

## **Week 2: Matthew 13-24**

### **Study Guide for the week of January 10-16, 2011**

#### **Personal reflection / journaling exercise**

This week spend time reflecting on Matthew 13:1-23

Gardeners know that soil is rarely what they wish it would be, so they get to work to pull weeds, dig out rocks, and add compost to prepare it for seeds. In this parable, Jesus compares the state of our heart to the soil in a farmer's field. How is the soil of your heart these days? What could you do to open your heart more to God, the Great Gardener, to improve the soil? Is your heart hard, like a path beaten into the dirt that doesn't allow the rain to penetrate and water the soil? If so, what do you need to do to learn more about God and his character to soften your heart? List those things that could help (regular prayer, Bible reading, meeting with a small group or spiritual friend, taking a class, serving others) and commit to filling yourself with things of God so there is no room for Satan to deceive you. Is your heart shallow, like soil that's filled with rocks that don't allow for roots to reach down deep? If so, what can you do to deepen and grow your faith? List those things that could help and commit to maturing in your faith so you may stand firm when the storms of life rage. Is your heart crowded out with the weeds of worry, scarcity, fear, sin, "me-ism," or all the other "-isms" that would choke life from you? If so, what can you do to weed out those things that would choke life from you? List those things that could help you commit to making the pursuit of God and his Kingdom your priority, so the fruit God has created you to produce crowds out the weeds.

#### **Discussion starters**

*If you are leading a small group, may not have time for all of these questions. Pick the ones that will work best for your group.*

1. Ice breaker question: As a child, what was a favorite story that you enjoyed? Is there a story you have enjoyed reading to children?
2. *(This question will be asked each week at the start of the discussion on the Bible readings for the week.)* Was there something that jumped out at you, surprised you, encouraged you, or disturbed you from the readings this last week (or two)? Why?
3. Matthew 13:1-9 Some have said that God is the farmer, the seed is God's word of salvation in Christ, and the whole field represents the whole world. The farmer seems carelessly liberal in the way he scatters the seed. What does this say about the way God has given out salvation to the world?
4. Matthew 13:13-23 Jesus uses the word from the prophets (Jeremiah 5:21, Ezekiel 12:2, Isaiah 6:9-10) to explain why he speaks in parables. Compare these prophetic words to Jesus' explanation of the Parable of the Sower (compare v.13 with v.19; v. 14 with vss.20-21; v.15a with v.22; v.15b with v.23). What comparisons do you see and how does this apply to us?
5. Matthew 13:44-46 In The Cost of Discipleship, Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote, "Costly grace is the treasure hidden in the field; for the sake of it a man will gladly go and sell all that he has. It is the pearl of great price to buy, for which the merchant will sell all of his goods." How valuable to you is the grace of God that has given you forgiveness, new life, and eternal life? What would you be willing to give up to keep this treasure?
6. Matthew 13:47-50 In his The Parables of the Kingdom, Robert Capon uses what Jesus said in John 12:31-33 to understand the Parable of the Net. Explain any connection you see between the two passages.
7. Matthew 14:13-35 *If possible, get copy of Willow Creek drama of Feeding of the 5000 and walking on water for group to watch.* The accounts of the Feeding of the Five Thousand and Walking on Water are examples of Jesus shocking his followers with what he could do. These are stories of doubt turning into belief. Peter's beginning to sink is an example of

even after we have faith, we have fears and doubts. What are some ways that Jesus has turned your doubt into faith by what he has done? Spiritually, where is Jesus calling you step out of the boat (your comfort zone) and walk in faith with him? Where do you still find yourself sinking in trusting Jesus?

8. Matthew 16:5-12 What is the simple event Jesus uses here as a “teachable moment” to instruct the disciples on something far more important? Jesus often did this and He still does. Can you recall an experience that you have had where, through the Holy Spirit, Jesus taught you something of importance?
9. Matthew 16:13-23 How would you describe the abrupt contrast between Peter’s two encounters with Jesus (verses 15-19 compared with 22-23)? Have you had an experience like Peter’s, where in one moment or day you seem so connected to Jesus and His will for you, but in the next moment or day you seem so disconnected? Describe it.
10. Matthew 18:15-17 What are the three steps to conflict resolution Jesus teaches his followers? Why do you think it’s important to approach a person who wronged you in private and by only yourself? What is your usual first step in conflict resolution? How is Jesus’ way better than yours (if they differ)?

### **Caring Time**

It is important to make time in your group to care for each other. Sometimes that happens during the discussion and sometimes it is best to end the time together with a question like this:

- What prayer needs or praises would like to share?

Also encourage people in the group to get together outside of the group time to foster deeper friendships with each other. Remember that small groups is primarily about sharing life together. It has been said that the most important time in small groups is the time people connect outside of the meeting time.

### **Bible verse to memorize: Matthew 22:37-40**