Unpacking biblical truths in a way that impacts our hearts and changes our lives

Written by Linda Allcock
Head, Heart, Hands are Bible study notes written for young people. I’m grateful to a number of women half my age – Bethan Reynolds, Sarah Spanner and Clare Doughty – for helping me to write the studies in a way that hopefully resonates with some of the issues with which young women struggle. Special thanks are due to Clare, who has done endless amounts of editing while patiently sharing a tiny workspace with me. Luckily she wasn’t there for the minestrone soup incident, when I killed my computer and thought I had lost all my files!

The reason this series is called *Head, Heart, Hands* came out of Jesus’ teaching in Matthew’s Gospel. He frequently criticises the religious leaders because ‘These people honour me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me’ (Matthew 15:8). We don’t want to read the Bible just to fill our heads with knowledge so that we have all the right answers. We study with our heads so that we will love Jesus with our hearts. That will overflow into genuine loving actions with our hands.

As a response to this, the questions are organised to help us understand truth with our *head*, probe our *heart* to see whether and why we are far from Jesus, and turn to Jesus for forgiveness. Only then are we able to ask for the Holy Spirit’s help to change our *hearts* so that we want to obey. The final question in each study will point us to see how this new desire can overflow into what we do with our *hands* (and lives).

A very powerful tool to help truth sink into our hearts and overflow into our lives is learning God’s word. We see this most clearly in chapter 4 when Jesus fights the devil with the words of God. In doing this Jesus was obeying the teaching in the Old Testament: ‘I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you’ (Psalm 119:11).

Hiding God’s word in your heart is a very powerful way of living out the truth. This became very precious to me when I was struggling with depression. My head was often full of negative thoughts: ‘I’m useless, worthless, rubbish.’ Hiding God’s word in my heart and remembering it when these negative thoughts came helped me to realise that such thoughts are not true. They are not how God sees me. I was able to replace these negative thoughts with true thoughts about God, from his word. That transformed me from the inside out.
Throughout the book there are suggested verses where you can hide God’s word in your heart. Learn them to help you in the fight to think truth about yourself, others, this world and our God. I’ve been excited to see how all of us working on this project have creatively responded to this idea: using calligraphy, sewing, fabric, paper, song, poetry and paint to help the truth become part of our lives. I hope these truths will excite your creativity so you can respond in a way that is helpful for you.

I firmly believe that with prayer, hard work and a few helpful hints you can read and understand the Bible for yourself. Therefore in a sense I find it ironic that I’m writing Bible study notes that do much of this work for you. However, these Bible reading notes are not designed to spoon-feed you a daily dose of truth. Rather, my hope is they will help you get into the habit of looking carefully at the Bible verses to see what they say, thinking about what they mean and then probing into your heart to find out why you find them so hard to obey!

As you progress through the book, I will introduce to you a set of questions you can ask of any passage. We will see in Matthew 11:25–27 and 16:17 that we will never understand what God is saying through our own cleverness, but only through God revealing his truth to us. So fundamental to every study is that we pause and pray, asking God to help us understand what he is saying. Through the Lord’s Prayer we will learn an outline for how you can start to pray. Then with a few helpful hints you will discover that some passages you can understand without the help of notes. I long that you will find this exciting and empowering, and that after a while you won’t even need Bible study notes!

She fumbled. ‘I don’t know. You’ll have to come to camp with me and someone there will be able to explain it to you.’

Instead of replying ‘I don’t know’ to an interested friend, I hope that through these notes you could say: ‘Would you like to read the Bible with me?’ Find a quiet space and spend ten minutes together, reading the opening illustration, answering the questions, then finishing by reading aloud the prayer.

Come to Jesus, learn from him, then go and tell others. That’s a great summary of Matthew that you can live out day by day.

I’m convinced that Matthew’s Gospel is a great place to start Bible readings because through it we learn some really awesome truths about how the two parts of the Bible – the Old and New Testaments – fit together.

Above all, I hope that through the pages of Matthew you meet Jesus. You will see he is no ordinary man. From the very start we are told he is God with us, and the One God’s people have been waiting for since pretty much the creation of the world. These are big claims. You need to look and see for yourself if there’s any truth in them. Enjoy!
In Head, Hearts, Hands: Matthew Volumes 1 and 2 I likened our journey through Matthew’s Gospel to being on an aeroplane. As we took off, we saw how this flight is actually part of a much bigger journey that started in the Old Testament (the first part of the Bible, written hundreds of years before Jesus came). Jesus is introduced to us as the King of this story. Throughout Matthew’s Gospel he demonstrates what sort of King he is, and calls people to join his kingdom: the kingdom of heaven (a phrase repeated over fifty times in Matthew’s Gospel!). In volume 3 we are coming into land, and from the very outset of chapters 21–28 the destination is in sight: Jerusalem, the city of the King.

Spirits are high as we make our approach. Circling far above we see the whole city is stirred as Jesus comes near. His coming seems totally weird: riding on a donkey, while praised by the old and young alike as they lay palm branches before him and sing ‘Hosanna!’ It turns out, when you investigate Zechariah and Psalms, that’s exactly what the Old Testament said would happen! But storm clouds gather as we get closer to the temple, in the heart of the city. The religious leaders see all the wonderful things Jesus is doing and they ... praise him and throw their cloaks before him? Quite the opposite. They are indignant. As the pages unfold, we see tensions increase between those who claim to be the leaders of God’s people and Jesus. He doesn’t just claim to be the rightful King. No, he pushes this superiority to a whole new level by claiming to be the Son of Man, an Old Testament character who is able to sit at the right hand of God himself. He is the One who will come to judge with power and great glory.

He is the rightful King, whether or not they recognise him as such (we’ll see this in the studies ‘That’s (not) my King’). Throughout chapters 21–25 he teaches us what his people are to be like, and reveals where the leaders have fallen short (the studies ‘That’s (not) my people’). He is not forcing these leaders into a corner to make them lose their temper – though we do see that happen in 26:69! He tells them the truth because he longs ‘to gather [them] as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings’ (23:37). The sad conclusion? But they ‘were not willing.’

By chapter 26 we would surely expect Jesus to land in Jerusalem, crowned as the rightful King, ready to subdue his enemies once and for all? Not quite ... I was once about to land on a flight into Miami when suddenly a terrible storm arose, forcing the airport to close. We circled and circled until, running out of fuel, we were forced to land on a tiny airstrip, seventy miles to the north. As the plot in Matthew’s Gospel thickens, the leaders’ hatred of Jesus increases, and it reaches breaking point as they plot to kill him. It looks like Jesus has been forced to land in the wrong place. Surely being crucified on a cross just outside of Jerusalem was never part of the plan?

Through chapters 26 and 27 we see the repeated idea (repeated at least ten times!) that this is all just as God promised would happen in the Old Testament. In Head, Hearts, Hands: Matthew Volume 1 we likened the Old Testament to an architect’s sketch of what God had planned. Jesus is the real-life version of the architect’s plans (he ‘fits the sketch’) and we see this most clearly in Jesus’ death. Over and again Matthew drops in Old Testament references to assure us this was always the plan. It’s as if God is so keen for us to know that the cross of Jesus, far from being an unwelcome detour or a tragic turn of events, is the planned destination.

Why? The clue is in the way Matthew ends, with Jesus promising to be with us. That is just as Matthew started his book, with the baby Jesus referred to as ‘Immanuel’. Which means? You guessed it: God with us. Through Jesus’ death the barrier of sin, separating us and God, is removed, making a way for God to be with us.

In an unexpected turn of events we suddenly begin to take off again – because death was not the end. Jesus does not stay dead. The cross is absolutely part of the plan, but it is not the end of the story. We soar to new heights as the tomb is found to be empty. Jesus is seen alive and, in 28:18, is given all authority in heaven and on earth. The final verses of Matthew are not so much an end as a wonderful new beginning, as we join him in this mission. God is with us and we are with him, taking the gospel message to all nations. ‘And surely I am with you always,’ promises Jesus, ‘to the very end of the age’ (28:20). This is a promise we can be confident of because the greatest enemies – sin and death – have been defeated once and for all!
Their idea of the King, the One God promised, is that he would be strong, powerful and victorious, coming to rescue them from the oppressive rulers over them. ‘That’s my King, coming on a warhorse!’ would be the climax of their book.

How different Jesus the King is. ‘That’s my King, gentle and riding on a baby donkey’ is how Jesus’ story goes. As we read on into Matthew’s Gospel, it gets even more shocking: ‘That’s my King, beaten, mocked and scorned by those he came to save … That’s my King, dying on a cross to save his people from their sins.’

Head: Matthew shows us at least four different responses to Jesus. Who does he pick out and what is their response (verses 9, 10 and 15)?

Heart: The crowd ask, ‘Who is this?’ (verse 10), then answer according to what they have seen (verse 11). What is your answer? Are you getting those ideas from what the Bible says about Jesus, or what you want him to be – a Jesus convenient to you?

Hands: Which group of people would you like to be like: the people and children, in verses 8–9, praising Jesus (that’s what ‘hosanna’ means); the teachers, indignant at Jesus for overturning the way they do things; or the crowd in Jerusalem, looking at all this and asking, ‘Who is this?’

Jesus has arrived just as the Old Testament prophecies said he would. The problem is that the chief priests and teachers of the law have not been looking closely at what the Bible said about the coming King. Instead, their idea of who the King would be has gradually built up into a King that is convenient for them. So they do not recognise Jesus as the King. Similarly, they have lost sight of what the Bible said the temple was for and have gradually, imperceptibly begun to make it a place convenient to them.

As Jesus comes to his city, Jerusalem, you can almost hear the Pharisees frantically searching for their copy of That’s not my King. That’s not my King, he’s coming on a donkey. That’s not my King, he’s praised by children. That’s not my King, he’s not impressive enough.

Head: How many Old Testament references are quoted here? In what ways is this arrival in line with what God said would happen? (Hint: Check out the footnotes if you’re not sure.)

Lord, I am so used to this world’s obsession with being impressive, successful, powerful. I often think of Jesus as What I see here is so surprising – a Jesus who is riding on a baby donkey, gentle and humble. Help me to see where I am wrong. Show me through the pages of Matthew who Jesus really is. Help me answer the question, ‘Who is this?’ for myself. Amen.

In the following studies try praying a similar prayer before you read the passage, asking God to help you to understand what he is saying through his word.
study 2

That’s Not My People

... they are not bearing fruit

Pray, asking God to help you understand his word

Read Matthew 21:12–22

The problem isn’t just that the Pharisees refuse to recognise Jesus as the King. The real reason behind this is that they are not in his kingdom. They claim to be his people, but they are not. In the coming chapters Jesus gives a devastating exposé of what they are really like.

You can almost imagine Jesus looking at the mess these religious leaders have made of the temple and saying, ‘That’s not my people. they’ve turned my temple into a den of robbers.’ Then he does something seemingly very strange, involving a fig tree... let’s try and work out the link.

Head: What did the fig tree look like in verse 19? (Hint: Did it look healthy?)

Heart: What’s the point of a fig tree? So why did Jesus react in the way he did?

Heart: What is the point of the teachers of the law? How should they respond when their King comes to his temple?

Heart: What similarity is there between the way Jesus reacts to the teachers of the law in verse 17 and to the fig tree in verse 19? What warning is there for us?

The fig tree is a visual aid, illustrating very powerfully the problem with the teachers of the law. Just like the fig tree, they look right on the outside - like God’s people, wearing the right robes, claiming to teach the law, keeping up a busy schedule of events at the temple. But they have missed the most important thing - they are supposed to be people of prayer, singing hosanna to their King. And when he comes, they don’t even recognise him! That is the fruit Jesus is looking for as he comes to the temple: prayer and praise. The children have got it right (verse 15), but the teachers of the law have epically failed.

Just like the fig tree, the teachers of the law look great on the outside, but look closely and you’ll see there’s no fruit. So instead of Jesus entering the temple and bringing to life God’s law that they have been teaching all their lives, he leaves them alone (verse 17). That may seem like no big deal, but actually it is the worst thing that could happen to anyone – their chance of life has gone. Just like the fig tree, they will wither without Jesus.

Heart: What are the characteristics of those who do bear fruit in verses 15 and 21–22?

Heart: What is the point of the teachers of the law? How should they respond when their King comes to his temple?

Heart: What similarity is there between the way Jesus reacts to the teachers of the law in verse 17 and to the fig tree in verse 19? What warning is there for us?

Heart: What’s the point of a fig tree? So why did Jesus react in the way he did?

Faith believes in the impossible, knowing God can do anything. That is what it means to bear fruit. It is looking to the One who can, in prayer and joyful praise.

When we look at our hearts, we can see elements of the teachers of the law inside us. We can look healthy and full of leaves on the outside, but we don’t always praise God like little children. Don’t despair: if God can move mountains, he can make us fruitful... if we ask him.

Hands: Imagine what it would be like for you to be a fruitful fig tree – praying and praising God in the different places where you live. Dream big! Now write out an impossibly big prayer asking that God would forgive your ‘nothing but leaves’ way of life and help you to begin to pray and praise him as you were created to.

Father, forgive me where Jesus’ verdict of ‘nothing on it except leaves’ (verse 19) has been true of me.

I love the idea of a faith that can move mountains. Please help me to believe that Jesus is able to change me, especially in this impossible situation.

so that I will pray and praise you as I was created to. Amen.
Study 3: That’s Not My People

They don’t accept my authority

Pray, asking God to help you understand his word

Read Matthew 21:23–27

In my kids’ secondary school the headmaster is called Mr Ebenezer. If you forget your conduct card, you are put into isolation for a day. If you lose your PE sock, isolation. He is so strict. The moment he says something, the boys do it – out of a mixture of fear and respect. Mr Ebenezer’s authority is only of human origin. So can you imagine how we would respond if we really believed Jesus spoke with authority from heaven? That he has the power to do anything he wants? The way we react to Jesus’ words shows what we think of his authority.

The chief priests and elders appear to have an issue with where Jesus’ authority is from. But Jesus exposes their real problem... by asking them about his forerunner, John the Baptist. John taught the people that Jesus was the One God promised. So the way that the chief priests and elders reacted to John’s teaching reflects the way they react to Jesus.

Head: Why can’t the chief priests and elders say that John’s baptism is from heaven?

Heart: Why are they scared to say his baptism is of human origin?

Heart: Where do they think John’s baptism – and therefore Jesus – is from? Human origin or heaven?

Jesus has exposed the root of the problem: the reason they don’t listen to him is because they think he is of human origin – just another man. So they believe his teaching has no authority over them and they don’t need to listen.

The reason they are afraid to say what they believe is because they are ‘afraid of the people’ (verse 26). They therefore tend to say and do what they think other people want them to. In this situation that means they won’t be honest because they want the people to like them. But they also can’t bring themselves to say that Jesus is from heaven. So they are forced to say, ‘We don’t know’ (verse 27). Jesus has deliberately done this to show what they are really like. It must have been a bit embarrassing for them!

Heart: In what ways might we slip into living in fear of what others think?

Hands: We are all guilty of fearing others to some extent. Who should we be fearing – if Jesus really does have authority from heaven? What will that look like for you today?

Hands: Think about the way you react to Jesus’ words, for example his teaching that we should honour our parents (15:4). What does your reaction reveal about the way you view Jesus? What would it look like to respect and fear him rightly?

Lord, I recognise that if you are from heaven, I must obey your words. Please forgive me for...

Please change my view of you so that I love to listen and do what you say. I long for the day when your kingdom comes and everyone respects and fears you rightly. In the meantime please help me not to be so fearful of others, like...

Instead help me stand up for what I believe. Amen.
The Jewish leaders know much about God. They say they will obey him – ‘I will, sir.’ They honour him with their lips, but their hearts are far from him (15:8). They do not do what they say; they do not practise what they preach; they do not bear fruit in keeping with repentance. So far in Matthew’s Gospel Jesus has likened them to fig trees bearing no fruit; to seed falling on a path, snatched away by the birds; to bad trees producing bad fruit; to wolves in sheep’s clothing. And there’s more criticism to come!

All this is perfectly summed up in Jesus’ pet name for them: ‘you hypocrites’. ‘Hypocrite’ is a word taken from the theatre, meaning actors on a stage. They put on a mask – in the Jewish leaders’ case, the mask of obedience. The mask hides their true identity: that they are disobedient with hearts far from God. They know so much about God – like the son who promised he would go and work, but then did not do so. They know all about Jesus, but they will not repent and believe.

The second group of people are those who say they won’t, but do. Through Matthew’s Gospel we have met many unlikely candidates for the kingdom. Jesus sums them up in verses 31–32: ‘the tax collectors and prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you. For John came to you [as we saw right back in chapter 3] to show you the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and prostitutes did. And even after you saw this, you did not repent and believe him.’

The two sons in this story help us make sense of all the contrasting responses to Jesus we see throughout the pages of Matthew’s Gospel. We see there are two types of people. The first are those who say they will, but don’t.

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Study 5...

THAT’S NOT MY PEOPLE

... they don’t want a King

Pray, asking God to help you understand his word

Read Matthew 21:33–46

Jesus illustrates this next story so perfectly that you don’t need any of my crazy stories about kids, headmasters or hypocrites. Suffice to say that imagine you had built a beautiful garden, carefully grown fruit which was of great value; painstakingly built a wall all the way around it to protect it from intruders; installed all the equipment you needed to harvest and make the most of the fruit in it; and built a watchtower from which you could guard it. Would you be wrong to expect those you hired to look after it and give you a share of the produce?

God had entrusted his vineyard – the nation of Israel, with its city and temple – to the chief priests and the Pharisees as the leaders. They were to bear fruit for him, teaching the people to love the Lord their God.

Head: What do the tenants do instead in verse 35?

In Jesus’ parable the landowner sends last of all his son. ‘They will respect my son,’ he declares (verse 37). What do they do with him? The servants kill him. That murderous plot is in the heart of the chief priests and teachers of the law from as early as Matthew 12:14. Even this is just as God promised, as recorded for us in Psalm 118:22: ‘The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. Truly Jesus is the stone that divides.

The religious leaders are the ones who should recognise Jesus for who he is (Just like builders know their stones, the religious should recognise their King.) They should be able to recognise the perfect cornerstone. But instead they reject him and set out to kill him. As they do, they seal their own fate: they will be ‘crushed’ (verse 44).

In contrast ‘Anyone who falls on this stone’ – that is, those who are willing to fall at the feet of Jesus – ‘will be broken to pieces’ (verse 44). This is a way of describing what it means to be humbled. Our ego, our pride and our dreams of being the greatest are broken to pieces as we fall on Jesus. Like our King we will even give up our lives. That is what it looks like to truly sing and live ‘hosanna’ to Jesus the King!

Heart: Imagine you were a newspaper reporter, looking at your life and writing about whether you follow Jesus.

What would the newspaper report conclude? Are you living for Jesus your King, or trying to get rid of him?

Hands: What could it look like for you to be broken and humbled, singing hosanna to Jesus your King?

My Father in heaven, thank you that this world is yours. I know that means I should live a life that bears fruit for you – praying and praising you. I confess that sometimes I live as if I want to get rid of Jesus. I don’t want to obey him in the areas of

Please break me, humble me and give me the simplicity of those little children shouting ‘hosanna’ to Jesus the King! I especially find this hard with

– please help me! Amen
hands.’ Later in verse 14 we read, ‘they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb’. The blood of the Lamb is Jesus’ death. When we repent and believe in him and his death in our place, he washes us and gives us his perfect clothes.

The problem with the Jews is they claim to belong to the kingdom but refuse to accept the invitation. That means their ‘clothes’ are not acceptable. The problem with the tax collectors and prostitutes is perhaps more obvious – there is no way they will be allowed in unless Jesus gives them new, spotless clothing.

In these Bible reading notes we will start to have some studies where you use a standard set of questions to understand the passage for yourself. At the end of the questions we will always say, ‘If you can’t understand a passage, don’t panic! Find the most obvious thing the passage is saying.’

Verses 11–13 are a good place to apply this rule. They are a bit confusing, but it seems that the most obvious thing Jesus is saying is that there will be no one in heaven who got in another way. No one will manage to sneak through in their own ‘clothes’. The only way we can be accepted into heaven is if we respond rightly to Jesus. The man without wedding clothes is proof to us that there is no back door into heaven. We can only enter through accepting the invitation from God through his messengers (the prophets, John the Baptist, ultimately his Son – 21:37).

Heart: What other ways do people think there are to get into heaven? What is Jesus’ warning in verses 11–13?

In the end the wedding banquet is full. It’s been quite a saga, full of irony, so is definitely a good movie plot. The people who look like they should belong, refuse. They don’t come. The people who don’t deserve to come, end up belonging. Belonging to the banquet isn’t on the basis of how good or religious we are, but is entirely dependent on responding to Jesus. The plot twist at the end is that over all of this apparently bad party planning, God was in control all along. Many are invited but few are chosen.

Hands: How would you respond if Jesus asked you, ‘How did you get in here, friend?’ What is your story of responding to Jesus’ call? Have you ever repented and believed?

Pray, asking God to help you understand his word
Read Matthew 22:1–14
In this next parable the banquet is an Old Testament picture of what heaven will be like when we finally see our King face to face. We will enjoy being in a relationship with him forever. This wedding planning all goes a bit crazy though – the guests who were invited make excuses as to why they cannot come. So the servants go out into the streets and gather all the people they can find. It sounds a bit like a plot for a movie!

Heart: Who are the people in verse 5?

Head: Can you see the progressive hardening of their hearts? What is the difference in their response from verse 3, to verse 5, to verse 6? How do we see that mirrored in the Pharisees throughout Matthew’s Gospel?

Heart: When the king comes in to see the guests, what does he find in verse 12? What’s the problem?

The king’s standards remain the same, whoever you are. You need to be wearing wedding clothes at the wedding banquet. In Revelation 7:9 John sees a vision of heaven (which is what this banquet pictures) ‘there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands.’ Later in verse 14 we read, ‘they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb’. The blood of the Lamb is Jesus’ death. When we repent and believe in him and his death in our place, he washes us and gives us his perfect clothes.

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Hands: How would you respond if Jesus asked you, ‘How did you get in here, friend?’ What is your story of responding to Jesus’ call? Have you ever repented and believed?
Head: What is the heart of the Sadducees’ problem (verse 29)? Do we see that attitude today?

The Sadducees are not just wrong about the power of God in the resurrection. They obviously don’t know their Scriptures if they cannot see how plainly it speaks of resurrection – as Jesus proves by quoting Exodus 3:6 (in verse 32). God is not the God of the dead. He does not say, ‘I was the God of Abraham’ and others. He says, ‘I am’ their God. He is still Abraham’s God because Abraham is not dead.

The crowd are astonished, but I imagine the Sadducees were annoyed. No one likes to be proved wrong!

Heart: How would you feel if Jesus said verse 29 to you? Are you willing to accept that some of your understanding might be wrong?

Hands: How do the crowds respond? Are they ready to let Jesus explain things to them? Are you? Here’s a challenge: why not ask Jesus to reveal where you might be in error in your understanding?

... he points out my error

Pray, asking God to help you understand his word

Read Matthew 22:15–33

‘I not wong!’ In volume 2 I mentioned this saying of my nephew. He is so cute, especially with the little lisp. But no one likes to be proved wrong, whether aged 3, 33 or 103, as the next three encounters show.

Head: What are the Pharisees’ and Sadducees’ intentions in this next set of encounters (verse 15)?

Jesus is not taken in – he sees exactly what the Pharisees and Sadducees are doing. In questioning him about taxes they think they have backed him into a corner he cannot get out of. They try to trap him about paying taxes, but Jesus turns it back on them. Not only is his answer profound but in his very response he cuts to the heart of the issue: they are to give to God what is due to him as their Lord.

Jesus – who is at the heart of God’s plan for his vineyard and his world, and the very heir – is the One they are trying to trap so they can get rid of him. They are just like the son who flatters his father with the words ‘I will, sir’, but then doesn’t obey. They will not obey and worship God, even though they say they do. They are simply hypocrites, covering up their evil intent with a mask of obedience.

Amazed at Jesus’ answer, the Pharisees go away from him. How sad. They are not willing to repent and believe, even though Jesus is so obviously right.

In the second of these exchanges, verses 23–33, Matthew points out from the outset of the debate that the Sadducees don’t believe in the resurrection. They present Jesus with a fictional scenario to try to prove to him that the resurrection doesn’t fit with the law.

Head: What are they doing in verse 16?

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Lord, I am sorry when I come to you thinking I already understand. Help me to be astonished by you – to recognise you are powerful, not me. Help me to be ready to ask you for the help I need when I don’t understand your word. Amen.
At Christmas my family got a camera trap. It's really fun. You set it up and lay bait for animals, then when the trap senses movement it switches on and films them. It revealed all sorts of unexpected goings on (though my Dad is not best pleased to discover how many mice there are running loose in his garden!). In this third encounter the Pharisees and Sadducees (who are a bit obsessed with keeping the law) are laying another trap for Jesus (see verse 15). They put out the bait and wait to see what he will say.

In this study we will begin using the questions I mentioned in study 6. Before you start, remember that you must first ask God to help you understand what he is saying through his word. Jesus tells us that we need God to reveal his truths to us (Matthew 11:25-27). We cannot work them out by ourselves, no matter how wise or learned we are.

Head: What does the passage say?
Read it out loud, looking for any repeated words/ideas.

Head: What is the structure of the passage – what are the scenes? Are there any surprises?

Heart: What would it have meant to those who first heard it? (Shocking, amazing, challenging?)

Heart: What does it teach me about God – the Father, Jesus the Son and the Holy Spirit?

Our Father in Heaven, thank you that I can come to you as a child and that you are powerful to help.
Thank you that your name is great, not mine. Thank you that you are

I long for your kingdom to come, when I will perfectly obey you and everything will be put right.

I know I have not obeyed you. Forgive me for

Please give me what I need today

Please protect me from

I don't have the power to do this, but you do. Help me glorify you today, my King. Amen.
He signs his own death warrant as he says to them, ‘you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven’ (26:64).

Their response to him is so sad. They are amazed and astonished. They can see he is telling the truth. But they are silenced. Stubbornly they refuse to respond in their wonder by repenting and believing. They will not call him ‘Lord’.

Heart: Jesus is amazing, astonishing, but is he your Lord?

Hands: What would it mean for you to call him ‘Lord’ like David did?

Now Jesus turns the tables on the Pharisees. ‘What do you think about the Messiah? Whose son is he?’ (verse 42). (Messiah means the King God promised to send.)

‘The son of David,’ they reply. Simple. Ask us another question...

Then Jesus asks how David calls him ‘Lord’ in Psalm 110 (a psalm well-known for being about the Messiah).

The Pharisees and Sadducees know that the Messiah is going to be David’s son. This means David would always be greater than the Messiah – because in those days the father of a family was always considered greater/more important than the son. So how can David refer to him as his ‘Lord’?

Jesus himself is pointing out something that seems to be a contradiction. Of course we know that Jesus is David’s son – Matthew shows us this at the beginning of his Gospel. Jesus is also the Son of God, as Matthew has told us time and again – such as in Matthew 1, when Mary becomes pregnant even though she is a virgin, and in chapters 3 and 17. So Jesus is both the son of David and the Son of God. That is how the Messiah can be both David’s son and be his Lord (that is, greater than him).

Why can’t the Pharisees explain this to Jesus? Because they refuse to accept that he is the Messiah!

Head: Will the Pharisees call Jesus ‘Lord'? What do they do instead?

The debate is over. Jesus has silenced his opponents. They will not be able to trap him in his words. In fact we find in Matthew 26:59–60 they cannot find any false evidence against him either. In the end Jesus has to give them the evidence they need to condemn him.

The Pharisees cannot trap Jesus. All his words are true. He perfectly fulfils every part of Scripture they can throw at him.

Their response to him is so sad. They are amazed and astonished. They can see he is telling the truth. But they are silenced. Stubbornly they refuse to respond in their wonder by repenting and believing. They will not call him ‘Lord’.

Heart: Jesus is amazing. astonishing. but is he your Lord?

Head: Why do you think Matthew includes the whole of Psalm 110:1? In what ways do we see the Lord putting his enemies under his feet?

Head: What is the warning here for those who are his enemies?

I want to willingly love you with all my heart. rather than being forced to submit to you as Lord when you put your enemies under your feet. Amen.

Lord, I want to worship you like David did. Please forgive me for those times when I’m your enemy, not wanting to submit to you and listen to your teaching. Please humble me and show me where I am wrong, especially in those areas where I find it hard to obey Jesus.

He knows more than me

Pray, asking God to help you understand his word

Read Matthew 22:41–46

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