

FACE TO FACE

DIVINE ENCOUNTERS

Matthew's Story

Focus Face-to-face encounters with Jesus are meant to be shared with our friends.

Open If you were to host a party this week, who would you invite?

Read We learn from the story of Jesus' disciple, Matthew, about how to lead our friends to Jesus. Matthew's story began when Jesus saw Matthew (Matthew 9:9–13). Jesus wasn't looking at Matthew's sinful past or how He could condemn Matthew (John 3:17). The same is true for us—Jesus doesn't want to condemn us but to have relationship with us.

Matthew's life changed when he followed Jesus. He laid down his wealth and his old way of life to follow Him. Matthew was not motivated by a religious obligation when he left everything behind, but by the love that Jesus displayed. Matthew's story shows us that Jesus didn't come to change our behavior, but to love us for all eternity.

Matthew's story also teaches us a strategy of how to lead our friends to Jesus. Matthew refused to be like the Pharisees, who judged people and isolated themselves from "sinners." As Christians, we are called to hate the sin of the world, but to love sinners (1 John 2:15; 1 Corinthians 5:9–11).

Matthew brought the sinners to Jesus. He hosted a party at his house, invited all his friends, and introduced them to Jesus. Matthew's story challenges us: are we loving lost people and bringing them to Jesus?

Matthew's story also challenges some of our modern methods of evangelism. Matthew led his friends to an encounter with Jesus. Are we so focused on getting people to make a decision for Christ that we rush the

process? Jesus calls us to a lifelong, eternal relationship with Him, not a quick decision that is made under pressure. Our job is to keep leading our friends to Jesus by loving them, even if it takes a long time.

Talk

1. In this story, who do you most relate to? Matthew? The Pharisees? Or Matthew's sinner friends?
2. Read John 3:17. As a follower of Jesus, do you ever struggle with feeling condemned? Where does condemnation come from? Read Romans 8:1–2. How do we overcome our struggles with condemnation?
3. Tell your story: who first led you to an encounter with Jesus by demonstrating His love to you?
4. Pastor Preston made this statement: "If all the people I love, love Jesus, then I don't love enough people, and I don't understand the love of Jesus." Discuss this thought with the group.
5. What are some practical ways we can show love to our friends who don't know Jesus? Use examples from your own life.

Live

Where are you right now in loving people who don't know Jesus? Are you isolated from them? Are you actively leading them to Jesus? Are you becoming discouraged as you wait for someone you love to decide to follow Jesus? Ask a friend to pray for you and some of your unsaved friends.

Pray

Thank You, Jesus, that You didn't condemn us—that You came to save us. We praise You, God, for Your transforming love and power. Holy Spirit, please help us to see the people that You want us to love. Show us how much You love them and how to lead them to You.