

SHARE THE BIBLE LESSON

WEEK 9

Jesus teaches the parable of the soil

Mark 4:1-20



DAY 1

Listen to the parable of four soils • Mark 4:1-9

READ

Mark 4:1-20

EXPLAIN

The truth of Mark 4:1-9

Why did Jesus start talking in parables? He knew that the crowd came only to see Him do amazing things, not to hear and receive His message. They were hearing His words with their ears but not accepting them with their hearts. So Jesus said, "Listen!" Then He told a **parable**, *a story that is both clear and unclear*. A parable is a simple word picture that illustrates a profound spiritual truth.

Parables are easy to remember, and in one sense, they are easy to understand. Even little children in the crowd understood this story, because they saw it happen every year as the crops were planted. But imagine what Jesus' audience was thinking when the parable ended: "Nice story, but what's the point?" Even though the story was simple, the point is impossible to understand without an explanation. This is because parables are designed to teach those who want to hear and understand. But for those who do not want to understand, the parable hides the truth. So Jesus challenged the crowd, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear!"

ASK

1. Why was there such a big crowd?
The crowd came to hear and see interesting things, but not to believe.
2. What did Jesus call the crowd to do several times?
Listen. Truly hear and accept His words.
3. What is a parable?
A parable is a simple word picture that explains a spiritual truth.
4. Why did Jesus not explain His parable to the crowd?
He refused to explain the truth to people who did not want to learn the truth.

DISCUSS

1. How can a parable reveal truth and hide truth at the same time?
2. How are many people who go to church just like this crowd?

DAY 2

Accept the reason for parables • Mark 4:10–12

READ

Mark 4:1–20

EXPLAIN

The truth of Mark 4:10–12

Why did Jesus speak in parables? Jesus explained why, but only to His true followers. They got to know the secret of God's kingdom because they were willing to learn. Jesus called this knowledge a “*secret*” because it was something that you can only know if God reveals it to you (cf. Dan 2:47). It was a secret about the kingdom of God. But what was so secret about God's kingdom? Hadn't the prophets spoken of this often? Yes, but despite all the prophecies, most Jews did not understand the true nature of God's kingdom. They had seen clear evidence that Jesus was the Messiah, yet they refused to accept that He was King, and that the kingdom was wherever He was (Matt 12:28). Why didn't they understand? Was the message too complicated? No, they did not understand because they did not want to believe. So they kept watching Jesus' miracles and listening to Jesus' words, but they did not take it to heart. Because they refused to believe what was clear, Jesus spoke in parables to make things less clear (Isa 6:9–10).

ASK

1. Who asked Jesus about the parables?
Those around Him and the twelve disciples, Jesus' true followers.
2. How did Jesus encourage His true followers?
By telling them that the secret of the kingdom of God had been revealed to them.
3. What was so secret about God's kingdom?
The true nature of God's kingdom: Jesus was king and the kingdom was present with them.
4. Why did Jesus speak in parables to the crowd?
Because they refused to believe what was clear.

DISCUSS

1. Is it possible to know a lot about God and God's word, but still not truly know God?
2. Why is it so dangerous to hear truth from the Bible but not take it to heart?

DAY 3

Understand the four kinds of hearers: Hard path and rocky soil • Mark 4:13–17

READ

Mark 4:1–20

EXPLAIN

The truth of Mark 4:13–17

How you receive God's word is what makes all the difference. In fact, that is what this first parable is all about. The seed is God's word, and God's word is spread to every kind of person, so that everyone has an opportunity to respond and receive life (1 Pet 1:23). But how each person responds depends on the condition of his heart, just as the growth of grain depends on the condition of the soil. The first soil

represents people who are totally unwilling to hear God's word. Their hearts are hard and they do not want to listen. So Satan quickly snatches away whatever knowledge was revealed to them (2 Cor 4:4). This first group lacks the humility to even open their ears. The second soil represents people who initially hear God's word with enthusiasm and emotion but are not truly changed. Even though God's word sounds good to them, they are unwilling to endure the persecution and hardship that comes with being a Christian. This second group lacks faith, for they do not trust God when life gets hard.

DAY 3 CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

ASK 

1. What is the main point of this parable?
How we respond to God's word determines whether we enter God's kingdom or not.
2. What was the first soil, and what did it represent?
The first soil was the hard path. The seeds couldn't get into the soil, and birds ate them. That is like people who do not even want to understand God's word.
3. What was the second soil, and what did it represent?
The second soil was the dirt with rock underneath. The plants died when it got hot. That is like people who like the good news but don't trust God when life gets hard.

DISCUSS 

1. Have you ever planted a flower or a garden plant? How does the soil quality affect plant growth? What kind of "soil" is in your heart?
2. Can you think of a time this week when you didn't want to listen to your parents? What kind of soil was your heart like?

DAY 4

Understand the four kinds of hearers: Thorny soil and good soil • Mark 4:18–20

READ 

Mark 4:1–20

EXPLAIN **The truth of Mark 4:18–20**

At first, the third soil looks good as the plants begin to grow well. It represents people who seem like genuine believers at first. However, as time reveals, they come to Jesus for the things He gives, not to get Jesus Himself. They do not love Him with heart, soul, mind, and strength (Mark 12:30). They are divided in their loyalty. They still love their possessions (Matt 6:24) and the things of the world (1 John 2:15–17) more than God, so they get distracted from the only One worth loving. They bear no fruit, because they lack true love. The fourth soil represents people who truly hear, understand, welcome, and trust Jesus' message. These are the only true believers, for they are the only ones who bear fruit (John 15:5–8). They are the only ones who persevere and do not fall away from Christ (8:31). What makes the difference between this fourth group and the other three? They listened with humble hearts (Matt 11:25). So when you hear God's word, be careful *how* you hear and consider carefully *what* you hear (Mark 4:24).

ASK 

1. What was the third soil, and what did it represent?
The third soil was thorny soil. The seed grew but produced no fruit. That is like people who love other things more than Jesus.
2. What was the fourth soil, and what did it represent?
The fourth soil was good soil. That is like people who welcome God's word and bear fruit. They will be harvested into God's kingdom.
3. Why is the fourth soil the only one that represents true believers?
True believers persevere (continually trust) and they bear spiritual fruit.

DISCUSS 

1. What's most important to you? An easy way to tell is to ask yourself, "What things do I become angry or sad about when I don't get them?"
2. What spiritual fruit is in your life? Are you known for your love, joy, peace, etc. (Gal 5:22)?

DAY 5

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly • Colossians 3:16

READ

Colossians 3:12–17

EXPLAIN

The truth of Colossians 3:16

How we receive God’s Word makes all the difference, both in salvation (Mark 4:1–20) and in our lives as Christians. The word of Christ, says Paul, is to “dwell in [us] richly” (Col 3:16). It is to live within us, invading every part of our lives. Every thought we think, every word we say, and every deed we do should be controlled by Scripture (Ps 119:11). We must prepare a home for God’s Word in our hearts. When we do, the results will be obvious to everyone around us. We will both share biblical truth (“teach”) as well as warn others of the consequences of their sinful behavior (“admonish”). As God’s Word dwells within us, we will also sing “psalms and hymns and spiritual songs.” There will be an emotional response to God’s Word within us. The Scripture that has saturated our hearts and minds will fill our souls with praise, joy, love, and thankfulness for who God is and what He has done for us. Some of these songs we will sing “in our hearts.” Others, we will sing with our mouths.

ASK

1. What is the “word of Christ”?
The Bible.
2. Where is it supposed to dwell?
In us.
3. How is it supposed to dwell in us?
Richly. It is to permeate every part of our lives.
4. What happens when the word of Christ dwells in us richly?
We teach and admonish (warn) others. We also sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs.

DISCUSS

1. What’s your favorite Christian song? Why do you like it?
2. Do you like watery hot chocolate best, or rich hot chocolate? Is God’s word like watery hot chocolate in you, or does it dwell in you richly?

NEXT WEEK

Jesus demonstrates His authority

Luke 8:22–39

