



# HEAD HEART HANDS

Matthew Volume 2



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Unpacking biblical truths in a way that  
impacts our hearts and changes our lives

Written by Linda Allcock

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First published in Great Britain in 2019

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978-1-912373-85-7

Designed by Hannah Bray

Printed in China

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# HEAD • HEART • HANDS

*Head, Heart, Hands* are Bible study notes written for young people. I'm grateful to a number of women half my age – Bethan Reynolds, Sarah Spanner and Clare Doughty – for helping me to write the studies in a way that hopefully resonates with some of the issues with which young women struggle. Special thanks are due to Clare, who has done endless amounts of editing while patiently sharing a tiny workspace with me. Luckily she wasn't there for the minestrone soup incident, when I killed my computer and thought I had lost all my files!

The reason this series is called *Head, Heart, Hands* came out of Jesus' teaching in Matthew's Gospel. He frequently criticises the religious leaders because 'These people honour me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me' (Matthew 15:8). We don't want to read the Bible just to fill our heads with knowledge so that we have all the right answers. We study with our heads so that we will love Jesus with our hearts. That will overflow into genuine loving actions with our hands.

As a response to this, the questions are organised to help us understand truth with our **head**, probe our **heart** to see whether and why we are far from Jesus, and turn to Jesus for forgiveness. Only then are we able to ask for the Holy Spirit's help to change our hearts so that we want to obey. The final question in each study will point us to see how this new desire can overflow into what we do with our **hands** (and lives).

A very powerful tool to help truth sink into our hearts and overflow into our lives is learning God's word. We see this most clearly in chapter 4 when Jesus fights the devil with the words of God. In doing this, Jesus was obeying the teaching in the Old Testament: 'I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you' (Psalm 119:11).

Hiding God's word in your heart is a very powerful way of living out the truth. This became very precious to me when I was struggling with depression. My head was often full of negative thoughts: 'I'm useless, worthless, rubbish.' Hiding God's word in my heart and remembering it when these negative thoughts came helped me to realise that such thoughts are not true. They are not how God sees me. I was able to replace these negative thoughts with true thoughts about God, from his word. That transformed me from the inside out.

Throughout the book there are suggested verses where you can **hide God's word in your heart**. Learn them to help you in the fight to think truth about yourself, others, this world and our God. I've been excited to see how all of us working on this project have creatively responded to this idea, using calligraphy, sewing, fabric, paper, song, poetry and paint to help the truth become part of our lives. I hope these truths will excite your creativity so you can respond in a way that is helpful for you.

## ◦ TO GET YOU STARTED ◦

I firmly believe that with prayer, hard work and a few helpful hints you can read and understand the Bible for yourself. Therefore in a sense I find it ironic that I'm writing Bible study notes that do much of this work for you. However, these Bible reading notes are not designed to spoon-feed you a daily dose of truth. Rather, my hope is they will help you get into the habit of looking carefully at the Bible verses to see what they say, thinking about what they mean and then probing into your heart to find out why you find them so hard to obey!

As you progress through the book, I will introduce to you a set of questions you can ask of any passage. We will see in Matthew 11:25-27 and 16:17 that we will never understand what God is saying through our own cleverness, but only through God revealing his truth to us. So fundamental to every study is that we pause and pray, asking God to help us understand what he is saying. Through the Lord's Prayer we will learn an outline for how you can start to pray. Then with a few helpful hints you will discover that some passages you can understand without the help of notes. I long that you will find this exciting and empowering, and that after a while you won't even need Bible study notes!

## ◦ FOR SHARING ◦

Throughout the Gospel of Matthew we see a repeated pattern – the disciples come to Jesus, they learn from him, then they go and tell others. Similarly these studies are designed not just for you to keep to yourselves but to share with others.

I became a Christian through my friend Cathy at secondary school. One day she said to me, 'I have become a Christian.'

To this I replied, 'I'd like to be one too. How do I become one?'

She fumbled, 'I don't know. You'll have to come to camp with me and someone there will be able to explain it to you!'

Instead of replying 'I don't know' to an interested friend, I hope that through these notes you could say, 'Would you like to read the Bible with me?' Find a quiet space and spend ten minutes together, reading the opening illustration, answering the questions, then finishing by reading aloud the prayer.

Come to Jesus, learn from him, then go and tell others. That's a great summary of Matthew that you can live out day by day.

## ◦ ALL ABOUT JESUS ◦

I'm convinced that Matthew's Gospel is a great place to start Bible readings because through it we learn some really awesome truths about how the two parts of the Bible – the Old and New Testaments – fit together.

Above all, I hope that through the pages of Matthew you meet Jesus. You will see he is no ordinary man. From the very start we are told he is God with us, and the One God's people have been waiting for since pretty much the creation of the world. These are big claims. You need to look and see for yourself if there's any truth in them. Enjoy!

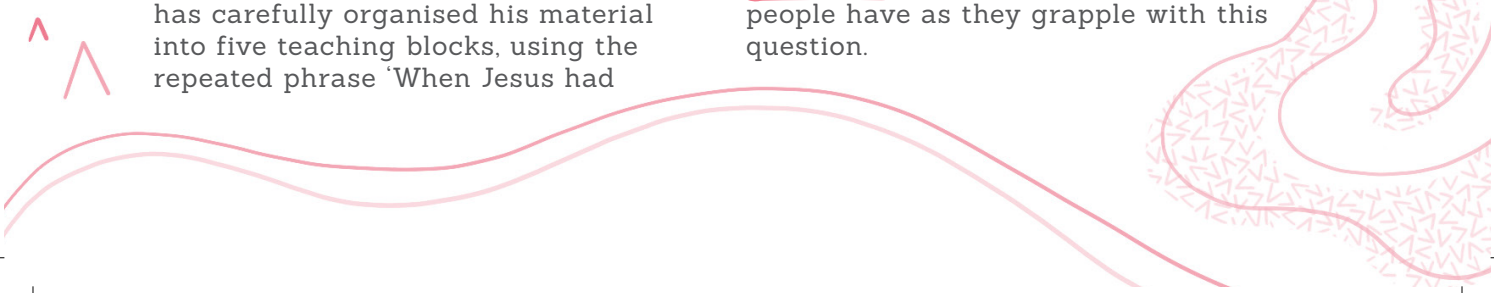




MAP OF

# Matthew

In *Head, Heart, Hands: Matthew Volume 1* I introduced the book of Matthew as being a bit like a journey. Not long ago I travelled to Kazakhstan via Istanbul. The first leg of the journey was fascinating as we travelled over land. Out of the window I could see the busy cities of England, the open fields of Belgium, the stunning mountains of Austria, the beautiful coast of Bulgaria and finally the bustling port of Istanbul. All the while I was watching the map screen. What I could see in overview on the screen, I could also watch unfold in detail below me. I want to give you a bit of a map to help you understand where we are going in Matthew's Gospel. Then as you journey through the chapters, you can look out of the window to see in detail the events unfolding. Hopefully the map will give you a bit of an idea of where we are, how it all fits together and where we are finally headed.

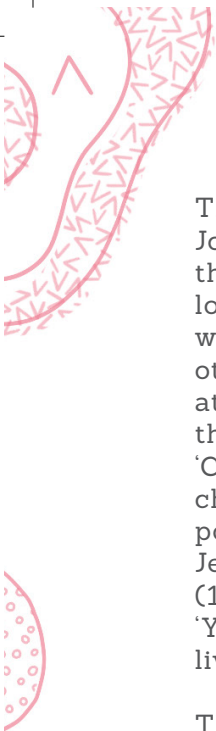


In the first leg of our journey through Matthew, we saw how Jesus fits with the story God started in the Old Testament. We noticed that Matthew has carefully organised his material into five teaching blocks, using the repeated phrase 'When Jesus had

finished ...' – or words very similar. In the first leg, volume 1, we covered two of the blocks. In chapters 1–7 Matthew introduced the kingdom of heaven with Jesus as its **King**. Jesus is described as the rising sun, with power to dispel the darkness of sin and suffering. He comes to call people to join his kingdom and teach them about what it looks like. Then in chapters 8–10 we saw Jesus healing with **amazing authority** to prove that he really is like the rising sun. All the symptoms of darkness – sin, sickness and death – shrink back as Jesus the sun rises.

The second leg of my journey from Istanbul to Kazakhstan was very different to the first. It was night-time and we were flying over a relatively uninhabited landscape. Out of the window there was nothing but darkness. Happily the second leg of our journey, in volume 2, is not like that! But there is one clear theme running through chapters 11–20, which is the question John the Baptist asks in our opening chapter: **is Jesus the One God promised?** We will see two responses people have as they grapple with this question.





The first response is epitomised by John the Baptist. As he asks, 'Are you the one who is to come?' (11:3), he is looking carefully at the evidence to work out the answer. We see many other people doing likewise – looking at Jesus' miracles and his teaching, then asking, like the crowds in 12:23, 'Could this be the Son of David?' By chapter 16 we reach a really crucial point in Peter's personal journey when Jesus asks him, 'Who do you say I am?' (16:15). He responds with certainty, 'You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God' (16:16).

The second response is there right alongside the first in 12:24. Even as the crowds look at the evidence and begin to understand who Jesus is, the Pharisees reject such a notion, claiming that Jesus is sent by Satan. They won't look at the evidence before them. Even when Jesus points out how illogical they are being, they refuse to listen to him. From the very outset of this section Matthew tells us that the Pharisees 'plotted how they might kill Jesus' (12:14). They want to test him, trap him in his words and get rid of him.

'Is Jesus the One God promised?' is the big question we all need to answer. Seeing the events in Matthew unfold will help you to look at the evidence for yourself. By chapter 20 you should be able to answer this question.

We cover another two teaching blocks in this book: chapters 11–13 and chapters 14–19. In both blocks Jesus teaches us more about the kingdom of heaven and what it means to follow Jesus. I'll give you a hint – it's not what you expected! The kingdom is just like its King – a place of generosity, forgiveness, serving ... and suffering. We gain glimpses of the terrain ahead as Jesus warns us that even 'the Son of Man [code name for an awesomely powerful, forever King] did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many' (20:28). He tells us clearly that the Son of Man is going to suffer at the hands of the religious leaders and must be killed, but that on the third day will be raised to life. (We will see these events unfold in Matthew 21–28, covered in *Head, Heart, Hands: Matthew Volume 3*). Jesus' death is no accident and comes as no surprise; he is in complete control. From the very start, in Matthew 1:21, he was given the name Jesus 'because he will save his people from their sins'. This is why he came.

For those interested, a much more detailed visual outline of Matthew is available on the Internet from the Bible Project.<sup>1</sup>



JESUS FITS THE SKETCH

AMAZING AUTHORITY

DISPELS DARKNESS

WHO DO YOU SAY I AM?

<sup>1</sup>For this visual outline go to <https://thebibleproject.com/explore/matthew/> and click on the link to 'Matthew Read Scripture Poster'.

# STUDY 1

## IS JESUS THE ONE GOD PROMISED?

Look carefully

Pray, asking God to help you understand his word

Read Matthew 11:1–6; 12:23–24

My parents bought me what they described as a perfect twenty-first birthday present. They gave clues about how useful it would be, how pleased I would be with it.

I knew what I wanted it to be. I wanted a car.

Matthew is giving us clues in his Gospel. Not to work out the identity of my birthday present, but about the identity of the Messiah – the One God promised to send. The Jews had been waiting far longer than twenty-one years! The clues were in the Old Testament (the first part of the Bible, written before Jesus came). Matthew has included loads of these clues in his Gospel. You can find out where they're from by glancing at the footnotes at the bottom of the page in the Bible. Flick back through Matthew and see how many you can spot – there's at least twenty!

By chapter 11:3 John the Baptist, who had been looking carefully at the clues, begins to get it. He asks Jesus, 'Are you the one?'

Head: Looking again at 12:23–24, what are we going to learn about Jesus' identity throughout this section? (You can also see this in 14:33, 16:16 and 17:5, if you have time.)

Most of us have not grown up in Jewish families, learning these hints and clues from the Old Testament, as Matthew's original hearers had. Can you imagine their excitement: ... is it, could it be, is Jesus the One who fits all the clues?

'Is Jesus the one?' is the question we each need to answer as we read through Matthew's Gospel. Jesus didn't reply to John with a simple 'yes'.

Head: Matthew 11:5 is basically a summary of what Jesus had just done in chapters 8–9. What had the disciples heard and seen that they needed to tell John about?

In the studies that follow we'll look through the clues Matthew gives us and begin to see for ourselves who Jesus is. We'll notice that some people look at the clues and start to understand, like the crowd are beginning to in 12:23: 'Could this be the Son of David?'

We'll also see, in contrast, that others have already decided what the Messiah



is going to be like, so they reject Jesus because he is not what they are expecting. These people are epitomised by the Pharisees in the very next verse: 'It is by ... the prince of demons, that this fellow drives out demons' (12:24). Throughout the next section of Matthew we will continue to see these two responses. Some believe; others refuse to.

As I turned twenty-one, finally I received what all the clues had been pointing towards. Puzzled, I thought, 'This is a large box for a small car key. Nice disguise!'

It was a sewing machine.

I didn't look carefully at the clues. I had already decided what I wanted the gift to be.

**Heart:** Have you already made up your mind about Jesus? What evidence have you based your decision on?

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**Hands:** Why not decide to look carefully at the clues and work out for yourself whether Jesus really is the One

God promised? Why not ask God now to give you an open mind as you read about Jesus?

To help us do this, in the following studies we will pray, asking God to help us understand what he is saying as we read his word.

*God, I know I perhaps haven't really thought about you much. I'm surprised how many clues there are about Jesus that were written before he was born on earth. Please help me to put to one side what I already think I know about Jesus: that he is*

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*Please be showing me, throughout this book, who Jesus really is.  
Amen.*



# STUDY 2

## IS JESUS THE ONE GOD PROMISED?

*Lots of little clues*

Pray, asking God to help you understand his word

Read Matthew 11:1-19

Have you ever played or watched a murder mystery? I'm on episode four of six at the moment in a TV drama. Every episode we get more clues, but no single clue is enough to make me sure 'whodunnit'. I can't wait until episode six when I get all the clues and make sense of it all!

John the Baptist also seems to be somewhere around episode four. He's got some of the clues and is starting to look at Jesus and wonder ... See what he asks in verse 3: 'Are you the one who is to come?'

John will have known some of the Old Testament clues about God's promised One from childhood. Look at the quotes below from Isaiah. When John's disciples ask Jesus if he was the one, see if you can work out why Jesus replies as he does in verse 5.

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The clues from Isaiah are:

*'Be strong, do not fear; your God will come ... he will come to save you.' Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped. Then will the lame leap like a deer, and the mute tongue shout for joy (Isaiah 35:4-6).*

*... the Lord has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners (Isaiah 61:1).*



Heart: As we ask the question 'Is Jesus the One God promised?' it would be great to get a big sign in the sky saying, 'Yes, he is!' Look carefully at verse 4. How does Jesus expect John – and us – to work out whether he is the One?

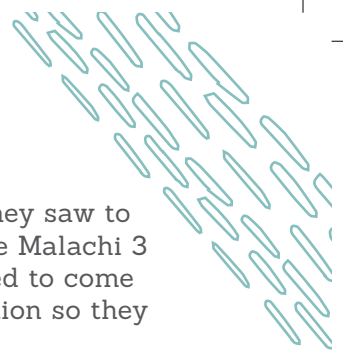
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Even the great prophet John the Baptist doesn't get a backstage pass to episode six. He has to wait, to collect the clues and to work it out. He has to listen to the reports of eyewitnesses who have seen and heard Jesus working miracles.

Like a good murder mystery, there is not one unanimous piece of evidence. No single clue is enough to decide the case once and for all. Instead there are lots of small clues. We make the mistake of thinking that if God just did ... then we would believe. That is



not how God reveals himself. He gives us loads and loads of little clues in the Bible. Taken together the evidence leads us to episode six when we can make sense of it all.

Even the coming of John the Baptist himself was a clue. He came just as was promised in Malachi 3:1, which Matthew quotes in verse 10. Jesus holds him up as the greatest one born of women, yet in the same breath announces that those in the kingdom are greater still.

**Heart:** John is still on episode four, asking, 'Are you the one?' Why are those in the kingdom greater than John? (Hint: What have they concluded from the clues?)

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**Head:** In verses 18–19 we find that some people disagree. When they look at John the Baptist – baptising in the desert, and teaching people to repent and believe the good news – what do they conclude? When they see Jesus – forgiving sinners and transforming the lives of evil tax collectors – what do they see?

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John's message was identical to Jesus' message. (You can check in Matthew 3:2 and 4:17!) They preached, 'Repent!' That means to change – to confess your sins and turn to Jesus for forgiveness. Some didn't want to hear that message; they didn't want to change their ways. So when they looked at John and Jesus,

they didn't compare what they saw to the Old Testament clues like Malachi 3 and Isaiah. Instead they tried to come up with a different explanation so they wouldn't have to change.

**Heart:** When you look at the clues Matthew gives us and when you look at what Jesus does and teaches, are you willing to listen? Do you want to understand? Are you willing to change?

**Hands:** Which episode are you up to? What have you concluded from the clues so far? Have you been holding out for one big piece of evidence? When you think about all you know about Jesus, what is the obvious conclusion?

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*Heavenly Father, thank you for all the clues you give me about who Jesus is. Forgive me where I have looked at the clues and argued with them. I find it hard to believe because*

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*I want to be sure, so please convince me that*

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*Amen.*

# Study 3 :

## IS JESUS THE ONE GOD PROMISED?

*Respond rightly to the miracles*

Pray, asking God to help you understand his word

Read Matthew 11:20-24

I helped as a leader on a youth camp when one of my kids was only eighteen months old. I left him with Granny. When I returned, he refused to even look at me. He just stood in front of me, staring at the ground. I felt so guilty!

In a not very similar way (!) Chorazin and Bethsaida are places in this passage who refuse to look at Jesus. They refuse to acknowledge who he is. They will not repent and run to him. Quite the opposite.

**Head: What is the problem with Chorazin, Bethsaida and also Capernaum? Have they seen the clues? What is their response?**

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**Head: Tyre, Sidon and Sodom are countries that are arch-enemies of God. In what ways would verses 21-24 have shocked the original hearers?**

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**Head: Jesus is very clear here: what are the consequences for those who know all about Jesus but refuse to repent?**

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Read on into 11:25 and see the problem. The wise and learned have much head knowledge, but they won't let it change their hearts – they refuse to repent and come to Jesus.

Repenting in sackcloth and ashes is an Old Testament practice. You see this really clearly in Jonah 3:7-9 when the King of Nineveh (another of God's arch-enemies) listens to Jonah's warning about judgement. He therefore commands his whole kingdom to not eat or drink, to call urgently on God, and to give up their evil ways and their violence in case God relents.

The irony in Jonah's day, as in this passage, is that God's enemies are quicker to repent than God's so-called people.

**Heart: Try to write out what it would look like for you to repent in sackcloth and ashes. Why should you respond to Jesus like this?**

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Hands: What stops you from responding to Jesus in this way?  
Why not turn the answer into a prayer?



*Father God, I admit that I hardly ever respond to Jesus by really being sorry and showing that by giving up my evil ways. Help me to believe that the day of judgement is coming. Help me to take the warning seriously, like Nineveh did. Please forgive me for my evil ways*

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*I call urgently on you to help me and those I love to turn to Jesus so we can be saved from judgement. Amen.*

# STUDY 4

## IS JESUS THE ONE GOD PROMISED?

*Little children recognise him*

Pray, asking God to help you understand his word

Read Matthew 11:25 – 12:21

Exam results day – what a huge stress. One slip of paper can change forever the course of your life. In our world being wise and learned is to be pursued at all costs. Not so in Jesus' kingdom. When Jesus gives us a model of who we are to be like, he doesn't pick a politician, professor or doctor. No, it's as if he picks baby Rosie from the creche. Be like her ... ?!

In chapters 11–12 we don't just see rejection or acceptance of Jesus. We are given a unique insight into how, who and why people come to Jesus. In 11:25–26 we find that the Father is not only pleased to, but has chosen to, reveal these things to 'little children'. That is why they come to Jesus. As we read on, we find such 'children' are those who are weary and burdened. We have met these people already – those with withered hands, withered lives, withered hearts. When such people hear the call of Jesus to repent, they come. And what do they find?

Rest. Rest for their souls. Jesus takes their weariness – the heavy burden of their shame and suffering and sin.

And he gives them his burden – his easy, light yoke.



The way of the kingdom – the beatitudes laid out for us in Matthew 5 – is brought to life in its King: the gentle, humble King. This is the King who was promised. Yes, he will bring victory, but he will do so gently, humbly: 'He will not quarrel or cry out; no one will hear his voice in the streets. A bruised reed he will not break, and a smouldering wick he will not snuff out' (12:19–20). When Jesus sees someone weary and burdened, he welcomes them. He completely restores the withered man's hand, and the lives and hearts of all who will come to him. He doesn't point the finger at all the ways we have failed. He tells us to repent – to come to him – and then he will take the burden of our failure and give us the light burden of his perfect life. All are welcome to come to Jesus – his call rings out to all nations as the gospel ends.

What a contrast to the Pharisees – the wise and learned ones who ply Jesus with accusations and quarrels, culminating in a plot to kill. We glimpse some of the burdens they heap onto people: rule upon rule about the



Sabbath, the temple, healing, working, doing good. In Matthew 23:4 we are told, 'They tie up heavy, cumbersome loads and put them onto people's backs, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them.' Back in chapter 12 they have no concern that Jesus' disciples are hungry. And they are more concerned to help their sheep than the man with the withered hand. They will not lift a finger to help; they only lift one to point.

The sad fact is that those who are wise and learned will not come to Jesus for help. All they can see is alleged faults: Jesus 'is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners' (11:19). The beauty of gentle, humble Jesus is hidden from them, so they refuse to accept his invitation to come.

**Head:** What does Jesus call the disciples (that just means learners) to do in 11:28?

**Heart:** Following Jesus is never promised to be easy – people will hate us for it. But here it is described as 'rest for your souls'. What do you think that means? Is your soul safe with Jesus or are you still trying to save your soul without him?

**Hide it in your heart:** Jesus calls us to come to him. That's easy to forget. Why not learn Matthew 11:28? When you feel burdened – perhaps with anxiety, stress, fear of failure or feeling

overwhelmed – come to Jesus. Use these words of truth to remind you that feeling weary and burdened is what qualifies us to come to him! Thank him that the burden he gives us is light, because he takes the burden of our sin and struggles on himself on the cross. Feel the burdens physically lift from your shoulders as you pray.

**Hands:** In what ways can we be too wise and learned for Jesus? Why not be honest with Jesus right now. Tell him about your burdens. Tell him what wearies you.

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*Father, I don't want to be too wise and learned to come to you. Please reveal Jesus to me – gentle, humble Jesus. When I look at him, I realise how weary and burdened I am, full of sin and failure*

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*Help me to come to Jesus – to ask him to take the weight of my burden on the cross. Amen.*

# study 5...

## IS JESUS THE ONE GOD PROMISED?

Two responses

Pray, asking God to help you understand his word

Read Matthew 12:22–37

*Bob the Builder* was a much-loved TV show when my kids were young. I still can't get the theme tune out of my head: '*Bob the Builder, can he fix it? Bob the Builder, yes, he can!*' One of my cheeky boys used to change the words to '*No, he can't!*' (That said much more about my boy than about Bob the Builder!) Here in this passage we glimpse two responses to Jesus. You can almost hear the Pharisees changing the response to '*No, he can't!*', preferring all manner of illogical explanations to the obvious conclusion of the people.

**Head:** How do the people respond to what they see and hear? What is shocking about the Pharisees' response?

Jesus points out how illogical the Pharisees are being in verses 25–29, using several different images.

**Head:** Why wouldn't Satan drive out Satan? (Hint: It's a bit like a politician going out and persuading people not to vote for him!) What would happen to his kingdom if he started to do that?

**Head:** What do you need to do if you are going to rob a strong man's house? How does this relate to Jesus driving out demons?

**Heart:** What are the two responses Jesus lays out in verse 30? Which one describes you best?

Notice how protective Jesus is about the third person of the Trinity: the Holy Spirit. Jesus will not allow the Holy Spirit to be slandered, but if people slander Jesus, he is gracious and will forgive.

**Hands:** '... the mouth speaks what the heart is full of' (v.24). What are your words revealing about your heart? How can a tree (v.23 – that is, a heart) be made good? (Hint: Look back to 12:13 and 11:28.)

*Father God, my words reveal that my heart so often whispers no to Jesus instead of yes. I say no to you about things like*

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*Help me to look at who Jesus really is and what he does, and to come to him to have my heart melted and changed. I don't want to be condemned. Please save me! Amen.*



**Hide it in your heart:** I know that in the last study we learned a verse, but I really recommend you learn Matthew 12:34 as well. It's easy to learn because the verse reference is: 1 2 3 4. And it's only nine words: '... the mouth speaks what the heart is full of.' But that verse has been incredibly significant for me in helping me to fight the root of my sin. My greatest struggle with sin is what I say. I find myself often speaking words that are harsh, sarcastic and unkind. Matthew 12:34 reminds me that the problem is not my words but my heart. I ask God to forgive me and change my heart towards the person or situation I am cross about so that I think of them like he does. As my heart changes, what overflows out of it changes too.

# STUDY 6

## IS JESUS THE ONE GOD PROMISED?

*The greater One*

Pray, asking God to help you understand his word

Read Matthew 11:20–24; 12:1–14, 38–50

I am that embarrassing mum who sends her kids to school with 'value' crisps. We also have 'value' jam, 'value' ice cream ... you get the picture! The other day we were at a friend's house and they brought out some Haagen Dazs ... something far greater was here. That was so exciting for me, but my son took one spoonful and spat it out!

Throughout chapters 11–12 Jesus keeps saying, 'something greater is here'. What is the something greater? It is Jesus, the One to whom all the Old Testament pointed. But the irony is this generation spit him out!

So Jesus condemns them for refusing to repent and change their ways. In 11:20 he uses some rather unlikely candidates for repentance in Israel's history: Tyre and Sidon – Israel's neighbours, whose king once claimed, 'I am a god' (Ezekiel 28:2); and Sodom – who God destroyed because of the extent of their wickedness. Jesus makes the point that if Tyre, Sidon and Sodom had seen the miracles he performed, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. So how much

more should this generation repent, who have seen the 'something greater' miracles of Jesus with their own eyes?

To the Pharisees, who are very concerned about keeping the Sabbath special, Jesus tells them something greater than the Sabbath is here. Referring to himself, he says, 'the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath' (12:8). But they spit him out!

We learn in 12:6 that also 'something greater than the temple is here'. **Jesus is the temple** – the place where we can meet with God. In his death and resurrection Jesus said he would break down the Jewish temple and rebuild it in three days (27:40). By this he meant the temple building would no longer be needed because it is now possible, through Jesus, for us to have a direct relationship with God. Yet even as Jesus dies, this generation are still mocking him, unable to see that Jesus is the 'something greater' than the temple. How much more should the Pharisees have repented and worshipped the One greater than the temple and the Lord of the Sabbath they profess to love? Yet instead of repentance they plot to kill Jesus. 'Get rid of the Haagen Dazs!' they're effectively declaring.



GET RID  
OF THE  
HAAGEN  
-DAZ!

In 12:39 Jesus refers to Nineveh, another great city, full of wickedness. Jonah the prophet was sent to them, preaching only eight words: 'Forty more

days and Nineveh will be overthrown' (Jonah 3:4). Nineveh repented. How much more should this wicked and adulterous generation repent, when they have so much more than eight words – they have the One greater than Jonah. Yet they have the audacity instead to ask for a miraculous sign, as if they haven't had enough. Jesus here hints that even when he gives them the greatest sign – dying and rising again after three days (like when Jonah spent three nights in the belly of a whale before being raised to life) – it will still not be enough for them. Still they will refuse to repent.

Then in 12:42 we see the example of the Queen of Sheba, who had all the wealth, power and privilege she could ever desire. Even so she came from the ends of the earth to hear Solomon's wisdom. But 'now something greater than Solomon is here' – Jesus. How much more should this generation come to listen to his wisdom.

But this is the heart of the problem. They will not come. They will not change. As we see in 12:46, even Jesus' mother and brothers want to summon him and so are standing outside, wanting him to come to them. They are like little children expecting him to dance to their tune. Jesus responds by saying those in his family are those who dance to his tune. They do not try to tell him what to do, ask for miraculous signs, try to catch him out by his good deeds on the Sabbath or refuse to believe his miracles. But they are those who do the will of his Father in heaven – those who will see the signs and repent.

How much more do we have now we can read all that Jesus did in Matthew's Gospel. We truly can understand how much greater he is than Jonah, as we

see him put to death by the Pharisees yet miraculously raised to life.

**Head:** What is Jesus' warning for those who will not repent (12:41-42)?

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**Heart:** We have far greater evidence even than Jesus' generation. How should we respond?

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**Hands:** Repentance means admitting we have got things wrong, asking for forgiveness and making changes. Why not write down what needs to change in your attitude towards Jesus. How will you live out that Jesus is greater?

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*Father God, I want to repent of when I have*

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*Help me to be ready for the judgement that is coming. Help me to see how much greater Jesus is, to appreciate him (like Haagen Dazs!) and to live that out by*

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*Amen.*

# STUDY 7:

## IS JESUS THE ONE GOD PROMISED?

Two responses

Pray, asking God to help you understand his word

Read Matthew 13:1-17

Our family has a problem with cracked heels. The skin on the back of the foot gets calloused – that means it becomes hard, dry and pretty dead. It cracks and gets really painful. Jesus wants to alert us to another type of callous, but this one is life-threatening: calloused hearts.



In verse 15 these calloused hearts are even worse because they stop your **eyes** from really seeing and your **ears** from really hearing.

You might think from the large crowds gathered round Jesus (v.2) that everyone is repenting, turning and following him. Not so. In fact it is never so.

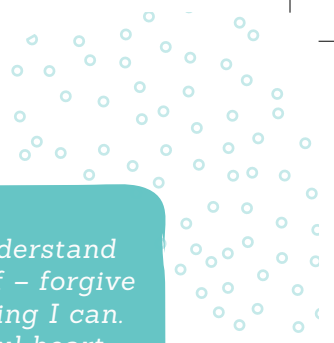
Head: Look at the Isaiah quote in 13:14-15. Do these people see Jesus' miracles and hear his teaching? In what way are the towns in 11:20-22 like this?

Head: Why does Jesus speak this way – in parables?

We will understand more about why Jesus' parables have a secret meaning in the next few studies. For the moment it's enough to notice that people will respond in one of two ways. Some will turn to God for help to understand. Others won't understand and will turn away. We need help to understand the parables – that's why Jesus uses them. They reveal who is willing to ask for help and who isn't.

Heart: Where does the problem lie – with Jesus' message or with the people? What stops them turning to God for healing?

These people refuse to come to Jesus to ask him to explain his teaching, because their hearts are calloused – hard, dry and pretty much dead.



Heart: Which of the two hearts is most similar to yours? Think about what happens when you – if you – read the Bible or listen to a sermon ...

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Heart: What hope is there for people whose eyes can't see? (Hint: Look back to 12:22.) What do they need?

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Hands: What does a fruitful heart do when it hears a sermon or reads the Bible (v.15)? Why not ask God to change your heart, helping you to hear, understand and turn to him each time you hear his word?



A large rectangular area with a dashed teal border, intended for a drawing or response.

*Father God, I cannot understand your kingdom by myself – forgive me for arrogantly thinking I can. Instead give me a fruitful heart – help me to really listen when your word is taught in church, Bible study group and*

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*Help me to pray to you for understanding. Help me turn to you to change, especially in the area of pride when I already think I know it all. Show me how much I need you to help me listen, understand and change. Amen.*

# Study 8

## THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN

Secrets revealed

Pray, asking God to help you understand his word

Read Matthew 13:11-17

The parable of the sower is the first in a set of seven parables. Jesus tells us what a parable is: a story that has a secret meaning. The people listening will not see or understand the meaning unless the storyteller **reveals** it to them.

**Head:** In this set of seven parables Jesus is revealing to us the secrets about, well, why not look for yourself in the introduction to each of the next stories: 13:24, 31, 33, 44, 45, 47? What phrase is repeated? What are all of these parables about?

To really understand what the kingdom of heaven is – and why it's a secret – we need to go back to the Old Testament. We're going to look at Daniel 2. Although it might not seem obvious why at first, as we read on in the following studies it will help us understand what Jesus is teaching us in Matthew 13. In Daniel 2 God

sketched out what this kingdom would be like by giving a dream to King Nebuchadnezzar. He couldn't understand it, so he asked the prophet Daniel for help. Daniel couldn't explain it either, but says that while he can't explain, 'there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries' (Daniel 2:28)

The dream was of an enormous dazzling statue, made of gold, silver, bronze, iron and clay. In the dream a rock was cut out but not by human hands. It struck the statue and smashed it. God, through Daniel, explains what the dream means in Daniel 2:44-45:

*In the time of those kings, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed, nor will it be left to another people. It will crush all those kingdoms and bring them to an end, but it will itself endure for ever. This is the meaning of the vision of the rock cut out of a mountain, but not by human hands – a rock that broke the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver and the gold to pieces.*

This kingdom, sketched out years ago, is the kingdom of heaven that Jesus teaches us about in Matthew 13.

We see this sketch of a rock (representing the kingdom) not cut out by human hands come to life in the conception and birth of King Jesus. He is not conceived in a natural human way, but from God. The rock seems small now – in Matthew 4 we read about it being like a light dawning. It is just a little glimpse. But dawn means the full light of day is



coming, smashing away the darkness of the kingdom of this world. Though the kingdom seems small now, it is **growing**. When Jesus returns, the kingdom of this world will become his. It will be the only kingdom and the Lord Jesus will be the only King, reigning forever and ever.

This is what Jesus is teaching us in these parables – the knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven. Psalm 78, quoted in 13:35, says that Jesus ‘will utter things hidden since the creation of the world’. As he teaches, some will reject what Jesus says and refuse to come to him for help. Others will be like Daniel, willing to admit they cannot understand, but asking the God in heaven to reveal the hidden meaning. We see the disciples doing this in 13:10 – they come to Jesus, wanting to understand what the parables mean. This is why we always pray at the start of each study – we need God to help us to understand his word.

It’s not that the message of the kingdom is failing in those who reject Jesus’ message. His word is doing its work. We would love to say that his word is rescuing everyone from the evil enemy, but actually some don’t want Jesus to rescue them. His word’s work is to reveal what people’s hearts are like.

**Head:** What are the two types of heart in verse 15?

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**Heart:** Which best describes your heart?

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**Hands:** In what areas of your life does your heart feel calloused? Where are you rejecting Jesus and refusing to repent? You could write out verse 15 in your own words as a prayer, asking God to forgive you where your heart is calloused and to give you eyes that see, ears that hear and a heart that understands and turns for healing.

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*Father God, I think back to times when I’ve heard your word being taught or when I’ve tried to read your word myself and I recognise the description of being calloused, hard, dry, dead. I am sorry, especially when I have done this by*

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*Please change my heart. Amen.*

# STUDY 9

## THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN

Two responses

Pray, asking God to help you understand his word

Read Matthew 13:18–23

The reality of farming is seen in a small scale in my garden. Some (or many) seeds get choked by the weeds; others I forget to water and they wither; still others get eaten by slugs. But remarkably, sometimes, they actually grow and bear fruit!

Head: In verse 19 what is the problem with the snatched seed? Do these people hear? Why don't they understand (look in verse 19 and back to verse 15)?

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Head: Describe the withered seedlings in verses 20–21. What is the problem with this type of heart?

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Head: What is the problem with the choked plants in verse 22?

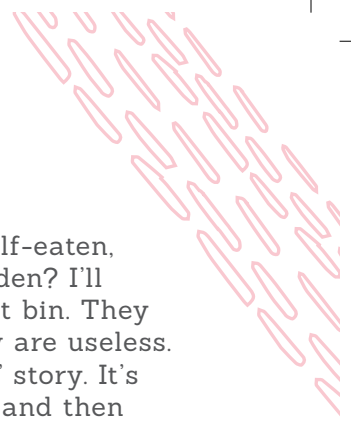
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Jesus is showing us through this parable that although many people look like they are listening and following Jesus, the reality is that lots of them (in this parable two-thirds of them) will stop following him. We need to recognise how tempting it will be to give up on Jesus when trouble comes – when life doesn't turn out how we expected. Maybe we won't get the grades we want or won't find a job. We might be mocked for our faith, losing friends, or work, or popularity or our reputation as a result. When the going gets tough ... it's easy to give up. As we read on in Matthew, we will see this starting to happen to those who look like they are Jesus' followers.

It's not just the tough times but also the good times that will drag us from Jesus. Look at how wealth is described: deceitful. This is why being wealthy seems so much more attractive than giving up everything to follow Jesus. But, like the plant, it will end up choked, withered and dead. Some are instead dragged away by the worries of this life: 'What if I lose out by following Jesus? What if I never find a Christian guy to marry?' How easy it is to compromise on wholeheartedly following Jesus because we don't want to miss out.

Now you understand why Matthew has spent so long showing us who Jesus is – someone greater than anything this world has to offer. Don't turn from him; **run to him!**



Heart: What is the difference between the fruitful heart and all the other hearts (v.23)?

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Hands: What do these different hearts look like in church on a Sunday? How does the path-like heart react to the sermon? What about the rocky heart? How does the heart-in-thorns respond? What about the fruitful heart (vv.15 and 23)?

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Hands: Be honest – what is your heart doing in church? Which of the above does it most resemble? What do you want your heart to be like? Could you make changes that help you to listen and turn to Jesus? Perhaps taking a notebook and pen to make notes at church? Or meeting with someone in the week to help you understand and obey the sermon?

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What will I do with the half-eaten, withered plants in my garden? I'll throw them in the compost bin. They don't produce fruit so they are useless. That is the shock of Jesus' story. It's no good hearing the word and then forgetting what we've heard. It's no good receiving it with joy, then giving up as soon as trouble comes. It's no good listening to Jesus, but letting his voice be choked by all the other things we love or are concerned about.

*Lord, I am sorry that so often when I hear your word, it gets snatched away. I fail to obey you when that gets hard. I love food, clothing, my mobile, the Internet, TV,*

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*rather than you. I have allowed my worries about*

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*to choke your word. Change my heart so it will not be calloused and hard. I want to hear and understand; to turn and be healed. Amen.*