

MEETING  
G O D  
IN SCRIPTURE

A HANDS-ON GUIDE TO  
LECTIO DIVINA

Jan Johnson



IVP Books

An imprint of InterVarsity Press  
Downers Grove, Illinois

# The Hidden Yet Powerful Kingdom of God

*Matthew 13:24-32, 36-40*

## **RELAX AND REFOCUS (*SILENCIO*)**

Center yourself by breathing in and out. Relax your neck and take time to let your muscles relax.

*Optional*—Ponder this question: What are some things that are hidden, yet powerful? For example, electricity itself isn't usually seen, but we see its powerful effects. What else?

## **READ (*LECTIO*)**

Read the passage to yourself silently. Then read the notes below it about the key words and phrases. Consider how these details help your understanding of the passage. Then read the passage aloud slowly. Take time to let the words “fall on your ear.”

## **REFLECT (*MEDITATIO*)**

*Questions and cues to help you enter into the story.*

1. *Characters focus: Farmer, enemy and slaves (verses 24-30).* Do you see yourself in any of the characters in the parable of the weeds or its explanation? Are you

## Matthew 13:24-32, 36-40

<sup>24</sup>Jesus told them another parable: “The **kingdom of heaven** is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. <sup>25</sup>But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away. <sup>26</sup>When the wheat sprouted and formed heads, then the weeds also appeared.

<sup>27</sup>“The owner’s servants came to him and said, ‘Sir, didn’t you sow good seed in your field? Where then did the weeds come from?’

<sup>28</sup>“‘An enemy did this,’ he replied.

“The servants asked him, ‘Do you want us to go and pull them up?’

<sup>29</sup>“‘No,’ he answered, ‘because while you are pulling the weeds, you may uproot the wheat with them. <sup>30</sup>Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time I will tell the harvesters: First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn.’”

<sup>31</sup>He told them another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like a **mustard seed**, which a man took and planted in his field. <sup>32</sup>Though it is the smallest of all seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds come and perch in its branches.”

<sup>36</sup>Then he left the crowd and went into the house. His disciples came to him and said, “Explain to us the parable of the weeds in the field.”

<sup>37</sup>He answered, “The one who sowed the good seed is the **Son of Man**. <sup>38</sup>The field is the world, and the good seed stands for the people of the kingdom. The weeds are the people of the evil one, <sup>39</sup>and the enemy who sows them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the harvesters are angels.

<sup>40</sup>“As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age.”

---

**kingdom of heaven** Matthew calls the kingdom of God the “kingdom of heaven,” perhaps because Jews avoid saying God’s name, or perhaps because Matthew wanted to emphasize the kingdom’s nearness. The Jews thought of heaven as beginning on the surface of the earth—the air around us—and extending upward.

**mustard seed** The small round seeds of mustard plants are usually 1 or 2 millimeters in diameter. They can be yellowish white or black.

**Son of Man** Jesus’ way of referring to himself.

- the diligent owner who plants wheat seed in his field?
- the enemy who sneaks in at night to scatter weeds in the field?
- the bewildered servants who ask how this bad thing could have happened?
- the solution-oriented servants who want to go gather up the weeds?
- the harvesters (angels) who collect both the wheat and the weeds?
- the owner who waits for what he thinks is the best moment to act—delaying the removal of the weeds in order to protect the precious wheat harvest?
- the people of the kingdom who live side by side with people of the evil one?

Why do you identify with that character? If you identified with any of the servants, how difficult would it be for you to trust the owner? (When you read the passage again later in this section, the Spirit may prompt you to identify with a different character.)

2. Does anything about Jesus' explanation of the parable of the weeds surprise or startle you?
  - Power and hiddenness don't seem to go together. Powerful people are usually visible, not hidden. But in these parables the powerful kingdom of God is always hidden in some way.
  - In the weeds parable, the separation between wheat and weeds is delayed, although the power of the growth of the wheat crop does not seem to be affected.
  - In the mustard seed parable, an item so small that it could easily be overlooked or thrown away grows into the biggest thing in the garden, which provides for others exactly what they need.

3. God's method of delay and hiddenness contradict today's preferences for prominence, flashiness and self-promotion. In the kingdom of God, values often seem upside down. Reading about the power of the kingdom is encouraging. How do you respond to the idea that the kingdom is often hidden and delayed?

- frustrated
- puzzled
- impressed
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Why do you think you respond that way?

4. Jesus used imagery of everyday objects and activities in his teaching. As I wrote elsewhere, he seemed to “pick up whatever was within arm's reach and show how it resembled the kingdom of God. He took whatever was at hand—a vine, tree, seed, plow, yoke, coin—and did this. One time when the disciples argued, he took a child in his arms and declared, ‘Unless you change and become like children . . .’ (Matthew 18:1-6). . . . Consider that Jesus was such an insightful teacher that if he were sitting next to you, he could pick up any [household] item and explain how the kingdom of God was just like that item.”<sup>1</sup>

Look at what is within arm's reach of you right now. Is there any way it could be compared to the kingdom of God?

- the richness of taste and deep satisfaction of a good cup of coffee
- water, a fundamental necessity of life
- an afghan that keeps you warm
- a reading lamp that makes it possible for you to read even when it's dark
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**Reflect on the invitation.** Read the passage again and then sit quietly for a few minutes, pondering these questions:

- What word or phrase stands out to you?
- Why do you think that is?
- Perhaps God is offering you an invitation in this passage to enlarge your understanding about God and his kingdom. What might that be?

**Reflect a little further.** You may wish to read the passage again. Then consider:

- How does this passage connect with your life?
- Is there some idea, feeling or intention you need to embrace from it? If so, what is it?
- What might God be inviting you to be, know, understand, feel or even do?

Be open to the quiet and don't feel pressured to come up with an answer.

#### **RESPOND (*ORATIO*)**

Take a few minutes to respond to what you have heard from God. What do you most wish to say to God about this experience in Scripture?

#### **REST (*CONTEMPLATIO*)**

Soak in what has stood out to you in this passage and consider: How did God (or God's actions) seem to you in this passage?

Spend a few minutes noticing the thoughts that have come to you. This may take the form of worship or simply resting in God's presence.

#### **TRYING IT ON (*INCARNATIO*)**

Look for circumstances or persons who seem hidden in their influence yet are still powerful. If nothing comes to you, ask God to help you see them.