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**CONTEXT FOR YOU**

Have you ever tried to grow something? Maybe a plant, or even a garden? You know how important the soil is, right? It needs to be the right kind, have enough nutrients, and be well-draining. If the soil isn’t good, the plant won’t thrive. Well, in our spiritual lives, there’s something similar called “spiritual soil.” It’s what helps us grow closer to God. Just like a plant needs good soil to grow strong and healthy, we need good spiritual soil to flourish in our relationship with God. Today, we’re going to learn about a story Jesus told to teach us about this spiritual soil. It’s a parable, or a story Jesus uses to teach us something. The story uses the image of a farmer planting seeds in different kinds of soil to show us how different people respond to God’s word.

As you prepare, read 13:1-23. But in your group, focus on 13:19. Don’t give away the secrets of what each soil represents. Have them think through it?

**OPEN THE CONVERSATION (5-7 minutes)**

Take some time to build relationships with the students:

* Ask for each student’s high and low from the week.
* Today’s RBQ (Relationship Building Question): If you could grow anything (ex. money off trees, pizza out of the ground) what would you grow?

**DIG IN (15 MINUTES)**

***READ MATTHEW 13:1-9 (Break Up Between People)***

1. **Walk through each soil Jesus mentions and ask everyone to come up with a description of a person who might look like that. What would someone with hard soil, rocky soil, or thorny soil look like in real life?**

***READ MATTHEW 13:18-23***

1. **How does a heart get one of the first 3 soils? What might lead them to that?**
2. **How can someone develop good soil in their hearts?**
3. **How can you prepare the soil of your heart for God to work in your life? Why is it important to always check your heart to see how you are doing with God?**

**WRAP UP**

**Put today's lesson into action: What’s one thing from this morning you can put into action this week?**

*Ask for any prayer requests and pray for one another.*

**EXTENDED CUT**

As the disciples were among the crowd that day listening to the parable of the sower, they had questions about Jesus’s method of teaching. Pulling Jesus aside, they asked why He was using parables instead of speaking the truth plainly. Although the story Jesus told was easy to picture in the hearers’ context, the spiritual application may not be easily discerned. Why was Jesus speaking in this manner? Jesus explained His motivation behind the parable. The reception of the audience served to further emphasize the point of the parable. The disciples and those who were spiritually sensitive had understanding due to soft hearts and open ears. But those with hearts that were closed would not receive the message, just as the bad soil would not receive the seed. Those that are open to spiritual things will receive truth that grows their faith and ministers to their hearts while those who are hardened to the gospel message will hear the story but not receive the true meaning. We are reminded through this passage that it is God who opens eyes and ears to receive the truth of the gospel. As His messengers, we are responsible for obediently taking His Word to others, but we cannot force anyone to genuinely believe. Jesus quoted words written in Isaiah 6 that the hardened would hear but not listen and see but remain blind. He described the people’s hearts as having grown dull. This describes those who are hardened to the truth of the Word of God to their lives. This is a plague on the American church today and one Christ followers must guard against. Jesus said the disciples were blessed because they were able to understand His message. All who are spiritually sensitive to the gospel are blessed. Not only do they gain the benefit of new understanding and spiritual growth, but they also enjoy fellowship with the Holy Spirit. Spiritual Truth is meant to continually transform us into the image of our Savior through understanding and application.