

Re-calculating Route
Matthew 1:1-17
Growth Group Discussion Guide

Opening question:

- What's something interesting about your family history? Was someone famous, infamous, or just really interesting? A particular event?
- We've just started an Advent series called "Re-routed." Have you had a season in recent memory when you felt like your life was "re-routed" from the course you thought you should be on? Please share about it.

1. TAKE TURNS READING MATTHEW 1:1-17, then discuss the following.

- How do you feel about reading genealogies in the Bible?
- 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.
 - What is the longest that you or your family has waited for something that was really important? Describe the situation and the feelings involved.
- Review the promises to which Matthew alludes here.
 - Abraham: read Genesis 12:1-3.
 - David: read 2 Samuel 7:8-17.
 - What is Matthew taking pains to show with respect to these promises?
- Pastor Josh said on Sunday that we can find purpose and hope in the twists and turns of life because **God keeps his promises**. Discuss:
 - How do you feel about this claim? Does it have any practical meaning to you? Why or why not?
 - What is one of God's promises to which you're clinging currently?

2. Let's look more closely at the names in the genealogy.

- What name or names stands out to you most in this lineage? Why?
- In Sunday's sermon, we spent some time focusing on the women in this genealogy. Commentator William Barclay points out, "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."
 - What makes the inclusion of these women so remarkable?
 - Why do you think that Matthew includes them here, at the outset of his Gospel?
 - 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?

- Pastor Josh claimed that we can be encouraged, because **God keeps his promises in ways that defy our criteria.**
 - If God doesn't use the same criteria to determine who gets into his family, or who plays a special role in his purposes, what criteria *does* he use?
 - How does this new criteria make you feel, personally? Is there any part of your history that you feel God cannot redeem?
 - Are there any types of people with whom you close yourself off, thinking God could not work in you through them? Be as honest as you can with your group.
 - What actions do you think God would have you to take in these relationships, now or in the future?
3. This Sunday's sermon concluded with a consideration of the fact that **God's promises have broken into human history in the person of Jesus.**
- What details in Matthew 1—or in other Gospel passages with which you're familiar—seem to emphasize this point?
 - C.S. Lewis, in his essay, "Myth Became Fact," talks about the ancient "myths," or stories, which cross cultures and generations and convey universal human longings.
 - What do you think are some of these universal human longings, with which you can identify?
 - What "myths" (i.e., stories—in song, writing, film, etc.) can you think of in our present culture, which convey these longings?
 - If Lewis is right, why does it matter that "myth became fact" in the person of Jesus?
 - 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." In what way does this truth impact how we relate with our culture's stories, and the people who live in it?
 - Wrap-up:
 - What aspect of this week's passage or study gives you the most encouragement for your present challenges?
 - Does it leave you wanting more in any way?
 - Is there any action step that you think God is calling you to, via this study?
4. **Share and Pray:**
- If this discussion has raised any pain, struggle, or action steps, and especially if anyone feels like they've just been "re-routed," take time to pray accordingly!
 - Take some time to share and pray about other needs and concerns that may exist among your group.