I guess our question today is this: Can God speak through a list of names? Or maybe this: Can the Holy Spirit stir our hearts through a reading of a family tree? I believe He can.

**Matthew 1:1-17**

This is the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah the son of David, the son of Abraham:

2 Abraham was the father of Isaac, Isaac the father of Jacob, Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers,  
3 Judah the father of Perez and Zerah, whose mother was Tamar, Perez the father of Hezron, Hezron the father of Ram,  
4 Ram the father of Amminadab, Amminadab the father of Nahshon, Nahshon the father of Salmon,  
5 Salmon the father of Boaz, whose mother was Rahab, Boaz the father of Obed, whose mother was Ruth, Obed the father of Jesse,  
6 and Jesse the father of King David. David was the father of Solomon, whose mother had been Uriah's wife,  
7 Solomon the father of Rehoboam, Rehoboam the father of Abijah, Abijah the father of Asa,  
8 Asa the father of Jehoshaphat, Jehoshaphat the father of Jehoram, Jehoram the father of Uzziah,  
9 Uzziah the father of Jotham, Jotham the father of Ahaz, Ahaz the father of Hezekiah,  
10 Hezekiah the father of Manasseh, Manasseh the father of Amon, Amon the father of Josiah,  
11 and Josiah the father of Jeconiah[c] and his brothers at the time of the exile to Babylon.

12 After the exile to Babylon: Jeconiah was the father of Shealtiel, Shealtiel the father of Zerubbabel, 13 Zerubbabel the father of Abihud,

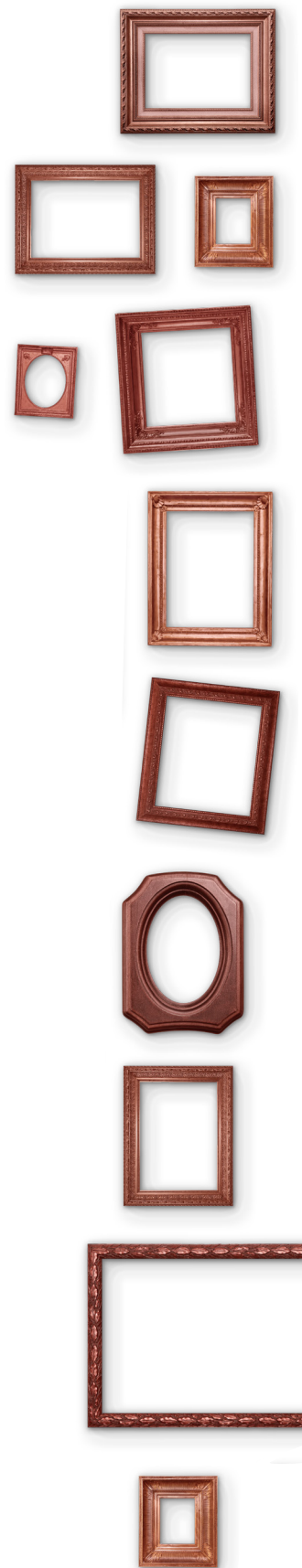
Abihud the father of Eliakim, Eliakim the father of Azor, 14 Azor the father of Zadok, Zadok the father of Akim, Akim the father of Elihud, 15 Elihud the father of Eleazar, Eleazar the father of Matthan, Matthan the father of Jacob, 16 and Jacob the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary, and Mary was the mother of Jesus who is called the Messiah.

17 Thus there were fourteen generations in all from Abraham to David, fourteen from David to the exile to Babylon, and fourteen from the exile to the Messiah. The word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

How many of you cut down your own trees for Christmas? How many of you still go for a real tree, but opt for someone else to cut it down? How many of you have opted out of the live tree thing all together and gone artificial? When I worked college ministry in western Massachusetts, I didn't know then, but one of the students in our InterVarsity fellowship group would go on to found the highly successful business, Balsam Hill. Balsam Hill has been voted the No. 1 most realistic Christmas tree around. I've watched Mac explain on different posts and talks shows the process for making these trees. It's incredible. And it's so pretty. We still get a live tree each year, but if we ever move to artificial—we are going to with Balsam Hill.

Recreating a beautiful tree that looks real is not an easy undertaking. Does the perfect tree exist? Every year we all go looking for the perfect tree. Real, constructed, shaped, live, from a box ... we all long for beauty at Christmas, and trees are a big part of that making that beauty.

When Matthew puts together the family tree of Jesus (these 17 verses), he carefully pulls together 42 generations of genealogy. Wow! 42 generations! That's a lot of records to pore over. And he would have had them. Temple records were preserved for the generations of priests. Families kept records. Taxation laws required that families knew at least seven generations



of lineage, and for those who descended from King David, they would certainly know their genealogy (Craig Keener, Matthew, p. 52).

We read names in this list that represent great epics and heroes of the faith. We also hear names that represent stories we would rather not tell our kids (at least not young kids). There are names that surprise us, names we don't recognize, names that reveal the glory of God and names that remind us that every generation has the opportunity to say "yes" to Jesus regardless of what their parents or grandparents did or said. In these verses, Matthew carefully and thoughtfully shapes Jesus' family tree to announce the good news of Jesus' birth.

But this is more than a cognitive exercise in genealogy. Matthew is not just reporting a list of Jesus' ancestors, he's telling a story. He is shaping a theology—he is speaking a "word about God." He's revealing the heart and mission of God. In Jesus, God Himself entered our world through a real family line. He entered human history the way that we enter history—born as a baby. This is no fairy tale. Jesus' family tree is as messy as yours and mine. But that doesn't stop Jesus from finding us. It doesn't stop Him from finding you, and including you in His family.

Find your branch. Tell your story. And let Jesus surprise you with the good news that He has been born to redeem you, your family and all families of the earth. Amen?

Matthew begins his gospel with this—"Welcome to Jesus' family tree." Here is how he starts:  
"This is the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah the son of David, the son of Abraham:" (1:1) Similar to the other gospels, Matthew does not wait until the end of this writing to reveal that Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah, the long-expected savior. This is the one you've been waiting for. By calling Jesus the son of David and the son of Abraham, there is no mistaking who Matthew believes Jesus is. He is Emmanuel, God's promised Messiah. From Abraham

to David to Mary and Joseph, Jesus is the fulfillment, the final word of all God's promises. Pay attention! When God makes a promise, it will be done. Matthew's genealogy invites us to reframe the entire Old Testament through a new lens—the birth of Jesus.

For those of us listening to Matthew's genealogy today, most of us wouldn't catch an odd inclusion here or there. But for those listening in Matthew's time, everyone in the room would catch some surprises. There are a few odd moments in how Matthew constructs this genealogy. I'm going to focus on two of them. Two surprises, hidden gifts that might help us see better what God is up to and how the birth of Jesus changes everything. Surprise No. 1: The Women. Surprise No. 2: The Math.

### **The Women**

Matthew anchors Jesus' birth in the history of Israel. He highlights the epic stories, the heroes of faith—Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Boaz, David, Josiah. But the surprise of this lineage is twofold—first, that women are included in the genealogy. And second, the women Matthew chooses to include. Theologian Dale Bruner writes, "Usually the names of men suffice in biblical genealogies, and women's names are added if they will enhance the purity of the line or enhance its dignity" (The Christbook, p. 9). In other words, women's names were not necessary. In the genealogies of Genesis and 1 Chronicles you will find a few names of women, scattered throughout, but the family line is always traced through the sons. For the most part, Matthew follows the pattern of the Old Testament genealogies, but he adds the names of five women. That's worth noting, friends.

I just want to say from all of us women in the room, a little high five to Matthew for representing us in Jesus' family tree. We don't need the recognition, of course, but in Genesis 1, the mandate to "be fruitful and multiply" is given to both men and women. And women do play a small role in that equation. But after the fall in Genesis 3, the curse takes over and women fade into the background. Could Matthew be indicating that the



redemption of all humanity (men and women), the reversal of the curse, is on the way? I think so. But listen, there is more.

Matthew includes these women: Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, the wife of Uriah (also known as Bathsheba) and Mary, the mother of Jesus. Four of these women are well-known in the Old Testament. We can read their stories, which is why these names give us pause. If indeed women's names are only included in the family line to strengthen the purity of the family tree (as Bruner writes), then these women are an odd choice. These four do not ensure the integrity of the line of David and Abraham. Rather, they do the opposite. This is what we know about their race and culture: Tamar was a Canaanite; Rahab was a Jerichoite; Ruth was a Moabitess; Bathsheba was a Hittite. These women are not Jewish. Matthew could have included Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel and Leah—the matriarchs of the faith—as each of their husbands are listed here. They are the obvious choices. Instead, he chooses four non-Jewish women. And further, apart from Ruth, these women highlight difficult moral and ethical moments in the history of Israel. Tamar pretends to be a harlot to trick her father-in-law into an incestuous plot. Deeper reading exposes Judah's sin against his family. Rahab is a prostitute who aids the Israelite spies and believes God's hand is at work. By bringing Bathsheba into the lineage, Matthew is highlighting David's lowest point of moral failure: his adultery. Ruth is a foreigner, a widow, penniless, and destitute. How did she get in this lineup?

In all of our family trees, there are secrets we prefer to keep hidden, stories we don't like to talk about. But Matthew puts them all out there. And then he shines a bright Christmas light on them. It's almost like Matthew pored over the stories of Jesus' family tree until he discovered the most questionable narratives he could find! These stories disrupt the presumed and expected wholeness of Jesus' family tree. Matthew, what in the world are you doing?

We are reminded of Jesus' words that Matthew recorded later in his gospel—"It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. ... For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners" (9:12-13). Matthew, the hated tax collector, who partied with Gentiles (foreigners) and sinners, knew first-hand the good news of Jesus. Jesus came to Matthew's house, dined with his friends and Matthew was never the same. Matthew takes the genealogical form and adjusts it. He includes women and foreigners and highlights the sin stories. What is he doing? Why can't he just simply show the acceptable lineage of Jesus? Because Matthew has met Jesus. He has been transformed. His eyes see the world differently. He knows what Jesus has come to do.

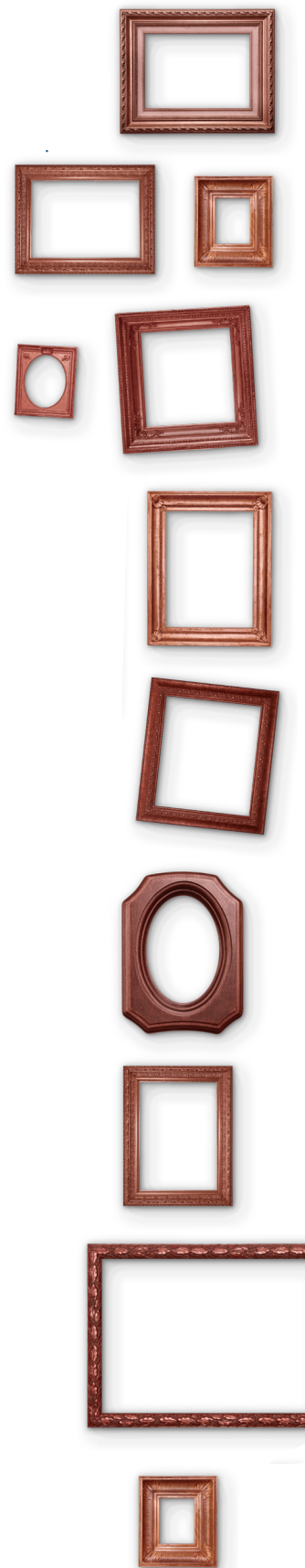
From the opening lines of his gospel, the big mission of God is on display. Jesus has come for everyone: Jew and Gentile, slave and free, men and women, sinners and tax collectors. The mission of God is big, friends. Abraham received this mission in Genesis 12—that all nations and family lines would be blessed by the people of God. All. Everyone. From the Middle East to Asia, to South America and Africa, and yes, even into our corner of the world, the light of Christ dawns for all. The birth of Jesus is good news for the whole world. The redemption of everything and everyone has come near.

### **The Math**

A second surprise in this family tree is the math. This genealogy puts the "math" in Matthew. But we have to wonder what grade Matthew got in math. Our oldest is now way past any math I remember from my youth. We don't even ask if we can help anymore. "Sorry, buddy. You are going to have to ask someone else." You might have noticed that Matthew seems to love the number 14.

"Thus, there were fourteen generations in all from Abraham to David, fourteen from David to the exile to Babylon, and fourteen from the exile to the Messiah" (1:17).

Matthew organizes his genealogy in three 14-generation waves of history,



the most important events in the life of the Hebrew people—the eras that define who they are.

14x14x14.

The first 14 generations lead to the pinnacle of their history when King David sits on the throne. Listen to the song of Israel in that time from Psalm 89:

You said, “I have made a covenant with my chosen one,

I have sworn to David my servant,

‘I will establish your line forever

and make your throne firm through all generations” (Psalm 89:3-4).

The longing of Israel in that time was for a king. God responds with a “yes,” but it’s not David ultimately who will reign forever. There is an eternal king coming who will rule with everlasting faithfulness.

The second wave of 14 chronicles Israel’s descent into exile in Babylon, the most difficult period of her life. The longing here was a for a savior, a rescuer. Listen to the song of Israel in this time frame: “The LORD is the strength of his people, a fortress of salvation for his anointed one.

Save your people and bless your inheritance;

be their shepherd and carry them forever” (Psalm 28:8-9).

We need a savior, one will rescue us and carry us forever. Will God send an eternal shepherd?

Finally in the third wave of 14, I look at these names and many of them (unlike the other waves) are not familiar to me. Zerubbabel is well known in the prophetic writings, but after him ... the names fade out. The stories of these descendants are not in the Bible. One of the last words that comes to Zerubbabel is this:

“This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel: ‘Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,’ says the LORD Almighty” (Zechariah 4:6).

From the close of the Old Testament to the opening of the book of Matthew, about 400 years pass and God has not sent a prophet or spoken to His people. These are the generations of silence. But the Spirit of God is still stirring.

And after 400 years the voice of God becomes audible again in these words of Matthew:

“... and Jacob the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary, and Mary was the mother of Jesus who is called Messiah” (Matthew 1:16).

Out of the silence, the stillness ... the hopes and fears of all the years ...

Messiah is born. The final Word of God. And His name shall be called...wonderful counselor, mighty God the everlasting father the Prince of Peace.

From the highest pinnacle of victory with King David to the depths of despair, disorientation and displacement in exile and through the years of a perceived absence, of silence, the Spirit of God is steadily at work in history and in our lives. And the answer comes in Jesus.

14x14x14

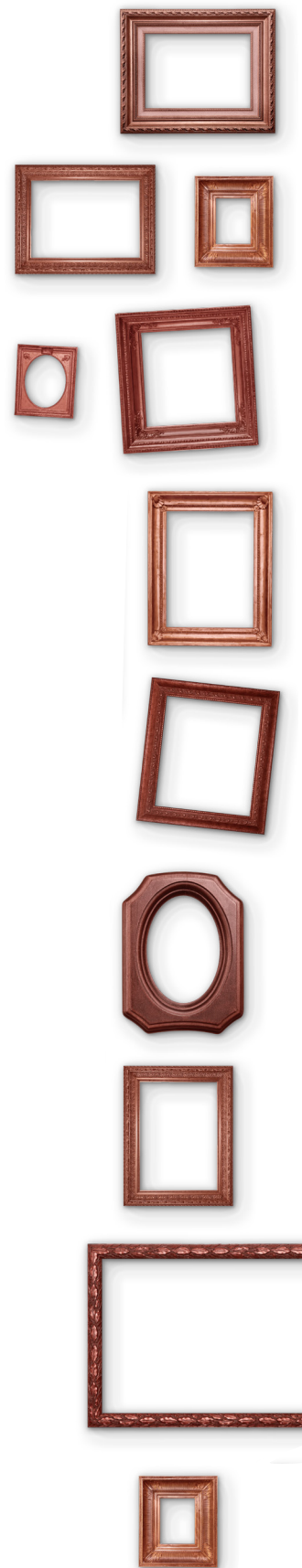
But back to the math ... you might not notice this, and I didn’t at first. The final generations of 14 has only 13 fathers. There is a missing father. You and I might not have noticed, but the first hearers of this book most certainly would have. Did Matthew make a mistake? Did he miscalculate? Unlikely. Matthew is a tax collector—counting is part of his job. He likely and intentionally shapes the lineage to fit this 14-generation grid. But then he leaves out the final generation. What about the missing father?

Joseph, we read, is the “husband” of Mary (vs. 16)—and Mary is the mother of Jesus. We learn in the second half of this chapter that Joseph becomes the adoptive father of Jesus. And that is as good as gold, but that makes Joseph number 13. Who is the missing 14th father? And where is the missing generation? Later in this chapter, we get a clue in the mystery of Jesus’ birth and the identity of the Father:

“Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 1:20).

And with the birth of Jesus, a new family tree begins to take shape, a new generation, loved and cared for by God the Father Himself.

“I believe in God the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth. And in



Jesus Christ his only Son, our Lord.” We affirm this almost every Sunday in the Apostles’ Creed.

**Conclusion**

A few years ago at Christmas, my older brother gave each of us a beautiful rendition of our family tree going a few generations back. It reminds me that I come from somewhere, that I have been born into this world through a lineage. I am connected to a clan, a tribe, a family, and a story. Just like Jesus, each of us was born into a family. You have a family tree, a genealogy. You were given the gift of life through a mother and father. You have aunts and uncles and grandparents and great grandparents. Each branch of your tree has a story to tell ... a story of good, of trial, of hope of despair. You are a part of your family lineage.

But there is another family tree that is growing in this world. It is the family of God, and with the birth of Jesus we learn about this family tree—a tree of surprise and sin. A tree of messy lives and stories of redemption and trust from the most unlikely places. And Matthew can’t wait to tell us all about it. For if Jesus can enter the world through 42 generations of this chaotic family tree, how much more can He enter your family tree and find you?

We give thanks for the stories of Tamar and Ruth, Bathsheba and Rahab ... for in their stories, we find ours. And we discover a God who finds us and loves us.

Matthew presents Jesus as the tree-topper, the crowning joy of thousands of years of history and preparation by God. In the beautiful birth of this tiny baby, a new family begins to take shape and the glorious redemption is unveiled for a world in waiting. In Jesus, we are brought into the family tree of God. We have new brothers and sisters, aunts and uncles. Through a simple “yes” to Jesus our branches are grafted in. And let me say this, friends, in being given a new family,

you are not unhooked from your family tree. I don’t know if that is good news or bad news for you today. Rather, you become an “agent of redemption in your family system—in Jesus, mind you. You aren’t the hero (that pressure is off)—Jesus is always the hero. But through new life in Christ, you become a branch of hope in your family tree.

So, back to our original question: Can Jesus speak through 17 verses of names? You bet He can. The gift of Christmas, friends, is that every branch on your family tree is now at risk of being redeemed—including yours. Jesus has come to save. Find your branch, tell your story. Share the good news. May a world in waiting know that Jesus has come for all. And may Jesus speak your name today that you might hear Him and know your place in the family of God.  
Amen.

