

# Membership Covenant



## A Guide for Spiritual Formation

Text for the Week: Matthew 13:1-23

Message for the Week: Heart Cultivation

Sunday, April 7

### Opening:

What is one low (a bad thing) and one high (a good thing) that happened to you this past week? Write them down and take turns sharing them with the others in your group.

Where have you seen the work of the Holy Spirit in your life this past week?

Tell about a magnificent garden that you enjoyed, either your own or others. What made it so magnificent?

### Preparation:

Spend 1-2 minutes in silence with God to center and prepare yourself for your time with God today.

### Read:

Read / Have two people in your group read [Matthew 13:1-23](#) out loud.

[Clicking the link will bring you to multiple translations.]

As you read and/or listen to the text being read, circle, highlight, or underline what words, phrases, or ideas grabbed your attention and heart in these verses?

Write them down below and/or share them with those who are with you.

## **Respond / Reflect:**

Jesus uses parables often while teaching. What is a parable? How would you define it?

Why do you think Jesus speaks in parables? Why doesn't he just "tell" the people?

What do we learn about the Sower in this story?

How is that we see and hear the things of God? How does this happen?

What happens during the process of cultivation? Is cultivation necessary? Why or why not?

What is the word of God doing in your heart and life? What effect is the Sower's seed having in your heart and life?

How do we acquire more of the kingdom of heaven?

## **Try It:**

What do your eyes need to see? What do your ears need to hear? See. Listen.

## **Prayer:**

Spend time in prayer with/for the other people who are with you. Pray this prayer together:

Father, our hearts tend to be messy. Help us to clean and cultivate our hearts and lives so we grow spiritually, and even more, begin to bear fruit for the Kingdom of God. Lead us and guide us in this to the glory and honor of your name. AMEN

## **Missional/Spiritual Practice: Growth**

I commit to deepen my faith in Jesus Christ through regular Scripture reading and prayer.

I commit to having and pursuing a personal rule of life (a plan for intentionally growing my relationship with Jesus Christ) and living it out in my community, my church, and His Kingdom.

## Matthew 13:1-23

### New International Version

**13** That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat by the lake. <sup>2</sup>Such large crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat in it, while all the people stood on the shore. <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>[a]</sup>

<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.”

a. [Matthew 13:15](#) Isaiah 6:9,10 (see Septuagint)

## The Message

### A Harvest Story

**13** <sup>1-3</sup> At about that same time Jesus left the house and sat on the beach. In no time at all a crowd gathered along the shoreline, forcing him to get into a boat. Using the boat as a pulpit, he addressed his congregation, telling stories.

<sup>3-8</sup> “What do you make of this? A farmer planted seed. As he scattered the seed, some of it fell on the road, and birds ate it. Some fell in the gravel; it sprouted quickly but didn’t put down roots, so when the sun came up it withered just as quickly. Some fell in the weeds; as it came up, it was strangled by the weeds. Some fell on good earth, and produced a harvest beyond his wildest dreams.

<sup>9</sup> “Are you listening to this? Really listening?”

### Why Tell Stories?

<sup>10</sup> The disciples came up and asked, “Why do you tell stories?”

<sup>11-15</sup> He replied, “You’ve been given insight into God’s kingdom. You know how it works. Not everybody has this gift, this insight; it hasn’t been given to them. Whenever someone has a ready heart for this, the insights and understandings flow freely. But if there is no readiness, any trace of receptivity soon disappears. That’s why I tell stories: to create readiness, to nudge the people toward a welcome awakening. In their present state they can stare till doomsday and not see it, listen till they’re blue in the face and not get it. I don’t want Isaiah’s forecast repeated all over again:

Your ears are open but you don’t hear a thing.

Your eyes are awake but you don’t see a thing.

The people are stupid!

They stick their fingers in their ears

so they won’t have to listen;

They screw their eyes shut

so they won’t have to look,

so they won’t have to deal with me face-to-face

and let me heal them.

<sup>16-17</sup> “But you have God-blessed eyes—eyes that see! And God-blessed ears—ears that hear! A lot of people, prophets and humble believers among them, would have given anything to see what you are seeing, to hear what you are hearing, but never had the chance.

### The Meaning of the Harvest Story

<sup>18-19</sup> “Study this story of the farmer planting seed. When anyone hears news of the kingdom and doesn’t take it in, it just remains on the surface, and so the Evil One comes along and plucks it right out of that person’s heart. This is the seed the farmer scatters on the road.

<sup>20-21</sup> “The seed cast in the gravel—this is the person who hears and instantly responds with enthusiasm. But there is no soil of character, and so when the emotions wear off and some difficulty arrives, there is nothing to show for it.

<sup>22</sup> “The seed cast in the weeds is the person who hears the kingdom news, but weeds of worry and illusions about getting more and wanting everything under the sun strangle what was heard, and nothing comes of it.

<sup>23</sup> “The seed cast on good earth is the person who hears and takes in the News, and then produces a harvest beyond his wildest dreams.”