

“The Word, the World, and the Worries” Discussion Guide

Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

Opening Prayer

Lord Jesus, give us ears to hear. Soften what has become hard, deepen what has remained shallow, and show us what may be crowding your word out of our lives. Help us receive the word of your kingdom with humble hearts so that it takes root and bears fruit. Amen.

Read Matthew 13:1-9

Observe the Text

1. Where is Jesus when he begins teaching?
2. Who gathers around him?
3. Why does Jesus get into a boat?
4. What does the sower do?
5. Where do the seeds fall?
6. What happens to the seed that falls along the path?
7. What happens to the seed that falls on rocky ground?
8. What happens to the seed that falls among thorns?
9. What happens to the seed that falls on good soil?
10. What different levels of harvest are produced?
11. How does Jesus conclude the parable in verse 9?

Interpret the Parable

12. Why do you think Jesus uses the common image of a farmer scattering seed?
13. What is significant about the same sower scattering the same kind of seed onto different soils?
14. What does the variety of soils suggest about the different ways people respond to Jesus?
15. Why might Jesus describe the response to the kingdom as something that grows gradually rather than something that appears instantly?
16. What do you think Jesus means when he says:

“He who has ears, let him hear”?

17. What is the difference between physically hearing Jesus and truly hearing him?

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Read Matthew 13:10-17

These verses are not included in the main reading, but they help explain why Jesus speaks in parables.

Observe

18. What question do the disciples ask Jesus?
19. What does Jesus say has been given to the disciples?
20. What does Jesus say about those who see but do not truly see and hear but do not truly hear?
21. Which Old Testament prophet does Jesus quote?
22. According to verse 15, what has happened to the people's hearts?

Interpret

23. How can parables both reveal truth and expose resistance?
24. Why are humility and openness important for understanding the kingdom?
25. What does the phrase "understand with their heart" suggest about biblical understanding?
26. How are hearing, understanding, turning, and healing connected in Jesus' quotation from Isaiah?

Read Matthew 13:18-23

The Seed Along the Path

Matthew 13:18-19

Observe

27. What does Jesus call the seed?
28. What happens when someone hears the word of the kingdom but does not understand it?
29. Who snatches away what was sown?
30. Where does Jesus say the word had been sown?

Interpret

31. What is "the word of the kingdom"?
32. Why is it important that Jesus describes the message as the word of a kingdom rather than simply moral advice?

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- 33. What does “understand” mean in this passage?
- 34. How is biblical understanding different from merely knowing information about the Bible?
- 35. How might familiarity with Scripture sometimes keep us from hearing it with fresh attention?

Reflect and Apply

- 36. Have you ever heard a passage so many times that you stopped expecting it to challenge you?
- 37. Where might you be around the Word without truly placing yourself under the Word?
- 38. When was the last time Scripture changed your mind, corrected you, or led you to act differently?
- 39. What habits or attitudes can make a heart hard toward the word of Jesus?

The Seed on Rocky Ground

Matthew 13:20-21

Observe

- 40. How does this person initially respond to the word?
- 41. What is missing beneath the surface?
- 42. How long does the response last?
- 43. What causes the person to fall away?
- 44. According to Jesus, why do tribulation or persecution arise?

Interpret

- 45. Why is joy not enough by itself to sustain discipleship?
- 46. What is the difference between quick growth and deep roots?
- 47. What kinds of pressure reveal whether faith is deeply rooted?
- 48. How does Matthew 10 help us understand the cost of following Jesus?
- 49. Why do you think spiritual excitement can sometimes be mistaken for spiritual maturity?

Reflect and Apply

- 50. Have you experienced a season of spiritual excitement that later became difficult to sustain?
- 51. What ordinary practices help the word grow deeper roots?
- 52. Which practices are most important in your present season: prayer, Scripture, worship, Christian community, service, confession, or something else?
- 53. Do you tend to follow Jesus most faithfully when you feel inspired, or have you learned to remain faithful when the emotion is gone?

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54. Where might Jesus be inviting you to grow deeper rather than simply seek another spiritual high?

The Seed Among Thorns

Matthew 13:22

Observe

55. What two things does Jesus say choke the word?
56. What is the final result?
57. Does the person reject the word immediately?

Interpret

58. Why might the thorny soil be more difficult to recognize than the path or rocky soil?
59. What are “the cares of the world”?
60. Why does Jesus describe riches as deceitful?
61. What kinds of promises does wealth make?
62. How can good things become spiritually dangerous when they become ultimate things?
63. Why do the thorns not have to oppose the seed in order to choke it?

Reflect and Apply

64. What concerns or anxieties occupy the most space in your mind?
65. Are there responsibilities that have grown so large that they are crowding out trust in Jesus?
66. Which good things are most likely to grow wild in your life?

Consider:

- Family
- Work
- House or land
- Retirement
- Sports and activities
- School schedules
- Comfort
- Community reputation
- Political concern
- Financial security
- Entertainment
- Busyness

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- 67. What does money promise you when you feel insecure?
- 68. Where do you most often look for safety, control, or identity?
- 69. Is your family ordered beneath King Jesus, or is Jesus sometimes fitted around the family schedule?
- 70. What are your choices teaching your children or younger people about what matters most?
- 71. Does Jesus regularly challenge your political assumptions, or do you mainly notice the parts of Jesus that confirm what you already believe?
- 72. What voices shape your fears, hopes, enemies, and imagination most strongly?
- 73. What may need to be trimmed back so the word of the kingdom has room to grow?

The Seed on Good Soil

Matthew 13:23

Observe

- 74. What three things describe the person represented by good soil?
- 75. What follows understanding?
- 76. Does every fruitful person produce the same amount?
- 77. What remains true despite the different harvest amounts?

Interpret

- 78. What does the movement below teach us?

Hears → Understands → Bears Fruit

- 79. Why is understanding incomplete if it never affects the heart or life?
- 80. What does it mean for the word to take root?
- 81. What kind of fruit does Matthew's Gospel lead us to expect?
- 82. Why do you think Jesus allows for different measures of fruitfulness?
- 83. How can comparison distract us from faithfulness?

Reflect and Apply

- 84. Where can you already see the word of Jesus bearing fruit in your life?
- 85. Where is Jesus making you more merciful, patient, generous, truthful, forgiving, humble, courageous, or faithful?
- 86. Which kind of kingdom fruit seems most needed in your life right now?
- 87. How might fruitfulness look different in different people, families, ages, or seasons of life?
- 88. What would it mean to receive the word more deeply this week?

Connecting the Whole Passage

- 89. What do all four soils have in common?
- 90. What is different about the way each soil responds?
- 91. What does this parable teach us about the power of the word?
- 92. What does it teach us about human response?
- 93. Why should mixed responses not cause disciples to lose confidence in the seed?
- 94. How does the parable challenge people who have been around Scripture for many years?
- 95. Which soil feels most familiar in your present season?
- 96. Can different areas of one person's life resemble different soils?
- 97. Why is this parable better used for self-examination than for labeling other people?
- 98. What would it look like for a church, family, or small group to cultivate good soil together?

The Way of Jesus

Throughout this series, we have been asking five questions.

1. What kind of thing is this?

How does recognizing this as a parable affect the way we read it? What does the story reveal indirectly that a simple command might not?

2. Where am I in the story?

Where do you recognize hardness, shallowness, crowdedness, or fruitfulness in your own life?

3. What echoes does this text carry?

How do Isaiah 6, Proverbs 2, and Matthew's earlier teaching about fruit help us understand the parable?

4. What does this reveal about God and King Jesus?

What does the generous scattering of the kingdom word show us about Jesus? What does the parable teach us about the power and purpose of his word?

5. How is this forming me into the way of Jesus?

What is one specific way you can make room for the word to go deeper and bear fruit?

Closing Prayer

Lord Jesus, thank you that the seed is good and that you continue to speak the word of your kingdom. Forgive us when we allow your word to remain on the surface, when we depend on excitement without growing roots, or when worries and good things grow so large that they crowd you out.

Break up the hard ground.

Drive our roots deeper.

Pull the thorns.

Make our hearts good soil.

Help us hear your word, understand it with our hearts, and bear fruit that reflects your kingdom.
Amen.