

The Farmer Sowing Seed

Lesson 02 in the series, "Parables"

A. One day Jesus told a parable about a farmer sowing seed.

Parable = a short story that explains spiritual truth by using everyday objects and relationships.

He told many stories in the form of parables, such as this one: "Listen! A farmer went out to plant some seeds. As he scattered them across his field, some seeds fell on a footpath, and the birds came and ate them. Other seeds fell on shallow soil with underlying rock. The seeds sprouted quickly because the soil was shallow. But the plants soon wilted under the hot sun, and since they didn't have deep roots, they died. Other seeds fell among thorns that grew up and choked out the tender plants. 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! Anyone with ears to hear should listen and understand." Matthew 13:3-9 (NLT)

B. Jesus often taught using parables in order to compel his listeners to discover truth.

His disciples came and asked him, "Why do you use parables when you talk to the people?" He replied, "You are permitted to understand the secrets of the Kingdom of Heaven, but others are not. To those who listen to my teaching, more understanding will be given, and they will have an abundance of knowledge. But for those who are not listening, even what little understanding they have will be taken away from them. That is why I use these parables, For they look, but they don't really see. They hear, but they don't really listen or understand. This fulfills the prophecy of Isaiah that says, 'When you hear what I say, you will not understand. When you see what I do, you will not comprehend. For the hearts of these people are hardened, and their ears cannot hear, and they have closed their eyes— so their eyes cannot see, and their ears cannot hear, and their hearts cannot understand, and they cannot turn to me and let me heal them.'

Matthew 13:10-15 (NLT) (see also Isaiah 6:9-10)

Life Application: God rewards those who seek him.

"Anyone who wants to come to him must believe that God exists and that he rewards those who sincerely seek him." Hebrews 11:6 (NLT)

Life Application: Love/obedience/surrender is a choice.

C. The parable of the farmer sowing seed reveals truth about the receptivity of our hearts.

"Now listen to the explanation of the parable about the farmer planting seeds:" Matthew 13:18 (NLT)

1. The hard soil. "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." Matthew 13:19 (NLT)

Life Application: We must keep our hearts from becoming hard.

"Plow up the hard ground of your hearts, for now is the time to seek the LORD, that he may come and shower righteousness upon you." Hosea 10:12 (NLT)

2. The shallow soil. "The seed on the rocky soil represents those who hear the message and immediately receive it with joy. 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." Matthew 13:20,21 (NLT)

Life Application: To grow deeper in our relationship with God we must surrender, listen, pray and obey.

"And now, just as you accepted Christ Jesus as your Lord, you must continue to follow him. Let your roots grow down into him, and let your lives be built on him. Then your faith will grow strong in the truth you were taught, and you will overflow with thankfulness." Colossians 2:6-7 (NLT)

3. The thorny soil. "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." Matthew 13:22 (NLT)

Life Application: We must regularly prune competing priorities.

"Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and he will give you everything you need. So don't worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring its own worries. Today's trouble is enough for today." Matthew 6:33-34 (NLT)

4. The good soil. “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!”
Matthew 13:23 (NLT)

Life Application: We must regularly examine our faith.

“Examine yourselves to see if your faith is genuine. Test yourselves. Surely you know that Jesus Christ is among you; if not, you have failed the test of genuine faith.” 2 Corinthians 13:5 (NLT)

“A good tree produces good fruit, and a bad tree produces bad fruit. A good tree can’t produce bad fruit, and a bad tree can’t produce good fruit... just as you can identify a tree by its fruit, so you can identify people by their actions. Not everyone who calls out to me, ‘Lord! Lord!’ will enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Only those who actually do the will of my Father in heaven will enter.” Matthew 7:17-21 (NLT)

Note: The gospel (the seed) brings new life. “For I am not ashamed of this Good News about Christ. It is the power of God at work, saving everyone who believes...” Romans 1:16 (NLT)

Life Application: We must not become discouraged if people do not respond to Jesus’ message.

“Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.”
Galatians 6:9 (NIV)

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Discussion Questions

1. Have you ever planted a garden? If so, what did you learn from the experience about soil? ...about weeds? ...about planting and harvesting?
2. Read Matthew 13:3-9 & 18-23. What spiritual truths is Jesus trying to communicate through the parable of the farmer sowing seed? Which soil can you most relate to? Why?
3. What causes our hearts to become hard? How do we cultivate receptive hearts? Discuss the following Scripture passages:
 - Ezekiel 36:26
 - Psalm 95:6-8
 - Hebrews 3:13-15
 - Hebrews 10:12
4. Read Hebrews 11:6, Matthew 7:7 & Matthew 13:10-15. Why does God desire for us to seek him? Why doesn't he just make it impossible for us to disobey him? Why does he give us a choice?
5. Read Matthew 7:17-21 & Galatians 5:22-23. Who is the most fruitful (not fruity) Christian you know? Describe him/her. What is their secret?
6. What competing priorities can creep into our lives and crowd out time for God? How do we prune them back?
7. Pray as a group that God's Word would take root and produce much fruit in your lives.
8. Discuss the following quotations:

"I will give you a new heart, and I will put a new spirit in you. I will take out your stony, stubborn heart and give you a tender, responsive heart." Ezekiel 36:26 (NLT)

"God created things which had free will. That means creatures which can go wrong or right. Some people think they can imagine a creature which was free but had no possibility of going wrong, but I can't. If a thing is free to be good it's also free to be bad. And free will is what has made evil possible. Why, then, did God give them free will? Because free will, though it makes evil possible, is also the only thing that makes possible any love or goodness or joy worth having. A world of automata -of creatures that worked like machines- would hardly be worth creating. The happiness which God designs for His higher creatures is the happiness of being freely, voluntarily united to Him and to each other in an ecstasy of love and delight compared with which the most rapturous love between a man and a woman on this earth is mere milk and water. And for that they've got to be free. Of course God knew what would happen if they used their freedom the wrong way: apparently, He thought it worth the risk. (...) If God thinks this state of war in the universe a price worth paying for free will -that is, for making a real world in which creatures can do real good or harm and something of real importance can happen, instead of a toy world which only moves when He pulls the strings- then we may take it worth paying." C.S. Lewis, *The Case for Christianity*

"Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. Point out anything in me that offends you, and lead me along the path of everlasting life." Psalm 139: 23-24