Parable of a Sower and Seeds



Scripture Reference: Matthew 13:1-9,18-23

Suggested Theme: God wants everyone to accept Him. Have the kind of heart that understands and accepts God's teachings.

Memory Verse: "Open my eyes to see the wonderful things in your teachings." Psalm 119:18, ICB

Story Overview:

Jesus told a parable about a farmer who planted seeds in four different types of soil. Only one of the soils produced a good crop. Jesus explained that the soils represented people's hearts. When the word of God is planted in a good heart, good things will be produced in that person's life.

Background Study:

Information about teaching the Parables

The word "parable" comes from the Greek word: *parabole*. It literally means "a placing beside." This refers to how a parable places two meanings side by side.

After telling the Parable of the Sower and Seeds, Jesus goes on to explain the meaning (Matthew 13:18-23). The seeds represent His teachings about the Kingdom of God. The soils represent four different ways that His word is received in the hearts of people.

In the verses in between (Matthew 13:10-17), we find an explanation of why Jesus taught in parables. Some people would only hear one meaning of a parable. Followers of Jesus would understand the second meaning.

Jesus was at the Sea of Galilee when He taught this parable. Instead of standing among the crowd, He got into a boat and spoke from there. By changing the speaking arrangement this way, everyone would have heard Jesus.

This is a good reminder to us that we should consider the teaching environment when we teach. Everyone should be able to hear the teacher and participate. Even changing the arrangement of furniture now and again will help children listen better. Consider sitting on cushions on the floor and telling today's story in different parts of the room.

The parable Jesus told was about farming. Most people listening to Jesus would have been familiar with planting seeds. If a field had been recently used, a farmer would have to plough it twice. Oxen pulling a plough helped the process. After first breaking up the soil, the farmer carried a basket full of seeds and used his hands to scatter the seeds. Wheat and barley were sown in late fall. Then, the field was ploughed again to cover the seed. Finally, the farmer often used a stick to smooth and flatten the soil.

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Paths were formed when people walked often in the same place. The soil was packed down so seeds falling on a path could not germinate. You can imagine birds keeping an eye out for just such an opportunity! Since it was totally exposed, the seed was quickly eaten. This soil represents someone who hears God's word but does not understand. The message does not even take root before Satan snatches it away. Satan waits around for that opportunity, as well.

Although the soil around Palestine appeared to be good, it was often only a thin layer of soil. When the farmer dug through the soil, he would quickly hit a layer of rock. Plants quickly sprout but die when the roots have no place to flourish. This soil represents the person who readily and genuinely accepts the word of God but then quickly falls away. Nothing develops under the surface.

The third situation involves seed sprouting and growing among thorny weeds. The plants grow, but the thorns and weeds take all of the nourishment, and the plant barely hangs on. The plant is worthless because it never bears any fruit. This soil represents people who become Christians but are over-influenced by the world. Worry and wealth deny them the spiritual nutrition they need. They may attend church and live moral lives, but they never really mature to the point that they teach others and become truly Christ-like.

Luke's account of this parable can be found in Luke 8:4-15.

Way to Introduce the Story:

The children will need four small plastic containers (ice cream containers, margarine tubs, etc.), soil, small rocks, some weeds, fast-growing seeds (beans are good), water, and newspapers to protect the working area. Guide the children in preparing samples of the four soils mentioned in the lesson today:

- The first soil should be packed down very hard.
- The second should have a thin layer of soil covering rocks.
- The third should have weeds (thorns) in it.
- The fourth and final soil should be a sample of good soil- loose, free of rocks and weeds.

When the samples are ready, the children can add seeds to the soil samples. "What do you think will happen to our seeds in each of these soils?" (Guide discussion.) Jesus told a parable about soil. He told a simple story about seeds growing in different kinds of soil. That simple story helped people understand something about different kinds of hearts."

The Story:

One day, Jesus was sitting on the shore of a lake. He began teaching the people on the shore. More people came to hear what Jesus was saying. Soon, the beach was filled with people. There were so many that Jesus decided to get in a boat and float it out from the beach. Then He could speak loudly, and everyone could hear Him without being so crowded.

Jesus told the crowd many parables. Do you remember what a parable is? A parable is an easy-to-understand story that helps people understand something very hard to understand. One of the parables that Jesus told from the boat was a story about a farmer who planted some seeds.

Farmers in those times did not plant seeds using tractors. The farmer would take a handful of seeds and carefully toss them onto the soil. After he was finished, he would cover the seeds with soil and then wait for the plants to grow. Planting seeds is called "sowing." Jesus' story is called the Parable of the Sower and the Seed.

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In the parable, the farmer sowed seeds, and the seeds fell into four different kinds of soil. The first seed fell onto a path where people walked. The soil on the path was hard because it was packed down. The seed that fell on the path just rolled on top of it. Soon, a bird came along and gobbled the seed up.

The next seed fell on some rocky soil. The seed sprouted very quickly and had leaves and roots in a few days. But soon, the plant was dead. That was because the roots could not grow in rocks. When the roots died, the plant died.

The third seed fell on soil that was full of weeds and thorns. The plant sprouted and began to grow, but it never got very big. The weeds choked the plant and kept taking all of the sun and the best soil. The plant never produced any grain.

The last seed fell on very good soil. Soon, the plant sprouted, and leaves began to appear. The roots were healthy, and the plant grew bigger every day. Grain began appearing on the stalk, and when the right time came, the farmer picked the grain to sell or crush it to make flour for bread.

The people asked Jesus what the parable meant. He told them that the seed was like the things He was trying to teach them about the Kingdom of God. Jesus taught many people that God is the King of the world in the same way that the farmer planted lots of seeds. Not all of the farmer's seeds grew, and not everyone who heard Jesus believed what he said. Different people have different kinds of hearts. There are different kinds of hearts, just like there are different kinds of soils.

The hard soil of the path was like the hard hearts of people who heard Jesus' teaching but did not even understand or care what it meant. When people have hard hearts, then they do not want to follow God. They go away from God like the birds took the seed.

The seed that fell on the rocky soil was like someone who heard about God and became a Christian. They were so happy to find God, but then they changed their minds when things got hard and turned away from Him. That is like a plant whose roots die.

Remember the seed that fell on the soil with weeds and thorns? That plant never got big. That is like people who listen to the Word of God but then get so busy making money and being worried about their lives that they don't let God's teaching change them or help them grow. Caring too much about money and being so worried about things in life keep them from being strong and healthy Christians, just like the weeds that choked the plant.

Finally, Jesus explained what good soil meant. The good soil was the kind of heart that we should all have. Good soil is a heart that listens to God's Word and tries to obey Him. Just like the seed grows in good soil, the words of Jesus grow in open hearts. The person whose heart is like the good soil always wants to listen to God and to make Him happy by obeying Him. God wants all of us to have hearts that love Him and follow Jesus' words. He wants everyone to hear the good news about His Kingdom.

Do you have a heart that wants to love God? Does God's word go into your heart? Are you growing up to be a healthy believer with a deep love for God?

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Ways to Tell the Story:

This story can be told using various methods. Always remain true to the facts found in the Bible, but help children connect to its meaning by using drama, visual aids, voice inflection or other group participation.

Be selective. Each teacher is unique, so only use the illustrations that best relate to how YOU tell the story in THIS lesson. Too many illustrations can be confusing, so eliminate any that cover other stories or details you do not wish to emphasise in this lesson.

Click here for visual aids and more storytelling methods.

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Review and Reflection Questions:

Review questions help children remember and know the facts of a story. Reflection questions encourage them to internalise the meaning and implications for their lives. Asking at least one of each type of question can help strengthen a child's spiritual development and help them connect to God. Click here to learn more about review and reflection questions.

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Review:

- What are the four types of soils in Jesus' parable of the Sower and the Seeds? (The path (hard, packed soil), rocky soil, thorny soil (full of weeds), and good soil)
- What does the seed represent in the Sower and the Seed Parable? (The teaching of Jesus)
- What does the good soil represent in the Parable of the Sower and the Seed? (Those with hearts who hear and understand Jesus' teaching, and keep growing and become more like Jesus because of their deep faith in God)
- What stopped some of the seeds from growing? (birds, rocky soil, thorny weeds)
- What stops some people from following Jesus or becoming like Him? (Satan, having hard times because they follow Jesus, persecution, loving money, worrying about things in life)
- What did you learn about God in this story?
- What did you learn about people in this story?

Reflection:

- How is Jesus' teaching like the farmer's seeds that he sowed?
- What part of this parable did you enjoy the most?
- Which soil in the parable do you think your heart is most like?
- Why do you think Jesus told this parable?
- What do you think this parable means? What was Jesus trying to teach us?
- Jesus talks about three kinds of people who stop following Him. One kind is people who hear about Jesus and His good news, but they don't understand it. Another kind is people who follow Jesus with joy, but when following Jesus is hard, they stop. the last kind is people who follow Jesus, but because they are worried about life and love money, they don't grow. How do you think God feels when He sees these people stop following Him?
- What might be hard about following Jesus?
- What helps someone follow Jesus' teaching and become more like Jesus?
- Imagine a beautiful plant that has been growing for a few days. It looks like the plant will grow to be strong and healthy, producing good things. But then, a plant with thorny weeds grows beside it and chokes the beautiful plant! The beautiful plant can't grow anymore because of the harmful thorny weeds growing by it. What should happen to the thorny weeds? What will help make sure they don't grow back?
- How do you hope to become more like Jesus?

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- What thorny weeds do you need to take out from your life so you can grow? What is stopping you from growing?

Prayer:

It is important to guide children in learning how to pray. In prayer, children can connect with God and learn that He hears and answers them. God can become a lifelong friend who is with them every moment of their lives. Try using a variety of prayer methods from time to time so that the children can learn to connect with God in different ways. Note that you can pray at any time throughout your lesson. A variety of prayer methods are found here.

Song Suggestions:

- Goodbye World Song
- He's Still Working on Me Song
- Refer to the Song Page on this website for more song options.

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Activities and Crafts:

- How to choose the best learning activities for my teaching situation.
- Visit the activities and songs pages for additional activities and crafts.

Activities:

- Since wheat and barley were the most common kinds of seeds planted in Palestine, try to find grainy bread that contains these. Let the children taste the bread.
- Bring seed packets or a gardening guide today, and let children read about the care these plants require.
- Provide various types of fruit for a snack and look at the seeds.
- Describe various situations and let the children decide which type of soil each situation falls under. Example: "Suzy listens to the sermon at church about not swearing. She even takes notes and writes down scriptures. She says she will never swear again. After church she forgets all about the lesson and starts swearing as soon as she is back with her friends. What kind of soil is Suzy? Rocky."
- For review, draw a large heart on the chalkboard or whiteboard and place a cross inside it to divide it into four parts. Each section will represent one of the four types of hearts. Ask the children to help you think of words that go in each section. For example, the first section might contain words such as path, birds, hard, eaten, heart, message, kingdom, sown and seeds. At the end, write the children's names in the section where the good soil is. Remind them that God wants us to have good hearts that love and obey Him.

Invite the children to respond to this story using the adaptable "God's Story" printable reflection page. Free printables for this story.

Crafts:

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- Print and use these free bookmarks, trading cards or timelines. Free printables for this story.

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Other Online Resources:

- Colouring page and worksheets about the parable of the sower (Calvary Curriculum)
- Colouring page and worksheets about parables in general (Calvary Curriculum)
- Parable of the Four Kinds of Soils Slideshow with narration (Youtube) 2 minutes and 17 seconds.
- Craft: Printable envelope and verses about the heart (thecraftyclassroom.com)
- Sower and the Seeds anagrams/word scrambles (dltk-bible.com)

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