

The Sower and the Seed

(Matthew 13:1-23)

Introduction

Today we are going to start a new series of lessons on the parables of Jesus.

Ask: Does anyone know what a *parable* is?

A *parable* is a story that has a lesson to it.

Don't you love a good story? I do! Jesus told stories to teach people about the kingdom of God because it got their attention!

This week we're going to take a look at one of the parables that Jesus taught, the one about the *Sower and the Seed*.

Ask: Who knows what the word "sow" means? [Teacher, write it on the board.]

The word "sow" means *to plant*. It sounds like "sew," but we are not talking about sewing with a needle and a thread. We are using farming terms.

Farming was something that everybody in Bible times knew about. If they weren't actually a farmer, they would most likely know farming terms because most likely everyone had a garden plot where they grew their own vegetables.

When Jesus taught people in parables, he used things that people were familiar with so they could understand the story's lesson. But sometimes this took a deeper kind of listening. The kind that gives spiritual insight and understanding.

God desires that His word takes root in our hearts where it can help us grow spiritually into the person God wants us to be so that our lives may bear fruit for His kingdom. So, let's open in prayer and ask God to prepare our hearts to receive the lesson He wants us to learn.

Opening Prayer

Father, prepare our hearts this morning so that the seed of Your Word will take root and we may see and understand the truths that You want us to learn. We want to be open and responsive to the leading and guiding of Your Holy Spirit. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Memory Verse

He who has ears to hear, let him hear! (Matthew 13:9)

Lesson

Ask: How many of you have planted a garden? What do you like to grow? Is it important to have good soil for vegetables to grow well? [Teacher, have some different types of soil that the children can observe.]

Farmers find the thought of good soil exciting! Good soil makes them want to get their hands in it and begin planting something! But most soil doesn't start out ready to be planted. It may be hard, or full of weeds or rocks. Usually, soil needs some work before seeds are planted.

In the parable of the *Sower and the Seed* Jesus talks about four different types of soils. The first kind of soil is hardpack.

1. The Path / Hard Soil

Matthew 13:3-4

*He told many stories in the form of parables, such as this one: "Listen! A farmer went out to plant some seeds. (4) As he scattered them across his field, some seeds fell on a **footpath**, and the birds came and ate them.*

Jesus starts His story of the *Sower and the Seed* by saying that one day a farmer went out to plant some seeds.

Farmers in Jesus' day didn't have machines, so they had to do everything by hand. First, the farmer had to prepare the soil. He removed the rocks from his field. Then he plowed his field. Finally, he

scattered the seed across his field by hand. When you scatter seed by hand, some seed always gets thrown in the wrong places and wasted.

Ask: In His story, where did Jesus say that some seed fell? (verse 4)

He says some *seeds fell along the path*. This would have been a road beside the field which would have never been ploughed. The road was as hard as cement, so the seed just lay on top of the dirt.

Ask: What happened to the seeds? Did they sprout?

No, the birds came, picked it up, and ate it.

2. Rocky Ground / Shallow Soil

Now Jesus is going to tell about a second kind of soil:

Matthew 13:5-6

*Other seeds fell on **shallow soil with underlying rock**. The seeds sprouted quickly because the soil was shallow. (6) But the plants soon wilted under the hot sun, and since they didn't have deep roots, they died.*

Ask: Where did the seeds fall this time? (verse 5)

He says that some seeds fell on rocky ground.

Ask: What happened to these seeds? (verse 6)

They withered away because there wasn't much dirt between the rocks. As soon as the rains came, they got watered and began to sprout. But soon the sun came out and they got sun burned. And, because they were not rooted in deep soil that could hold the moisture, they soon dried up and withered away.

3. Thorns

Now Jesus is going to tell about a third kind of soil:

Matthew 13:7

*Other seeds fell among **thorns** that grew up and choked out the tender plants.*

Ask: Where did these seeds fall?

He says some seeds fell among thorns.

Ask: What happened to these seeds?

They got choked out because the thorn bushes grew up and soon overtook the wheat seedlings, choking them to death.

4. Good Soil / Fertile Soil

Now Jesus is going to tell about a fourth kind of soil:

Matthew 13:8

*Still other seeds fell on **fertile soil**, and they produced a crop that was thirty, sixty, and even a hundred times as much as had been planted!*

Ask: Where did the seeds fall this time?

He says that some seeds fell on good soil.

Ask: What happened to these seeds?

They grew up strong because they got planted into the field properly where the birds couldn't come and pick it up and eat it; where it could get rooted in deep enough soil to get plenty of good nourishment and protection from the sun, and where it wasn't choked out by the thorny bushes.

Jesus finished His story by saying....

Matthew 13:9

Anyone with ears to hear should listen and understand."

Ask: What do you think Jesus was saying here?

I think He was saying, "*Listen up, guys! I'm trying to make an important point.*" He was telling them to pay attention with their spiritual ears; that is, with their hearts. Jesus wanted the people to do a deeper kind of listening. The kind that gives spiritual insight and understanding.

When Jesus talked about the different soils, most people probably nodded their heads, thinking, "*Yes, that's true about farming!*" But they didn't think deeply enough to understand why Jesus told the story.

So, Jesus tells them the meaning behind the story He just told them about the *Sower and the Seed* to help them understand the deeper meaning of His story.

Matthew 13:18

"Now listen to the explanation of the parable about the farmer planting seeds:

Before we go on, let's make sure we understand the deeper meaning of Jesus' story so we can get spiritual insight and understanding.

[Teacher, using the *Keys To Understanding Jesus' Parables* worksheet, have the children write in the answers as you discuss the following:]

- 1) Who is the **farmer** in Jesus' story? That is, who is the one who scatters the seed? (The Lord is the farmer. He's the One spreading the Word of the kingdom.)
- 2) What is the **seed**? (God's Word; the truth about God's kingdom)
- 3) What is the **field**? Where is the seed getting sown? (In the hearts of people)
- 4) What are the different types of **soils**?
 - a) The Path (Hard pack; seeds could not take root)

b) Rocky Ground (Shallow soil; seeds spouted but did not produce deep roots.)

c) Thorny (Seed got choked out)

d) Good Soil (Seeds were nourished; developed deep roots)

- 5) Who are the **birds** that came and ate the seed that fell on the footpath? (Satan, the wicked one who comes and snatches away the Word of God that was sown in someone's heart)
- 6) What are the **thorns**? (Cares of this world; love of money and things.)

Compare People to the Soil Types

The four types of soil represent different ways people respond to God's message of forgiveness of sin. People react differently because they are in different states of openness to the Gospel.

Let's compare these soil types to people's hearts.

Hardhearted People

Ask: What kind of people have hearts like the hard footpath?

Matthew 13:19

*The seed that fell on the footpath represents those who **hear the message about the Kingdom and don't understand it.** Then the evil one comes and snatches away the seed that was planted in their hearts.*

Jesus is saying that some of the people listening to His story were hardhearted. He knew that some people really didn't want to change. Maybe they didn't think they needed to change. So, when they heard the Gospel, their *hard-heartedness* kept them from understanding the message of the cross.

Ask: What makes a person hardhearted? What are some reasons people don't want to hear and understand God's word? (Selfish, too busy, not interested, don't believe.)

Shallow People

Ask: What kind of people have hearts like the shallow rocky soil?

Matthew 13:20-21

The seed on the rocky soil represents those who hear the message and immediately receive it with joy. (21) But since they don't have deep roots, they don't last long. They fall away as soon as they have problems or are persecuted for believing God's word.

Jesus is saying that some of the people listening to His story were not very deep thinkers; they would not bother to think about the deep things of God. We say this kind of person is "shallow." Oh, at first, they may have been happy to hear what Jesus had to say and they may have said, "I'm going to live like Jesus wants."

When life gets hard for shallow-hearted people, they give up their interest in the things of God.

Ask: What are some hard things in life that can distract a person from listening to God's word? (Death, sickness, loss of job, etc.)

Worldly People

Ask: What kind of people have hearts like the soil with thorns or weeds in it?

Matthew 13:22

The seed that fell among the thorns represents those who hear God's word, but all too quickly the message is crowded out by the worries of this life and the lure of wealth, so no fruit is produced.

Ask: What are the thorns? (The cares and worries of this world; the desires of our flesh; materialism.)

Jesus is saying that some of the people listening to His story were allowing the cares of this world to choke out God's Word. Thorny-hearted people get distracted by the things of this world. We say they are "worldly." They are more worried about taking care of themselves (making money and buying material things) than they are about following Jesus.

Ask: What are some things of this world that can keep you from following Jesus? (desire for more things, like toys, video games, clothes, etc.)

The person who hears the Good News about Jesus, but who is unwilling to give up worldly ways, is the one who's heart is full of thorns. Soon the love of things will choke out the truth about God's love and forgiveness and His gift of eternal life.

Fruitful People

Ask: What kind of people have hearts like the good soil?

Matthew 13:23

The seed that fell on good soil represents those who truly hear and understand God's word and produce a harvest of thirty, sixty, or even a hundred times as much as had been planted!"

Jesus is saying that some of the people listening to His story were very interested in the things He was teaching them about the kingdom of God. Good-soil people want to know more about God's Word; they want to live their lives in a way that pleases Him.

Notice that when the word of truth is sown into a heart of good soil, it bears fruit and it produces more fruit.

Ask: What kind of a "crop" do these good-soil type people produce?

This describes a person who comes to know the truth about Jesus and shows others how to live by God's Word as well. And, then those people go and tell still more people about God's wonderful gift of forgiveness of sin and salvation.

We all have a choice to either pay attention to God's Word, or to ignore Him. Some of you might listen to God's Word when you're at church on Sundays, but then you don't think about it at all during the week. Some of you might say you want to obey God's Word, but then never read it or try to understand what it says.

People who have hearts like good soil know God's Word helps them live in a godly way. They want to spend time reading and thinking about God's Word. They want to understand and obey it.

Ask: What kind of soil is your heart? Has God's Word taken root in your life?

CLOSING PRAYER:

Father, we want our hearts to be fertile soil where the truth about Your plan of salvation can take root and grow. We want much fruit to come from our lives. Please help us to always be interested and excited about the deeper things of life. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen

LEARNING ACTIVITIES:

CRAFT CORNER:

Have the children make *Seeds of Kindness Seed Packets* using the Seed Packet Pattern found on my website. Or, let the children plant seeds in different types of soil.

GAME CENTER

Use the following questions in a game of your choice:

Review questions:

1. What is a parable? (A story that has a lesson to it.)
2. Why does it take deep thinking to understand Jesus' parables?

(Because Jesus was using common, everyday experiences to teach important spiritual truths.)

3. What happened to the seeds that fell on the path? (The seed lay on top of the hardpack and the birds came and snatched it away.)
4. What happened to the seeds that fell on the rocky ground? (Because there wasn't much soil, the seed didn't get firmly rooted so it withered away.)
5. What happened to the seeds that fell among the thorns? (The seed got choked by the thorn bushes.)
6. What happened to the seeds that fell on good soil? (The seed grew strong.)
7. What kind of people have hearts like the hard footpath? (People who are hard hearted and don't want to listen to God's plan of salvation. Hardhearted people do not care about the things of God.)
8. What excuses do people use as reasons for not wanting to listen to God's Word? (Too busy, not interested, don't believe it.)
9. What kind of people have hearts like the rocky soil? (Shallow people that don't bother to think about the deep things of God. They start out doing well, but give up when life gets hard.)
10. What kind of people have hearts like the soil with thorns or weeds in it? (Worldly people who are more concerned with the cares of this world than about God's plan for their lives.)
11. What are some things in our lives that are like thorny bushes that choke out God's Word? (Money, peer pressure.)
12. What kind of people have hearts like the good soil? (People who have tender hearts towards the things of God and want to live their lives in a way that pleases Him.)

13. What kind of a “crop” do these good-soil type people produce?
(People who come to the Lord because you shared the message of the cross with them.)
14. How can you prepare the soil of your heart so you can be a good-soil type person? (Take time to think about and pray about what you read from Gods’ Word. Plan ways to obey God’s Word.)

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