

# THE PARABLE OF THE SOWER

## DAY 1: LISTEN! (MARK 4:3)

During class, students will often ask, "Will this be on the test?" Few teachers are going to give a straight answer, but they tend to adapt ways to signal the students that some part of the information is more important than others. Teachers may put the information on a Power Point slide, or they may repeat information so students will recognize its importance. Some use a statement such as, "You'll want to remember this." In every case, the desire is to get students' attention, not to make a better grade on the test, but because the information has value.

Read Mark 4: 3. Jesus used parables, or short stories, to communicate significant truths about God to His listeners. Some of the parables are short and to the point. Some are longer and easy to understand. And some are more complex in a way that makes understanding those truths difficult. Jesus began the Parable of the Sower with the command, "Listen!" His command signaled that His listeners would need help to understand the truth within the parable He was about to tell.

Have you had difficulty understanding any of Jesus' teachings? What have you done to try to make what seems difficult make sense?

## DAY 2: SEEKING TRUE UNDERSTANDING (MARK 4:3-9)

Jesus was a storyteller. He took things that people knew and understood, things they had experienced, objects they owned, and situations that were common, and used them in His stories. He told the stories in a way that grabbed His listeners' attention, challenged their long-held beliefs, condemned their wrongly held values, and at times, incited their anger. Can you imagine what it would have been like to have been in the crowd as Jesus openly responded to His critics?

Read Mark 4:3-9. Jesus told of a farmer who went about sowing seed. Some seed landed on hard pathways, some on rocky ground, some in areas covered in thorns, and some on fertile soil. Not surprisingly, not all the seeds flourished. The seed on the hard pathways were eaten by birds; the seed in the rocky ground couldn't survive in shallow soil; the seed amid the thorns were choked out as they began to grow. Only the seed that fell on the fertile soil took root and flourished. Jesus ended the story with the cryptic words, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear."

Jesus told this parable to teach an important truth about God, but that truth is buried in this parable. Here's the beginning of unraveling its meaning. Jesus is the sower, who came to sow the seeds of God's Word. With that in mind, read this passage again. Listen to the words. As you read, replace "the sower" throughout the passage with "Jesus," and replace "seed" throughout with "God's Word." Ask the Holy Spirit to help you see yourself in this parable.

## DAY 3: IT'S OKAY TO ASK QUESTIONS (MARK 4:10-13)

Good teachers inspire questions from their students. They enjoy the dialog that comes as students push back about something that was said. They encourage students to disagree, to challenge, to try out answers and arguments, to accept what is truth and reject what is false. Jesus was a great teacher.

Read Mark 4:10-13. The disciples heard the same parable you read yesterday, and they didn't understand it. They couldn't see the point of what Jesus had to share and were having trouble connecting it with a revelation from God. Jesus' response must have confused the disciples even more—the understanding of the parable had already been given to the disciples. Jesus questioned how the disciples would be able to understand other parables as well. Without that understanding, they, too, would hear God's Word, but not know what it meant.

While these words are confusing, their reality is quite simple. Believers, through the Holy Spirit, have been given the ability to understand and to discern. It's okay to ask questions. The presence of the Holy Spirit guides you in finding the answers. How do you feel the Spirit's guidance in your ability to discern God's Word?

# THE PARABLE OF THE SOWER

## DAY 4: BREAKING THE CODE (MARK 4:14-19).

The movie, *The Imitation Game*, tells the story of a small group of people who set out to break the Nazi's enigma code during World War II. Each coded message was sent through a special typewriter with rotor settings that had to be duplicated on a receiving typewriter to be understood. The rotor settings changed frequently, making the code even harder to read. By developing a process to break the Nazi code, the Allies were able to read Nazi messages without the Nazis knowing that the messages were no longer secure, which led to ending the War in Europe at least two years earlier than the war would have ended without breaking the code.

Read Mark 4:14-19. Jesus broke the code of the parable by assigning meaning to each section. Jesus brought God's Word. Some who heard it were like the hard path. God's Word could not take root in their hardened hearts, so Satan (the birds) snapped them up. Some were like the rocky soil, and although they joyfully sprang up to accept God's Word, they were rootless in their faith, with no foundation to sustain them. Some heard God's Word, but their hearts were surrounded by desires for things of the world rather than God's Word. Three types of soil . . . three types of hearers . . . three different responses . . . one result. None of these flourished in God's Word, or in becoming people of God. For them, the secrets of God's Kingdom would remain secret.

Use the code, read these verses again, and break the code of this parable in your life. Do you see yourself on the hard path, in the rocks, or among the thorns? Have your allowed God's Word to take root in your life, or do you struggle with giving God control? If you see yourself in any of these illustrations, are you ready to give God control?

## DAY 5: GOOD SOIL (MARK 4:20)

Garden centers sell a variety of garden soil. There's soil that helps control moisture, and soil that is specifically for things that bloom like flowers and vegetables. There's soil that designed to be used with potted plants, and soil specifically to use for plants in the ground. There's soil to help grass grow, and soil for vegetables and herbs. The reason for all these choices? To grow the biggest, healthiest, most beautiful, most colorful plants possible! The type of soil determines the quality of the result.

Read Mark 4:20. Jesus described the fourth type of soil as "good soil." This good soil was capable of bringing life to the plants, of helping the plants grow and flourish. The good soil represented those who heard God's Word and accepted it, lived by it, and desired to grow and mature in it. Those who accepted God's Word (Jesus) would flourish and produce fruit. Their harvest would multiply thirty, sixty, and even a hundred times more.

The Parable of the Sower has now been laid out before you. The code has been broken; the secret has been revealed. Yet, to stop at this point in reflecting on the parable misses its purpose. This parable is wasted on us if we don't use it as a lens with which to look at our own spiritual lives. Close out your study of this parable by prayerfully reflecting on these questions: How do you describe God's Word in your life? Is it flourishing? Is it merely surviving, holding a place among many other influences in your life, but not the top priority? Is it wilting, losing energy and purpose? Are you satisfied with where your spiritual life is right now? If now, what are you going to do about it?