



*Thy kingdom come.
Thy will be done
On earth as it is in heaven. (Matthew 6:10)*

This is the prayer of the church.

This is the longing of every believer.

This is the hope for the world.

The Old Testament promised a kingdom on earth to the nation of Israel. This would be a kingdom ruled by the Messiah, inhabited by the saints, and freed from the curse of sin on the earth.

*The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb,
The leopard shall lie down with the young goat,
The calf and the young lion and the fatling together;
And a little child shall lead them.*

...

*They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain,
For the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord
As the waters cover the sea. (Isaiah 11:6, 9)*

But the Messiah came.

And this kingdom did not come to earth.

Why?

This would be the question on every Jewish person's mind. "How could Jesus be the Messiah if He came to earth and failed to establish His kingdom on earth?"

The Gospel of Matthew answers this question.

Messiah did come.

Messiah did offer the kingdom to Israel.

But Israel rejected it...just as the wilderness generation rejected the Promised Land though they were right on the edge of it.

Israel's rejection brought about not only the sacrificial death of the Messiah for the sins of the world but also the postponement of the Messianic kingdom on earth.

We live in the "pause"—the time between the first and second comings of the Messiah.

If Jesus would have set up His righteous kingdom during His first coming, then none of us would have qualified for it. We needed a Savior for our sins before we needed a King over the earth. So now, Jesus is filling His kingdom with those who are willing to receive Him as their Savior and Lord.

And one day soon He will come back to establish His promised kingdom on earth.

Matthew 13-16 teaches us what life will be like on this earth in the meantime.

To understand Matthew 13-16, we must first understand the gospel of Matthew.

AUTHOR: Matthew (Jewish name, Levi). Matthew was a tax collector (10:3), a despised profession among the Jews (5:46; 9:11; 11:19; 18:17; 21:31-32; Luke 18:11). He was probably a wealthy man based on the large banquet he was able to host for his friends (Luke 5:29). In Matthew 9:9, Jesus told him, "Follow Me," and Matthew followed Jesus immediately and wholeheartedly.

Matthew's training and vocation as a tax gatherer would have uniquely equipped him not only with the languages of Galilee but with an orderly mind and the habit of jotting down notes. (D. A. Carson)

DATE: The early church considered the Gospel of Matthew as the first gospel, written possibly as early as AD 40. More recent Bible scholars view Mark as the first gospel and thus date Matthew later, sometime between AD 50-70. The evidence seems to indicate that Matthew was written no later than AD 70 when Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans (cf. Matthew 4:5, 27:53).

According to the unanimous testimony of the early church, Matthew was the first gospel written. The church father Eusebius places the date of the gospel of Matthew in A.D. 41. (Don Stewart)

PURPOSE: Matthew wrote primarily with a Jewish audience in mind, seeking to demonstrate that Jesus is the prophesied King and Messiah of the Old Testament. There are 54 direct quotations of the OT and as many as 262 allusions to the OT in Matthew (*UBS Greek New Testament*). Matthew also wrote to strengthen the early church as they fulfilled the Great Commission.

During the first three centuries of the church, Matthew was the most highly revered and frequently quoted canonical Gospel. (D. A. Carson)

Of all the NT Writings, Matthew was the one whose literary influence was the most widespread and the most profound in Christian literature that extended into the last decades of the second century... Matthew's Gospel was the normative fact of Christian life. It created the background for ordinary Christianity. (Edouard Massaux)

Together, the four Gospels present a fuller picture of the identity and life of Jesus Christ.

	MATTHEW	MARK	LUKE	JOHN
Jesus	King	Servant	Son of Man	Son of God
Genealogy	Son of David	None	Son of Adam	Eternal
Audience	Jews	Romans	Greeks	Universal
Emphasis	Sermons	Miracles	Parables	Signs
Rev 4:7	Lion	Ox	Man	Flying Eagle

OUTLINE:

- I. The Preparation of the King (1:1-4:11)**
 - A. The King's Birth (1:1-25)
 - B. The King's Epiphany (2:1-23)
 - C. The King's Messenger (3:1-17)
 - D. The King's Test (4:1-11)

- II. The Proclamation of the King (4:12-16:20)**
 - A. The King's Message (4:12-7:29)
 - B. The King's Power (8:1-11:1)
 - C. The King's Opposition (11:2-12:50)
 - D. The King's Rejection (13:1-16:20)

- III. The Passion of the King (16:21-28:20)**
 - A. The King's Instruction (16:21-25:46)
 - B. The King's Crucifixion (26:1-27:66)
 - C. The King's Resurrection (28:1-15)
 - D. The King's Commission (28:16-20)

The Gospel of Matthew contains five major sermons or discourses of Jesus. The center sermon (Matthew 13) represents a key chapter in understanding the nature of the Messianic kingdom in this present age. In fact, the whole gospel can be outlined with this chapter at the center.

- A. Demonstration of Jesus' Qualifications as King (ch. 1-4)
- B. **Sermon on the Mount: Who Can Enter the Kingdom?** (ch. 5-7)
- C. Miracles and Instruction (ch. 8-9)
- D. **Instruction to the Twelve: Authority and Message for Israel** (ch. 10)
- E. Opposition: The Nation's Rejection of the King (ch. 11-12)
- F. **Parables of the Kingdom: The Kingdom Postponed** (ch. 13)
- E'. Opposition: The Nation's Rejection of the King (ch. 14-17)
- D'. **Instruction to the Twelve: Authority and Message for the Church** (ch. 18)
- C'. Miracles and Instruction (ch. 19-23)
- B'. **Olivet Discourse: When Will the Kingdom Come?** (ch. 24-25)
- A'. Demonstration of Jesus' Qualifications as King (ch. 26-28)

—Outline by Gary W. Derickson
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The following study guide takes you through an exploration of Matthew 13-16. The five-day format for each week is designed to enhance your Bible study.

Day 1: **OBSERVATION**. Reading the passage and observing what it says.

Day 2: **MEDITATION**. Reading key verse(s) over and over and memorizing them.

Day 3: **INTERPRETATION**. Doing a word study and/or exploring parallel passages.

Day 4: **DEVOTION**. Reading an excerpt from a classic commentary on Matthew.

Day 5: **APPLICATION**. Seeking to live out God's Word in your daily life.

We encourage you to do this study individually *and* corporately. Spending time alone in God's Word is a daily discipline that grows us in the faith. However, our spiritual growth is also connected to and lived out in community. Sharing what you are learning with others, praising God together, and loving/praying for one another are essential to our growth and to our joy.

READING THROUGH MATTHEW 11-12

Jesus has announced to the nation of Israel: *Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!* (4:17)
The twelve disciples have also gone out to the nation of Israel with this same message. (10:7)

Read Matthew 11-12 in one sitting. These two chapters will give you an idea of the response of the nation of Israel to this message. Mark key words or phrases as you read.

11 Now it came to pass, when Jesus finished commanding His twelve disciples, that He departed from there to teach and to preach in their cities.

² And when John had heard in prison about the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples ³ and said to Him, “Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?”

⁴ Jesus answered and said to them, “Go and tell John the things which you hear and see:
⁵ The blind see and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear; the dead are raised up and the poor have the gospel preached to them. ⁶ And blessed is he who is not offended because of Me.”

⁷ As they departed, Jesus began to say to the multitudes concerning John: “What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? ⁸ But what did you go out to see? A man clothed in soft garments? Indeed, those who wear soft clothing are in kings’ houses. ⁹ But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I say to you, and more than a prophet. ¹⁰ For this is he of whom it is written:

*Behold, I send My messenger before Your face,
Who will prepare Your way before You.*

¹¹ “Assuredly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist; but he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. ¹² And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force. ¹³ For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John. ¹⁴ And if you are willing to receive it, he is Elijah who is to come. ¹⁵ He who has ears to hear, let him hear!

¹⁶ “But to what shall I liken this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to their companions, ¹⁷ and saying:

*We played the flute for you,
And you did not dance;
We mourned to you,
And you did not lament.*

¹⁸ For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, ‘He has a demon.’ ¹⁹ The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, ‘Look, a glutton and a winebibber, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!’ But wisdom is justified by her children.”

²⁰ Then He began to rebuke the cities in which most of His mighty works had been done, because they did not repent: ²¹ “Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. ²² But I say to you, it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment than for you. ²³ And you, Capernaum, who are exalted to heaven, will be brought down to Hades; for if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. ²⁴ But I say to you that it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment than for you.”

²⁵ At that time Jesus answered and said, “I thank You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and prudent and have revealed them to little children. ²⁶ Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Your sight. ²⁷ All things have been delivered to Me by My Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father. Nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and the one to whom the Son wills to reveal Him. ²⁸ Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.”

12 At that time Jesus went through the grainfields on the Sabbath. And His disciples were hungry, and began to pluck heads of grain and to eat. ² And when the Pharisees saw it, they said to Him, “Look, Your disciples are doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath!”

³ But He said to them, “Have you not read what David did when he was hungry, he and those who were with him: ⁴ how he entered the house of God and ate the showbread which was not lawful for him to eat, nor for those who were with him, but only for the priests? ⁵ Or have you not read in the law that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath, and are blameless? ⁶ Yet I say to you that in this place there is One greater than the temple. ⁷ But if you had known what this means, ‘I desire mercy and not sacrifice,’ you would not have condemned the guiltless. ⁸ For the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.”

⁹ Now when He had departed from there, He went into their synagogue. ¹⁰ And behold, there was a man who had a withered hand. And they asked Him, saying, “Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?”—that they might accuse Him.

¹¹ Then He said to them, “What man is there among you who has one sheep, and if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will not lay hold of it and lift it out? ¹² Of how much more value then is a man than a sheep? Therefore, it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath.” ¹³ Then He said to the man, “Stretch out your hand.” And he stretched it out, and it was restored as whole as the other. ¹⁴ Then the Pharisees went out and plotted against Him, how they might destroy Him.

¹⁵ But when Jesus knew it, He withdrew from there. And great multitudes followed Him, and He healed them all. ¹⁶ Yet He warned them not to make Him known, ¹⁷ that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet, saying:

*18 Behold! My Servant whom I have chosen,
My Beloved in whom My soul is well pleased!
I will put My Spirit upon Him,
And He will declare justice to the Gentiles.
19 He will not quarrel nor cry out,
Nor will anyone hear His voice in the streets.
20 A bruised reed He will not break,
And smoking flax He will not quench,
Till He sends forth justice to victory;
21 And in His name Gentiles will trust.*

²² Then one was brought to Him who was demon-possessed, blind and mute; and He healed him, so that the blind and mute man both spoke and saw. ²³ And all the multitudes were amazed and said, "Could this be the Son of David?"

²⁴ Now when the Pharisees heard it they said, "This fellow does not cast out demons except by Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons."

²⁵ But Jesus knew their thoughts, and said to them: "Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and every city or house divided against itself will not stand. ²⁶ If Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then will his kingdom stand? ²⁷ And if I cast out demons by Beelzebub, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore, they shall be your judges. ²⁸ But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you. ²⁹ Or how can one enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man? And then he will plunder his house. ³⁰ He who is not with Me is against Me, and he who does not gather with Me scatters abroad.

³¹ "Therefore I say to you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven men. ³² Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven him; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven him, either in this age or in the age to come.

³³ "Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or else make the tree bad and its fruit bad; for a tree is known by its fruit. ³⁴ Brood of vipers! How can you, being evil, speak good things? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. ³⁵ A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good things, and an evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth evil things. ³⁶ But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment. ³⁷ For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned."

³⁸ Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered, saying, "Teacher, we want to see a sign from You."

³⁹ But He answered and said to them, “An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. ⁴⁰ For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. ⁴¹ The men of Nineveh will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and indeed a greater than Jonah is here. ⁴² The queen of the South will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and indeed a greater than Solomon is here.

⁴³ “When an unclean spirit goes out of a man, he goes through dry places, seeking rest, and finds none. ⁴⁴ Then he says, ‘I will return to my house from which I came.’ And when he comes, he finds it empty, swept, and put in order. ⁴⁵ Then he goes and takes with him seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter and dwell there; and the last state of that man is worse than the first. So shall it also be with this wicked generation.”

⁴⁶ While He was still talking to the multitudes, behold, His mother and brothers stood outside, seeking to speak with Him. ⁴⁷ Then one said to Him, “Look, Your mother and Your brothers are standing outside, seeking to speak with You.”

⁴⁸ But He answered and said to the one who told Him, “Who is My mother and who are My brothers?” ⁴⁹ And He stretched out His hand toward His disciples and said, “Here are My mother and My brothers! ⁵⁰ For whoever does the will of My Father in heaven is My brother and sister and mother.”

What thought or verse stands out to you after readings these two chapters? Why?

Who are the different people or groups that question or reject Jesus in these two chapters?

How does Jesus describe “this generation” in 12:39, 41-42, 45? _____

What invitation does Jesus extend to those who are weary and heavy laden (11:28-30)?

THE MYSTERIES OF THE KINGDOM

Matthew 13:1-17

DAY ONE **Observation**

In the course of one day, Jesus heals a man who is demon-possessed, blind, and mute and He is immediately attacked by the Pharisees as a demon-possessed man himself (12:22-37). Then the Pharisees demand a sign from Him—even after such a miraculous, complete healing (12:38-45)—and His own mother and brothers come to speak to Him and presumably to take Him home (12:46-49; cf. Mark 3:21). Jesus is being rejected more and more by the very people who should have received Him.

Ask God to speak to your heart as you read Matthew 13:1-17. Mark words or phrases that stand out to you. Write down the main message or your thoughts next to each paragraph.

On the same day Jesus went out of the house and sat by the sea. ² And great multitudes were gathered together to Him, so that He got into a boat and sat; and the whole multitude stood on the shore.

³ Then He spoke many things to them in parables, saying: “Behold, a sower went out to sow. ⁴ And as he sowed, some seed fell by the way-side; and the birds came and devoured them. ⁵ Some fell on stony places, where they did not have much earth; and they immediately sprang up because they had no depth of earth. ⁶ But when the sun was up they were scorched, and because they had no root they withered away. ⁷ And some fell among thorns, and the thorns sprang up and choked them. ⁸ But others fell on good ground and yielded a crop: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. ⁹ He who has ears to hear, let him hear!”

¹⁰ And the disciples came and said to Him, “Why do You speak to them in parables?”

¹¹ He answered and said to them, “Because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. ¹² For whoever has, to him more will be given, and he will have abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him. ¹³ Therefore I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. ¹⁴ And in them the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled, which says:

‘Hearing you will hear and shall not understand,
And seeing you will see and not perceive;
¹⁵ For the hearts of this people have grown dull.
Their ears are hard of hearing,
And their eyes they have closed,
Lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears,

Lest they should understand with their hearts and turn,
So that I should heal them.'

¹⁶ But blessed are your eyes for they see, and your ears for they hear;
¹⁷ for assuredly, I say to you that many prophets and righteous men
desired to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you
hear, and did not hear it. (NKJV)

What thought or verse stands out to you in Matthew 13:1-17? Why?

Complete the following sentences based on Matthew 13:1-17:

And great _____ were gathered together around Him (13:2).

Then He spoke to many things to them in _____ (13:3).

*Other seed fell on good soil and yielded a crop: some a _____,
some _____, some _____ (13:8).*

_____ are your eyes for they see and your ears for they hear (13:16).

A parable is a true-to-life story meant to teach a truth for life.

What are the four types of soils mentioned in the parable of the sower and the seed?

What is the disciples' question to Jesus (13:10)? _____

Why do you think they asked this question? _____

How would you summarize Jesus' answer to them (13:11-17)? _____

**DAY TWO
Meditation**

Quiet your heart and allow God to speak through His Word. Slowly read Matthew 13:14-16 several times. Reflect on each word. Meditate on them over and over until you memorize them.

In them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah:

*You will be ever hearing but never understanding;
you will be ever seeing but never perceiving.
For this people's heart has become calloused;
they hardly hear with their ears,
and they have closed their eyes.
Otherwise they might see with their eyes,
hear with their ears,
understand with their hearts
and turn, and I would heal them.*

But blessed are your eyes because they see, and your ears because they hear. (NIV)

Write down the observations that you can make from this passage, sketch out any images or thoughts that you have, or simply rewrite the passage below giving emphasis to key words.

Offer the passage back to God in the form of a personalized prayer.

DAY THREE Interpretation

In interpretation, you are digging deeper into the passage in order to better understand its meaning. A word study on a key word and/or looking up parallel passages can help you in your understanding.

Jesus' preaching and teaching ministry changes dramatically in Matthew 13. Jesus goes from preaching directly to the people—*Repent! For the kingdom of heaven is at hand!*—to speaking to them in parables and stories.

Go to blueletterbible.org and type "Matthew 13" into the "Search the Bible" box. Next click on Matthew 13:3 to bring up the verse in the Greek. Find the word "parables" and click on the Strong's number (G3850) to bring up the Greek word, its definition, and its usage in the NT.

What is the Greek word for "parables"? _____ (Use the transliteration.)

How many times is it used in the New Testament? _____ (See KJV Translation Count.)

How many times is it used in Matthew, Mark, and Luke? _____ (See Search Results by Book.)

What is its definition? (Note especially II. in the Outline of Biblical Usage)

Jesus uses parables both to *reveal* and to *conceal* truth. For those willing to listen, the parable opens their ears and their eyes to greater truth. To those unwilling to listen, the parable further confuses and condemns them.

In these parables, Jesus reveals the "mysteries of the kingdom."

Go to blueletterbible.org and type "Matthew 13" into the "Search the Bible" box. Next click on Matthew 13:11 to bring up the verse in the Greek. Find the word "mysteries" and click on the Strong's number (G3466) to bring up the Greek word, its definition, and its usage in the NT.

What is the Greek word for "mysteries"? _____ (Use the transliteration.)

How many times is it used in the New Testament? _____ (See KJV Translation Count.)

How many times is it used in Matthew? _____ (See Search Results by Book.)

What is its definition? (Note especially I. in the Outline of Biblical Usage)

Theologically, the word “mystery” refers to those truths that were not fully revealed in the Old Testament but that are now being revealed in the New.

Read the following passages. Mark key words or phrases as you read.

*I do not want you to be ignorant of this **mystery**, brothers and sisters, so that you may not be con-
ceited: Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in.
(Romans 11:25)*

*Now to Him who is able to establish you in accordance with my gospel, the message I proclaim
about Jesus Christ, in keeping with the revelation of the **mystery** hidden for long ages past, but
now revealed and made known through the prophetic writings by the command of the eternal God,
so that all the Gentiles might come to the obedience that comes from faith (Romans 16:25-26)*

*But we speak the wisdom of God in a **mystery**, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the
ages for our glory, which none of the rulers of this age knew; for had they known, they would not
have crucified the Lord of glory. (1 Corinthians 2:7-8)*

*Behold, I tell you a **mystery**: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed—in a moment, in the
twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised in-
corruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal
must put on immortality. So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put
on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: “Death is swallowed up in
victory.” (1 Corinthians 15:51-54)*

*I became a servant of the church according to the stewardship from God—given to me for you—in
order to complete the word of God, that is, the **mystery** that has been kept hidden from ages and
generations, but has now been revealed to His saints. God wanted to make known to them the
glorious riches of this **mystery** among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.
(Colossians 1:25-26)*

*Beyond all question, the **mystery** from which true godliness springs is great: He appeared in the
flesh, was vindicated by the Spirit, was seen by angels, was preached among the nations, was
believed on in the world, was taken up in glory. (1 Timothy 3:16)*

Write down some of the “mysteries” that have been revealed in the New Testament.

DAY FOUR Devotion

Read the following excerpt from **Matthew Henry's Exposition of the Old and New Testaments**. Matthew Henry (1662-1714) was a pastor and author from Chester, England. He is best known for his exhaustive, six-volume, verse-by-verse commentary on the Scriptures. Charles Spurgeon stated that, "Every minister ought to read it entirely and carefully through once at least."

MATTHEW 13:1-17

We have here Christ preaching, and may observe,

1. When Christ preached this sermon; it was the same day that he preached the sermon in the foregoing chapter: so unwearied was he in doing good, and working the works of him that sent him. Note, Christ was for preaching both ends of the day... Though Christ had been in the morning opposed and caviled at by his enemies, disturbed and interrupted by his friends, yet he went on with his work; and in the latter part of the day, we do not find that he met with such discouragements. Those who with courage and zeal break through difficulties in God's service, will perhaps find them not so apt to recur as they fear. Resist them, and they will flee.

2. To whom he preached; there were *great multitudes gathered together to him*, and they were the auditors; we do not find that any of the scribes or Pharisees were present. They were willing to hear him when he preached in the synagogue (12:9, 14), but they thought it below them to hear a sermon by the sea-side, though Christ himself was the preacher: and truly he had better have their room than their company, for now they were absent, he went on quietly and without contradiction. Note, Sometimes there is most of the *power* of religion where there is least of the *pomp* of it: *the poor receive the gospel...*

Note, Christ will be glorified in spite of all opposition; he will be followed.

3. Where he preached this sermon.

a. His meeting-place was the sea-side. He went out of the house (because there was no room for the auditory) into the open air. It was pity but such a Preacher should have had the most spacious, sumptuous, and convenient place to preach in, that could be devised, like one of the Roman theatres; but he was now in his state of humiliation, and in this, as in other things, he denied himself the honors due to him; as he had not a house of his own to live in, so he had not a chapel of his own to preach in. By this he teaches us in the external circumstances of worship not to covet that which is stately, but to make the best of the conveniences which God in his providence allots to us. When Christ was born, he was crowded into the stable, and now to the sea-side, upon the strand, where all persons might come to him with freedom.

b. His pulpit was a ship... No place amiss for such a Preacher, whose presence dignified and consecrated any place: let not those who preach Christ be ashamed, though they have mean and inconvenient places to preach in. Some observe, that the people stood upon dry ground and firm ground, while the Preacher was upon the water in more hazard. Ministers are most exposed to trouble. Here was a true rostrum, a ship pulpit.

4. What and how he preached.

a. He spoke many things unto them. Many more it is likely than are here recorded, but all excellent and necessary things, things that belong to our peace, things pertaining to the kingdom of heaven: they were not trifles, but things of everlasting consequence, that Christ spoke of. It concerns us to give a more earnest

heed, when Christ has so many things to say to us, that we miss not any of them.

b. What he spoke was in parables. A parable sometimes signifies any wise, weighty saying that is instructive; but here in the gospels it generally signifies a continued similitude or comparison, by which spiritual or heavenly things were described in language borrowed from the things of this life. It was a way of teaching used very much, not only by the Jewish rabbi, but by the Arabians, and the other wise men of the east; and it was found very profitable, and the more so from its being pleasant. Our Savior used it much, and in it condescended to the capacities of people...

I. We have here the general reason why Christ taught in parables. The disciples were a little surprised at it, for hitherto, in his preaching, he had not much used them, and therefore they ask, *Why do you speak to them in parables?* Because they were truly desirous that the people might hear with understanding. They do not say, *Why do you speak to us?* (they knew how to get the parables explained) but to *them*. Note: We ought to be concerned for the edification of others, as well as for our own, by the word preached; and if ourselves be *strong*, yet to *bear the infirmities of the weak*.

To this question Christ answers largely, v. 11-17, where he tells them, that *therefore* he preached by parables, because thereby the things of God were made more plain and easy to them who were willingly ignorant; and thus the gospel would be *a savor of life* to some, and *of death* to others. A parable, like the pillar of cloud and fire, turns a dark side towards Egyptians, which confounds them, but a light side towards Israelites, which comforts them, and so answers a double intention. The same light directs the eyes of some, but dazzles the eyes of others. Now,

1. This reason is laid down (v. 11): *Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given...* A parable is a shell that keeps good fruit *for* the diligent, but keeps it *from* the slothful. There are mysteries in the kingdom of heaven, and *without controversy, great is the mystery of godliness:* Christ's incarnation, satisfaction, intercession, our justification and sanctification by union with Christ, and indeed the whole work of redemption, from first to last, are *mysteries*, which could never have been discovered but by divine revelation, were at this time discovered but in part to the disciples, and will never be fully discovered till the veil shall be rent; but the mysteriousness of gospel truth should not discourage us from, but quicken us in, our enquiries after it and searches into it.

a. It is graciously given to the disciples of Christ to be acquainted with these mysteries. Knowledge is the first gift of God, and it is a distinguishing gift (Prov. 2:6); it was given to the apostles, because they were Christ's constant followers and attendants. Note, The nearer we draw to Christ, and the more we converse with him, the better acquainted we shall be with gospel mysteries.

b. It is given to all true believers, who have an experimental knowledge of the gospel, and that is without doubt the best knowledge: a principle of grace in the heart, is that which makes men of quick understanding in *the fear of the Lord*, and in the faith of Christ, and so in the meaning of parables...

c. There are those to whom this knowledge is not given, and a man can *receive nothing unless it be given him from above* (Jn. 3:27); and be it remembered that God is debtor to no man; his grace is his own; he gives or withholds it at pleasure (Rom. 11:35); the difference must be resolved into God's sovereignty, as before, Matthew 11:25-26.

2. This reason is further illustrated by the rule God observes in dispensing his gifts.

He bestows them on those who improve them, but takes them away from those who bury them. It is a rule among men, that they will rather entrust their money with those who have increased their estates by their industry, than with those who have diminished them by their slothfulness...

3. This reason is particularly explained, with reference to the two sorts of people Christ had to do with.

a. Some were willingly ignorant; and such were amused by the parables (v. 13); *because they seeing, see not.* They had shut their eyes against the clear light of Christ's plainer preaching, and therefore were now left in the dark. Seeing Christ's person, they see not his glory, see no difference between him and another man; seeing his miracles, and hearing his preaching, they see not, they hear not with any concern or application; they understand neither... There are many that see the gospel light, and hear the gospel sound, but it never reaches their hearts, nor has it any place in them. It is just with God to take away the light from those who shut their eyes against it; that such as will be ignorant, may be so; and God's dealing thus with them magnifies his distinguishing grace to his disciples.

Now in this the scripture would be fulfilled, Isa. 6:9-10. The evangelical prophet that spoke most plainly of gospel grace, foretold the contempt of it, and the consequences of that contempt...

First. A description of sinners' willful blindness and hardness, which is their sin. *This people's heart is waxed gross;* it is fattened, which denotes both sensuality and senselessness (Ps. 119:70)... When the heart is thus heavy, no wonder that the ears are dull of hearing; the whispers of the Spirit they

hear not at all; the loud calls of the word, though the word be nigh them, they regard not, nor are at all affected by them: *they stop their ears,* Ps. 58:4, 5. And because they are resolved to be ignorant, they shut both the learning senses; for their eyes also they have closed, resolved that they would not see light come into the world, when the Son of Righteousness arose, but they shut their windows, because they *loved darkness rather than light,* Jn. 3:19; 2 Pt. 3:5.

Secondly, a description of that judicial blindness, which is the just punishment of this. *"By hearing, ye shall hear, and shall not understand..."* The saddest condition a man can be in on this side hell, is to sit under the best teaching with a dead, stupid, untouched heart. To hear God's word, and see his providences, and yet not to understand and perceive his will, either in the one or in the other, is the greatest sin and the greatest judgment that can be...

Thirdly, the woeful effect and consequence of this; *Lest at any time they should see.* They will not see because they will not turn; and God says that they shall not see, because they shall not turn: *lest they should be converted, and I should heal them.*

Note, seeing, hearing, and understanding, are necessary to conversion; for God, in working grace, deals with men as men, as rational agents; he draws with the cords of a man, changes the heart by opening the eyes, and turns *from the power of Satan unto God,* by turning *from darkness to light,* (Acts 26:18).

b. Others were effectually called to be the disciples of Christ, and were truly desirous to be taught of him; and they were instructed, and made to improve greatly in knowledge, by these parables, especially when they were expounded; and by them the things of God were made more plain and easy, more

intelligible and familiar, and more apt to be remembered (13:16-17). *Your eyes see, your ears hear.* They saw the glory of God in Christ's person; they heard the mind of God in Christ's doctrine; they saw much, and were desirous to see more, and thereby were prepared to receive further instruction; they had opportunity for it, by being constant attendants on Christ, and they should have it from day to day, and grace with it. Now this Christ speaks of,

1) As a blessing; *“Blessed are your eyes for they see, and your ears for they hear; it is your happiness, and it is a happiness for which you are indebted to the peculiar favor and blessing of God... The eyes of the simplest believer that knows experimentally the grace of Christ, are more blessed than those of the greatest scholars, the greatest masters in experimental philosophy, that are strangers to God; who, like the other gods they serve, have eyes, and see not.*

Note, True blessedness is entailed upon the right understanding and due improvement of the mysteries of the kingdom of God. The hearing ear and the seeing eye are God's work in those who are sanctified; they are the work of his grace (Prov. 20:12), and they are a blessed work, which shall be fulfilled with

power, when those who *now see through a glass darkly, shall see face to face...* (1 Cor. 13:12)

2) As a transcendent blessing, desired by, but not granted to, many prophets and righteous men, 13:17. The OT saints, who had some glimpses, some glimmerings of gospel light, coveted earnestly further discoveries. They had the types, shadows, and prophecies, of those things but longed to see the Substance, that glorious end of those things which they could not steadfastly look unto; that glorious inside of those things which they could not look into. They desired to see the great Salvation, the Consolation of Israel, but did not see it, because the fullness of time was not yet come...

Those who know something of Christ, cannot but covet to know more... For the abounding of our thankfulness, and the quickening of our diligence, it is good for us to consider what means we enjoy, and what discoveries are made to us, now under the gospel, above what they had, and enjoyed, who lived under the Old Testament dispensation, especially in the revelation of the atonement for sin...

May our improvements be proportional to our advantages!

What thought from Matthew Henry's words stands out to you the most? Why?

DAY FIVE Application

Re-read Matthew 13:1-17 and consider the truths that you have learned this week. Seek to apply the message of Matthew 13:1-17 to your life.

What thought or truth impacted you this week from your study of Matthew 13:1-17?

One of the clear principles in Matthew 13:1-17 is that those who want to see more of God's truth see more of it and those who don't want to see it become more and more blind.

*Whoever has will be given more, and they will have an abundance.
Whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them. (13:12)*

On the surface, it sounds "unfair." But it is really a basic truth of life. For instance, if I want to learn more about art and I seek out art museums around me, then I will gain more and more understanding of art. But if I am uninterested in art and close my eyes to it, then I will not see it or understand it even if it passes right in front of me. What my heart wants to see, I tend to see.

So the real question is not so much "what do I see?" but "what do I *want* to see?"

If I love golf, I will tend to see golf courses around me. If I love shopping, then I will tend to see stores around me. If I love to eat, then I will tend to see restaurants around me. Our eyes (what I see) and my ears (what I listen to) reveal the true desires of my heart (what I worship).

Blessed are your eyes for they see and your ears for they hear. (13:16)

When you wake up in the morning, what do you tend to do first?

- Check my phone Turn on the news Read the paper Meditate on Scripture
 Spend time in prayer Other: _____

How do you typically respond when the Word of God is being read or taught?

- Check my phone a lot Check my watch to see how long it will take Daydream
 Listen intently Take notes Other: _____

Honestly, how hungry are you for God? _____

SUGGESTED QUESTIONS FOR GROUP OR FAMILY DISCUSSION:

The goal is not to get through all the questions but to spark discussion around the truth of Matthew 13:1-17. Use the questions below to interact together with what you learned.

- Describe a time in your life when you got distracted during an important activity or did not hear an important piece of information. What happened? What was the result?
- Honestly, how hard is it for you to read or listen to God's Word? Why?
- Based on your answer to the question above, how would you describe your heart? Is it more like a hardened road, a rocky place with little soil, a weed-filled patch of ground, or cultivated and watered soil?
- Who does Jesus say is "blessed" in this passage? Why?
- What mysteries have been revealed in the New Testament that were hidden in the Old?
- How does Matthew 13:12 strike you? Why?
- Did you discover anything new, interesting, or meaningful in your study of this passage this week? Or in your reading of Matthew Henry? If so, what?
- Take a deep breath, calm your mind, and have someone read a portion of Scripture out loud. One of the Psalms (like Psalm 16, 19, 23, 46, 51, or 130) may be good or select another portion of Scripture. Focus on truly hearing the Word of God. How difficult is it for you to concentrate and listen to God's Word? Why?
- Close your time in prayer asking God to tune your heart to hear His Word.

*Most Christians don't hear God's voice because we've already decided
that we aren't going to do what He says.*

A. W. Tozer

The heart wants what it wants, or else it does not care.

Emily Dickinson

THE PARABLE OF THE SOWER

Matthew 13:18-23

DAY ONE Observation

In Matthew 13:18-23, Jesus explains His first parable to His disciples. This parable describes the four different responses to the Word of God.

Ask God to speak to your heart as you read Matthew 13:18-23. Mark words or phrases that stand out to you. Write down the main message or your thoughts next to each paragraph.

“Therefore hear the parable of the sower:

¹⁹ When anyone hears the word of the kingdom, and does not understand it, then the wicked one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is he who received seed by the wayside.

²⁰ But he who received the seed on stony places, this is he who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; ²¹ yet he has no root in himself, but endures only for a while. For when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he stumbles.

²² Now he who received seed among the thorns is he who hears the word, and the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful.

²³ But he who received seed on the good ground is he who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and produces: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.” (NKJV)

Write down three things that you can learn about each type of soil in this parable.

<p>13:19</p> 	<p>13:22</p> 
<p>13:20-21</p> 	<p>13:23</p> 

**DAY TWO
Meditation**

Quiet your heart and allow God to speak through His Word. Slowly read Matthew 13:19-23 several times. Reflect on each word. Meditate on them over and over until you memorize them.

When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in their heart. This is the seed sown along the path.

The seed falling on rocky ground refers to someone who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away.

The seed falling among the thorns refers to someone who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, making it unfruitful.

But the seed falling on good soil refers to someone who hears the word and understands it. This is the one who produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown. (NIV)

Write down the observations that you can make from this passage, sketch out any images or thoughts that you have, or simply rewrite the passage below giving emphasis to key words.

Offer the passage back to God in the form of a personalized prayer.

DAY THREE Interpretation

In interpretation, you are digging deeper into the passage in order to better understand its meaning. A word study on a key word and/or looking up parallel passages can help you in your understanding.

Perhaps the key word in Matthew 13:18-23 is the word “hear.” It is used 18x in this chapter alone.

Go to blueletterbible.org and type “Matthew 13” into the “Search the Bible” box. Next click on Matthew 13:18 to bring up the verse in the Greek. Find the word “hear” and click on the Strong’s number (G191) to bring up the Greek word, its definition, and its usage in the New Testament.

What is the Greek word for “hear”? _____ (Use the transliteration.)

How many times is it used in the New Testament? _____ (See KJV Translation Count.)

How many times is it used in Matthew? _____ (See Search Results by Book.)

What is its definition? (Note especially II. in the Outline of Biblical Usage)

Read the following passages about the importance of hearing. Mark key phrases as you read.

***Hear,** O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. (Deuteronomy 6:4-5)*

*Come, my children, **listen** to me;
I will teach you the fear of the Lord. (Psalm 34:11)*

***Listen,** my son, accept what I say,
and the years of your life will be many.
I instruct you in the way of wisdom
and lead you along straight paths.
When you walk, your steps will not be hampered;
when you run, you will not stumble.
Hold on to instruction, do not let it go;
guard it well, for it is your life. (Proverbs 4:10-13)*

*Therefore everyone who **hears** these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. (Matthew 7:24-25)*

*Then Jesus said, “Whoever has ears to **hear**, let them **hear**.” (Mark 4:19; cf. Matt. 11:15; 13:19, 43)*

*My sheep **listen** to My voice; I know them, and they follow Me. (John 10:27)*

So, as the Holy Spirit says:
"Today, if you **hear** His voice,
do not harden your hearts
as you did in the rebellion,
during the time of testing in the wilderness..." (Hebrews 3:7-8)

My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be **quick to listen**, slow to speak and slow to become angry, because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires. (James 1:19-20)

Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone **hears** my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me. (Revelation 3:20)

What do you learn about the importance of listening from these passages?

What sets the good soil apart from the other soils is that not only does the person "hear" the word of God but they also "understand" it.

Go to blueletterbible.org and type "Matthew 13" into the "Search the Bible" box. Next click on Matthew 13:23 to bring up the verse in the Greek. Find the word "understand" and click on the Strong's number (G4920) to bring up the Greek word, its definition, and its usage in the NT.

What is the Greek word for "understand"? _____ (Use the transliteration.)

How many times is it used in the New Testament? _____ (See KJV Translation Count.)

How many times is it used in Matthew? _____ (See Search Results by Book.)

What is its definition? _____

What do you think is the difference between hearing something and truly listening to it?

DAY FOUR Devotion

Read the following excerpt from Alexander MacLaren's *Expositions of Holy Scriptures*. **Alexander MacLaren** (1826-1910) was a Baptist pastor in Manchester, England whose sermons were known for their "profundity of thought, logical arrangement, eloquence of appeal, and power over the human heart."

The first parable, which concerns us now, has been generally called the **Parable of the Sower**, but he is not the prominent figure. The subject is much rather the soils; and the intention is, not so much to declare anything about him, as to explain to the people, who were looking for the kingdom to be set up by outward means, irrespective of men's dispositions, that the way of establishing it was by teaching which needed receptive spirits.

The parable is both history and prophecy. It tells Christ's own experience, and it foretells His servants'. He is the great Sower, who has 'come forth' from the Father. His present errand is not to burn up thorns or to punish the husbandmen, but to scatter on all hearts the living seed, which is here interpreted, in accordance with the dominant idea of this Gospel, as being 'the word of the kingdom.'

All who follow Him, and make His truth known, are sowers in their turn, and have to look for the same issue of their work. The figure is common to all languages. Truth, whether intellectual, moral, or spiritual, must be deposited in the heart. Here it grows. It has a mysterious vitality, and its issue is not a manufacture, but a fruit...

We have here four sowings and one ripening—a sad proportion! We are not told that the quantity of seed was in each case the same. Rather we may suppose that much less fell on the wayside, and on the rocky soil, and among the thorns, than on the good ground. So we cannot say that seventy-five per cent, of it was wasted; but, in any case, the proportion of failure is tragically large. This Sower was under no illusion as to the result of His work.

It is folly to sow on the hard footpath, or the rocky ground, or among thorns; but Christ and His servants have to do that, in endless hope that these unreceptive hearts may become good soil. One lesson of the parable is, Scatter the seed everywhere, on the most unlikely places.

I. Our Lord begins with the case in which the seed remains quite outside the soil, or, without metaphor, in which the word finds absolutely no entrance into the heart or mind. A beaten path runs by the end, or perhaps through the middle, of the cornfield. It is of exactly the same soil as the rest, but many passengers have trodden it hard, and the very foot of the sower, as he comes and goes in his work, has helped. Some of the seed, sown broadcast, of course falls there, and lies where it falls, having no power to penetrate the hard surface. A flock of bold, hungry birds watch the sower; and, as soon as his back is turned, they are down with a swift-winged swoop, and away goes the exposed grain. So there is an end of it; and the path is as bare as ever, five minutes after it has been strewed with seeds.

The explanation is too plain to be mistaken, but we may briefly touch its main features. Notice, then, that our Lord begins with the case in which there is least contact between His word and the soul, and that, as the contact is least in degree, so it is shortest in duration. A minute or two finishes it. Notice especially that the path has been made hard by external pressure. It is not rock, but soil like the other parts of the field. It represents the case of men whose insensibility to the word is caused by outward things having made a thoroughfare of their natures, and trodden them into

incapacity to receive the message of Christ's love. The heavy baggage-wagons of commerce, the light cars of pleasure, merry dancers, and sad funeral processions, have all used that way, and each footfall has beaten the once loose soil a little firmer. We are made insensitive to the gospel by the effect of innocent and necessary things, unless we take care to plough up the path along which they travel, and to keep our spirits susceptible by a distinct effort. How many hearers of every teacher are there, who never take in his words at all, simply because they are so completely preoccupied!

Notice what becomes of the seed that lies thus bare. 'Immediately,' says Mark, 'Satan cometh.' His agents are these light-winged thoughts that flutter round the hearer as soon as the sermon or the lesson is over. Talk of the weather, criticism of the congregation, or of the sower's attitude as he flung the seed, or politics, or business, drive away the remembrance of even the text, before many of our hearers are out of sight of the church. Then the whirl of traffic begins again, and the path is soon beaten a little harder. If the seed had got ever so little way into the ground, the sharp beaks of the thieves would not have carried it off so easily. Impressions so slight as Christ's word makes on busy men are quickly rubbed out. But if the seed sown vanishes thus swiftly, the fault is not in it, but in ourselves. Satan may seek to snatch it away, but we can hinder him...

II. The next variety of soil differs from the preceding in having its hindrance deep seated. Many a hillside in Galilee—as in Scotland or New England—would show a thin surface of soil over rock, like skin stretched tightly on a bone. No roots could get through the rock nor find nourishment in it; while the very shallowness of earth and the heat of the underlying stone would accelerate growth. Such premature and feeble shoots

perish as quickly as they spring up; the fierce Eastern sun makes a speedy end of them, and a few days sees their springing and withering. It is a case of 'lightly come, lightly go.' Quick-sprouting herbs are soon-dying herbs. A shallow pond is up in waves under a breeze which raises no sea on the Atlantic, and it is calm again in a few minutes. Readily stirred emotion is transient. Brushwood catches fire easily, and burns itself out quickly...

The persons meant are those of excitable temperament, whose feelings lie on the surface, and can be got at without first passing through the understanding or the conscience. Such people are easily played on by the epidemic influence of any prevalent enthusiasm or emotion, as every revival of religion shows... Their immediate reception of it is suspicious, for it suggests that there has been no time to consult the understanding or to form a deliberate purpose; stable resolutions are slowly formed. It is the sunny side of religion which, has attracted them. They know nothing of its difficulties and depths. Hence, as soon as they find out the realities of the course which they have embraced so lightly, they desert...

The Christian life means self-denial, toil, hard resistance to many fascinations. It means sweat and blood, or it means nothing. Whether there be 'persecution' or no, there will be affliction, 'because of the word,' and all the joyful emotion will ooze out at the man's finger-ends. The same superficial excitability which determined his swift reception of the word will determine his hasty casting of it aside, and immediately he stumbles. All his acts will be done in a hurry, and none of his moods will last. Feeling is in its place down in the engine-room, but it makes a poor pilot. Very significant is that phrase, 'No root in himself.' His roots are in the accidents of the moment. His religion has never really struck root in him, but only in the

superficial layer of him. His conscience, will, understanding, are unpenetrated by its fibers. So it is easily pulled up, as well as soon withered...

III. In one part of the field was a patch where there had been a tangle of thorns, which grow luxuriantly in Palestine. These had been cut down, but not stubbed up, as is plain from the very fact that the seed reached the ground, as also from the description of them as ‘springing up.’ The two growths advance together. In this case, the seed has a longer life than in the former...

The main point here is simultaneousness of the two growths. This man is, as James calls him, a ‘double-minded man.’ He is trying to grow both corn and thorn on the same soil. He has some religion, but not enough to make thorough work of it. He is endeavoring to ride on two horses at once. Religion says ‘either—or’; he is trying ‘both—and.’ The human heart has only a limited amount of love and trust to give, and Christ must have it all. It has enough for one—that is, for Him; but not enough for two—that is, for Him and the world. This man’s religion has not been powerful enough to grub up the roots of the thorns. They were cut down when the seed was sown, for a little while, at the beginning of his course; the new life in him seemed to conquer, but the roots of the old lay hid, and, in due time, showed again above ground. ‘Ill weeds grow apace’; and these, as is their nature, grow faster than the good seed. So the only thing to do is to get them out of the ground to the last fiber.

Christ specifies what He deems thorns. We can all understand care being so called; but riches? Yes, they too have sharp prickles, as anybody will find who stuffs a pillow with them. But our Lord chooses His words to point the lesson that not outward things, but our attitude to them, make the barrenness of

this soil. It is not ‘this world,’ but ‘the care of this world,’ not ‘riches,’ but ‘the deceitfulness of riches,’ that choke the word. These two seem opposites, but they are really the same thing on two opposite sides. The man who is burdened with the cares of poverty, and the man who is deceived by the false promises of wealth, are really the same man. The one is the other turned inside out. We make the world our god, whether we worship it by saying, ‘I am desolate without thee,’ or by fancying that we are secure with it. Note that the issue in this case is—unfruitfulness. The man may, and I suppose usually does, keep up a profession of Christianity all his life. He very likely does not know that the seed is choked, and that he has become unfruitful. But he is a stunted, useless Christian, with all the sap and nourishment of his soul given to his worldly position, and his religion is a poor pining growth, with blanched leaves and abortive fruit. How much of Christ’s field is filled with plants of that sort!

IV. The parable tells us nothing about the comparative acreage of the path and the rocky and thorny soils on the one hand, and of the fertile soil on the other. It is not meant to teach the proportion of success to failure, but to exhibit the fact that the reception of the word depends on men’s dispositions. The good soil has none of the faults of the rest of the field. It is loose, and thus unlike the path; deep, and thus unlike the rocky bit; clean, and thus unlike the thorn brake. The interpretation given of it by our Lord seems at first sight incomplete. It is all summed up in one word, *understandeth*. Then, did not the second and third classes, at all events, understand? They received the word, and it had some growth in them. The distinction between them and the good-soil hearer is surely of a moral nature, rather than of so purely intellectual a kind as ‘understanding’ suggests. Hence, Luke’s keep fast

‘in an honest and good heart’ may seem a more adequate statement. But Biblical usage does not regard ‘understanding’ as a purely intellectual process, but rather as the action of the whole moral and spiritual nature. It knows nothing of dividing a man up into water-tight compartments, one of which may be full of evil, and the other clean and receptive of good. According to it, we ‘understand’ religious truth by our hearts and moral nature in conjunction with the dry light of intellect. So the word here is used in a pregnant sense, and includes the grasp of the truth with the whole being, the complete reception of the word of the kingdom not merely into the intellect, but into the central self which is the undivided fountain from which flow the issues of life, whether these be called intellect, or affection, or conscience, or will. Only he who has thus become one with the word, and housed it deep in his inmost soul, ‘understands’ it, in the sense in which our Lord here uses that expression. ‘Thy word have I hid in mine heart’ exactly corresponds to the ‘under-standing’ which is here given as the distinctive mark of the good soil.

The result of that reception into the depths of the spirit is that he ‘verily bears fruit.’ The man who receives the word is identified with the plant that springs from the seed which he receives. The life of a Christian is the result of the growth in him of a supernatural seed. He bears fruit, yet the fruit comes not from

him, but from the seed sown. ‘I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me.’ Fruitfulness is the aim of the sower, and the test of the reception of the seed. If there is not fruit, manifestly there has been no real understanding of the word. A touchstone, that, which will produce surprising results in detecting spurious Christianity, if it be honestly applied!

There is variety in the degree of fruitfulness, according to the goodness of the soil; that is to say, according to the thoroughness and depth of the reception of the word. The great Husbandman does not demand uniform fertility. He is glad when He gets an hundredfold, but He accepts sixty, and does not refuse thirty, only He arranges them in descending order, as if He would fain have the highest rate from all the plants, and, not without disappointment, gradually stretches His merciful allowance to take in even the lowest. He will accept the scantiest fruitage, and will lovingly ‘purge’ the branch ‘that it may bring forth more fruit.’

No parable teaches everything. Paths, rocks, and thorns cannot change. But men can plough up the trodden ways, and blast away the rock, and root out the thorns, and, with God’s help, can open the door of their hearts, that the Sower and His seed may enter in. We are responsible for the nature of the soil, else His warning were vain, ‘Take heed, therefore, how ye hear.’

What thought from Alexander MacLaren’s words stands out to you the most? Why?

DAY FIVE
Application

Re-read Matthew 13:18-23 and consider the truths that you have learned this week. Seek to apply the message of Matthew 13:18-23 to your life.

What thought or truth impacted you this week from your study of Matthew 13:18-23? Why?

THE PARABLE



Which of the four soils in 13:18-23 do you think best described your heart when you were a young child?

Which one described your heart as a teenager?

OF THE SOWER



Which one described your heart as a young adult?

Which one describes your heart now?

The Word of God is the seed that God uses to grow His fruit in our lives (Luke 8:11). How we listen to the Word of God when it is read or taught is a good indication of our true spiritual condition.

In what area(s) of your life are you hardened to the Word of God? What is a truth that you do not like to hear or that you find yourself resisting almost immediately? Why?

What distractions of this world keep you from listening to and studying the Word of God?

What do you need to do to cultivate better soil in your heart—soil receptive to God’s Word?

SUGGESTED QUESTIONS FOR GROUP OR FAMILY DISCUSSION:

The goal is not to get through all the questions but to spark discussion around the truth of Matthew 13:18-23. Use the questions below to interact together with what you learned.

- What is one of the first Bible verses that you can remember hearing or memorizing? Who taught you this verse? How did it impact you?
- Think of a time when someone shared a Bible verse with you that you didn't want to hear. What verse was it? How did you react? What was the end result?
- Talk about each of the four soils in this parable. What do you learn about each soil? What is one word to describe each person's heart in this parable?
- What is the difference between hearing and truly listening?
- What are the biggest challenges that we face in listening to the Word of God today?
- What other lessons can you learn about our hearts from gardening?
- Did you discover anything new, interesting, or meaningful in your study of this passage this week? Or in your reading of Alexander MacLaren? If so, what?
- Pray for someone whom you know that is resisting the Word of God in their heart. Ask God to soften their heart and to make them receptive to His truth.

The word 'listen' contains the same letters as the word 'silent.'

Alfred Brendel

People generally see what they look for, and hear what they listen for.

Harper Lee

We often miss hearing God's voice simply because we aren't paying attention.

Rick Warren



As for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it. He indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty. —Matthew 13:23

THE PARABLE OF WHEAT & WEEDS

Matthew 13:24-43

DAY ONE **Observation**

In Matthew 13:24-43, Jesus gives three more parables describing the kingdom of heaven. This is what the kingdom will look like on earth now that Messiah has been rejected by Israel. Thus, these parables, along with the rest in Matthew 13, describe the time between Christ's first and second comings.

Ask God to speak to your heart as you read Matthew 13:24-43. Mark words or phrases that stand out to you. Write down the main message or your thoughts next to each paragraph.

²⁴ He put another parable before them, saying, "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field, ²⁵ but while his men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat and went away. ²⁶ So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared also. ²⁷ And the servants of the master of the house came and said to him, 'Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have weeds?' ²⁸ He said to them, 'An enemy has done this.' So the servants said to him, 'Then do you want us to go and gather them?' ²⁹ But he said, 'No, lest in gathering the weeds you root up the wheat along with them. ³⁰ Let both grow together until the harvest, and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, "Gather the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn."'"

³¹ He put another parable before them, saying, "The kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed that a man took and sowed in his field. ³² It is the smallest of all seeds, but when it has grown it is larger than all the garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches."

³³ He told them another parable. "The kingdom of heaven is like leaven that a woman took and hid in three measures of flour, till it was all leavened."

³⁴ All these things Jesus said to the crowds in parables; indeed, he said nothing to them without a parable. ³⁵ This was to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet:

*I will open my mouth in parables;
I will utter what has been hidden since the foundation of the world.*

³⁶ Then he left the crowds and went into the house. And his disciples came to him, saying, "Explain to us the parable of the weeds of the field." ³⁷ He answered, "The one who sows the good seed is the Son

of Man. ³⁸ The field is the world, and the good seed is the sons of the kingdom. The weeds are the sons of the evil one, ³⁹ and the enemy who sowed them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels. ⁴⁰ Just as the weeds are gathered and burned with fire, so will it be at the end of the age. ⁴¹ The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all law-breakers, ⁴² and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. ⁴³ Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear. (ESV)

Jesus provides His disciples with an interpretation of the parable of the wheat and the weeds.

What do each of these things represent in Jesus' parable?

- The one who sows seed: _____
- The field: _____
- The good seed: _____
- The weeds: _____
- The enemy who sowed weeds: _____
- The harvest: _____
- The reapers: _____
- Burning the weeds: _____



The one group that Jesus does not identify in the parable are the “servants of the master” who ask to separate the weeds from the wheat (13:27-28). **Who do you think they represent?**

What can you learn from Jesus' response to them (13:29-30)? _____

What can you learn about the kingdom from the parable of the mustard seed (13:31:32)?

What can you learn from the parable of the leaven (13:33)? _____

**DAY TWO
Meditation**

Quiet your heart and allow God to speak through His Word. Slowly read Matthew 13:31-32 several times. Reflect on each word. Meditate on them over and over until you memorize them.

He gave them another parable:

*“The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed
that a man took and sowed in his field.
It is the smallest of all the seeds,
but when it has grown it is the greatest garden plant and becomes a tree,
so that the wild birds come and nest in its branches.” (NET)*

Write down the observations that you can make from this passage, sketch out any images or thoughts that you have, or simply rewrite the passage below giving emphasis to key words.

Offer the passage back to God in the form of a personalized prayer.

DAY THREE Interpretation

In interpretation, you are digging deeper into the passage in order to better understand its meaning. A word study on a key word and/or looking up parallel passages can help you in your understanding.

Go to blueletterbible.org and type “Matthew 13” into the “Search the Bible” box. Next click on Matthew 13:25 to bring up the verse in the Greek. Find the word “tares” and click on the Strong’s number (G2215) to bring up the Greek word, its definition, and its usage in the New Testament.

What is the Greek word for “tares”? _____ (Use the transliteration.)

How many times is it used in the New Testament? _____ (See KJV Translation Count.)

How many times is it used in Matthew? _____ (See Search Results by Book.)

What is its definition? (Click on *Vine’s Expository Dictionary* for the fullest definition.)

What can you learn about unbelievers or false believers from this definition of “tares”?

The parable of the wheat and the tares teaches us that during this present age it is often very difficult to discern between true and false believers. One person may look good on the outside but may be hiding things on the inside. Another may not look so good on the outside but may have a heart that is humble before God and is growing in very small steps. As good as we may think we are in discerning this distinction, we will inevitably make mistakes and hurt some people if we think we have it all figured out. God will ultimately sort everything out in the end.

Thus, in this present age, there will be a mixture of responses to the message of Christ—some looking real initially but not lasting over time (the parable of the sower)—and there will be a mixture of people who claim to follow Him (the parable of the wheat and weeds).

Now, go to blueletterbible.org and click on Matthew 13:31 to bring up the verse in the Greek. Find the word “mustard seed” and click on the Strong’s number (G4615) to bring up the Greek word, its definition, and its usage in the New Testament.

What is the Greek word for “mustard seed”? _____ (Use the transliteration.)

How many times is it used in the New Testament? _____ (See KJV Translation Count.)

What is its definition? (Click on *Vine's Expository Dictionary* for the fullest definition.)

Now, go to blueletterbible.org and click on Matthew 13:33 to bring up the verse in the Greek. Find the word "leaven" and click on the Strong's number (G2219) to bring up the Greek word, its definition, and its usage in the New Testament.

What is the Greek word for "leaven"? _____ (Use the transliteration.)

How many times is it used in the New Testament? _____ (See KJV Translation Count.)

What is its definition? (Click on *Vine's Expository Dictionary* for the fullest definition.)

The parable of the mustard seed and the leaven both seem to indicate that the message of Christ will have a small, insignificant beginning but then a rapid and worldwide growth.

There may also be a subtle message that this expansive growth will not always be good.

How are the birds described in the parable of the sower (13:4)? Are they good or bad?

How is leaven described in other passages of Scripture? Read Leviticus 2:11, 6:17; 1 Cor. 5:6-8.

If the previous parables speak of a "mixture" in global Christendom with some looking like believers but not really following Christ, then it is possible that the parable of the mustard seed and leaven, though positive on the surface, may also warn that within the coming church age there will be false believers who nest in the church or bring a corrupting influence into its midst.

DAY FOUR Devotion

Read the following commentary from J.C. Ryle's *Expository Thoughts on Matthew*. **J. C. Ryle** (1816-1900) was the Anglican bishop of Liverpool, where his sermons and writings impacted thousands in England and abroad. At the end of his life, he was described as "the man of granite with the heart of a child."

THE parable of the wheat and tares, which occupies the chief part of these verses, is one of peculiar importance in the present day. It is eminently calculated to correct the extravagant expectations in which many Christians indulge, as to the effect of missions abroad, and of preaching the Gospel at home. May we give it the attention which it deserves!

In the first place, this parable teaches us, *that good and evil will always be found together in the professing Church, until the end of the world.*

The visible Church is set before us as a mixed body. It is a vast "field" in which "wheat and tares" grow side by side. We must expect to find believers and unbelievers, converted and unconverted, "the children of the kingdom, and the children of the wicked one," all mingled together in every congregation of baptized people.

The purest preaching of the Gospel will not prevent this. In every age of the Church, the same state of things has existed. It was the experience of the early Fathers. It was the experience of the Reformers. It is the experience of the best ministers at the present hour. There has never been a visible Church or a religious assembly, of which the members have been all "wheat." The devil, that great enemy of souls, has always taken care to sow "tares."

The most strict and prudent discipline will not prevent this. Episcopalians, Presbyterians, and Independents, all alike find it to be so. Do what we will to purify a church, we shall never succeed in obtaining a perfectly pure communion. Tares will be found among

the wheat. Hypocrites and deceivers will creep in. And, worst of all, if we are extreme in our efforts to obtain purity, we do more harm than good. We run the risk of encouraging many a Judas Iscariot, and breaking many a bruised reed. In our zeal to "gather up the tares," we are in danger of "rooting up the wheat with them." Such zeal is not according to knowledge, and has often done much harm. Those who care not what happens to the wheat, provided they can root up the tares, show little of the mind of Christ. And after all there is deep truth in the charitable saying of Augustine, "Those who are tares to-day, may be wheat to-morrow."

Are we inclined to look for the conversion of the whole world by the labors of missionaries and ministers? Let us place this parable before us, and beware of such an idea. We shall never see all the inhabitants of earth the wheat of God, in the present order of things. The tares and wheat will "grow together till the harvest." The kingdoms of this world will never become the kingdom of Christ, and the millennium begin, until the King Himself returns.

Are we ever tried by the scoffing argument of the infidel, that Christianity cannot be a true religion, when there are so many false Christians? Let us call to mind this parable, and remain unmoved. Let us tell the infidel, that the state of things he scoffs at does not surprise us at all. Our Master prepared us for it 1800 years ago. He foresaw and foretold, that His Church would be a field, containing not only wheat, but tares.

Are we ever tempted to leave one Protestant Church for another, because we see many of its members unconverted? Let us remember

this parable, and take heed what we do. We shall never find a perfect Church. We may spend our lives in migrating from communion to communion, and pass our days in perpetual disappointment. Go where we will, and worship where we may, we shall always find tares.

In the second place the parable teaches us, *that there is to be a day of separation between the godly and ungodly members of the visible Church, at the end of the world.*

The present mixed state of things is not to be forever. The wheat and the tares are to be divided at last. The Lord Jesus shall “send forth his angels” in the day of His second advent, and gather all professing Christians into two great companies. Those mighty reapers shall make no mistake. They shall discern with unerring judgment between the righteous and the wicked, and place every one in his own lot. The saints and faithful servants of Christ shall receive glory, honor, and eternal life. The worldly, the ungodly, the careless, and the unconverted shall be “cast into a furnace of fire,” and receive shame and everlasting contempt.

There is something peculiarly solemn in this part of the parable. The meaning of it admits of no mistake. Our Lord Himself explains it in words of singular clearness, as if He would impress it deeply on our minds. Well may He say at the conclusion,

“Who hath ears to hear, let him hear.”

Let the ungodly man tremble when he reads this parable. Let him see in its fearful language his own certain doom, unless he repents and is converted. Let him know that he is sowing misery for himself, if he goes on still in his neglect of God. Let him reflect that his end will be to be gathered among the “bundles” of tares, and be burned. Surely such a prospect ought to make a man think. As

Baxter truly says, “We must not misinterpret God’s patience with the ungodly.”

Let the believer in Christ take comfort when he reads this parable. Let him see that there is happiness and safety prepared for him in the great and dreadful day of the Lord. The voice of the archangel and the trump of God will proclaim no terror for him. They will summon him to join what he has long desired to see, a perfect Church and a perfect communion of saints. How beautiful will the whole body of believers appear, when finally separated from the wicked! How fine will the wheat look in the garner of God, when the tares are at length taken away! How brightly will grace shine, when no longer dimmed by incessant contact with the worldly and unconverted!

The righteous are little known in the present day. The world sees no beauty in them, even as it saw none in their Master. “The world knows us not, because it knew him not.” (1 John 3:1.) But the righteous shall one day “shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father.” To use the words of Matthew Henry, “their sanctification will be perfected, and their justification will be published.” “When Christ who is our life shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory.” (Col. 3:4)

MATTHEW 13:31-32

The parable of the mustard seed is one of those parables which partake of the character both of history and prophecy. It seems intended to illustrate the history of Christ’s visible church on earth, from the time of the first advent down to the judgment day. The seed cast into the earth, in the preceding parable, showed us the work of grace in a heart. The mustard seed shows us THE PROGRESS OF PROFESSING CHRISTIANITY IN THE WORLD.

We learn, in the first place, that, like the grain of mustard seed, *Christ's visible church was to be small and weak in its beginnings.*

A grain of mustard seed was a proverbial expression among the Jews for something very small and insignificant. Our Lord calls it “smaller than all the seeds that are in the earth.” Twice in the Gospels we find our Lord using the figure as a word of comparison, when speaking of a weak faith. (Matt. 17:20; Luke 17:6) The idea was doubtless familiar to a Jewish mind, however strange it may sound to us. Here, as in other places, the Son of God shows us the wisdom of *using language familiar to the minds of those whom we may address.*

It would be difficult to find an emblem which more faithfully represents the history of the visible church of Christ than this grain of mustard seed.

Weakness and apparent insignificance were undoubtedly the characteristics of its beginning. How did its Head and King come into the world? He came as a feeble infant, born in a manger at Bethlehem, without riches, or armies, or attendants, or power. Who were the men that the Head of the Church gathered round Himself, and appointed His apostles? They were poor and unlearned people—fishermen, publicans, and men of like occupations, to all appearance the most unlikely people to shake the world. What was the last public act of the earthly ministry of the great Head of the Church? He was crucified, like a malefactor, between two thieves, after having been forsaken by nearly all His disciples, betrayed by one, and denied by another. What was the doctrine which the first builders of the Church went forth from the upper chamber in Jerusalem to preach to mankind? It was a doctrine which to the Jews was a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness. It was a proclamation that the great Head of their new religion had been put to

death on a cross, and that notwithstanding this, they offered life through His death to the world!

In all this the mind of man can perceive nothing but weakness and feebleness. Truly the emblem of a grain of mustard seed was verified and fulfilled to the very letter. To the eyes of man the beginning of the visible church was contemptible, insignificant, powerless, and small.

We learn, secondly, that, like the mustard seed, *the visible church, once planted, was to grow and greatly increase.*

“The grain of mustard seed,” says our Lord, “when it is sown, grows up and becomes greater than all garden plants.” These words may sound startling to an English ear. We are not accustomed to such a growth in our cold northern climate. But to those who know eastern countries, there is nothing surprising in it. The testimony of well-informed and experienced travelers is distinct, that such an increase is both possible and probable.

No figure could be chosen more strikingly applicable to the growth and increase of Christ's visible church in the world. It began to grow from the day of Pentecost, and grew with a rapidity, which nothing can account for but the finger of God. It grew wonderfully when three thousand souls were converted at once, and five thousand more in a few days afterwards. It grew wonderfully, when at Antioch, and Ephesus, and Philippi, and Corinth, and Rome, congregations were gathered together, and Christianity firmly established. It grew wonderfully, when at last the despised religion of Christ overspread the greater part of Europe, and Asia Minor, and North Africa, and, in spite of fierce persecution and opposition, supplanted heathen idolatry, and became the professed creed of the whole Roman empire. Such growth must have been marvelous in the eyes

of many. But it was only what our Lord foretold in the parable before us. “The kingdom of God is like a grain of mustard seed.”

The visible church of Christ is not yet done growing. Notwithstanding the melancholy apostasy of some of its branches, and the deplorable weakness of others, it is still extending and expanding over the world. New branches have continually been springing up in America, in India, in Australia, in Africa, in China, in the Islands of the South Seas, during the last fifty years. Evils undoubtedly there are many. False profession and corruption abound. But still, on the whole, heathenism is waning, wearing out, and melting away. In spite of all the predictions of Voltaire and Paine, in spite of foes without, and treachery within, the visible church progresses — the mustard plant still grows!

And the prophecy, we may rest assured, is not yet exhausted. A day shall yet come, when the great Head of the church shall take to Himself His power, and reign, and put down every enemy under His feet. The earth shall yet be filled with the knowledge of God, as

the waters cover the sea. (Hab. 2:14.) Satan shall yet be bound. The heathen shall yet be our Lord's inheritance, and the utmost parts of the earth His possession. And then this parable shall receive its full accomplishment. The little seed shall become “a great tree,” and fill the whole earth. (Dan. 4:11.)

Let us leave the parable with a resolution never to despise any movement or instrumentality in the church of Christ, because at first it was weak and small. Let us remember the manger of Bethlehem, and learn wisdom. The name of Him who lay there, a helpless infant, is now known all over the globe. The little seed which was planted in the day when Jesus was born, has become a great tree, and we ourselves are rejoicing under its shadow. Let it be a settled principle in our religion, never to “despise the day of small things.” (Zech. 4:10.)

One child may be the beginning of a flourishing school — one conversion the beginning of a mighty church — one word the beginning of some blessed Christian enterprise — one seed the beginning of a rich harvest of saved souls.

What thought from J. C. Ryle’s words stands out to you the most? Why?

DAY FIVE Application

Re-read Matthew 13:24-43 and consider the truths that you have learned this week. Seek to apply the message of Matthew 13:24-43 to your life.

What thought or truth impacted you this week from your study of Matthew 13:24-43?



The Parable of the Wheat and the Weeds reminds us that there will always be a mixture of true and false believers in the world during this present age. That will probably be true of every local church as well. Though we are called to be wise and discerning and to see the fruit of a person's life (7:16-20), we are not able to see a person's heart and to determine who is "in" and who is "out" of Christ's kingdom. That is not our call. Our call is to love and to share the gospel with others (cf. Matt. 28:18-20; 1 Peter 3:8-9).

Have you ever written someone off as a "tare"? Have you ever determined in your own mind that someone could not be a believer in Christ...indeed could *never* be a believer in Christ?

Take time before the Lord and ask Him to give you a heart of love and compassion toward others...even those who may seem like they are far, far away from Him. If a person comes into your mind, spend time in prayer for them.

There is also comfort in this parable. We never know if someone at the last minute turned their heart over to Jesus Christ. The most obvious "tare" may be a "wheat" in the end, just like the thief on the cross. If you have a loved one that you wonder if they died without Christ, then put them in the gracious, wise, loving hands of God and trust Him to do what is right in the end.

The Parable of the Mustard Seed reminds us that the smallest things may end up having the greatest impact. There is no insignificant person in the kingdom of Christ. There is no act of love too small that it cannot have an eternal impact. And a small act of faith can move mountains.

Truly I tell you, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you.

—Matthew 17:20b



Think of a small act that someone did for you that ended up having a major impact in your life. What did they do? In what ways has it impacted you today?

Do you ever feel like you are insignificant? Or that the things you do are insignificant? Are you willing to see the bigger picture and realize that nothing done in the name of the Lord is ever insignificant? In fact, it will have eternal reward and impact!

And whoever gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because he is a disciple, truly I tell you, he will never lose his reward. (Matthew 10:42)

Who is someone that you can encourage today in a small way? _____

What ministry has God called you to do? How can you serve Him with the gifts that you have?



The Parable of the Leaven (Yeast) can be a little harder to interpret. Most Bible teachers see it as another reminder that the small beginnings of the gospel will eventually spread out and impact the entire world. There is no question that this is true! From its humble beginnings, the Christian faith has spread to every corner of the globe.

But if leaven is typically seen as a corrupting influence in Scripture, then it is also possible that this parable (like the previous ones) contains some hint of a “mixture” of good and bad in the manifestation of the kingdom in this present age. Perhaps the mustard seed reminds us that the Christian faith will grow to impact the world and

the leaven reminds us that a corrupting influence will also grow within the visible Christian church at the same time. *A little leaven leavens the whole lump!* (1 Corinthians 5:6; Galatians 5:9)

What little sins have you allowed to creep into your life? What lies have you entertained in your mind? Acknowledge these things before the Lord and ask Him to purify your heart!

SUGGESTED QUESTIONS FOR GROUP OR FAMILY DISCUSSION:

The goal is not to get through all the questions but to spark discussion around the truth of Matthew 13:24-43. Use the questions below to interact together with what you learned.

- What are some basic principles that you know about gardening or about lawncare? What can they teach you about the Christian faith?
- Have you ever known someone who professed Christ but then fell away later in life or even became antagonistic to the Christian faith? How did this impact you?
- According to Jesus, what is the danger of trying to separate the wheat from the weeds?
- If we are not supposed to try to separate the wheat and the weeds, does that mean that a church should never exercise church discipline or ask someone to leave? Why or why not?
- Which parable impacted you the most this week? Why?
- What is a small act that someone did for you that ended up having a major impact?
- Did you discover anything new, interesting, or meaningful in your study of this passage this week? Or in your reading of J. C. Ryle? If so, what?
- The smallest acts can have the greatest impacts. Discuss as a group a small way that you can help someone this week—sending them a note, giving them a gift card, offering babysitting, cleaning their house, etc. Set up a time when you can complete this act together.

*Christians are not qualified to infallibly distinguish between true and false believers.
Every time the church has presumed to do that it has produced an ungodly bloodbath...
In the present age, believers are not God's instruments of judgment and destruction but of truth
and grace. Toward unbelievers we are not to have hearts of condemnation but of compassion.*

John MacArthur, Jr.

THE PARABLES OF GREAT TREASURE

Matthew 13:44-58

DAY ONE **Observation**

In 13:44-58, Jesus presents four more parables in regard to the kingdom of heaven and then He finishes His teaching. These parables express the great value of the kingdom of heaven and the good news of Jesus Christ.

Ask God to speak to your heart as you read Matthew 13:44-58. Mark words or phrases that stand out to you. Write down the main message or your thoughts next to each paragraph.

⁴⁴ “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and hid; and for joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.

⁴⁵ “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking beautiful pearls, ⁴⁶ who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had and bought it.

⁴⁷ “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a dragnet that was cast into the sea and gathered some of every kind, ⁴⁸ which, when it was full, they drew to shore; and they sat down and gathered the good into vessels, but threw the bad away. ⁴⁹ So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come forth, separate the wicked from among the just, ⁵⁰ and cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth.”

⁵¹ Jesus said to them, “Have you understood all these things?”

They said to Him, “Yes, Lord.”

⁵² Then He said to them, “Therefore every scribe instructed concerning the kingdom of heaven is like a householder who brings out of his treasure things new and old.”

⁵³ Now it came to pass, when Jesus had finished these parables, that He departed from there. ⁵⁴ When He had come to His own country, He taught them in their synagogue, so that they were astonished and said, “Where did this Man get this wisdom and these mighty works? ⁵⁵ Is this not the carpenter’s son? Is not His mother called Mary? And His brothers James, Joseph, Simon, and Judas? ⁵⁶ And His sisters, are they not all with us? Where then did this Man get all these things?” ⁵⁷ So they were offended at Him.

But Jesus said to them, “A prophet is not without honor except in his own country and in his own house.” ⁵⁸ Now He did not do many mighty works there because of their unbelief. (NKJV)

What thought or verse stands out to you in Matthew 13:44-58? Why?



In the Parable of the Treasure in the Field, there are several verbs which describe the man's actions (13:44). **Circle** each of these verbs in this verse. **Write these verbs below.**

What do each of these verbs teach you about this man?



In the next parable, what is the merchant seeking (13:45)?

What did the man do when he finally found it (13:46)?

What do you think these two parables are seeking to teach regarding the kingdom of heaven?

The Parable of the Dragnet echoes many of the same themes as the Wheat and the Tares.

What did the dragnet catch (13:47)? _____

What did the fisherman do with their catch (13:48)? _____

What is the interpretation of this parable according to Jesus (13:49-50)?

DAY TWO
Meditation

Quiet your heart and allow God to speak through His Word. Slowly read Matthew 13:45-46 several times. Reflect on each word. Meditate on them over and over until you memorize them.

*“The kingdom of heaven is like treasure, buried in a field,
that a man found and reburied.
Then in his joy he goes and sells everything he has and buys that field.*

*“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls.
When he found one priceless pearl,
he went and sold everything he had and bought it. (CSB)*

Write down the observations that you can make from this passage, sketch out any images or thoughts that you have, or simply rewrite the passage below giving emphasis to key words.

Offer the passage back to God in the form of a personalized prayer.

DAY THREE Interpretation

In interpretation, you are digging deeper into the passage in order to better understand its meaning. A word study on a key word and/or looking up parallel passages can help you in your understanding.

The parables in 13:44-52 express the supreme value of the kingdom of heaven. To gain the kingdom of heaven in Jesus Christ is to gain everything. To lose it is to lose everything.

Our lives are generally determined by what we value the most. We all have something that we assign supreme worth to. We all put our hope, confidence, security, and joy in something.

The big question is, "Is the Lord my greatest treasure? Is He my greatest desire?"

Read the following passages of Scripture. Mark key words and phrases as you read.

*The law of the Lord is perfect,
refreshing the soul.
The statutes of the Lord are trustworthy,
making wise the simple.
The precepts of the Lord are right,
giving joy to the heart.
The commands of the Lord are radiant,
giving light to the eyes.
The fear of the Lord is pure,
enduring forever.
The decrees of the Lord are firm,
and all of them are righteous.
They are more precious than gold,
than much pure gold;
they are sweeter than honey,
than honey from the honeycomb.
By them your servant is warned;
in keeping them there is great reward. (Psalm 19:7-11)*

*Delight yourself in the Lord,
and He will give you the desires of your heart. (Psalm 37:4)*

*As the deer pants for streams of water,
so my soul pants for You, my God. (Psalm 42:1)*

*O God, You are my God; earnestly I seek You;
my soul thirsts for You;
My flesh faints for You,
as in a dry and weary land where there is no water. (Psalm 63:1)*

*Yet I am always with You;
You hold me by my right hand.
You guide me with Your counsel,
and afterward You will take me into glory.
Whom have I in heaven but You?
And earth has nothing I desire besides You.
My flesh and my heart may fail,
but God is the strength of my heart
and my portion forever. (Psalm 73:23-26)*

*“Behold, God is my salvation;
I will trust, and will not be afraid;
for the Lord God is my strength and my song,
and He has become my salvation.” (Isaiah 12:2)*

*My soul yearns for You in the night;
my spirit within me earnestly seeks You.
For when Your judgments are in the earth,
the inhabitants of the world learn righteousness. (Isaiah 26:9)*

*But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness,
and all these things will be added to you. (Matthew 6:33)*

*Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ
Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as
rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness
of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the
righteousness from God that depends on faith. (Philippians 3:8-9)*

*The Spirit and the Bride say, “Come.” And let the one who hears say, “Come.” And let the
one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price.
(Revelation 22:17)*

What do you learn about delighting in God and desiring Him from these verses?

DAY FOUR Devotion

Read the following commentary from J.C. Ryle's *Expository Thoughts on Matthew*. **J. C. Ryle** (1816-1900) was the Anglican bishop of Liverpool, where his sermons and writings impacted thousands in England and abroad. At the end of his life, he was described as "the man of granite with the heart of a child."

MATTHEW 13:44-50

The parable of the "TREASURE hidden in the field," and the "merchant man seeking goodly PEARLS," appear intended to convey one and the same lesson. They vary, no doubt, in one striking particular. The "treasure" was found of one who does not seem to have sought it. The "pearl" was found of one who was actually seeking pearls. But the conduct of the finders, in both cases, was precisely alike. Both "sold all" to make the thing found their own property. And it is exactly at this point that the instruction of both parables agrees.

These two parables are meant to teach us, that *men really convinced of the importance of salvation, will give up everything to win Christ, and eternal life.*

What was the conduct of the two men our Lord describes? The one was persuaded that there was a "treasure hidden in the field," which would amply repay him, if he bought the field, however great the price that he might give. The other was persuaded that the "pearl" he had found was so immensely valuable, that it would compensate him to purchase it at any cost. Both were convinced that *they had found a thing of great value.* Both were satisfied that *it was worth a great present sacrifice to make this thing their own.* Others might wonder at them. Others might think them foolish for paying such a sum of money for the field and pearl. But they knew what they were about. They were sure that they were making a good bargain.

Behold in this single picture, *the conduct of a true Christian explained!* He is what he is, and does what he does in his religion, because

he is *thoroughly persuaded* that it is worthwhile. He comes out from the world. He puts off the old man. He forsakes the vain companions of his past life. Like Matthew, he gives up everything, and, like Paul, he "counts all things loss" for Christ's sake. And why? Because he is convinced that Christ will make amends to him for all he gives up. He sees in Christ an endless "treasure." He sees in Christ a precious "pearl." To win Christ he will make any sacrifice. This is true faith. This is the stamp of a genuine work of the Holy Spirit.

Behold in these two parables *the real clue to the conduct of many unbelievers!* They are what they are in religion, because they are *not fully persuaded* that it is worthwhile to be different. They flinch from decision. They shrink from taking up the cross. They halt between two opinions. They will not commit themselves. They will not come forward boldly on the Lord's side. And why? Because they are not convinced that it will compensate them. They are not sure that "the treasure" is before them. They are not satisfied that "the pearl" is worth so great a price. They cannot yet make up their minds to "sell all," that they may win Christ. And so too often they perish everlastingly! When a man will venture nothing for Christ's sake, we must draw the sorrowful conclusion that he has not got the grace of God.

The parable of the NET let down into the sea, has some points in common with that of the wheat and the tares. It is intended to instruct us on a most important subject, *the true nature of the visible Church of Christ.*

The preaching of the Gospel was the letting down of a large net into the midst of the sea

of this world. The professing church which it was to gather together, was to be a mixed body. Within the folds of the net, there were to be fish of every kind, both good and bad. Within the pale of the Church there were to be Christians of various sorts, unconverted as well as converted, false as well as true. The separation of good and bad is sure to come at last, but not before the end of the world. Such was the account which the great Master gave to His disciples of the churches which they were to found.

It is of the utmost importance to have the lessons of this parable deeply engraved on our minds. There is hardly any point in Christianity on which greater mistakes exist, than *the nature of the visible Church*. There is none, perhaps, on which mistakes are so perilous to the soul.

Let us LEARN from this parable, that all congregations of professed Christians ought to be regarded as *mixed bodies*. They are all assemblies containing “good fish and bad,” converted and unconverted, children of God and children of the world, and ought to be described and addressed as such. To tell all baptized people, that they are born again, and have the Spirit, and are members of Christ, and are holy, in the face of such a parable as this, is utterly unwarrantable. Such a mode of address may flatter and please. It is not likely to profit or save. It is painfully calculated to promote self-righteousness, and lull sinners to sleep. It overthrows the plain teaching of Christ, and is ruinous to souls...

Finally, let it be a settled principle with us, never to be satisfied with mere *outward church-membership*. We may be inside the net, and yet not be in Christ. The waters of baptism are poured on myriads who are never washed in the water of life. The bread and wine are eaten and drunk by thousands at the Lord's table, who never feed on Christ by faith. Are we converted? Are we among the

“good fish?” This is the grand question. It is one which must be answered at last. The net will soon be “drawn to shore.” The true character of every man's religion will at length be exposed. There will be an eternal separation between the good fish and the bad. There will be a “furnace of fire” for the wicked. Surely, as Baxter says, “these plain words more need belief and consideration than exposition.”

MATTHEW 13:51-58

Personal application has been called the *soul* of preaching. A sermon without application is like a letter posted without an address. It may be well-written, rightly dated, and duly signed. But it is useless, because it never reaches its destination. Our Lord's inquiry is an admirable example of real heart-searching application, “Have you understood?”

The mere form of hearing a sermon can profit no man, unless he comprehends what it means. He might just as well listen to the blowing of a trumpet, or the beating of a drum. He might just as well attend a Roman Catholic service in Latin. His intellect must be set in motion, and his heart impressed. Ideas must be received into his mind. He must carry off the seeds of new thoughts. Without this he hears in vain.

It is of great importance to see this point clearly. There is a vast amount of ignorance about it. There are thousands who go regularly to places of worship, and think they have done their religious duty, but never carry away an idea, or receive an impression. Ask them, when they return home on a Sunday evening, what they have learned, and they cannot tell you a word. Examine them at the end of a year, as to the religious knowledge they have attained, and you will find them as ignorant as the heathen.

Let us watch our souls in this matter. Let us take with us to Church, not only our bodies, but our minds, our reason, our hearts, and our consciences. Let us often ask ourselves, “What have I got from this sermon? What have I learned? What truths have been impressed on my mind?” *Intellect*, no doubt, is not everything in religion. But it does not therefore follow that it is nothing at all. The *heart* is unquestionably the main point. But we must never forget that the Holy Spirit generally reaches the heart through the mind. Sleepy, idle, inattentive hearers, are never likely to be converted.

The second thing which we ought to notice is *the strange treatment which our Lord received in His own country.*

He came to the town of Nazareth, where He had been brought up, and “taught in their synagogue.” His teaching, no doubt, was the same as it always was. “Never a man spoke like this man.” But it had no effect on the people of Nazareth. They were “astonished,” but their hearts were unmoved. They said, “Isn't this the carpenter's son? Is not his mother called Mary?” They despised Him, because they were so familiar with Him. “They were offended in him.” And they drew from our Lord the solemn remark, “A prophet is not without honor, except in his own country, and in his own house.”

Let us see, in this history, a melancholy page of human nature unfolded to our view. We are all apt to despise mercies, if we are accustomed to them, and have them cheap. The Bibles and religious books, which are so

plentiful in England, the means of grace of which we have so abundant a supply, the preaching of the Gospel which we hear every week—all, all are liable to be undervalued. It is mournfully true that in religion, more than in anything else, *familiarity breeds contempt.* Men forget that truth is truth, however old and hackneyed it may sound, and despise it because it is old. Alas! by so doing, they provoke God to take it away...

Do we wonder that the relations, servants and The last thing we ought to notice in these verses is *the ruinous nature of unbelief.* The chapter ends with the fearful words, “He didn't do many miraculous works there, because of their unbelief.”

Behold in this single word the secret of the everlasting ruin of multitudes of souls! They perish forever, because they will not believe. There is nothing beside in earth or heaven that prevents their salvation. Their sins, however many, might all be forgiven. The Father's love is ready to receive them. The blood of Christ is ready to cleanse them. The power of the Spirit is ready to renew them. But a great barrier interposes — they will not believe. “You will not come unto me,” says Jesus, “that you might have life.” (John 5:40.) May we all be on our guard against this accursed sin. It is the old root-sin, which caused the fall of man. Cut down in the true child of God by the power of the Spirit, it is ever ready to bud and sprout again. There are three great enemies against which God's children should daily pray — pride, worldliness, and unbelief. Of these three, none is greater than unbelief.

What thought from J. C. Ryle's words stands out to you the most? Why?

DAY FIVE
Application

Re-read Matthew 13:44-58 and consider the truths that you have learned this week. Seek to apply the message of Matthew 13:44-58 to your life.

What thought or truth impacted you this week from your study of Matthew 13:44-58?

To come to Jesus Christ, one must see His supreme value. He is the treasure hidden in the field. He is the pearl of great price. Nothing compares to Him. To find Him is to find everything. To miss Him is to miss everything. He is supreme joy. He is perfect peace. He is pure love. He is true life.

- Have you come to the place where you realize that this world will not satisfy? Yes No
- Have you recognized your need for the forgiveness and grace of Jesus Christ? Yes No
- Have you placed your faith in Jesus Christ alone for your salvation? Yes No

If you have trusted in Jesus Christ for your salvation, what was your life like before finding Him?

What first alerted you to your need for Jesus Christ? What drew you to Him?

How did you trust in Jesus Christ as Savior? Who shared with you? How did you respond?

How has your life changed since finding Jesus? _____

If you have not trusted in Jesus Christ as your Savior, what do you think is holding you back?

Are you willing to trust Him now? There is no greater treasure on earth than knowing Jesus!

*Dear God, I know I am a sinner.
I know my sin deserves to be punished.
I believe Christ died for me and rose from the grave.
I trust Jesus alone as my Savior.
Thank you for the gift of forgiveness and everlasting life.
In Jesus' name, Amen.*

SUGGESTED QUESTIONS FOR GROUP OR FAMILY DISCUSSION:

The goal is not to get through all the questions but to spark discussion around the truth of Matthew 13:44-58. Use the questions below to interact together with what you learned.

- When you were a child, what was your most valued possession? Why was it so special to you? Where is that possession now?
- What is one of the best purchases that you have ever made? How did you feel buying it?
- What first drew you to Jesus Christ? When did you see the great value of following Him?
- Read Paul's testimony in Philippians 3:5-11. What did Paul give up or leave behind in order to follow Christ? Why was he willing to give these things up?
- What things have you had to give up or leave behind to follow Jesus? Has it been worth it?
- What do you learn from the parable of the dragnet?
- Jesus was rejected in His own hometown. Why do you think they had such a hard time believing in Him?
- Did you discover anything new, interesting, or meaningful in your study of this passage this week? Or in your reading of J. C. Ryle? If so, what?
- Go around and have each person complete these sentences: *I first realized the value of Jesus Christ when _____ . At that point I decided to _____ . Now I see Him as my _____ .*

DISCIPLESHIP TRAINING: Meeting Needs
Matthew 14:1-21

DAY ONE
Observation

Beginning in Matthew 14, Jesus intensifies His training of the disciples. The mood has changed. The crowds are still gathering around Jesus but the opposition to His ministry has taken on a more aggressive tone. The killing of John the Baptist by Herod Antipas exemplifies the increasing danger to Jesus' ministry.

Ask God to speak to your heart as you read Matthew 14:1-21. Mark words or phrases that stand out to you. Write down the main message or your thoughts next to each paragraph.

At that time Herod the tetrarch heard the reports about Jesus, ² and he said to his attendants, "This is John the Baptist; he has risen from the dead! That is why miraculous powers are at work in him."

³ Now Herod had arrested John and bound him and put him in prison because of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, ⁴ for John had been saying to him: "It is not lawful for you to have her." ⁵ Herod wanted to kill John, but he was afraid of the people, because they considered John a prophet.

⁶ On Herod's birthday the daughter of Herodias danced for the guests and pleased Herod so much ⁷ that he promised with an oath to give her whatever she asked. ⁸ Prompted by her mother, she said, "Give me here on a platter the head of John the Baptist." ⁹ The king was distressed, but because of his oaths and his dinner guests, he ordered that her request be granted ¹⁰ and had John beheaded in the prison. ¹¹ His head was brought in on a platter and given to the girl, who carried it to her mother. ¹² John's disciples came and took his body and buried it. Then they went and told Jesus.

¹³ When Jesus heard what had happened, he withdrew by boat privately to a solitary place. Hearing of this, the crowds followed him on foot from the towns. ¹⁴ When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed their sick.

¹⁵ As evening approached, the disciples came to him and said, "This is a remote place, and it's already getting late. Send the crowds away, so they can go to the villages and buy themselves some food."

¹⁶ Jesus replied, "They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat."

¹⁷ "We have here only five loaves of bread and two fish," they answered.

¹⁸ “Bring them here to me,” he said. ¹⁹ And he directed the people to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the people. ²⁰ They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over. ²¹ The number of those who ate was about five thousand men, besides women and children. (NIV)

What thought or verse stands out to you in Matthew 14:1-21? Why?

When Herod the Great died in 4 BC, his territory was divided into four regions ruled by three of his sons (Herod Archelaus, Herod Antipas, Philip) and his sister (Salome I). A “tetrarch” is a ruler of a ¼ of a kingdom. The Herod mentioned in Matthew 14:1 is Herod Antipas who divorced his own wife in AD 26 and then married his sister-in-law, Herodias, who had been married to Philip.

What can you learn about Herod Antipas from this passage?

His personality: _____

His fears: _____

His sins: _____

What problems do the disciples encounter in 14:13-17? _____

What is their suggested solution? _____

What does Jesus do in light of these problems? _____

What is the result? _____

DAY TWO Meditation

Quiet your heart and allow God to speak through His Word. Slowly read Matthew 14:15-20 several times. Imagine the scene in your mind.

*Now when it was evening, the disciples came to Him and said,
“This place is secluded and the hour is already past to eat;
send the crowds away, so that they may go into the villages and buy food for themselves.”*

But Jesus said to them, “They do not need to go; you give them something to eat!”

They said to Him, “We have nothing here except five loaves and two fish.”

And He said, “Bring them here to Me.”

*And ordering the crowds to sit down on the grass,
He took the five loaves and the two fish, and looked up toward heaven.
He blessed the food and breaking the loaves,
He gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds.
And they all ate and were satisfied,
and they picked up what was left over of the broken pieces: twelve full baskets. (NASB)*

Write down the observations that you can make from this passage, sketch out any images or thoughts that you have, or simply rewrite the passage below giving emphasis to key words.

Offer the passage back to God in the form of a personalized prayer.

DAY THREE Interpretation

In interpretation, you are digging deeper into the passage in order to better understand its meaning. A word study on a key word and/or looking up parallel passages can help you in your understanding.

The miracle of the feeding of the 5000 is the only miracle of Jesus recorded in all four gospels.

Read the other three gospel accounts of this miracle. Mark or underline key words or phrases.

³¹ And He said to them, "Come away by yourselves to a secluded place and rest a little while." (For there were many people coming and going, and they did not even have time to eat.) ³² And they went away in the boat to a secluded place by themselves.

³³ The people saw them going, and many recognized them and ran there together on foot from all the cities, and got there ahead of them. ³⁴ When Jesus went ashore, He saw a large crowd, and He felt compassion for them because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and He began to teach them many things.

³⁵ And when it was already late, His disciples came up to Him and said, "This place is secluded and it is already late; ³⁶ send them away so that they may go into the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat." ³⁷ But He answered them, "You give them something to eat!" And they said to Him, "Shall we go and spend two hundred denarii on bread, and give it to them to eat?" ³⁸ But He said to them, "How many loaves do you have? Go look!" And when they found out, they said, "Five, and two fish."

³⁹ And He ordered them all to recline by groups on the green grass. ⁴⁰ They reclined in groups of hundreds and fifties. ⁴¹ And He took the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up toward heaven, He blessed the food and broke the loaves and He gave them to the disciples again and again to set before them; and He divided the two fish among them all. ⁴² And they all ate and were satisfied; ⁴³ and they picked up twelve full baskets of the broken pieces of bread, and of the fish. ⁴⁴ There were five thousand men who ate the loaves. (Mark 6:31-44)

Write down any additional details that you learn from Mark's account of this miracle.

¹² Now the day was ending, and the twelve came up and said to Him, "Dismiss the crowd, so that they may go into the surrounding villages and countryside and find lodging and get something to eat; because here, we are in a secluded place." ¹³ But He said to them, "You give them something to eat!" But they said, "We have no more than five loaves and two fish, unless perhaps we go and buy food for all these people." ¹⁴ (For there were about five thousand men.)

But He said to His disciples, "Have them recline to eat in groups of about fifty each."¹⁵ They did so, and had them all recline.¹⁶ And He took the five loaves and the two fish, and, looking up to heaven, He blessed them and broke them, and gave them to the disciples again and again, to serve the crowd.¹⁷ And they all ate and were satisfied; and the broken pieces which they had left over were picked up, twelve baskets full. (Luke 9:12-17)

Write down any additional details that you learn from Luke's account of this miracle.

⁵ So Jesus, after raising His eyes and seeing that a large crowd was coming to Him, said to Philip, "Where are we to buy bread so that these people may eat?"⁶ But He was saying this only to test him, for He Himself knew what He intended to do.⁷ Philip answered Him, "Two hundred denarii worth of bread is not enough for them, for each to receive just a little!"⁸ One of His disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to Him,⁹ "There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish; but what are these for so many people?"

¹⁰ Jesus said, "Have the people recline to eat." Now there was plenty of grass in the place. So the men reclined, about five thousand in number.¹¹ Jesus then took the loaves, and after giving thanks He distributed them to those who were reclining; likewise also of the fish, as much as they wanted.

¹² And when they had eaten their fill, He said to His disciples, "Gather up the leftover pieces so that nothing will be lost."¹³ So they gathered them up, and filled twelve baskets with pieces from the five barley loaves which were left over by those who had eaten.

¹⁴ Therefore when the people saw the sign which He had performed, they said, "This is truly the Prophet who is to come into the world."¹⁵ So Jesus, aware that they intended to come and take Him by force to make Him king, withdrew again to the mountain by Himself, alone. (John 6:5-15)

Write down any additional details that you learn from John's account of this miracle.

Why do you think this miracle is in all four gospels? What does it teach us about Jesus?

DAY FOUR Devotion

Read the following excerpt from William Barclay's *Daily Study Bible*. **William Barclay** (1907-78) was a Scottish minister, Greek scholar, and theological professor at the University of Glasgow. Though liberal in many of his beliefs, his *Daily Study Bible* is considered a masterpiece of scholarly and biblical insight.

The Tragic Drama (14:1-12)

In this tragic drama of the death of John the Baptist, the dramatic personas stand clearly delineated and vividly displayed.

(i) There is John himself. As far as Herod was concerned John had two faults. (a) He was too popular with the people. Josephus also tells the story of the death of John, and it is from this point of view that he tells it. Josephus writes (*Antiquities of the Jews*):

“Now when many others came in crowds about him, for they were greatly moved by hearing his words, Herod, who feared lest the great influence John had over the people might put it into his power and inclination to raise a rebellion (for they seemed ready to do anything he should advise), thought it best, by putting him to death, to prevent any mischief he might cause, and not bring himself into difficulties by sparing a man who might make him repent of it when it was too late. Accordingly, he was sent a prisoner out of Herod's suspicious temper to Machaerus ... and was there put to death.”

As Josephus read the facts, it was Herod's suspicious jealousy of John which made him kill John. Herod, like every weak and suspicious and frightened tyrant, could think of no way of dealing with a possible rival other than killing him.

(b) But the gospel writers see the story from a different point of view. As they see it, Herod killed John because he was a man who told the truth. It is always dangerous to rebuke a tyrant, and that is what John did.

The facts were quite simple. Herod Antipas was married to a daughter of the king of the

Nabatean Arabs. He had a brother in Rome called Philip... On a visit to Rome, Herod Antipas seduced his brother's wife, and persuaded her to leave his brother and to marry him. In order to do so he had to put away his own wife, with, as we shall see, disastrous consequences to himself. In doing this, apart altogether from the moral aspect of the question, Herod broke two laws. He divorced his own wife without cause, and he married his sister-in-law, which was a prohibited marriage under Jewish law. Without hesitation John rebuked him...and signed his own death warrant...

(ii) There is Herodias. As we shall see, she was the ruination of Herod in every possible sense, although she was a woman not without a sense of greatness. At the moment we simply note that she was stained by a triple guilt. She was a woman of loose morals and of infidelity. She was a vindictive woman, who nursed her wrath to keep it warm, and who was out for revenge, even when she was justly condemned. And—perhaps worst of all—she was a woman who did not hesitate to use even her own daughter to realize her own vindictive ends. It would have been bad enough if she herself had sought ways of taking vengeance on the man of God who confronted her with her shame. It was infinitely worse that she used her daughter for her nefarious purposes and made her as great a sinner as herself. There is little to be said for a parent who stains a child with guilt in order to achieve some evil personal purpose.

(iii) There is Herodias' daughter, Salome. Salome must have been young, perhaps sixteen or seventeen years of age. Whatever she may later have become, in this instance

she is surely more sinned against than sinning. There must have been in her an element of shamelessness. Here was a royal princess who acted as a dancing-girl. The dances which these girls danced were suggestive and immoral. For a royal princess to dance in public at all was an amazing thing. Herodias thought nothing of outraging modesty and demeaning her daughter, if only she could gain her revenge on a man who had justly rebuked her.

(iv) There is Herod himself. He is called the tetrarch. Tetrarch literally means the ruler of a fourth part; but it came to be used quite generally, as here, of any subordinate ruler of a section of a country. Herod the Great had many sons. When he died, he divided his territory into three, and, with the consent of the Romans, willed it to three of them. To Archelaus he left Judaea and Samaria; to Philip he left the northern territory of Trachonitis and Ituraea; to Herod Antipas—the Herod of this story—he left Galilee and Peraea. Herod Antipas was by no means an exceptionally bad king; but here he began on the road that led to his complete ruin. We may note three things about him.

(a) He was a man with a guilty conscience. When Jesus became prominent, Herod immediately leaped to the conclusion that this was John come back to life again. Origen has a most interesting suggestion about this. He points out that Mary, the mother of Jesus, and Elisabeth, the mother of John, were closely related (Luke 1:36) and thus Jesus and John closely resembled each other in appearance. If that was the case, then Herod's guilty conscience might appear to have even more grounds for its fears. He is the great proof that no man can rid himself of a sin by ridding himself of the man who confronts him with it. There is such a thing as conscience, and, even if a man's human accuser is eliminated, his divine accuser is still not silenced.

(b) Herod's action was typical of a weak man. He kept a foolish oath and broke a great law. He had promised Salome to give her anything she might ask, little thinking what she would request. He knew well that to grant her request, so as to keep his oath, was to break a far greater law; and yet he chose to do it because he was too weak to admit his error. He was more frightened of a woman's tantrums than of the moral law. He was more frightened of the criticism, and perhaps the amusement, of his guests, than of the voice of conscience. Herod was a man who could take a firm stand on the wrong things, even when he knew what was right; and such a stand is the sign, not of strength, but of weakness.

(c) Herod's action in this case was the beginning of his ruin. The result of his seduction of Herodias and his divorce of his own wife, was that (very naturally) Aretas, the father of his wife, and the ruler of the Nabateans, bitterly resented the insult perpetrated against his daughter. He made war against Herod, and heavily defeated him. The comment of Josephus is:

“Some of the Jews thought that the destruction of Herod's army came from God, and that very justly, as a punishment for what he did against John, who was called the Baptist.”

Herod was in fact only rescued by calling in the power of the Romans to clear things up.

From the very beginning Herod's illegal and immoral alliance with Herodias brought him nothing but trouble. But the influence of Herodias was not to stop there. The years went by and Caligula came to the Roman throne. The Philip who had been tetrarch of Trachonitis and Ituraea died, and Caligula gave the province to another of the Herod family named Agrippa; and with the province he gave him the title of king. The fact that Agrippa was called king moved Herodias to bitter envy. Josephus says,

“She was not able to conceal how miserable she was, by reason of the envy she had towards him.”

The consequence of her envy was that she incited Herod to go to Rome and to ask Caligula that he too should be granted the title of king, for Herodias was determined to be a queen. “Let us go to Rome,” she said, “and let us spare no pains or expenses, either of silver or gold, since they cannot be kept for any better use than for obtaining a kingdom.”

Herod was very unwilling to take action; he was naturally lazy, and he also foresaw serious trouble. But this persistent woman had her way. Herod prepared to set out to Rome; but Agrippa sent messengers to forestall him with accusations that Herod was preparing treacherously to rebel from Rome. The result was that Caligula believed Agrippa's accusations, took Herod's province from him, with all his money, and gave it to Agrippa, and banished Herod to far off Gaul to languish there in exile until he died.

So in the end it was through Herodias that Herod lost his fortune and his kingdom, and dragged out a weary existence in the far away places of Gaul...

If ever there was proof that sin brings its own punishment, that proof lies in the story of Herod. It was an ill day when Herod first seduced Herodias. From that act of infidelity came the murder of John, and in the end disaster, in which he lost all...

Compassion and Power (14:13-21)

Galilee must have been a place where it was very difficult to be alone. Galilee was a small country, only 50 miles from north to south and 25 miles from east to west, and Josephus tells us that in his time within that small area there were 204 towns and villages, none with a population of less than 15,000 people. In such a thickly populated area it was not easy

to get away from people for any length of time. But it was quiet on the other side of the lake, and at its widest the lake was only 8 miles wide. Jesus' friends were fishermen; and it was not difficult to embark on one of their boats and seek retirement on the east side of the lake. That is what Jesus did when he heard of the death of John.

There were three perfectly simple and natural reasons why Jesus should seek to be alone. He was human and he needed rest. He never recklessly ran into danger, and it was well to withdraw, lest too early he should share the fate of John. And, most of all, with the Cross coming nearer and nearer, Jesus knew that he must meet with God before he met with men. He was seeking rest for his body and strength for his soul in the lonely places.

But he was not to get it. It would be easy to see the boat set sail and to deduce where it was going; and the crowds flocked round the top of the lake and were waiting for him at the other side. So Jesus healed them and, when the evening came, he fed them before they took the long road home. Few of Jesus' miracles are so revealing as this.

(i) It tells us of the compassion of Jesus. When he saw the crowds he was moved with compassion to the depths of his being. That is a very wonderful thing. Jesus had come to find peace and quiet and loneliness; instead he found a vast crowd eagerly demanding what he could give. He might so easily have resented them. What right had they to invade his privacy with their continual demands? Was he to have no rest and quiet, no time to himself at all? But Jesus was not like that. So far from finding them a nuisance, he was moved with compassion for them...

We must never deal with people with one eye on the clock, and as if we were anxious to be rid of them as soon as we decently can.

(ii) We see Jesus witnessing that all gifts are from God. He took the food and he said a blessing. The Jewish grace before meals was very simple:

“Blessed art thou, Jehovah our God, King of the universe, who bringest forth bread from the earth.”

That would be the grace which Jesus said, for that was the grace which every Jewish family used. Here we see Jesus showing that it is God's gifts which he brings to men. The grace of gratitude is rare enough towards men; it is rarer still towards God.

(iii) This miracle informs us very clearly of the place of the disciple in the work of Christ. The story tells that Jesus gave to the disciples and the disciples gave to the crowd. Jesus worked through the hands of his disciples that day, and he still does...

Jesus Christ needs disciples through whom he can work and through whom his truth and his love can enter into the lives of others. He needs men to whom he can give, in order that they may give to others...

It would be easy to be daunted and discouraged by a task of such magnitude. But there is another thing in this story that may lift up our hearts. When Jesus told the disciples to feed the crowd, they told him that all

they had was five loaves and two fishes; and yet with what they brought to him, Jesus wrought his miracle. Jesus sets every one of us the tremendous task of communicating himself to men; but he does not demand from us splendors and powers that we do not possess. He says to us, “Come to me as you are, however ill-equipped; bring to me what you have, however little, and I will use it greatly in my service.”

Little is always much in the hands of Christ.

There are some people who read the miracles of Jesus, and feel no need to understand. Let them remain forever undisturbed in the sweet simplicity of their faith. There are others who read and their minds question and they feel they must understand. Let them take no shame of it, for God comes far more than half way to meet the questing mind. But in whatever way we approach the miracles of Jesus, one thing is certain. We must never be content to regard them as something which happened; we must always regard them as something which happens. They are not isolated events in history; they are demonstrations of the always and forever operative power of Jesus Christ...

It does not matter how we understand this miracle. One thing is sure—when Christ is there, the weary find rest and the hungry soul is fed.

What thought from William Barclay’s words stands out to you the most? Why?

DAY FIVE
Application

Re-read Matthew 14:1-21 and consider the truths that you have learned this week. Seek to apply the message of Matthew 14:1-21 to your life.

What thought or truth impacted you this week from your study of Matthew 14:1-21?

The miracle of the feeding of the 5000 is a miracle that still instructs us today.

What task or problem are you facing right now in your life that feels overwhelming?

What is an “easy way out” in this situation? What might you be tempted to do?

**What are your “fish and loaves” in this situation?
What small things can you do?**



What can't you do in this situation? What do you need to hand over to Jesus?

Little is much in the hands of Jesus! Offer your life to Him and trust Him to meet your needs.

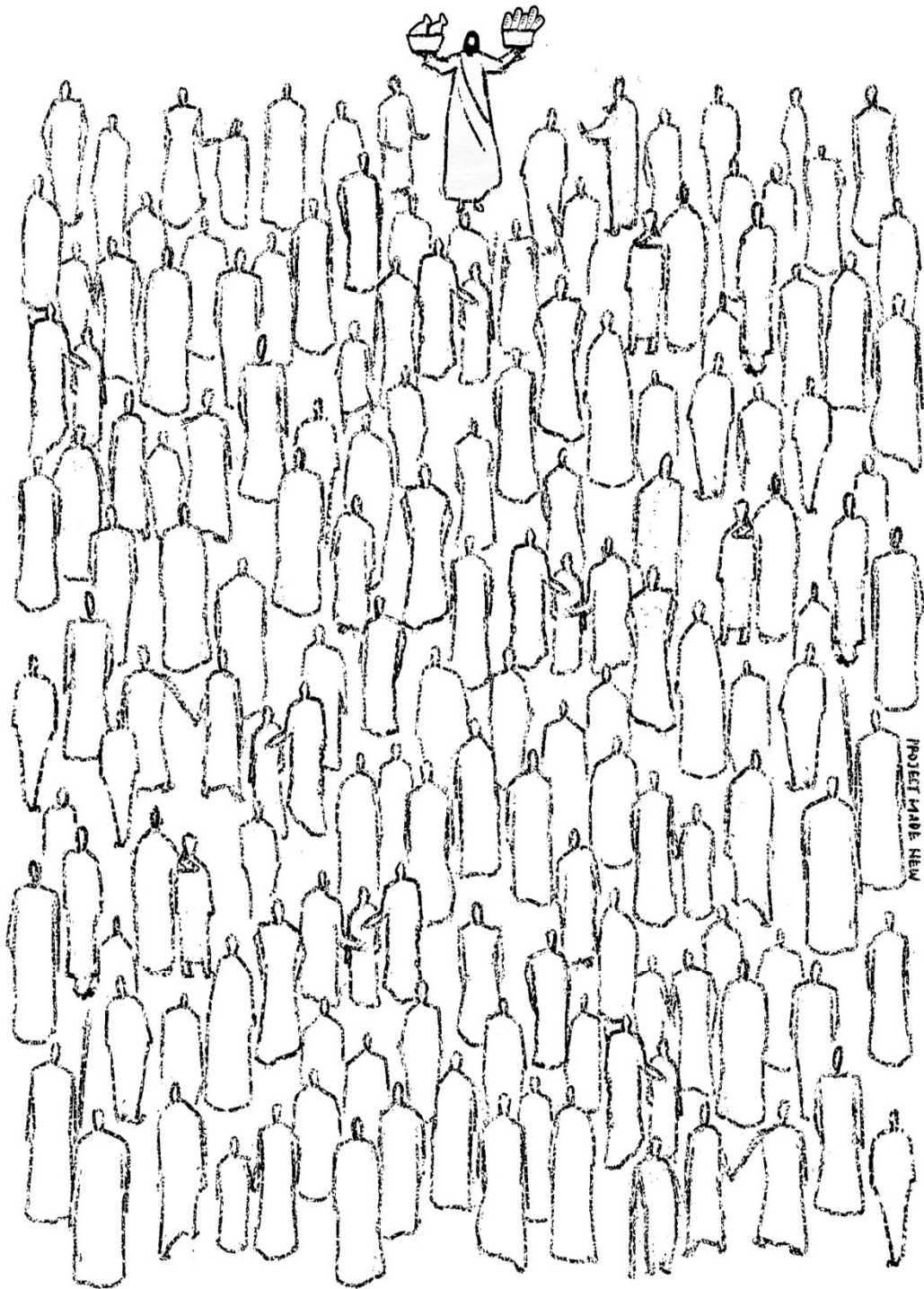
SUGGESTED QUESTIONS FOR GROUP OR FAMILY DISCUSSION:

The goal is not to get through all the questions but to spark discussion around the truth of Matthew 14:1-21. Use the questions below to interact together with what you learned.

- Talk about a time in your life when you were confronted with a situation that reminded you that you were not in control. How did you feel in the midst of this situation? What did you do? What did you learn in the midst of it?
- Jesus said that “among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist” (11:11). Yet what happened to John the Baptist? What does his short life teach you about what it means to be great in God’s eyes?
- What do you learn about Herod Antipas in this passage? What were his fears? His mistakes? His weaknesses? His sins? What moral lessons can you learn from his life?
- Put yourself in the disciples’ shoes in Matthew 14. You have had an incredibly busy day. You are tired, exhausted, emotionally spent. There are crowds of people all around, needing food. Who would you have been most like among Jesus’ disciples? Philip, trying to figure out the logistics and financial cost of such a task? Andrew, looking for whatever help he can find? Or Peter and the other disciples, telling Jesus to just send them all away?
- How would you have responded when Jesus told you to give them something to eat? What would be your facial expression? What would you say (or want to say) to Him?
- How would you have responded after the miracle? How would you feel?
- What does this miracle teach you about Jesus?
- Did you discover anything new, interesting, or meaningful in your study of this passage this week? Or in your reading of William Barclay? If so, what?
- Share a problem or difficulty that you are facing in your life right now. What small thing can you do in this situation? What do you need to hand over to Jesus? Spend time in prayer together, praying for one another as you learn to rely on Jesus.

*The significance of this miracle was intended primarily for the disciples.
Jesus was illustrating the kind of ministry they would have after His departure.
They would be involved in feeding people, but with spiritual food.
The source for their feeding would be the Lord Himself.
When their supply ran out, as with the bread and fish,
they would need to return to the Lord for more.
He would supply them, but the feeding would be done through them.*

Louis A. Barbieri, Jr.



I am the bread of life.
Whoever comes to me will never go hungry,
and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.
John 6:35

DISCIPLESHIP TRAINING: Overcoming Fear
Matthew 14:22-36

DAY ONE
Observation

After the feeding of the 5000, Jesus immediately compels His disciples to get into their boat and go to the other side. Apparently the miracle had stirred up the people to the point that they wanted to seize Jesus and make Him their king (John 6:15) and the disciples may have been ready to join in with the crowd. Instead, Jesus has another lesson for them to learn—how to trust Him in the midst of storms.

Ask God to speak to your heart as you read Matthew 14:22-36. Mark words or phrases that stand out to you. Write down the main message or your thoughts next to each paragraph.

²² Immediately he made the disciples get into the boat and go before him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. ²³ And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up on the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, ²⁴ but the boat by this time was a long way from the land, beaten by the waves, for the wind was against them.

²⁵ And in the fourth watch of the night he came to them, walking on the sea. ²⁶ But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, and said, “It is a ghost!” and they cried out in fear. ²⁷ But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, “Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid.”

²⁸ And Peter answered him, “Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.” ²⁹ He said, “Come.” So Peter got out of the boat and walked on the water and came to Jesus. ³⁰ But when he saw the wind, he was afraid, and beginning to sink he cried out, “Lord, save me.” ³¹ Jesus immediately reached out his hand and took hold of him, saying to him, “O you of little faith, why did you doubt?”

³² And when they got into the boat, the wind ceased. ³³ And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, “Truly you are the Son of God.”

³⁴ And when they had crossed over, they came to land at Gennesaret. ³⁵ And when the men of that place recognized him, they sent around to all that region and brought to him all who were sick ³⁶ and implored him that they might only touch the fringe of his garment. And as many as touched it were made well. (ESV)

What thought or verse stands out to you in Matthew 14:22-36? Why?

The feeding of the 5000 took place on the east side of the Sea of Galilee, somewhere near Bethsaida (Lk. 9:10). Jesus commands His disciples to go to *the other side*. They head off toward Capernaum (Jn. 6:17) but, because of the force of the storm, end up in the area of Gennesaret, apparently where Jesus wanted them to go the whole time.



Put a box around the word “immediately,” used 3x in this passage. **What three things does Jesus do *immediately* in this passage?**

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Write down 3-5 things that you learn about Jesus from this passage.

Complete the following sentences from this passage.

Jesus went up on the mountain by Himself to _____.

When the disciples saw Him walking on the sea, they were _____.

Jesus said to them: “Take heart. _____ . Do not be afraid.”

When Peter saw the wind, he was _____.

When Peter began to sink, he cried out, _____.

Those in the boat worshiped him, saying, _____.

**DAY TWO
Meditation**

Quiet your heart and allow God to speak through His Word. Slowly read Matthew 14:35-37 several times. Reflect on each word. Meditate on them over and over until you memorize them.

*Now in the fourth watch of the night,
Yeshua came to them,
walking on the sea.*

*But when the disciples saw Him walking on the sea,
they were terrified, saying, "It's a ghost!"
And they cried out with fear.*

*But immediately, Yeshua spoke to them,
saying, "Take courage! I am. Don't be afraid." (TLV)*

*The TLV (Tree of Life Version) is a Messianic Jewish version that uses the Hebrew name Yeshua for Jesus.

Write down the observations that you can make from this passage, sketch out any images or thoughts that you have, or simply rewrite the passage below giving emphasis to key words.

Offer the passage back to God in the form of a personalized prayer.

DAY THREE Interpretation

In interpretation, you are digging deeper into the passage in order to better understand its meaning. A word study on a key word and/or looking up parallel passages can help you in your understanding.

There is a key phrase in Matthew 14 that is often missed in English translations.

Go to blueletterbible.org and type "Matthew 14" into the "Search the Bible" box. Next click on Matthew 14:27 to bring up the verse in the Greek.

Find the phrase "it is I." It will be two Greek words. First, click on the Strong's number (G1510) for "it is" to bring up the Greek word, its definition, and its usage in the NT.

What is the Greek word for "it is"? _____ (Use the transliteration.)

How many times is it used in the New Testament? _____ (See KJV Translation Count.)

What is its definition? (See Outline of Biblical Usage and Strong's Definition.)

How is this phrase translated when it is used with G1473? (See KJV Translation Count, 1st listing)

Now go back and click on "I" (G1473).

What is this Greek word for "I"? _____ (Use the transliteration)

How many times is it used in the New Testament? _____ (See KJV Translation Count.)

Why is it used in the NT? (Note what it says under Root Word and Strong's Definition.)

When Jesus uses this phrase in the Gospels, it often echoes back to Exodus 3:13-14.

Then Moses said to God, "Indeed, when I come to the children of Israel and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they say to me, 'What is His name?' what shall I say to them?" And God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM." And He said, "Thus you shall say to the children of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you.'"

The personal name of God, the One that He chooses for Himself, is YAHWEH, meaning—I AM.

God is independent, all-sufficient in himself, and the only source of all existence and life.

Yahweh is the name that describes this essence and identity most clearly. His name is "being."

—Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*

Read the following passages in which Jesus uses this phrase. Mark key words as you read.

*And when they saw Him walking on the sea, they supposed it was a ghost, and cried out; for they all saw Him and were troubled. But immediately He talked with them and said to them, "Be of good cheer! **It is I**; do not be afraid." (Mark 6:49-50)*

*Then Jesus spoke to them again, saying, "**I am** the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life." (John 8:12)*

*And He said to them, "You are from beneath; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world. Therefore, I said to you that you will die in your sins; for if you do not believe that **I am**, you will die in your sins." (John 8:23-24)*

*Then Jesus said to them, "When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that **I am**, and that I do nothing of Myself; but as My Father taught Me, I speak these things. And He who sent Me is with Me. The Father has not left Me alone, for I always do those things that please Him." (John 8:28-29)*

*Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad." Then the Jews said to Him, "You are not yet fifty years old, and have You seen Abraham?" Jesus said to them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, **I AM**." Then they took up stones to throw at Him; but Jesus hid Himself and went out of the temple, going through the midst of them, and so passed by. (Jn 8:56-59)*

*"**I am** the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep." (John 10:11)*

*Jesus said to her, "**I am** the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?" (John 11:25-26)*

*"Now I tell you before it comes [His betrayal by Judas], that when it does come to pass, you may believe that **I am**. Most assuredly, I say to you, he who receives whomever I send receives Me; and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me." (John 13:19-20)*

*Jesus said to him, "**I am** the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me. (John 14:6)*

*Then Judas, having received a detachment of troops, and officers from the chief priests and Pharisees, came there with lanterns, torches, and weapons. Jesus therefore, knowing all things that would come upon Him, went forward and said to them, "Whom are you seeking?" They answered Him, "Jesus of Nazareth." Jesus said to them, "**I am**." And Judas, who betrayed Him, also stood with them. Now when He said to them, "**I am**," they drew back and fell to the ground. (John 18:3-6)*

What do you learn about Jesus after reading these verses? What stands out to you? Why?

DAY FOUR Devotion

Read the following excerpt from Alexander MacLaren's *Expositions of Holy Scriptures*. **Alexander MacLaren** (1826-1910) was a Baptist pastor in Manchester, England whose sermons were known for their "profundity of thought, logical arrangement, eloquence of appeal, and power over the human heart."

The King's Highway (Matthew 14:22-36)

The haste and urgency with which the disciples were sent away, against their will, after the miracle of feeding the five thousand, is explained in John's account. The crowd had been excited to a dangerous enthusiasm by a miracle so level to their tastes. A prophet who could feed them was something more than a prophet. So they determine to make him a king. Our Lord, fearing the outburst, resolves to withdraw into the lonely hills, that the fickle blaze may die down. If the disciples had remained with Him, He could not have so easily stolen away, and they might have caught the popular fervor. To divide would distract the crowd, and make it easier for Him to disperse them, while many of them, as really happened, would be likely to set off by land for Capernaum, when they saw the boat had gone.

The main teaching of this miracle, over and above its demonstration of the Messianic power of our Lord, is symbolical. All the miracles are parables, and this eminently so. Thus regarding it, we have—

I. Struggling toilers and the absent Christ.

They had a short row of some five or six miles in prospect, when they started in the early evening. An hour or so might have done it, but, for some unknown reason, they lingered. Perhaps instead of pulling across, they may have kept inshore, by the head of the lake, expecting Jesus to join them at some point. Thus, night finds them but a short way on their voyage. The paschal moon would be shining down on them, and perhaps in their eager talk about the miracle they had just

seen, they did not make much speed. A sudden breeze sprang up, as is common at nightfall on mountain lakes; and soon a gale, against which they could make no headway, was blowing in their teeth. This lasted for eight or nine hours. Wet and weary, they tugged at the oars through the livelong night, the seas breaking over them, and the wind howling down the glens.

They had been caught in a similar storm once before, but then He had been on board, and it was daylight. Now it was dark, 'and Jesus had not yet come to them,' How they would look back at the dim outline of the hills, where they knew He was, and wonder why He had sent them out into the tempest alone! Mark tells us that He saw them distressed, hours before He came to them, and that makes His desertion the stranger. It is but His method of lovingly training them to do without His personal presence, and a symbol of what is to be the life of His people till the end. He is on the mountain in prayer, and He sees the laboring boat and the distressed rowers.

The contrast is the same as is given in the last verses of Mark's Gospel, where the serene composure of the Lord, sitting at the right hand of God, is sharply set over against the wandering, toiling lives of His servants, in their evangelistic mission. The commander-in-chief sits apart on the hill, directing the fight, and sending regiment after regiment to their deaths. Does that mean indifference? So it might seem but for the words which follow, 'the Lord working with them.' He shares in all the toil; and the lifting up of His holy hands sways the current of the fight, and inclines the balance. His love appoints effort and persistent struggle as the law of our lives.

Nor are we to mourn or wonder; for the purpose of the appointment, so far as we are concerned, is to make character, and to give us 'the wrestling might that tackles the world.' Difficulties make men of us. Summer sailors, yachting in smooth water, have neither the joy of conflict nor the vigor which it gives. Better the darkness, when we cannot see our way, and the wind in our faces, if the good of things is to be estimated by their power to 'strengthen us with strength in our soul!'

II. We have the approaching Christ.

Not till the last watch of the night does He come, when they have long struggled, and the boat is out in the very middle of the lake, and the storm is fiercest. We may learn from this the delays of His love. Because He loved Mary and Martha and Lazarus, He stayed still, in strange inaction, for two days, after their message. Because He loved Peter and the praying band, He let him lie in prison till the last hour of the last watch of the last night before his intended execution, and then delivered him with a leisureliness making him put on article after article of dress which tells of conscious omnipotence.

Heaven's clock goes at a different rate from our little timepieces. God's day is a thousand years, and the longest tarrying is but 'a little while.' When He has come, we find that it is 'right early,' though before He came He seemed to us to delay.

He comes across the waves. Their restless and yielding crests are smoothed and made solid by the touch of His foot. 'He walketh on the sea as on a pavement' (Job 9:8). It is a revelation of divine power. It is one of the very few miracles affecting Christ's own person, and may perhaps be regarded as being, like the Transfiguration, a casual gleam of latent glory breaking through the body of His humiliation, and so, in some

sense, prophetic. But it is also symbolic. He ever uses tumults and unrest as a means of advancing His purposes. The stormy sea is the recognized OT emblem of antagonism to the divine rule; and just as He walked on the billows, so does He reach His purpose by ... making it to praise Him. In this sense, too, His 'paths are in the great waters.'

In another aspect, we have here the symbol of Christ's using our difficulties and trials as the means of His loving approach to us. He comes, giving a deeper and more blessed sense of His presence by means of our sorrows, than in calm sunny weather. It is generally over a stormy sea that He comes to us, and golden treasures are thrown on our shores after a tempest.

III. We have terror and recognition.

The disciples were as yet little lifted above their fellows; they had no expectation of His coming, and thought just what any rude minds would have thought, that this mysterious Thing stalking towards them across the waters came from the unseen world, and that it was the herald of their drowning. Terror froze their blood, and brought out a shriek as the word might be rendered which was heard above the dash of waves and the raving wind. They had gallantly fought the tempest, but this unmanned them.

We too often mistake Christ, when He comes to us. We do not recognize His working in the storm, nor His presence giving power to battle with it. We are so absorbed in the circumstances that we fail to see Him through them. Our tears weave a veil which hides Him, or the darkness obscures His face, and we see nothing but the threatening crests of the waves, curling high above our little boat. We mistake our best friend, and we are afraid of Him as we dimly see Him; and sometimes we think that the tokens of His presence are only phantasms of our own imagination.

They who were deceived by His appearance knew Him by His voice, as Mary did at the sepulcher. How blessed must have been the moment when that astounding certitude thrilled through their souls! That low voice is audible through all the tumult. He speaks to us by His word, and by the silent speech in our spirits, which makes us conscious that He is there. He does speak to us in the deepest of our sorrows, in the darkest of our nights; and when we hear of His voice, and with wonder and joy cry out, 'It is the Lord,' our sorrow is soothed, and the darkness is light about us.

The consciousness of His presence banishes all fear. 'Be not afraid,' follows 'It is I.' It is of no use to preach courage unless we preach Christ first. If we have not Him with us, we do well to fear: His presence is the only rational foundation for calm fearlessness. Only when the Lord of Hosts is with us, ought we not to fear, 'though the waters roar . . . and be troubled.' 'Through the dear might of Him that walked the waves' can we feeble creatures face all terrors, and feel no terror.

IV. We have the end of the storm and the voyage.

The storm ceases as soon as Jesus is on board. John does not mention the cessation of the tempest, but tells us that they were immediately at the shore. It does not seem necessary

to suppose another miracle, but only that the voyage ended very speedily. It is not always true that His presence is the end of dangers and difficulties, but the consciousness of His presence does hush the storm. The worst of trouble is gone when we know that He shares it; and though the long swell after the gale may last, it no longer threatens.

Nor is it always true that His coming, and our consciousness that He has come, bring a speedy close to toils. We have to labor on, but in how different a mood these men would bend to their oars after they had Him on board! With Him beside us toil is sweet, burdens are lighter, and the road is shortened.

Even with Him on board, life is a stormy voyage; but without Him, it ends in shipwreck. With Him, it may be long, but it will look all the shorter while it lasts, and when we land the rough weather will be remembered but as a transient squall.

These wearied rowers, who had toiled all night, stepped on shore as the morning broke on the eastern bank. So we, if we have had Him for our shipmate, shall land on the eternal shore, and dry our wet garments in the sunshine, and all the stormy years that seemed so long shall be remembered but as a watch in the night.

What thought from Alexander MacLaren's words stands out to you the most? Why?

DAY FIVE
Application

Re-read Matthew 14:22-36 and consider the truths that you have learned this week. Seek to apply the message of Matthew 14:22-36 to your life.

What thought or truth impacted you this week from your study of Matthew 14:22-36?

Often our lives can feel out of control. This world can feel out of control. We face trials, difficulties, and fears.

What fears do you have right now in your life? What are you afraid of?

Be honest with yourself. Remember that often behind our anger and sorrow is fear.



How do Jesus' words give you comfort today? *Take courage, I AM, do not be afraid!*

Though Peter had only a "little faith" he was still able to walk on the water as long as he kept his eyes on Jesus. Think about it. Peter walked *above the waves* when his eyes were fixed on Jesus.

Go back and read the "I am" words of Jesus on page 70. Pick one verse that speaks to your heart. Repeat it out loud. Memorize it. Ask God to help you fix your eyes on Jesus this week.

SUGGESTED QUESTIONS FOR GROUP OR FAMILY DISCUSSION:

The goal is not to get through all the questions but to spark discussion around the truth of Matthew 14:22-36. Use the questions below to interact together with what you learned.

- Which of the following fears is one of your biggest—heights, flying on a plane, snakes, spiders, germs, public speaking, or being in tight spaces? Why do you think you have this fear?
- What is a time that you can remember being afraid as a child? What helped you in the midst of your fear?
- What do you learn about the disciples from this passage? How would you have responded if you would have been in their situation?
- What do you learn about Jesus from this passage?
- Why do you think Jesus waited *until the fourth watch* (3-6am) before coming to the disciples?
- Why do you think Peter asked to walk on the water to Jesus? What was going through his mind? Why did he sink?
- Did you discover anything new, interesting, or meaningful in your study of this passage this week? Or in your reading of Alexander MacLaren? If so, what?
- Share one of the fears that you have on your mind or heart today. Why do you have this fear? How do Jesus' words—*Take courage, I AM, do not be afraid*—encourage you?
- Spend time together in prayer for one another.

The remarkable thing about fearing God is that when you fear God you fear nothing else, whereas if you do not fear God you fear everything else.

Oswald Chambers

The presence of hope in the invincible sovereignty of God drives out fear.

John Piper

DISCIPLESHIP TRAINING: Seeing the Heart
Matthew 15:1-20

DAY ONE
Observation

Jesus continues His intensive training of His disciples. In this passage, a group of religious leaders arrive in Galilee from Jerusalem in order to confront Jesus regarding the “tradition of the elders” (Jewish oral law).

Ask God to speak to your heart as you read Matthew 15:1-20. Mark words or phrases that stand out to you. Write down the main message or your thoughts next to each section.

Then the scribes and Pharisees who were from Jerusalem came to Jesus, saying, ²“Why do Your disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat bread.”

³He answered and said to them, “Why do you also transgress the commandment of God because of your tradition? ⁴For God commanded, saying, ‘Honor your father and your mother’; and, ‘He who curses father or mother, let him be put to death.’ ⁵But you say, ‘Whoever says to his father or mother, “Whatever profit you might have received from me is a gift to God”— ⁶then he need not honor his father or mother.’ Thus you have made the commandment of God of no effect by your tradition. ⁷Hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy about you, saying:

⁸ ‘These people draw near to Me with their mouth,
And honor Me with their lips,
But their heart is far from Me.
⁹ And in vain they worship Me,
Teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.’ ”

¹⁰ When He had called the multitude to Himself, He said to them, “Hear and understand: ¹¹ Not what goes into the mouth defiles a man; but what comes out of the mouth, this defiles a man.”

¹² Then His disciples came and said to Him, “Do You know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this saying?”

¹³ But He answered and said, “Every plant which My heavenly Father has not planted will be uprooted. ¹⁴ Let them alone. They are blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind leads the blind, both will fall into a ditch.”

¹⁵ Then Peter answered and said to Him, “Explain this parable to us.”

¹⁶ So Jesus said, “Are you also still without understanding? ¹⁷ Do you not yet understand that whatever enters the mouth goes into the stomach and is eliminated? ¹⁸ But those things which proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and they defile a man. ¹⁹ For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies. ²⁰ These are the things which defile a man, but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile a man.” (NKJV)

What thought or verse stands out to you in Matthew 15:1-20? Why?

The “tradition of the elders” refers to a collection of oral teachings on the OT Law by various rabbis down through the centuries. This oral tradition was later compiled into the *Mishnah*.

What issue do the Pharisees have with Jesus’ disciples (15:1-2)?

How would you summarize Jesus’ response to them (15:3-9)?

What does Jesus want the multitudes to hear and understand (15:10-11)?

Jesus’ disciples report to Him that the Pharisees were very offended by Jesus’ answer to them.

How would you summarize Jesus’ response to His disciples (15:13-14)?

Complete the following sentences based on this passage:

Those things which proceed out of the mouth come from the _____.

For out of the heart proceed evil _____, murders, _____, fornications, thefts, _____, blasphemies.

To eat with unwashed hands does not _____ a man.

DAY TWO
Meditation

Quiet your heart and allow God to speak through His Word. Slowly read Matthew 15:16-20 several times. Reflect on each word. Meditate on them over and over until you memorize them.

“Are you still so dull?” Jesus asked them.

“Don’t you see that whatever enters the mouth goes into the stomach and then out of the body?”

But the things that come out of a person’s mouth come from the heart, and these defile them.

For out of the heart come evil thoughts—

murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander.

These are what defile a person;

but eating with unwashed hands does not defile them.” (NIV)

Write down the observations that you can make from this passage, sketch out any images or thoughts that you have, or simply rewrite the passage below giving emphasis to key words.

Offer the passage back to God in the form of a personalized prayer.

DAY THREE Interpretation

In interpretation, you are digging deeper into the passage in order to better understand its meaning. A word study on a key word and/or looking up parallel passages can help you in your understanding.

To understand this passage, it is important to know the importance of the “oral law” in Judaism.

Read the following explanation of the oral law from gotquestions.com.

The Mishnah is the oral law in Judaism, as opposed to the written Torah, or the Mosaic Law. The Mishnah was collected and committed to writing about AD 200. A particular teaching within the Mishnah is called a midrash.

Orthodox Judaism believes that Moses received the Torah (the books of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy) from God and that he wrote down everything God spoke to him. However, they also believe that God gave Moses explanations and examples of how to interpret the Law that Moses did *not* write down. These unwritten explanations are known in Judaism as the Oral Torah. The Oral Torah was supposedly passed down from Moses to Joshua and then to the rabbis until the advent of Christianity when it was finally written down as the legal authority called *halahka* (“the walk”).

The Mishnah (משנה, “repetition”) essentially records the debates of the post-temple sages from AD 70—200 and is considered the first major work of “Rabbinical Judaism.” It is composed of six orders (*sedarim*), arranged topically:

- *Zeraim* (“seeds”) – discussions concerning prayer, diet, and agricultural laws
- *Moed* (“festival”) – discussions about holidays
- *Nashim* (“women”) – discussions about women and family life
- *Nezikin* (“damages”) – discussions about damages and compensation in civil law
- *Kodashim* (“holy things”) – discussions on sacrifices, offerings, and temple-related matters
- *Tohorot* (“purities”) – discussions regarding the purity of vessels, foods, dwellings, and people

After the Mishnah was published, it was studied exhaustively by generations of rabbis in both Babylonia and Israel. From AD 200—500, additional commentaries on the Mishnah were compiled and put together as the Gemara. Actually, there are two different versions of the Gemara, one compiled by scholars in Israel (c. AD 400) and the other by the scholars of Babylonia (c. AD 500).

Together, the Mishnah and the Gemara form the Talmud. Since there are two different Gemaras, there are two different Talmuds: the Babylonian Talmud and the Jerusalem (or Palestinian) Talmud. The Talmud can be thought of as rabbinical commentaries on the Hebrew Scriptures...

In Judaism the Talmud is just as important as the Hebrew Bible.

Though the Mishnah was not written down until AD 200, it is pretty clear that the oral traditions recorded in the Mishnah were reflections of the “traditions of the elders” that the Pharisees and scribes of Jesus’ day would have taught, debated, and followed. Thus, reading about hand washing in the Mishnah can give us a sense of what the Pharisees were arguing with Jesus about.

Read the following excerpts and explanations on hand washing from the Mishnah.

Introduction. People tend to touch many things (in Hebrew this is phrased—hands are busy) and it would be virtually impossible to prevent one's hands from ever touching something that was impure. To remedy this problem the rabbis decreed that one should always wash one's hands before eating any food. This is the source of the custom that remains to this day to ritually wash one's hands before eating.

The first Mishnah of Yadayim is about how much water is necessary for the ritual washing of one's hands. A log is about 1/2 a liter of water. So the basic amount of 1/4 log works out to about 100 grams of water, a third of a can of Coke for those who drink that stuff.

Mishnah Yadayim 1:1. *[A minimum of] a quarter [of a log] of water must be poured over the hands for one [person] and even for two. A minimum of half a log must be poured over the hands for three or four persons. A minimum of one log [is sufficient] for five, ten, or one hundred persons. Rabbi Yose says: as long as there is not less than a quarter of a log left for the last person among them. More may be added to the second water, but more may not be added to the first water.*

Explanation. *When one pours water over one's hands, there needs to be two pourings. For the first pouring the water must go up to the joint, which is interpreted either as the second joint of the fingers or the joint attaching the fingers to the hand. The problem is that his fingers now defile the water that is on them. To fix this problem he then washes off the water with more water. If the first washing didn't reach all the way to the joint, he is not allowed to pour the second pouring in a place where the first one didn't reach. Rather, he would have to redo the whole thing. But if the second pouring didn't reach the joint, he can just add water to the spots he missed.*

Mishnah Yadayim 1:2. *Water may be poured over the hands out of any kind of vessel, even out of vessels made of animal dung, out of vessels made of stone or out of vessels made of clay. Water may not be poured from the sides of [broken] vessels or from the bottom of a ladle or from the stopper of a jar. Nor may one pour [water] over the hands of his fellow out of his cupped hands. Because one may not draw, nor sanctify, nor sprinkle the water of purification, nor pour water over the hands except in a vessel. And only earthenware vessels closely covered with a lid protect [their contents from uncleanness]...*

Mishnah Yadayim 1:5. *All are fit to pour water over the hands, even a deaf-mute, imbecile, or minor. A person may place the jug between his knees and pour out the water, or he may turn the jug on its side and pour it out. A monkey may pour water over the hands. Rabbi Yose declares these [latter] two cases invalid.*

Explanation: *The requirement is that some power should cause the water to be poured over the hands. Water which flows on its own, for instance rainwater coming out of a drainage pipe, cannot be used for yadayim. A person puts a jug with water in it between his legs and then tilts it to the side. This is a valid way of performing yadayim because his legs count as having caused the water to be poured onto his hands. He can even tilt the jug on its side and then put his hands under the water pouring out. Even a monkey could pour water over someone's hands. In other words, there must be an outside power, but that power need not be human. Rabbi Yose says that the final two cases are invalid because the water needs to be poured by a force initiated by a person. So if the water flows from the barrel on its own or a monkey pours the water, the hand-washing is invalid..*

What were some of the rules for washing your hands in the oral tradition of the Mishnah?

The Pharisees were meticulous about obeying these kinds of rules when it came to washing their hands but they neglected the more important commandments of God. **What does Jesus confront them with in 15:4-6? What were they neglecting to do in their own personal lives?**

Read Isaiah 29:13. This is the passage that Jesus quotes to describe the Pharisees.

The Lord says:

“These people come near to me with their mouth

and honor me with their lips,

but their hearts are far from me.

Their worship of me is based on merely human rules they have been taught.”

Circle three key words in this verse. What words did you circle and why?

Go to blueletterbible.org and type “Matthew 15” into the “Search the Bible” box. Next click on Matthew 15:18 to bring up the verse in the Greek. Find the word “heart” and click on the Strong’s number (G2588) for “it is” to bring up the Greek word, its definition, and its usage in the NT.

What is the Greek word for “heart”? _____ (Use the transliteration.)

How many times is it used in the New Testament? _____ (See KJV Translation Count.)

What is its definition? (See particularly B. in the Outline of Biblical Usage.)

On a scale of 1 to 10, how important is the condition of your heart in God’s eyes? _____

DAY FOUR Devotion

Read the following commentary from J.C. Ryle's *Expository Thoughts on Matthew*. **J. C. Ryle** (1816-1900) was the Anglican bishop of Liverpool, where his sermons and writings impacted thousands in England and abroad. At the end of his life, he was described as "the man of granite with the heart of a child."

MATTHEW 15:1-9

We have in these verses a conversation between our Lord Jesus Christ, and certain Scribes and Pharisees. The subject of it may seem, at first sight, of little interest in modern days. But it is not so in reality. The principles of the Pharisees are principles that never die. There are truths laid down here, which are of deep importance.

We learn, for one thing, that *hypocrites generally attach great importance to mere outward things in religion.*

The complaint of the Scribes and Pharisees in this place, is a striking case in point. They brought an accusation to our Lord against His disciples. But what was its nature? It was not that they were covetous or self-righteous. It was not that they were untruthful or uncharitable. It was not that they had broken any part of the law of God. But they "disobey the tradition of the elders. They don't wash their hands when they eat bread." They did not observe some rule of mere human authority, which some old Jew had invented! This was the head and front of their offence!

Do we see nothing of the spirit of the Pharisees in the present day? Unhappily we see only too much. There are thousands of professing Christians, who seem to care nothing about the religion of their neighbors, provided that it agrees in outward matters with their own. Does their neighbor worship according to their particular form? Can he repeat their shibboleth, and talk a little about their favorite doctrines? If he can, they are satisfied, though there is no evidence that he is converted. If he cannot, they are always

finding fault, and cannot speak peaceably of him, though he may be serving Christ better than themselves. Let us beware of this spirit. It is the very essence of hypocrisy. Let our principle be—"the kingdom of God is not food and drink, but righteousness and peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit." (Rom. 14:17.)

We learn, for another thing, from these verses, *the great danger of attempting to add anything to the word of God.* Whenever a man takes upon him to make additions to the Scriptures, he is likely to end with valuing his own additions above Scripture itself.

We see this point brought out most strikingly in our Lord's answer to the charge of the Pharisees against His disciples. He says, "Why do you disobey the commandment of God because of your *tradition*?" He strikes boldly at the whole system of adding anything, as needful to salvation, to God's perfect word. He exposes the mischievous tendency of the system by an example. He shows how the vaunted traditions of the Pharisees were actually destroying the authority of the fifth commandment. In short, He establishes the great truth, which ought never be forgotten, that there is an inherent tendency in all traditions, to "make the commandment of God void." The authors of these traditions may have meant no such thing. Their intentions may have been pure. But that there is a tendency in all religious institutions of mere human authority, to usurp the authority of God's word, is evidently the doctrine of Christ. It is a solemn remark of Bucer's, that "a man is rarely to be found, who pays an excessive attention to human inventions in religion, who does not put more trust in them than in the grace of God."

And have we not seen melancholy proof of this truth, in the history of the Church of Christ? Unhappily we have seen only too much. As Baxter says, “men think God's laws too many and too strict, and yet make more of their own, and are precise for keeping them.” Have we never read how some have exalted canons, rubrics, and ecclesiastical laws above the word of God, and punished disobedience to them with far greater severity than open sins, like drunkenness and swearing? Have we never heard of men who make more ado about eating meat in Lent, than about gross impurity of life, or murder? Have we never observed in our own land, how many seem to regard “Churchmanship,” as they call it, as far outweighing repentance, faith, holiness, and the graces of the Spirit?

These are questions which can only receive one sorrowful answer. The spirit of the Pharisees still lives... The disposition to “make the commandment of God void by traditions,” is to be found among Christians, as well as among Jews. The tendency practically to exalt man's inventions above God's word, is still fearfully prevalent. May we watch against it, and be on our guard! ...

We learn, in the last place, from these verses, that *the religious worship which God desires, is the worship of the heart*. We find our Lord establishing this by a quotation from Isaiah, “This people draws near to me with their lips, but their heart is far from me.”

The heart is the principal thing in the relation of husband and wife, of friend and friend, of parent and child. The heart must be the principal point to which we attend in all the relations between God and our souls. What is the first thing we need, in order to be Christians? A new heart. What is the sacrifice God asks us to bring to him? A broken and a contrite heart. What is the true circumcision? The circumcision of the heart. What is

genuine obedience? To obey from the heart. What is saving faith? To believe with the heart. Where ought Christ to dwell? To dwell in our hearts by faith. What is the chief request that Wisdom makes to every one? “My son, give me your heart.”

Let us leave the passage with honest self-inquiry as to the state of our own hearts. Let us settle it in our minds, that all formal worship of God, whether in public or private, is utterly in vain, so long as our “hearts are far from Him.” The bended knee, the bowed head, the loud amen, the daily chapter, the regular attendance at the Lord's table, are all useless and unprofitable, so long as our affections are nailed to sin, or pleasure, or money, or the world. The question of our Lord must yet be answered satisfactorily, before we can be saved. He says to everyone, “Do you love me?” (John 21:17.)

MATTHEW 15:10-20

There are two striking sayings of the Lord Jesus in this passage. One respects false doctrine. The other respects the human heart. Both of them deserve the closest attention.

Respecting FALSE DOCTRINE, our Lord declares, that *it is a duty to oppose it, its final destruction is sure, and its teachers ought to be forsaken*. He says, “Every plant which my heavenly Father didn't plant will be uprooted. Leave them alone.”

It is clear from examination of the passage, that the disciples were surprised at our Lord's strong language about the Pharisees and their traditions. They had probably been accustomed from their youth to regard them as the wisest and best of men. They were startled to hear their Master denouncing them as hypocrites, and charging them with transgressing the commandment of God. “Do you know,” they said, “that the Pharisees were offended.”

To this question we are indebted for our Lord's explanatory declaration—a declaration which perhaps has never received the notice it deserves.

The plain meaning of our Lord's words is, that false doctrine like that of the Pharisees, was a plant to which no mercy should be shown. It was a “plant which His heavenly Father had not planted,” and a plant which it was a duty to root up, whatever offence it might cause. It was no charity to spare it, because it was injurious to the souls of men. It mattered nothing that those who planted it were high in office, or learned. If it contradicted the word of God, it ought to be opposed, refuted, and rejected. His disciples must therefore understand that it was right to resist all teaching that was unscriptural, and to “let alone,” and forsake all instructors who persisted in it... To use the words of Whitby, “It never can be right to follow the blind into the ditch.” ...

Respecting the HEART OF MAN, our Lord declares in these verses, that *it is the true source of all sin and defilement*. The Pharisees taught that holiness depended on foods and drinks, on bodily washings and purification. They held that all who observed their traditions on these matters were pure and clean in God's sight, and that all who neglected them were impure and unclean. Our Lord overthrew this miserable doctrine, by showing His disciples that the real fountain of all defilement was not outside a man, but within. “Out of the heart,” He says, “come forth evil thoughts, murders, adult-

eries, sexual sins, thefts, false testimony, and blasphemies. These are the things which defile the man.” He that would serve God aright needs something far more important than bodily washings. He must seek to have “a clean heart.”

What a dreadful picture we have here of human nature! What a fearful catalogue is this of the contents of our own hearts! ... This is no sketch of the heart of a robber, or murderer. It is the true and faithful account of the hearts of all mankind. May God grant that we may ponder it well and learn wisdom!

Let it be a settled resolution with us, that *in all our religion the state of our hearts shall be the main thing*. Let it not content us to go to church, and observe the forms of religion. Let us look far deeper than this, and desire to have a “heart right in the sight of God.” (Acts 8:21.) The right heart is a heart sprinkled with the blood of Christ, and renewed by the Holy Spirit, and purified by faith. Never let us rest until we find within the witness of the Spirit, that God has created in us a clean heart, and made all things new. (Ps. 51:10. 2 Cor. 5:17.)

Finally, let it be a settled resolution with us to “keep our hearts with all diligence,” all the days of our lives (Prov. 4:23). Let us never forget that *our chief danger is from within*. The world and the devil combined, cannot do us so much harm as our own hearts will, if we do not watch and pray. Happy is he who remembers daily the words of Solomon, “One who trusts in himself is a fool.” (Prov. 28:26)

What thought from J. C. Ryle’s words stands out to you the most? Why?

DAY FIVE Application

Re-read Matthew 15:1-20 and consider the truths that you have learned this week. Seek to apply the message of Matthew 15:1-20 to your life.

What thought or truth impacted you this week from your study of Matthew 15:1-20?

It is very easy to fall into the same trap as the Pharisees. Instead of loving God and loving others, we tend to elevate rules over relationship and outer conformity over inward intimacy. Let's face it...it is whole a lot easier to follow a check-list than to do a serious examination of our own hearts.

In what area(s) of your Christian life can you tend to be legalistic? Why?

What is a legalistic rule that you have judged other believers for not following?

On the other side of the spectrum from legalism is licentiousness—using “freedom” as an excuse to follow your own selfish desires and lusts. Both reflect a heart that is not right before God.

Jesus says that what comes out of our mouths often reveals what is really going on in our hearts.

Check some of the things that have come out of your mouth this past week.

- | | | | |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Complaining | <input type="checkbox"/> Criticizing | <input type="checkbox"/> Cursing | <input type="checkbox"/> Angry outburst |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Gossip | <input type="checkbox"/> Slander | <input type="checkbox"/> Lying | <input type="checkbox"/> Sexual innuendo |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Flattery | <input type="checkbox"/> Arguing | <input type="checkbox"/> Bragging | <input type="checkbox"/> Harsh words |

If you are honest, what do these things reveal about your heart?

Spend some time in confession before the Lord. Ask Him to purify and renew your heart!

SUGGESTED QUESTIONS FOR GROUP OR FAMILY DISCUSSION:

The goal is not to get through all the questions but to spark discussion around the truth of Matthew 15:1-20. Use the questions below to interact together with what you learned.

- What was a rule that you had to obey as a child (in your home, at school, etc.) that you found to be unfair or unnecessary? Why do you think the rule was in place? Did you follow it?
- What do you learn about the Pharisees in this passage? If you had to describe them in one word, what word would you use?
- Comedian Jeff Foxworthy used to have jokes that would begin: “You might be a Redneck if...” How would you complete this sentence: “You might be a Pharisee if...”
- What are the dangers of legalism according to this passage?
- Have you ever found yourself singing or talking about God without really thinking about Him? Why do you think it is so easy to do this? How can we prevent it?
- Is Jesus saying that you don’t need to wash your hands before you eat? Why or why not?
- If what comes out of our mouths reveals our hearts, then what did you learn about your heart this week from your mouth?
- Did you discover anything new, interesting, or meaningful in your study of this passage this week? Or in your reading of J.C. Ryle? If so, what?
- If you had to use one word to describe your heart right now, what would it be (e.g., distracted, overwhelmed, joyful, stubborn, confused, burdened, anxious, angry, discouraged, sad, etc.)? Spend time praying together that God would purify and refresh your hearts with His Spirit.

Rigid scrupulosity about things of little moment may be accompanied with utterly unscrupulous conduct in matters that are vital.

Alfred Plummer (1841-1926)

Legalism lacks the supreme sense of worship. It obeys but it does not adore.

Geerhardus Vos (1862-1949)

Legalism is looking to something besides Jesus Christ in order to be acceptable and clean before God.

Timothy Keller (1950-2023)



Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it. (Proverbs 4:23, NIV)

DISCIPLESHIP TRAINING: Loving the Least of These
Matthew 15:21-28

DAY ONE
Observation

After His confrontation with the religious leaders, Jesus withdraws into Gentile territory to the north of Galilee (modern-day Lebanon). Here the disciples will get another intensive lesson on ministry. This time it is to a Canaanite woman who begs Jesus to help her daughter. But Jesus' reply raises many questions.

Ask God to speak to your heart as you read Matthew 15:21-31. Mark words or phrases that stand out to you. Write down the main message or your thoughts next to each section.

²¹ Then Jesus went out from there and departed to the region of Tyre and Sidon. ²² And behold, a woman of Canaan came from that region and cried out to Him, saying, "Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David! My daughter is severely demon-possessed."

²³ But He answered her not a word.

And His disciples came and urged Him, saying, "Send her away, for she cries out after us."

²⁴ But He answered and said, "I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."

²⁵ Then she came and worshiped Him, saying, "Lord, help me!"

²⁶ But He answered and said, "It is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the little dogs."

²⁷ And she said, "Yes, Lord, yet even the little dogs eat the crumbs which fall from their masters' table."

²⁸ Then Jesus answered and said to her, "O woman, great is your faith! Let it be to you as you desire." And her daughter was healed from that very hour. (NKJV)

What verse or thought stands out to you after reading this passage? Why?

In this passage, Jesus leaves Jewish territory and enters into the region of Tyre and Sidon, heavily populated by Gentiles.

Tyre, a Phoenician city on the Mediterranean, very ancient, large, splendid, flourishing in commerce, and powerful by land and sea. In the time of Christ and the apostles it was subject to the Romans, but continued to possess considerable wealth and prosperity down to A.D. 1291. (*Thayer's Greek Lexicon*)

Though this was primarily Gentile territory, many from this area had already heard of Jesus' ministry and miracles.

But Jesus withdrew with His disciples to the sea. And a great multitude from Galilee followed Him, and from Judea and Jerusalem and Idumea and beyond the Jordan; and those from Tyre and Sidon, a great multitude, when they heard how many things He was doing, came to Him. (Mark 3:7-8)



Write down five observations that you can make about this Canaanite woman in this passage.

What do the disciples want Jesus to do (15:23)? _____

Jesus makes three statements in this passage. **Summarize each statement below.**

15:24 _____

15:26 _____

15:28 _____

Which statement surprises you the most? Why? _____

In contrast to the disciples ("little faith," 8:26, 14:31, 16:8), this woman displays "great faith."

What do you think is the reason that Jesus calls her faith "great"? _____

**DAY TWO
Meditation**

Quiet your heart and allow God to speak through His Word. Slowly read Matthew 15:25-28 several times. Reflect on each word. Meditate on them over and over until you memorize them.

*But she came and worshiped him,
pleading again, "Lord, help me!"*

Jesus responded, "It isn't right to take food from the children and throw it to the dogs."

*She replied, "That's true, Lord,
but even dogs are allowed to eat the scraps that fall beneath their masters' table."*

*"Dear woman," Jesus said to her, "your faith is great! Your request is granted."
And her daughter was instantly healed. (NLT)*

Write down the observations that you can make from this passage, sketch out any images or thoughts that you have, or simply rewrite the passage below giving emphasis to key words.

Offer the passage back to God in the form of a personalized prayer.

DAY THREE Interpretation

In interpretation, you are digging deeper into the passage in order to better understand its meaning. A word study on a key word and/or looking up parallel passages can help you in your understanding.

Jesus' interaction with this Canaanite woman certainly raises some questions. On first glance, it appears to be out of line from Jesus' character and compassion displayed in the Gospels.

Read Mark's parallel account in Mark 7:24-30. Mark key thoughts or phrases you read.

²⁴ After Jesus left there, he went to the region of Tyre. When he went into a house, he did not want anyone to know, but he was not able to escape notice. ²⁵ Instead, a woman whose young daughter had an unclean spirit immediately heard about him and came and fell at his feet. ²⁶ The woman was a Greek, of Syrophenician origin. She asked him to cast the demon out of her daughter.

²⁷ He said to her, "Let the children be satisfied first, for it is not right to take the children's bread and to throw it to the dogs."

²⁸ She answered, "Yes, Lord, but even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs."

²⁹ Then he said to her, "Because you said this, you may go. The demon has left your daughter." ³⁰ She went home and found the child lying on the bed, and the demon gone.

What additional details do you learn from Mark's account of this passage?

One of the things that cannot be discerned from this passage is *how* Jesus spoke to her. If Jesus had a "wink in His eye" or an inviting tone, then the woman may have sensed that Jesus was testing her faith or encouraging her to engage in the dialogue to challenge common Jewish assumptions. One possible indication of a slightly "playful" tone is the use of the word "dog."

Go to blueletterbible.org and type "Matthew 15" into the "Search the Bible" box. Next click on Matthew 15:26 to bring up the verse in the Greek. Find the word "dog" and click on the Strong's number (G2952) to bring up the Greek word, its definition, and its usage in the New Testament.

What is the Greek word for "dog"? _____ (Use the transliteration.)

How many times is it used in the New Testament? _____ (See KJV Translation Count.)

How many times is it used in Matthew? _____ (See Search Results by Book.)

What is its definition? (See Outline of Biblical Usage and Strong's Definition.)

We cannot know for sure all that Jesus had in mind in His interaction with this Gentile woman but we can know for sure Jesus' heart. His ultimate desire is not to condemn the world but to save it (cf. John 3:16-17). Though Jesus was initially sent to the nation of Israel as their Messiah, the OT always made it clear that the Messiah's ministry would also bring blessing to the Gentiles.

Read the following passages. Mark key words or phrases as you read.

Now the Lord had said to Abram:

"Get out of your country,

From your family and from your father's house,

To a land that I will show you.

I will make you a great nation;

I will bless you and make your name great;

And you shall be a blessing.

I will bless those who bless you,

And I will curse him who curses you;

*And in you **all the families of the earth** shall be blessed."* (Genesis 12:1-3)

God be merciful to us and bless us,

And cause His face to shine upon us, Selah

That Your way may be known on earth,

*Your salvation among **all nations**.* (Psalm 67:1-2)

It shall come to pass in the latter days

That the mountain of the house of the Lord

Shall be established as the highest of the mountains,

And shall be lifted up above the hills;

*And **all the nations** shall flow to it.* (Isaiah 2:2)

On that day the root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples.

***The nations** will seek Him, and His resting place will be glorious.* (Isaiah 11:10)

*He says: "It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring back the preserved of Israel; I will make you as a light for **the nations**, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth."* (Isaiah 49:6)

Read the following passages which tell of the specific faith of people from Tyre and Sidon.

Now Hiram king of Tyre sent his servants to Solomon, because he heard that they had anointed him king in place of his father, for Hiram had always loved David. (1 Kings 5:1)

Then the word of the Lord came to him [Elijah]: "Go at once to Zarephath in the region of Sidon and stay there. I have directed a widow there to supply you with food." (1 Kings 17:8-9)

The very temple of the Lord was built with timber and supplies from Hiram, the king of Tyre, who loved King David. And during a severe famine in Israel, Elijah the prophet was sent to a widow in Sidon to help supply her needs and even to raise her son to life (cf. Luke 4:26).

DAY FOUR Devotion

Read the following excerpt from Alexander MacLaren's *Expositions of Holy Scriptures*. **Alexander MacLaren** (1826-1910) was a Baptist pastor in Manchester, England whose sermons were known for their "profundity of thought, logical arrangement, eloquence of appeal, and power over the human heart."

Crumbs and the Bread (Matt. 15:21-31)

The King of Israel has passed beyond the bounds of Israel, driven by the hostility of those who should have been His subjects. The delegates of the priestly party from Jerusalem, who had come down to see into this dangerous enthusiasm which was beginning in Galilee, have made Christ's withdrawal expedient, and He goes northward, if not actually into the territory of Tyre and Sidon, at any rate to the border land...

The story of the Syro-Phoenician woman naturally falls into four parts, each marked by the recurrence of 'He answered.'

I. There is the piteous cry and the answer of silence.

Mark tells us that Jesus sought concealment in this journey; but distress has quick eyes, and this poor woman found Him. Canaanite as she is, and thus a descendant of the ancient race of Israel's enemies, she has learned to call Him the Son of David, owning His kingship, which His born subjects disowned. She beseeches for that which He delights to give, identifying herself with her poor child's suffering, and asking as for herself His mercy. As Chrysostom says: 'It was a sight to stir pity to behold a woman calling aloud in such distress, and that woman a mother, and pleading for a daughter, and that daughter in such evil plight.' In her humility she does not bring her child, nor ask Him to go to her. In her agony, she has nothing to say but to spread her grief before Him, as thinking that He, of whose pity she has heard, needs but to know in order to alleviate, and requires no motives urged to induce Him to help. In her

faith, she thinks that His power can heal from afar. What more could He have desired?

All the more startling, then, is His demeanor. All the conditions which He usually required, were present in her; but He, who was wont to meet these with swift and joyful answers, has no word to say to this poor, needy, persevering, humble, and faithful suppliant. The fountain seems frozen, from which such streams of blessing were wont to flow. His mercy seems clean gone, and His compassion to have failed. A Christ silent to a sufferer's cry is a paradox which contradicts the whole gospel story, and which, we may be very sure, no evangelist would have painted, if he had not been painting from the life.

II. There is the disciples' intercession answered by Christ's statement of the limitations of His mission.

Their petition evidently meant, 'Dismiss her by granting her request.' They seem, then, more merciful than He is. But their thoughts are more for themselves than for her... They did not like the noise, and they feared it might defeat His purpose of secrecy; and so, by their phrase, 'Send her away,' they unconsciously betray that what they wanted was not granting the prayer, but getting rid of the petitioner. Perhaps, too, they mean, 'Say something to her; either tell her that Thou wilt or that Thou wilt not; break Thy silence somehow.' No doubt, it was intensely disagreeable to have a shrieking woman coming after them; and they were only doing as most of us would have done, and as so many of us do, when we give help without one touch of compassion, in order to stop some imploring mouth.

Their apparently compassionate but really selfish intercession was put aside by the answer, which explains the paradox of His silence. It puts emphasis on two things: His subordination to the divine will of the Father, and the restrictions imposed thereby on the scope of His beneficent working. He was obeying the divine will in confining His ministry to the Jewish people, as we know that He did. Clearly, that restriction was necessary... The fire must be gathered on the hearth, if it is afterward to warm the chamber. There must be geographical and national limits to His life; and the Messiah, who comes last in the long series of the kings and prophets, can only be authenticated as the world's Messiah, by being first the fulfiller to the children of the promises made to the fathers. The same necessity, which required that revelation should be made through that nation, required that the climax and fulfiller of all revelation should limit His earthly ministry to it...

He knew that there was an order of development in the kingdom, and that at its then stage the surest way to attain the ultimate universality was rigid limitation of it to the chosen people. This conviction locked His gracious lips against even this poor woman's piteous cry. We may well believe that His sympathy outran His commission, and that it would have been hard for so much love to be silent in the presence of so much sorrow, if He had not felt the solemn pressure of that divine necessity which ruled all His life. He was bound by His instructions, and therefore He answered her not a word.

Individual suffering is no reason for transcending the limits of God-appointed functions; and he is absolved from the charge of indifference who refrains from giving help, which he can only give by overleaping the bounds of his activity, which have been set by the Father.

III. We have, next, the persistent suppliant answered by a refusal which sounds harsh and hopeless.

Christ's former words were probably not heard by the woman, who seems to have been behind the group. She saw that something was being said to Him, and may have gathered, from gestures or looks, that His reply was unfavorable. Perhaps there was a short pause in their walk, while they spoke, during which she came nearer. Now she falls at His feet, and with 'beautiful shamelessness,' as Chrysostom calls it, repeats her prayer, but this time with pathetic brevity, uttering but the one cry, 'Lord, help me!' The more intense the feeling, the fewer the words. Heart-prayers are short prayers. She does not now invoke Him as the Son of David, nor tell her sorrow over again, but flings herself in desperation on His pity, with the artless and unsupported cry, wrung from her agony, as she sees the hope of help fading away. Like Jacob, in his mysterious struggle, 'she wept, and made supplication unto Him.'

As it would seem, her distress touched no chord of sympathy; and from the lips accustomed to drop oil and wine into every wound, came words like swords, cold, unfeeling, keen-edged, fitted and meant to lacerate...

The 'bread' is the blessing which He, as the sent of God, brings; the 'children' are the 'lost sheep of the house of Israel'; the 'dogs' are the Gentile world. The meaning of the whole is simply the necessary restriction of His personal activity to the chosen nation. It is not meant to wound nor to insult, though, no doubt, it is cast in a form which might have been offensive, and would have repelled a less determined or less sorrowful heart.

The form may be partly explained by the intention of trying her earnestness, which, though it is not the sole, or even the principal,

is a subordinate, reason of our Lord's action. But it is also to be considered in the light of the woman's quick-witted retort, which drew out of it an inference which we cannot suppose that Christ did not intend. He uses a diminutive for 'dogs,' which shows that He is not thinking of the fierce, unclean animals, masterless and starving, that still haunt Eastern cities, and deserve their bad character, but of domestic pets, who live with the household, and are near the table. In fact, the woman seized His intention much better than later critics who find 'national scorn' in the words; and the fair inference from them is just that which she drew, and which constituted the law of the preaching of the Gospel—*To the Jew first, and also to the Gentile.*

IV. We have the woman's retort, which wrings hope out of apparent discouragement, answered by Christ's joyful granting of her request.

Out of His very words she weaves a plea. 'Yes, Lord; I am one of the dogs; then I am not an alien, but belong to the household.' The Revised Version does justice to her words by reading 'for even' instead of 'yet.' She does not enter a caveat against the analogy, but accepts it wholly, and only asks Him to carry out His own metaphor. She takes the sword from His hand, or, as Luther says, 'she catches Him in His own words.'

She does not ask a place at the table, nor anything taken from those who have a prior claim to a more abundant share in His

mercies. A crumb is enough for her, which they will never miss...

She recognizes that all nations belong to God's household, and that she and her countrymen have a real, though for the time inferior, position in it. She pleads that her gain will not be the children's loss, nor the answer to her prayers an infraction of the spirit of His mission. Perhaps, too, there may be a reference to the fact of His being there on Gentile soil, in her words, 'Which fall from the children's table.' She does not want the bread to be thrown from the table to her. She is not asking Him to transfer His ministry to Gentiles; but here He is. A crumb has fallen, in His brief visit. May she not eat of that? In this answer faith, humility, perseverance, swift perception of His meaning, and hallowed ingenuity and boldness, are equally admirable. By admitting that she was 'a dog,' and pleading her claim on that footing, she shows that she was 'a child.' And therefore, because she has shown herself one of the true household, in the fixedness of her faith, in the meekness of her humility, in the persistence of her prayers, Christ joyfully responds...

Such faith is entitled to the fullest share of His gift. She takes her place beside the Gentile centurion as the two recipients of commendation from Him for the greatness of their faith. It had seemed as if He would give nothing; but He ends with giving all, putting the key of the storehouse into her hand, and bidding her take, not a crumb, but 'as thou wilt.'

What thought from Alexander MacLaren's words stands out to you the most? Why?

DAY FIVE
Application

Re-read Matthew 15:21-28 and consider the truths that you have learned this week. Seek to apply the message of Matthew 15:21-28 to your life.

What thought or truth impacted you this week from your study of Matthew 15:21-28?

Like the Samaritan woman in John 4, the Canaanite woman in Matthew 15 is not the type of person that the disciples would have desired to minister to. They wanted Jesus to send her away. “C’mon, Lord. We don’t have time for this. She is bothering us too much. Can you just get rid of her or just answer her request so that she will go away?” One of the reasons for Jesus’ silence and “insensitive comments” to the woman appears to be a lesson to the disciples. Jesus wanted them to experience their own discomfort, prejudice, and lack of compassion for her. Like the disciples, we carry our own prejudices and we are not as loving as we often think we are.

Who do you label as unworthy of Christ’s love? What group of people do you tend to judge, criticize, or lack compassion for and often wish they would just go away?

Loving those different than us is not easy. Loving the unlovable does not come naturally to us. Loving the least of these requires the love of Christ and the power of the Spirit working in us.

Write down 3-5 people you know who need Jesus Christ. Spend time praying for them now.

God wants all the nations to worship Him (Psalm 96). Around His throne, at the end of time, people from every tribe, tongue, people, and nation will glorify His name (Revelation 5:9-10). If you harbor any prejudice or animosity toward any group of people, confess it to the Lord.

Go to [operationworld.org](https://www.operationworld.org) (or download the app). Pray for the nation that is featured today.

What nation did you pray for? _____

SUGGESTED QUESTIONS FOR GROUP OR FAMILY DISCUSSION:

The goal is not to get through all the questions but to spark discussion around the truth of Matthew 15:21-28. Use the questions below to interact together with what you learned.

- Who was someone that really bothered you in elementary school? Why did they bother you so much? What do you think happened to them?
- Matthew describes the woman as a “woman of Canaan.” This would have evoked some negative reactions from most Jews of that time (just as the title “tax collector” would). Who are some groups of people that can evoke the same kind of reaction in you today?
- What stands out to you about this Canaanite woman? Why?
- Why do you think Jesus was initially silent to her pleas? Why do you think He says to her what He says? Was He being “insensitive” and “mean”?
- If you were one of Jesus’ disciples, what would be going through your mind during this whole episode? What might you have been tempted to say to Jesus?
- How does the woman display “great faith”?
- Did you discover anything new, interesting, or meaningful in your study of this passage this week? Or in your reading of Alexander MacLaren? If so, what?
- Share one or two people in your life that need the Lord. Spend time praying for them together as a group. Also use Operation World to find a nation of the world that you can pray for.

We do not know how to contend unless we are standing up for our rights.

“This is what I am owed!”

But this woman is not doing that at all.

This is “right-less assertiveness,”

something we know little about.

She’s not saying,

“Lord, give me what I deserve on the basis of my goodness.”

She’s saying,

“Give me what I don’t deserve on the basis of Your goodness—

And I need it now.”

Timothy Keller (1950-2023)

DISCIPLESHIP TRAINING: Ministering to Gentiles
Matthew 15:29-16:12

DAY ONE
Observation

In this passage, Jesus continues to minister in Gentile territory. He leaves the region of Tyre and Sidon and journeys down to the cities of the Decapolis ("Ten Cities") on the eastern side of the Sea of Galilee (Mark 7:31).

Ask God to speak to your heart as you read Matthew 15:29-16:12. Mark words or phrases that stand out to you. Write down the main message or your thoughts next to each section.

²⁹ Jesus went on from there and walked beside the Sea of Galilee. And he went up on the mountain and sat down there.

³⁰ And great crowds came to him, bringing with them the lame, the blind, the crippled, the mute, and many others, and they put them at his feet, and he healed them, ³¹ so that the crowd wondered, when they saw the mute speaking, the crippled healthy, the lame walking, and the blind seeing. And they glorified the God of Israel.

³² Then Jesus called his disciples to him and said, "I have compassion on the crowd because they have been with me now three days and have nothing to eat. And I am unwilling to send them away hungry, lest they faint on the way." ³³ And the disciples said to him, "Where are we to get enough bread in such a desolate place to feed so great a crowd?" ³⁴ And Jesus said to them, "How many loaves do you have?" They said, "Seven, and a few small fish."

³⁵ And directing the crowd to sit down on the ground, ³⁶ he took the seven loaves and the fish, and having given thanks he broke them and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds. ³⁷ And they all ate and were satisfied. And they took up seven baskets full of the broken pieces left over. ³⁸ Those who ate were four thousand men, besides women and children. ³⁹ And after sending away the crowds, he got into the boat and went to the region of Magadan.

16 And the Pharisees and Sadducees came, and to test him they asked him to show them a sign from heaven. ² He answered them, "When it is evening, you say, 'It will be fair weather, for the sky is red.' ³ And in the morning, 'It will be stormy today, for the sky is red and threatening.' You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times. ⁴ An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah." So he left them and departed.

⁵ When the disciples reached the other side, they had forgotten to bring any bread. ⁶ Jesus said to them, “Watch and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees.” ⁷ And they began discussing it among themselves, saying, “We brought no bread.” ⁸ But Jesus, aware of this, said, “O you of little faith, why are you discussing among yourselves the fact that you have no bread? ⁹ Do you not yet perceive? Do you not remember the five loaves for the five thousand, and how many baskets you gathered? ¹⁰ Or the seven loaves for the four thousand, and how many baskets you gathered? ¹¹ How is it that you fail to understand that I did not speak about bread? Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees.”

¹² Then they understood that he did not tell them to beware of the leaven of bread, but of the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees. (ESV)

What thought or verse stands out to you in Matthew 15:29-16:12? Why?

How did the Gentile crowds respond to Jesus’ ministry (15:29-31)?

Complete the following sentences based on this passage.

Jesus has _____ on the crowd.

The disciples had _____ loaves and a few fish to feed the crowd.

The crowd (over 4000 people) all ate and were _____.

The disciples gathered up _____ baskets full of the broken pieces left over.

What do the Pharisees and Sadducees want from Jesus (16:1)? _____

What is the only sign that Jesus will give them (16:4)? _____

Write down three observations that you can make about Jesus’ disciples from this passage.

**DAY TWO
Meditation**

Quiet your heart and allow God to speak through His Word. Slowly read Matthew 16:1-4 several times. Reflect on each word. Meditate on them over and over until you memorize them.

*Now the Pharisees and Sadducees came up,
and testing Yeshua,
they asked Him to show them a sign from heaven.*

*But He replied to them,
“When evening comes, you say, ‘Fair weather coming, for the sky is red,’
and in the morning, ‘Stormy weather today, for the sky is red and gloomy.’
You know how to discern the appearance of the sky,
but you cannot discern the signs of the times!
An evil and adulterous generation clamors for a sign,
yet no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah.”*

And leaving them behind, He went away. (TLV)

Write down the observations that you can make from this passage, sketch out any images or thoughts that you have, or simply rewrite the passage below giving emphasis to key words.

Offer the passage back to God in the form of a personalized prayer.

DAY THREE Interpretation

In interpretation, you are digging deeper into the passage in order to better understand its meaning. A word study on a key word and/or looking up parallel passages can help you in your understanding.

The Decapolis was a ten-city region to the east of the Sea of Galilee and the Jordan River.

Each city in the Decapolis was a free-state (*polis*). The Decapolis dominated trade routes in the region bringing about prosperity and funding for public art and monumental Greco-Roman architecture...

The presence of a significant Greek population, who settled in the region at the time of Alexander the Great, is consistent with there being swine kept by the people of Decapolis (Mark 5:11-20).

Cultural conflict plagued this region. Homosexuality was a well-accepted pattern of behavior in Greek culture. The games, such as those at Olympia, promoted homosexuality and cultic activity. The Jews particularly saw the widespread practice of Greek homosexual behavior as idolatrous and repugnant. They held the Greeks in contempt and attempted to expel them to remove uncleanness from the land whenever they could. These irreconcilable cultural differences resulted in numerous clashes between Greeks and the Jews.

www.bibarch.com/archaeologicalsites



The miracle of the feeding of the 4000 is an obvious parallel to the feeding of the 5000. But what makes this miracle different is that the first miracle was with a primarily or entirely Jewish crowd while the second miracle is with a primarily or entirely Gentile crowd.

There is also a difference in the number of baskets of remains. The disciples take up twelve baskets of remains after feeding the 5000 and seven baskets of remains after feeding the 4000. It is possible that the twelve baskets allude to the Messiah's sufficient supply for the twelve tribes of Israel. If that is the case, then what could the seven baskets allude to?

Read Deuteronomy 7:1-2.

"When the Lord your God brings you into the land which you go to possess, and has cast out many nations before you, the Hittites and the Girgashites and the Amorites and the Canaanites and the Perizzites and the Hivites and the Jebusites, seven nations greater and mightier than you, and when the Lord your God delivers them over to you, you shall conquer them and utterly destroy them. You shall make no covenant with them nor show mercy to them."

Perhaps there is an allusion to the seven nations that Israel conquered in the land. Now, with the Messiah, there is not judgment on these Canaanite nations but rather abundant blessing.

Go to blueletterbible.org and type "Matthew 15" into the "Search the Bible" box. Next click on Matthew 15:32 to bring up the verse in the Greek. Find the phrase "I have compassion" and click on the Strong's #G4697 to bring up the Greek word, its definition, and its usage in the NT.

What is the Greek word for "compassion"? _____ (Use the transliteration.)

How many times is it used in the New Testament? _____ (See KJV Translation Count.)

What is its definition? (See Outline of Biblical Usage and Vine's Expository Dictionary.)

Read the following verses that use this word. Mark key words or phrases as you read.

*But when He saw the multitudes, He was **moved with compassion** for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd. (Matthew 9:36)*

*And when Jesus went out He saw a great multitude; and He was **moved with compassion** for them, and healed their sick. (Matthew 14:14)*

*Jesus called his disciples to him and said, "**I have compassion** for these people; they have already been with me three days and have nothing to eat. I do not want to send them away hungry, or they may collapse on the way." (Matthew 15:32)*

*Then the master of that servant was **moved with compassion**, released him, and forgave him the debt. (Matthew 18:27)*

*So Jesus **had compassion** and touched their eyes. And immediately their eyes received sight, and they followed Him. (Matthew 20:34)*

*But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was. And when he saw him, he **had compassion**. (Luke 10:33)*

*And he arose and came to his father. But when he was still a great way off, his father saw him and **had compassion**, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him. (Luke 15:20)*

*Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on **tender mercies**, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering. (Colossians 3:12, the noun form of this Greek word)*

What do you learn about compassion from these verses?

DAY FOUR Devotion

Read the following commentary from J.C. Ryle's *Expository Thoughts on Matthew*. **J. C. Ryle** (1816-1900) was the Anglican bishop of Liverpool, where his sermons and writings impacted thousands in England and abroad. At the end of his life, he was described as "the man of granite with the heart of a child."

MATTHEW 15:29-39

This passage contains three points which deserve our special attention.

In the first place, let us remark, *how much more pain people take about the relief of their bodily diseases, than about their souls*. We read, that "great multitudes came to him, having with them the lame, blind, mute, maimed, and many others." Many of them, no doubt, had journeyed many miles, and gone through great fatigues. Nothing is so difficult and troublesome, as to move sick people. But the *hope of being healed* was in sight. Such hope is everything to a sick man.

We know little of human nature, if we wonder at the conduct of these people. We need not wonder at all. They felt that health was the greatest of earthly blessings. They felt that pain was the hardest of all trials to bear. There is no arguing against sense. A man feels his strength failing. He sees his body wasting, and his face becoming pale. He is sensible that his appetite is leaving him. He knows, in short, that he is ill, and needs a physician. Show him a physician within reach, who is said never to fail in working cures, and he will go to him without delay.

Let us however not forget that *our souls are far more diseased than our bodies*, and learn a lesson from the conduct of these people. Our souls are afflicted with a malady far more deep-seated, far more complicated, far more hard to cure than any ailment that flesh is heir to. They are in fact plague-stricken by sin. They must be healed, and healed effectually, or perish everlastingly. Do we really know this? Do we feel it? Are we alive to our spirit-

ual disease? Alas! there is but one answer to these questions. The bulk of mankind do not feel it at all. Their eyes are blinded. They are utterly insensible to their danger. For bodily health they crowd the waiting-rooms of doctors. For bodily health they take long journeys to find purer air. But for their soul's health they take no thought at all. Happy indeed is that man or woman who has found out his soul's disease! Such a one will never rest until he has found Jesus. Troubles will seem nothing to him. Life, life, eternal life is at stake. He will count all things loss that he may win Christ, and be healed.

In the second place, let us remark the *marvelous ease and power with which our Lord healed all who were brought to Him*. We read that "the multitude wondered when they saw the mute speaking, injured whole, lame walking, and blind seeing—and they glorified the God of Israel."

Behold in these words a lively emblem of our Lord Jesus Christ's power to heal sin-diseased souls! There is no ailment of heart that He cannot cure. There is no form of spiritual complaint that He cannot overcome. The fever of lust, the palsy of the love of the world, the slow consumption of indolence and sloth, the heart-disease of unbelief, all, all give way when he sends forth His Spirit on any one of the children of men. He can put a new song in a sinner's mouth, and make him speak with love of that Gospel which he once ridiculed and blasphemed. He can open the eyes of a man's understanding and make him see the kingdom of God. He can open the ears of a man and make him willing to hear His voice, and follow Him wherever He goes. He can give power to a man who once walked in

the broad way that leads unto destruction, to walk in the way of life. He can make hands that were once instruments of sin, serve Him and do His will. The time of miracles is not yet past. Every conversion is a miracle. Have we ever seen a real instance of conversion? Let us know that we saw in it the hand of Christ. We should have seen nothing really greater, if we had seen our Lord making the dumb to speak, and the lame to walk, when He was on earth...

In the third place, let us remark *the abundant compassion of our Lord Jesus Christ*. We read that Jesus summoned his disciples and said, "I have compassion on the multitude." A great crowd of men and women is always a solemn sight. It should stir our hearts to feel that each is a dying sinner, and each has a soul to be saved. None ever seems to have felt so much when he saw a crowd, as Christ.

It is a curious and striking fact that of all the feelings experienced by our Lord when upon earth, there is none so often mentioned as *compassion*. His joy, His sorrow, His thankfulness, His anger, His wonder, His zeal, are all occasionally recorded. But none of these feelings are so frequently mentioned as *compassion*. The Holy Spirit points out to us, that this was the distinguishing feature of His character, and the predominant feeling of His mind, when He was among men...

It ought to encourage all who are hesitating about beginning to walk in God's ways. Let them remember that their Savior is full of compassion. He will receive them graciously. He will forgive them freely. He will remember their former iniquities no more. He will abundantly supply all their needs. Let them not be afraid. *Christ's mercy is a deep well, of which no one has ever found the bottom.*

It ought to comfort the saints and servants of the Lord when they feel weary. Let them call

to mind that Jesus is full of compassion. He knows what a world it is in which they live. He knows the body of a man and all its frailties. He knows the devices of their enemy, the devil. And the Lord pities His people. Let them not be cast down. They may feel that weakness and failure are stamped on all they do. But let them not forget that word which says, *His compassions fail not.* (Lam. 3:22.)

MATTHEW 16:1-12

In these verses we find our Lord assailed by the untiring enmity of the Pharisees and Sadducees. As a general rule these two sects were at enmity between themselves. In persecuting Christ, however, they made common cause. Truly it was *an unholy alliance!* Yet how often we see the same thing in the present day. Men of the most opposite opinions and habits will agree in disliking the Gospel, and will work together to oppose it...

The first point which deserves special notice is *the repetition which our Lord makes of words used by Him on a former occasion*. He says, "An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and there will be no sign given to it, except the sign of the prophet Jonah." If we turn to Matt. 12:39, we shall find that He had said the very same thing once before...

This repetition shows us that our Lord was in *the habit of saying the same things over again*. He did not content Himself with saying a thing once, and afterwards never repeating it. It is evident that it was His custom to bring forward certain truths again and again, and thus to impress them more deeply on the minds of His disciples. He knew the weakness of our memories in spiritual things. He knew that what we hear twice, we remember better than what we hear once. He therefore brought out of His treasury old things as well as new...

The second point which deserves special notice in these verses is, *the solemn warning which our Lord takes occasion to give to His disciples*. His mind was evidently pained with the false doctrines which He saw among the Jews, and the pernicious influence which they exercised. He seizes the opportunity to utter a caution...

To *whom* was this warning addressed? To the twelve apostles—to the first ministers of the Church of Christ—to men who had forsaken all for the Gospel's sake! Even they are warned! *The best of men are only men*, and at any time may fall into temptation. “Let him who thinks he stands be careful that he doesn't fall.” If we love life, and would see good days, let us never think that we do not need that hint, “take heed, and beware.”

Against *what* does our Lord warn His apostles? Against the “doctrine” of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees. The Pharisees, we are frequently told in the Gospels, were self-righteous formalists. The Sadducees were skeptics, freethinkers, and half infidels...

How does our Lord describe the false doctrines? He calls them *yeast*. Like yeast, they might seem a small thing compared to the whole body of truth. Like yeast, once admitted they would work secretly and noiselessly. Like yeast, they would gradually change the whole character of the religion with which they were mixed. How much is often contained in a single word! It was not merely the open danger of heresy, but *yeast*, of which the apostles were to beware...

Let us then remember that this saying of our Lord's was intended for all time. It was not meant only for the generation to which it was spoken. It was meant for the perpetual benefit of the Church of Christ. He who spoke it saw with prophetic eye the future history of Christianity. The Great Physician knew well that Pharisee-doctrines and Sadducee-doctrines would prove the two great wasting diseases of His Church, until the end of the world. He would have us know that there will always be Pharisees and Sadducees in the ranks of Christians. Their succession shall never fail. Their generation shall never become extinct. Their name may change, but their spirit will always remain. Therefore, He cries to us, “take heed and beware.”

Finally, let us make a *personal use* of this caution, by keeping up a *holy jealousy over our own souls*. Let us remember, that we live in a world where Pharisaism and Sadduceism are continually striving for the mastery in the Church of Christ. Some want to ADD to the Gospel, and some want to TAKE AWAY from it. Some would bury it, and some would pare it down to nothing. Some would stifle it by heaping on additions, and some would bleed it to death by subtraction from its truths. Both parties agree only in one respect. Both would kill and destroy the life of Christianity, if they succeeded in having their own way. Against both errors let us watch and pray, and stand upon our guard. Let us not add to the Gospel... Let us not subtract from the Gospel... Let our principle be *the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth*, nothing added to it, nothing taken away.

What thought from J.C. Ryle's words stands out to you the most? Why?

DAY FIVE Application

Re-read Matthew 15:29-16:12 and consider the truths that you have learned this week. Seek to apply the message of this passage to your life.

What thought or truth impacted you this week from your study of Matthew 15:29-16:12?

One of the distinguishing characteristics of Jesus was His compassion. When Jesus saw people, He was *moved with compassion*. It coursed in His veins. It flowed out of Him. It was His instinctive response to people. On the other hand, when the disciples saw people, they often saw problems or cultural differences or ethnic barriers. We are probably very much like the disciples.

Read the character of Christ that we are to “put on” and clothe ourselves with every day.

Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. (Colossians 3:12-14)

It is knowing who you are in Christ which enables you to be who you are in Christ. Since you are *chosen, holy, and deeply loved* by God, then, through the power of the Holy Spirit, you can begin to live out Christ’s compassion, love, and grace in your own life.

Circle a characteristic in Colossians 3:12-14 that you need to clothe yourself with today.

How can you display this characteristic today and in your daily life moving forward?

Jesus warns His disciples about two dangers—becoming like a Pharisee (legalistic, judgmental, overly critical) or becoming like a Sadducee (liberal, elitist, overly tolerant of every behavior).

Which do you tend to lean toward more? Being a Pharisee Being a Sadducee

Like leaven, the little lies, weaknesses, sins, thoughts, and attitudes that we allow into our lives will have a tendency to grow into more deeply-embedded character issues, cynical bitterness, and self-deception. What do you need to confess and put on the altar before the Lord today?

SUGGESTED QUESTIONS FOR GROUP OR FAMILY DISCUSSION:

The goal is not to get through all the questions but to spark discussion around the truth of Matthew 15:29-16:12. Use the questions below to interact together with what you learned.

- Who is one of the most compassionate people that you have ever known? What impacted you about the way they lived?
- Who are some of the people that it is hardest for you to have compassion for? Why?
- Why do you think Jesus practically duplicated the miracles of the feeding of the 5000 and the feeding of the 4000? What do you think He was trying to teach His disciples?
- What do you learn about Jesus from this passage? What do you learn about the multitudes? What do you learn about the Pharisees & Sadducees? What do you learn about the disciples?
- Why do you think Jesus says that *a wicked and adulterous generation seeks after a sign*?
- How is false teaching, wrong thinking, or a bad attitude like yeast?
- Did you discover anything new, interesting, or meaningful in your study of this passage this week? Or in your reading of J. C. Ryle? If so, what?
- How can you clothe yourself with the character of Christ? What does this look like on a practical, day-to-day basis? Which of the characteristics in Colossians 3:12-14 do you need to clothe yourself with more each day?
- Spend time praying for one another. Pray also for those who need the compassion of Jesus.

Compassion will cure more sins than condemnation.

Henry Ward Beecher (1813-87)

*How far you go in life depends on your being tender with the young,
compassionate with the aged, sympathetic with the striving and tolerant of the weak and strong.
Because someday in your life you will have been all of these.*

George Washington Carver (1864-1943)

Biblical orthodoxy without compassion is surely the ugliest thing in the world.

Francis Schaeffer (1912-84)

DISCIPLESHIP TRAINING: Knowing Who Jesus Is
Matthew 16:13-28

DAY ONE
Observation

The training of the disciples hits a climax in Matthew 16:13-28. Jesus asks His disciples the most important question that He can ask—*Who do you say that I am?* Knowing the identity of Jesus—knowing who He is and what He has come to do—is the foundation of the Christian faith. This passage is an important one in the Scriptures as it teaches us about Jesus Christ, the church, and the cross.

Ask God to speak to your heart as you read Matthew 16:13-28. Mark words or phrases that stand out to you. Write down the main message or your thoughts next to each section.

¹³ When Jesus came into the region of Caesarea Philippi, He asked His disciples, saying, “Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?”

¹⁴ So they said, “Some say John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.”

¹⁵ He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?”

¹⁶ Simon Peter answered and said, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

¹⁷ Jesus answered and said to him, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. ¹⁸ And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. ¹⁹ And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.”

²⁰ Then He commanded His disciples that they should tell no one that He was Jesus the Christ.

²¹ From that time Jesus began to show to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day.

²² Then Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, “Far be it from You, Lord; this shall not happen to You!”

²³ But He turned and said to Peter, “Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men.”

²⁴ Then Jesus said to His disciples, “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.

²⁵ For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. ²⁶ For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? ²⁷ For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works. ²⁸ Assuredly, I say to you, there are some standing here who shall not taste death till they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom.” (NKJV)

Which verse or thought strikes you the most after reading this passage? Why?

Who did some of the people think Jesus was (16:13-14)? _____

What was Peter’s confession (16:16)? _____

Why did Jesus commend Peter (16:17)? _____

Why did Jesus later rebuke Peter (16:22-23)? _____

Complete the following sentences based on this passage.

On this rock, I will build My _____.

The gates of _____ shall not prevail against it.

I will give you the _____ of the kingdom of heaven.

If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his _____ and follow Me.

For what is a man profited if he gains the whole world and loses his own _____.

Matthew 16:21 marks a key transition in the gospel of Matthew (cf. 4:17).

What did Jesus begin to do *from that time* (16:21)? _____

**DAY TWO
Meditation**

Quiet your heart and allow God to speak through His Word. Slowly read Matthew 16:15-18 several times. Reflect on each word. Meditate on them over and over until you memorize them.

“But you,” He asked them, “who do you say that I am?”

Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God!”

And Jesus responded,

*“Simon son of Jonah, you are blessed
because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you,
but My Father in heaven.*

*And I also say to you that you are Peter,
and on this rock I will build My church,
and the forces of Hades will not overpower it. (HCSB)*

Write down the observations that you can make from this passage, sketch out any images or thoughts that you have, or simply rewrite the passage below giving emphasis to key words.

Offer the passage back to God in the form of a personalized prayer.

DAY THREE Interpretation

In interpretation, you are digging deeper into the passage in order to better understand its meaning. A word study on a key word and/or looking up parallel passages can help you in your understanding.

“Few verses in Scripture have generated more controversy or divisiveness than Matthew 16:18” (Burnette). Jesus’ declaration that He will build His church on “this rock” has been discussed and debated throughout church history. There are three major views on the identity of “this rock”:

1. The rock is Peter.
2. The rock is Peter’s confession of who Jesus is.
3. The rock is Jesus Christ Himself.

Much of the debate hinges on the meaning of words and the possible word-plays in this verse.

Go to blueletterbible.org and type “Matthew 16” into the “Search the Bible” box. Next click on Matthew 16:18 to bring up the verse in the Greek. Find the name “Peter” and click on the Strong’s number (G4074) to bring up the Greek word, its definition, and its usage in the New Testament.

What is the Greek word for “Peter”? _____ (Use the transliteration.)

How many times is it used in the New Testament? _____ (See KJV Translation Count.)

What is its definition? (See Outline of Biblical Usage and Strong’s Definition.)

Next find the word “rock” in 16:18 and click on the Strong’s number (G4073).

What is the Greek word for “rock”? _____ (Use the transliteration.)

How many times is it used in the New Testament? _____ (See KJV Translation Count.)

What is its definition? (Note especially *Vine’s Expository Dictionary*.)

So Jesus does use two different words. Perhaps He was making a slight alteration to Peter’s name but most likely Jesus was using a word-play off Peter’s name and his God-inspired confession.

Read the following passages on the Rock. Mark key words and phrases as you read.

*“Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the **rock**: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the **rock**.” (Matthew 7:24-25)*

*I will proclaim the name of the Lord!
Oh, praise the greatness of our God!
He is the **Rock**, His works are perfect,
And all His ways are just.
A faithful God who does no wrong,
Upright and just is He. (Deuteronomy 32:3-4)*

*“For who is God, except the Lord?
And who is a **rock**, except our God?
God is my strength and power,
And He makes my way perfect. (2 Samuel 22:32-33)*

*The Lord is my **rock** and my fortress and my deliverer;
My God, my strength, in whom I will trust;
My shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold. (Psalm 18:1-2)*

*He only is my **rock** and my salvation;
He is my defense; I shall not be moved. (Psalm 62:6)*

*“Do not tremble, do not be afraid.
Did I not proclaim this and foretell it long ago?
You are my witnesses. Is there any God besides me?
No, there is no other **Rock**; I know not one.” (Isaiah 44:8)*

*They all ate the same spiritual food and drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual **rock** that accompanied them, and that **rock** was Christ. (1 Corinthians 10:3-4)*

Read what Peter himself said in his epistle to believers scattered throughout the empire.

As you come to Him, the living Stone—rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to Him—you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For in Scripture it says:

*“See, I lay a stone in Zion,
a chosen and precious cornerstone,
and the one who trusts in Him
will never be put to shame.”*

*⁷ Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe,
“The stone which the builders rejected
Has become the chief cornerstone.” (1 Peter 2:4-7)*

What do you learn about the living Stone, the Rock, Jesus Christ, from these verses?

DAY FOUR Devotion

Read the following commentary from J.C. Ryle's *Expository Thoughts on Matthew*. **J. C. Ryle** (1816-1900) was the Anglican bishop of Liverpool, where his sermons and writings impacted thousands in England and abroad. At the end of his life, he was described as "the man of granite with the heart of a child."

MATTHEW 16:13-20

There are words in this passage which have led to painful differences and divisions among Christians. Men have striven and contended about their meaning, until they have lost sight of all charity, and yet failed to carry conviction to one another's minds. Let it suffice us to glance briefly at the controverted words, and then pass on to more practical lessons.

What, then are we to understand, when we read that remarkable saying of our Lord's, "You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church?" Does it mean that the apostle Peter himself was to be the foundation on which Christ's Church was to be built? Such an interpretation, to say the least, appears exceedingly improbable. To speak of an erring, fallible child of Adam as the foundation of the spiritual temple, is very unlike the ordinary language of Scripture. Above all, no reason can be given why our Lord should not have said, "I will build my church upon you"—if such had been His meaning.

The true meaning of "the rock" in this passage appears to be the truth of our Lord's Messiahship and divinity, which Peter had just confessed. It is as though our Lord had said, "You are rightly called by the name Peter, or stone, for you have confessed that mighty truth, on which, as on a rock, I will build my church."

But what are we to understand, when we read the promise which our Lord makes to Peter, "I will give to you the keys of the kingdom of heaven?" Do these words mean that the right of admitting souls to heaven was to be placed

in Peter's hands? The idea is preposterous. Such an office is the special prerogative of Christ Himself. (Rev. 1:18.) Do the words mean that Peter was to have any primacy or superiority over the rest of the apostles? There is not the slightest proof that such a meaning was attached to the words in the New Testament times, or that Peter had any rank or dignity above the rest of the twelve.

The true meaning of the promise to Peter appears to be, that ***he was to have the special privilege of first opening the door of salvation, both to the Jews and Gentiles.*** This was fulfilled to the letter, when he preached on the day of Pentecost to the Jews, and visited the Gentile Cornelius at his own house. On each occasion he used *the keys*, and threw open the door of faith. And of this he seems to have been sensible himself—"God," he says, "made choice among us, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the Gospel, and believe." (Acts 15:7)

Finally, what are we to understand, when we read the words, "Whatever you bind on earth will have been bound in heaven; and whatever you release on earth will have been released in heaven?" Does this mean that the apostle Peter was to have any power of forgiving sins, and absolving sinners? Such an idea is derogatory to Christ's special office, as our Great High Priest. It is a power which we never find Peter, or any of the apostles, once exercising. They always refer men to Christ.

The true meaning of this promise appears to be, that Peter and his brethren, the apostles, were to be ***specially commissioned to teach with authority the way of salvation.*** As the OT priest declared authoritatively whose lep-

rosy was cleansed, so *the apostles were appointed to “declare and pronounce” authoritatively, whose sins were forgiven.* Beside this, they were to be specially inspired to lay down rules for the guidance of the Church on disputed questions. Some things they were to “bind” or forbid—others they were to “loose” or allow. The decision of the council at Jerusalem, that the Gentiles need not be circumcised, was one example of the exercise of this power (Acts 15:19.) But it was a commission specially confined to the apostles. In discharging it they had no successors. With them it began, and with them it expired.

We will leave these controverted words here. Enough perhaps has been said upon them for our personal edification... Let us now turn our attention to points which more immediately concern our own souls.

In the first place, let us admire *the noble confession which the apostle Peter makes in this passage.* He says, in reply to our Lord's question, “Who do you say that I am?”—“You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

At first sight a careless reader may see nothing very remarkable in these words of the apostle. He may think it extraordinary that they should call forth such strong commendation from our Lord. But such thoughts arise from ignorance and inconsideration. Men forget that it is a widely different thing to believe in Christ's divine mission, when we dwell in the midst of professing Christians, and to believe in it when we dwell in the midst of hardened and unbelieving Jews. The glory of Peter's confession lies in this, that he made it when few were with Christ and many against Him. He made it when the rulers of his own nation, the Scribes, and Priests, and Pharisees, were all opposed to his Master. He made it when our Lord was in the “form of a servant,” without wealth, without royal dignity, without any visible marks of a King. To

make such a confession at such a time, required great faith and great decision of character. The confession itself, as Brentius says, “was an epitome of all Christianity, and a compendium of true doctrine about religion.” Therefore, it was that our Lord said, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah.”

We shall do well to copy that hearty zeal and affection which Peter here displayed. We are perhaps too much disposed to underrate this holy man, because of his occasional instability, and his thrice-repeated denial of his Lord. This is a great mistake. With all his faults, Peter was a true-hearted, fervent, single-minded servant of Christ. With all his imperfections, he has given us a pattern that many Christians would do wisely to follow. Zeal like his may have its ebbs and flows, and sometimes lack steadiness of purpose. Zeal like his may be ill-directed, and sometimes make sad mistakes. But zeal like his is not to be despised. It awakens the sleeping. It stirs the sluggish. It provokes others to exertion. Anything is better than sluggishness and lukewarmness in the Church of Christ. Happy would it have been for Christendom had there been more Christians like Peter...

In the next place, let us take care that *we understand what our Lord means when He speaks of His Church.*

The Church which Jesus promises to build upon a rock, is the “blessed company of all believing people.” It is not the *visible* church of any one nation, or country, or place. It is the whole body of believers of every age, and tongue, and people. It is a church composed of all who are washed in Christ's blood, clothed in Christ's righteousness, renewed by Christ's Spirit, joined to Christ by faith, and epistles of Christ in life. It is a church of which every member is baptized with the Holy Spirit, and is really and truly holy. It is a church which is one body. All who belong

to it are of one heart and one mind, hold the same truths, and believe the same doctrines as necessary to salvation. It is a church which has only one Head. That head is Jesus Christ. *He is the head of the body.* (Col. 1:18)

Let us beware of mistakes on this subject. Few words are so much misunderstood as the word “Church.” Few mistakes have so much injured the cause of pure religion. Ignorance on this point has been a fertile source of sectarianism... Men have wrangled and contended about Episcopal, Presbyterian, and Independent Churches, as if it were needful to salvation to belong to some particular party, and as if, belonging to that party, we must of course belong to Christ. And all this time they have lost sight of the one true Church, outside of which there is no salvation at all. It will matter nothing at the last day where we have worshiped, if we are not found members of the true Church of God's elect.

In the last place, let us mark *the glorious promises which our Lord makes to His Church.* He says, *all the powers of hell will not conquer it.*

The power of Satan shall never destroy the people of Christ. He that brought sin and death into the first creation, by tempting Eve, shall never bring ruin on the new creation, by overthrowing believers. The mystical body of Christ shall never perish or decay. Though often persecuted, afflicted, distressed, and brought low, it shall never come to an end. It shall outlive the wrath of Pharaohs and Roman Emperors. Visible churches, like Ephesus, may come to nothing. But the true Church never dies. Like the bush that Moses saw, it may burn, but shall not be consumed. Every member of it shall be brought safe to glory, in spite of falls, failures, and shortcomings—in spite of the world, the flesh, and the devil—no member of the true Church shall ever be cast away. (John 10:28)

MATTHEW 16:21-23

In the beginning of these verses we find our Lord revealing to His disciples a great and startling truth. That truth was His approaching death upon the cross. For the first time He places before their minds the astounding announcement, that “He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer—and be killed.” He had not come on earth to take a kingdom, but to die. He had not come to reign, and be served, but to shed His blood as a sacrifice, and to give His life as a ransom for many.

It is almost impossible for us to conceive how strange and incomprehensible these tidings must have seemed to His disciples. Like most of the Jews, they could form no idea of a *suffering* Messiah. They did not understand that Isaiah 53 must be literally fulfilled. They did not see that the sacrifices of the law were all meant to point them to the death of the true Lamb of God. They thought of nothing but the glorious coming of Messiah, which is yet to take place at the end of the world. They thought so much of Messiah's *crown*, that they lost sight of His *cross*...

We learn, in the first place, from these verses, that *there may be much spiritual ignorance even in a true disciple of Christ.*

We cannot have a clearer proof of this, than the conduct of the apostle Peter in this passage. He tries to dissuade our Lord from suffering on the cross. “Far be it from you, Lord,” he says, “this will not be done to you.” He did not see the full purpose of our Lord's coming into the world. His eyes were blinded to the necessity of our Lord's death. He actually did what he could, to prevent that death taking place at all! And yet we know that Peter was a converted man. He really believed that Jesus was the Messiah. His heart was right in the sight of God.

These things are meant to teach us that we must neither regard saved men as infallible, because they are saved men, nor yet suppose they have no grace, because their grace is weak and small. One brother may possess singular gifts, and be a bright and shining light in the Church of Christ. But let us not forget that he is a man, and as a man liable to commit great mistakes. Another brother's knowledge may be scanty. He may fail to judge rightly on many points of doctrine. He may err both in word and deed. But has he faith and love towards Christ? Does he hold the Head? If so, let us deal patiently with him. What he sees not now, he may see hereafter. Like Peter, he may now be in the dark, and yet enjoy one day the full light of the Gospel.

Let us learn, in the second place, that ***there is no doctrine of Scripture so deeply important as the doctrine of Christ's atoning death.***

We cannot have clearer proof of this, than the language used by our Lord in rebuking Peter. He addresses him by the dreadful name of "Satan," as if he was an *adversary*, and doing the devil's work, in trying to prevent His death. He says to him, whom he had so lately called "blessed," "Get behind me, Satan! You are an offence unto me." He tells the man whose noble confession he had just commended so highly, "for you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of men." Stronger words than these never fell from our Lord's lips. The error that drew from so loving a Savior such a stern rebuke to such a true disciple, must have been a mighty error indeed.

The truth is, that our Lord would have us regard the crucifixion as the central truth of Christianity. Right views of His vicarious death, and the benefits resulting from it, lie at the very foundation of Bible-religion. Never let us forget this. On matters of church government, and the form of worship, men

may differ from us, and yet reach heaven in safety. On the matter of Christ's atoning death, truth is only one. If we are wrong here, we are ruined forever. *Error on many other points is only a skin disease. Error about Christ's death is a disease at the heart.* Here let us take our stand. Let nothing move us from this ground. The sum of all our hopes must be, "Christ has died for us." (1 Thess. 5:10) Give up that doctrine, and we have no solid hope at all.

MATTHEW 16:24-28

In order to see the connection of these verses, we must remember the mistaken impressions of our Lord's disciples as to the purpose of His coming. Like Peter, they could not bear the idea of the crucifixion. They thought that Jesus had come to set up an earthly kingdom. They did not see that He *must* suffer and die. They dreamed of worldly honors and temporal rewards in their Master's service. They did not understand that true Christians, like Christ, must be made perfect through sufferings. Our Lord corrects these misapprehensions in words of peculiar solemnity, which we shall do well to lay up in our hearts.

Let us learn, in the first place, that ***men must make up their minds to difficulties and self-denial, if they follow Christ.***

Our Lord dispels the fond dreams of His disciples, by telling them that His followers must *take up the cross*. The glorious kingdom they were expecting, was not about to be set up immediately. They must make up their minds to persecution and affliction, if they intended to be His servants. They must be content to "lose their lives," if they would have their souls saved.

It is good for us all to see this point clearly. We must not conceal from ourselves that true Christianity brings with it a *daily cross in this*

life, while it offers us a crown of glory in the life to come. The flesh must be daily crucified. The devil must be daily resisted. The world must be daily overcome. There is a warfare to be waged, and a battle to be fought. All this is the inseparable accompaniment of true religion. Heaven is not to be won without it. Never was there a truer word than the old saying, “No cross, no crown!” If we never found this out by experience, our souls are in a poor condition.

Let us learn, in the second place, that *there is nothing so precious as a man's soul*.

Our Lord teaches this lesson by asking one of the most solemn questions that the NT contains. It is a question so well known, and so often repeated, that people often lose sight of its searching character. But it is a question that ought to sound in our ears like a trumpet, whenever we are tempted to neglect our eternal interests—*What will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses his soul?*

There can only be one answer to this question. There is nothing on earth, or under the earth, that can make amends to us for the loss of our souls. There is nothing that money can buy, or man can give, to be named in comparison with our souls. The world, and all that it contains is temporal. It is all fading, perishing, and passing away. The soul is eternal. That one single word is the key to the whole question. Let it sink down deeply into our hearts. Are we wavering in our religion? Does the way seem too narrow? Let our Master's words ring in our ears, “What will it profit a man?” and let us doubt no more.

Let us learn, in the last place, that *the second coming of Christ is the time when His people shall receive their rewards*.

There is deep wisdom in this saying of our Lord's, when viewed in connection with the preceding verses. He knows the heart of a man. He knows how soon we are ready to be cast down, and like Israel of old to be “discouraged by the difficulties of the way.” He therefore holds out to us a gracious promise. He reminds us that He has yet to come a second time, as surely as He came the first time. He tells us that this is the time when His disciples shall receive their good things. There will be glory, honor, and reward in abundance one day for all who have served and loved Jesus. But it is to be in the dispensation of the second advent, and not of the first. The bitter must come before the sweet, the cross before the crown. The first advent is the dispensation of the crucifixion. The second advent is the dispensation of the kingdom. We must submit to take part with our Lord in His humiliation, if we mean ever to share in his glory.

And now let us not leave these verses without serious self-inquiry as to the matters which they contain. We have heard of the necessity of taking up the cross, and denying ourselves. Have we taken it up, and are we carrying it daily? We have heard of the value of the soul. Do we live as if we believed it? We have heard of Christ's second advent. Do we look forward to it with hope and joy? Happy is that man who can give a satisfactory answer to these questions.

What thought from J.C. Ryle's words stands out to you the most? Why?

DAY FIVE
Application

Re-read Matthew 16:13-28 and consider the truths that you have learned this week. Seek to apply the message of Matthew 16:13-23 to your life.

What thought or truth impacted you this week from your study of Matthew 16:13-28?

Jesus asks us the most important question in life and eternity—*Who do you say that I am?*

Who is Jesus Christ to you? Write out your own confession and declare it out loud.

Jesus, You are _____

The church has only one foundation—Jesus Christ. *For no one can lay any foundation other than what has been laid down. That foundation is Jesus Christ.* (1 Corinthians 3:11)

Jesus is the living Stone, the chief cornerstone, the Rock of our salvation.

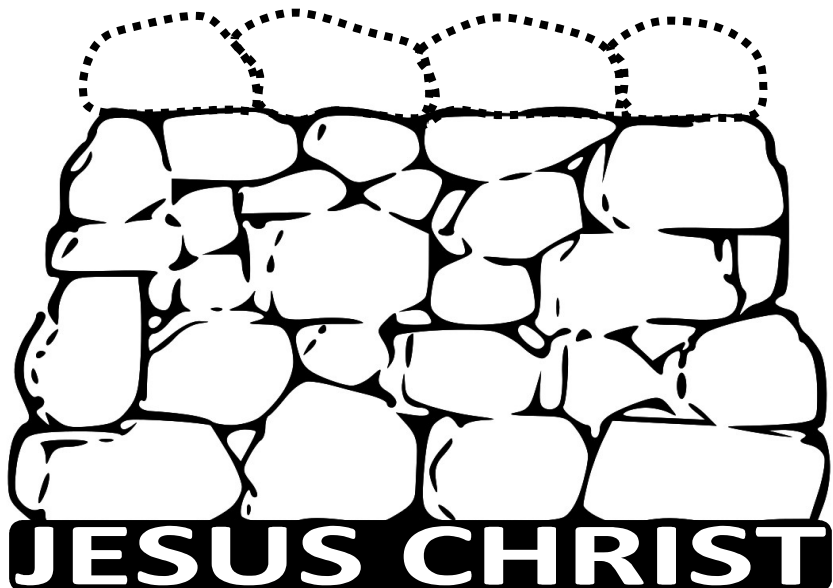
When you trust in Jesus Christ as your Savior, then you are built upon Him and joined to Him as a living stone—connected to all other believers—and being built into a holy temple to the Lord.

Write your name in one of the stones built upon Jesus Christ.

Write the names of other believers in the other stones.

Write the names of people you are praying for to receive Jesus in the dotted stones.

Pray for them now!



SUGGESTED QUESTIONS FOR GROUP OR FAMILY DISCUSSION:

The goal is not to get through all the questions but to spark discussion around the truth of Matthew 16:13-28. Use the questions below to interact together with what you learned.

- When did you first hear about Jesus? Who taught you? What do you learn? What were your first impressions of Him?
- If you asked random people on the street today who Jesus is, what would be some of the answers that you would receive?
- What is Peter's confession? What makes it so important?
- What is your confession of who Jesus is? Read your statement on page 118.
- How have you understood Matthew 16:18? What do you think now after doing this study?
- Why do you think Jesus tells the disciples not to tell anyone else that He is the Christ (16:20)?
- What do you learn about being a disciple of Jesus from 16:24-28?
- Did you discover anything new, interesting, or meaningful in your study of this passage this week? Or in your reading of J.C. Ryle? If so, what?
- How have you grown in your understanding of who Jesus is during your life? How did you view Jesus when you were a child? As a teenager? As a young adult? At this point in your life? How do you want to grow in your understanding of Jesus as you look toward your future?
- Spend time praising Jesus for who He is. Focus on one of these titles of Jesus in your prayer to Him—Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace, Lord, Savior, Redeemer, Immanuel, Lamb of God, Lion of Judah, Bread of Life, Everlasting Rock, Good Shepherd, Creator, Alpha and Omega, Great High Priest, and King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

Now this name of Peter was given him by the Lord, and in a figure, that he should signify the Church.

For seeing that Christ is the rock (Petra), Peter is the Christian people.

Therefore Peter is so called from the rock; not the rock from Peter;

as Christ is not called Christ from the Christian, but the Christian from Christ.

'Therefore,' he saith, 'Thou art Peter; and upon this Rock' which Thou hast confessed,

upon this rock which Thou hast acknowledged, saying,

'Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God, will I build My Church;'

that is upon Myself, the Son of the living God, 'will I build My Church.'

I will build thee upon Myself, not Myself upon Thee.

Augustine (354-430)

FINAL NOTES FROM MATTHEW 13-16

Things that I have learned during this study:

Who is Jesus to you? Have you acknowledged Him as your only Savior and Lord? There is no other name under heaven by which people can be saved (Acts 4:12). Jesus entered our world to save us from our sins. He died on the cross for you and for me. He rose again to give us eternal life. Have you placed your trust in Him? If not, do so today!

If you declare with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved. —Romans 10:9-10

This study guide was written by Pastor Steve Foster for use with the Gospel of Matthew sermon series at Community Bible Church, Baton Rouge, LA. You are welcome to reproduce any part of it for your own personal study. For any other use, please contact pastor@516church.org.



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