

## LESSON SEVEN

# SPIRITUAL RECEPTIVITY

*“It has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. 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.”*

MATTHEW 13:11-12 NKJV



## REFLECTION

The Bible is filled with agricultural imagery. Ours is not the agrarian society it used to be, but spending on lawn-and-garden supplies has nevertheless skyrocketed over the years. If you have much experience growing in flowers, fruit, or vegetables, what have you found to be the secret to success in the yard or garden?

## SITUATION

The kingdom of heaven was a source of great hope for the Jewish people. And yet, this much-discussed subject was also a matter of major misunderstanding. Jesus addressed the problem by telling short stories called *parables*. Within these short stories, he employed common, everyday objects and activities to illustrate various truths about God's kingdom.

## OBSERVATION

*Read Matthew 13:3–23 from the New International Version or the New King James Version.*

## NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION

<sup>3</sup> Then he told them many things in parables, saying: "A farmer went out to sow his seed. <sup>4</sup> As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. <sup>5</sup> Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. <sup>6</sup> But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. <sup>7</sup> Other seed fell among thorns,

which grew up and choked the plants. <sup>8</sup> Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop—a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown. <sup>9</sup> Whoever has ears, let them hear."

<sup>10</sup> The disciples came to him and asked, "Why do you speak to the people in parables?"

<sup>11</sup> He replied, "Because the knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them. <sup>12</sup> 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. <sup>13</sup> This is why I speak to them in parables:

"Though seeing, they do not see;  
though hearing, they do not hear or understand.

<sup>14</sup> In them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah:

"You will be ever hearing but never understanding;  
you will be ever seeing but never perceiving.

<sup>15</sup> 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."

<sup>16</sup> But blessed are your eyes because they see, and your ears because they hear. <sup>17</sup> For truly I tell you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it.

<sup>18</sup> "Listen then to what the parable of the sower means: <sup>19</sup> 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. <sup>20</sup> The seed falling on rocky ground refers

to someone who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. <sup>21</sup> 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. <sup>22</sup> 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. <sup>23</sup> 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.”

#### NEW KING JAMES VERSION

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

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

<sup>11</sup> 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. <sup>12</sup> 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. <sup>13</sup> Therefore I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. <sup>14</sup> 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;

<sup>15</sup> 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.’

<sup>16</sup> But blessed are your eyes for they see, and your ears for they hear; <sup>17</sup> 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.

<sup>18</sup> “Therefore hear the parable of the sower: <sup>19</sup> 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. <sup>20</sup> But he who received the seed on stony places, this is he who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; <sup>21</sup> 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. <sup>22</sup> 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. <sup>23</sup> 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.”

## EXPLORATION

### 1. What happened in the story of the seed-sowing farmer?

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### 2. What factors determined whether the seed bore fruit?

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3. Why did Jesus say he relied so heavily on parables in his teaching?

4. Why did Jesus say the disciples were blessed? What did they have that the masses did not?

5. How did Jesus explain the underlying meaning of the parable of the four soils?

6. According to Jesus, why is it not enough for a person to be exposed to the Word of God?

## INSPIRATION

To the Hebrew mind, the heart is a freeway cloverleaf where all emotions and prejudices and wisdom converge. It is a switch house that receives freight cars loaded with moods, ideas, emotions, and convictions and puts them on the right track.

And just as a low-grade oil or alloyed gasoline would cause you to question the performance of a refinery, evil acts and impure thoughts cause us to question the condition of our hearts. . . . The heart is the center of the spiritual life. If the fruit of a tree is bad, you don't try to fix

the fruit; you treat the roots. And if a person's actions are evil, it's not enough to change habits; you have to go deeper. You have to go to the heart of the problem, which is the problem of the heart.

That is why the state of the heart is so critical. What's the state of yours?

When someone barks at you, do you bark back or bite your tongue? That depends on the state of your heart.

When your schedule is too tight or your to-do list too long, do you lose your cool or keep it? That depends on the state of your heart.

When you are offered a morsel of gossip marinated in slander, do you turn it down or pass it on? That depends on the state of your heart.

Do you see the bag lady on the street as a burden on society or as an opportunity for God? That, too, depends on the state of your heart.

The state of your heart dictates whether you harbor a grudge or give grace, seek self-pity or seek Christ, drink human misery or taste God's mercy. No wonder, then, the wise man begs, "Above all else, guard your heart" (Proverbs 4:23).

David's prayer should be ours: "Create in me a pure heart, O God" (Psalm 51:10).

And Jesus' statement rings true: "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." (From *The Applause of Heaven* by Max Lucado.)

## REACTION

7. A thousand people can hear the same sermon, but only five in the crowd will truly be impacted and changed. What do you think makes the difference?

8. How do each of the four soils differ from one another?

**9.** What is necessary for people to change if they realize the soil of their heart is not conducive to growth or that their life is barren of fruit?

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**10.** What does fruitfulness and abundance look like in a life that is yielded to God?

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**11.** Compare your life to the soils described by Jesus. Which soil is closest to you?

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**12.** How do the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the Word of God? How does a citizen of the kingdom of heaven guard against these things?

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## LIFE LESSONS

The kingdom of God has both a present and a future aspect. During his first coming, Jesus fulfilled the role of a suffering servant. Through his death on the cross, he defeated the kingdom of darkness and made it possible for sinners to be forgiven and brought into his spiritual kingdom. He currently rules quietly in the hearts of those who are responsive to him—those who collectively make up his church. But at his second

coming, Christ will rule all things. His kingdom then will be visible and universal, and it will never end. By letting his Word take root in our hearts, we bear fruit for God. Through a kind of spiritual cultivation we are to watch over our souls, keeping them from becoming hard or hostile to the truth and rooting out any weeds of worldliness that can choke the fruit of righteousness.

## DEVOTION

*Father, protect me from the evil one. Keep me from spiritual indifference and shallowness. Make me aware and intolerant of worldly attitudes. Give me an ever-deepening desire to receive your Word with great eagerness. May it take root deeply in my soul so that I bear lasting fruit for your glory.*

## JOURNALING

What are the worries of this world that threaten to make you unfruitful in your faith?

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## FOR FURTHER READING

To complete the book of Matthew during this twelve-part study, read Matthew 13:1-52. For more Bible passages on fruitfulness, read Hosea 10:11-12; Luke 3:8-9; 13:6-9; John 15; Galatians 5:22-23; and Colossians 1:10.