

# Parable of the Sower (Matt. 13:1-9, 18-23; Mark 4:13-20; Luke 8:11-15)

## A Small Group Outline

*Suggestion: Do this lesson over 2 or 3 sessions*

### 1. Praise (Purpose: To worship God)

- What are you thankful for this week? (*let the group's secretary write these down in an A4 hardcover or some notebook*)
- Song Service
  - Sing a few songs of praise to God

### 2. Pray (Purpose: To carry each others' burdens and to seek the Lord)

- What challenges did you have this week? (*write these down in an A4 hardcover or some notebook*)
- Go into a season of prayer

### 3. Review (Purpose: To learn accountability)

- Tell us how it went with what you promised to do in last week's meeting? (*e.g. Who did your share you faith with this past week? Who did you minister to? How did actioning your I WILL STATEMENT go?*)
- *Where people have failed to fulfil what they said they would, do not be harsh with them but gently encourage them to try again in the coming week. Give them more support by phoning or joining them in the week.*

### 4. Give (Purpose: To be good stewards of our monies)

- This is the time to return tithes and offerings. If done electronically, kindly ensure that you get the bank account details of your local church from your treasurer. Don't forget to complete an envelope and to send the breakdown to him/her.

### 5. Discover (Purpose: To learn to listen to God, and be obedient to His Word)

- **Notes for the facilitator**
  - Read *Christ's Object Lessons (COL)*, pp. 33-61
  - The Parable of the Sower teaches us that people react differently to the Word (gospel), depending on the state of their hearts. Not all positive reactions to the gospel indicate a real, lasting change.
  - The seed is the Word of God (Luke 8:11). It is the Word that gives life, not human theories and speculations
  - **The type of soil depends on the action of the will.** Even though people can't change themselves, they can **choose** what they will become. "The wayside, the stony-ground, the thorny-ground hearers need not remain such. The Spirit of God is ever seeking to break the spell of infatuation that holds men absorbed in worldly things, and to awaken a desire for the imperishable treasure." It is by **resisting the Spirit**, that people prevent the good seed from taking root (see COL 56).
  - Parallels between the Word of God and seed:
    - There is risk and effort required in sowing
    - For seeds to germinate there needs to be combination of human and divine (humans to scatter seeds, God to provide sunshine and rain). God's Word can only grow in people's lives if human will and divine strength are united.
    - Not all seeds germinate
    - It should be broadcast (scattered widely)
    - It must be internalised for it to have value, just like seed must get INTO the soil for it to grow
    - It works quietly by implanting a new principle in the hearts of people



- The seed contains life (just like the Word contains the very life and character of God)
- See grow gradually. Sanctification is thus the work of a lifetime.
- Seeds produce after their own kind. Similarly the Bible will produce after the kind of Christ – righteousness, holiness, purity, love, obedience, etc.
- It grows into something much greater than what it originally was
- It requires the right soil for growth
- There are competing seeds that are also sown by Satan and his agents
- **Wayside soil**
  - Seed that falls on a path along the edge of the field, or on a path running through the field to fields farther on. Because of the hard surface of the path the seed lies exposed and has no opportunity even to germinate.
  - The wayside hearers are those **superficial hearers** upon whom the truths of the gospel have no effect, and are **inattentive** (*SDA Bible Commentary*)
  - Matt. 13:19 says they **do not understand**. Truth apparently makes no sense to them, not because they are unintelligent, but because their hearts are not open to it. **‘Understanding’ in the Bible is linked to the condition of the heart**, to a willingness to obey (see Mark 8:17; Matt. 13:13, 15; Eph. 4:18)
  - “The seed sown by the wayside represents the word of God as it falls upon the heart of an inattentive hearer. Like the hard-beaten path, trodden down by the feet of men and beasts, is the **heart that becomes a highway for the world's traffic, its pleasures and sins. Absorbed in selfish aims and sinful indulgences**, the soul is ‘hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.’ Hebrews 3:13. The **spiritual faculties are paralyzed**. Men hear the word, but understand it not. They do not discern that it applies to themselves. They do not realize their need or their danger. They do not perceive the love of Christ, and they pass by the message of His grace as something that does not concern them” (COL 44).
  - **“As the birds are ready to catch up the seed from the wayside, so Satan is ready to catch away the seeds of divine truth from the soul.** He fears that the word of God may awaken the careless, and take effect upon the hardened heart. Satan and his angels are in the assemblies where the gospel is preached. While angels of heaven endeavor to impress hearts with the word of God, the enemy is on the alert to make the word of no effect.... He excites criticism, or insinuates doubt and unbelief. The speaker's choice of language or his manner may not please the hearers, and they dwell upon these defects. Thus the truth they need, and which God has graciously sent them, makes no lasting impression” (COL 44)
  - Ways seeds of truth can be snatched up from hearts:
    - ⇒ Criticising the words of a preacher, his character, motives, actions, etc. By doing this, especially in front of our children, we teach them to regard God’s Word lightly (see COL 45)
    - ⇒ By living lives that deny the power of the gospel, the Word of God can be devalued and downplayed, causing people to turn away from it
    - ⇒ A few distractions that can side-track people during church services:
      - Children not controlled while God’s Word is preached
      - Couples who are overly affectionate with each other
      - Dress of attendees (both immodest and showy clothing)
      - Going to the bathroom at inappropriate times
- **Stony soil**
  - Apparently this does not refer to ground covered by loose stones, but rather to rocky protrusions near the surface, covered with a thin layer of soil. **There is**

enough soil to germinate, but the soil is shallow and the effect of the gospel is at best superficial. The gospel appeals to their emotions, and they are quick to react to it, but the impression made by it passes with the fickle tide of emotion. The rock of selfishness (see COL 46) prevents the gospel from effecting a reform in the life. Any effort to serve Christ is so hindered by the fundamental purpose in life to serve self (see COL 50) that the gospel has little or no influence (*SDA Bible Commentary*).

- Stony-ground hearers habitually **follow inclination rather than on principle**. It is evident that the truth has a measure of appeal to them; they admit that it is good; but they love themselves (*Ibid*).
- They **fail to count the cost of discipleship; they do not apply the principles of the gospel to their lives and give it an opportunity to reform their patterns of thought and action**. They are unwilling to face the fact that their habits must be change (*Ibid*).
- “The love of self [in stony-ground hearers] is not subdued. They have not seen the exceeding sinfulness of sin, and the heart has not been humbled under a sense of its guilt. This class **may be easily convinced, and appear to be bright converts**, but they have only a superficial religion” (COL 46)
- “**The stony-ground hearers depend upon self instead of Christ**. They trust in their good works and good impulses, and are strong in their own righteousness. They are not strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might” (COL 47)
- “Many **receive the gospel as a way of escape from suffering**, rather than as a deliverance from sin. They rejoice for a season, for **they think that religion will free them from difficulty and trial**. While life moves smoothly with them, they may appear to be consistent Christians. But they faint beneath the fiery test of temptation. They cannot bear reproach for Christ's sake. **When the word of God points out some cherished sin, or requires self-denial or sacrifice, they are offended**. It would cost them too much effort to make a radical change in their life” (COL 47)
- “They profess to accept Christ as their Saviour, but they **do not believe that He will give them power to overcome their sins. They have not a personal relation with a living Saviour**, and their characters reveal defects both hereditary and cultivated” (COL 48).
- “[They] **make efforts for reform; but they do not crucify self**. They do not give themselves entirely into the hands of Christ, seeking for divine power to do His will.... **In a general way they acknowledge their imperfections, but they do not give up their particular sins**” (COL 48)
- “**The effort to serve both self and Christ makes one a stony-ground hearer, and he will not endure when the test comes upon him**” (COL 50)

○ **Thorny soil**

- In thorny ground the tender plants did not wither as rapidly as they did in the stony ground. Similarly, **the experience of thorny-ground Christians progresses further than that of the stony-ground hearers**. They make what appears to be a real start, and apparently they experience justification and the new birth. But they soon become “weary in well doing” (Gal. 6:9) and do not “go on unto perfection” [Heb. 6:1] – (*SDA Bible Commentary*).
- Absorbed by the pleasures of this world and in the pursuit of its attractions, they neglect to weed out from the life those tendencies and traits of character that respond to temptation.... **Many of the things that attract the thorny-ground hearers and absorb their attention may not, in and of themselves, be harmful. But such persons become so absorbed in this world that they have no time to prepare for the next (*Ibid*).**

- They seem to **emphasize justification and grace**, but **downplay sanctification and obedience** (*Ibid*).
- “The gospel seed often falls among thorns and noxious weeds; and if there is **not a moral transformation in the human heart**, if **old habits and practices and the former life of sin are not left behind**, if the attributes of Satan are not expelled from the soul, the wheat crop will be choked [and killed]” (COL 50)
- Thorns must not merely be cut off, but uprooted (see COL 50)
- The gospel of Mark defines the thorns as ‘the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts of other things’ (Mark 4:19). In addition to Mark, Luke 8:14 adds, the ‘pleasures of life’. These things choke out the Word, as well as spiritual life.
  - ⇒ **“The cares of this world.”** These come to both rich and poor. Sadly Christians forget that God said He would provide for us (see Matt. 6:25-34). Many don’t trust in God’s constant watch-care. Christ “cannot carry their burdens because they don’t cast it on Him. Thus the cares of life, which should drive them to the Saviour for help and comfort, separate them from Him... Many who might be fruitful in God's service become bent on acquiring wealth.... **Many become so absorbed in business that they have no time for prayer, no time for the study of the Bible, no time to seek and serve God...**The things of eternity are made subordinate, the things of the world supreme. It is impossible for the seed of the word to bring forth fruit; for the life of the soul is given to nourish the thorns of worldliness” (COL 51)
  - ⇒ **“The deceitfulness of riches.”** The love of riches has an infatuating, deceptive power.... Instead of regarding wealth as a talent to be employed for the glory of God and the uplifting of humanity, [those who possess worldly treasure] look upon it as a means of serving themselves. Instead of developing in man the attributes of God, riches thus used are developing in him the attributes of Satan. The seed of the word is choked with thorns” (COL 52).
  - ⇒ **“Pleasures of this life.”** There is danger in amusement that is sought merely for self-gratification. All habits of indulgence that weaken the physical powers, that becloud the mind, or that benumb the spiritual perceptions, are ‘fleshly lusts, which war against the soul’ 1 Peter 2:11” (COL 53).
    - **“Many parents seek to promote the happiness of their children by gratifying their love of amusement.** They allow them to engage in sports, and to attend parties of pleasure, and provide them with money to use freely in display and self-gratification. The more the desire for pleasure is indulged, the stronger it becomes. The interest of these youth is more and more absorbed in amusement, until they come to look upon it as the great object of life. They form habits of idleness and self-indulgence that make it almost impossible for them ever to become steadfast Christians” (COL 54)
  - ⇒ **“And the lusts of other things.”** These are not necessarily things sinful in themselves, but something that is made first instead of the kingdom of God. Whatever attracts the mind from God, whatever draws the affections away from Christ, is an enemy to the soul (COL 53)

- **Good soil**
  - This refers to the fruit of character (see on Gal. 5:22, 23). The fruit of the Spirit manifested in the outward life is evidence of a healthy Christian experience. In the hearts of the wayside hearers the truth found no response. With the stony-ground hearers truth produced nothing more than a momentary impulse. With the thorny-ground hearers it was a response that began well but withered in the face of difficulty and opposition. But **in the hearts of the good-ground hearers the response is permanent and effective**. The result is a life transformed according to the pattern of the perfect life of Jesus Christ (*SDA Bible Commentary*).
  - “The ‘honest and good heart’ of which the parable speaks, is not a heart without sin; for the gospel is to be preached to the lost...**He has an honest heart who yields to the conviction of the Holy Spirit**. He confesses his guilt, and feels his need of the mercy and love of God. He has a sincere desire to know the truth, that he may obey it. The good heart is a believing heart, one that has faith in the word of God” (COL 58).
  - “‘And bring forth fruit.’ Those who, having heard the word, keep it, will bring forth fruit in obedience. **The word of God, received into the soul, will be manifest in good works**. Its results will be seen in a Christlike character and life” (COL 60).
  - “The word of God often comes in collision with man's hereditary and cultivated traits of character and his habits of life. But the good-ground hearer, in receiving the word, **accepts all its conditions and requirements. His habits, customs, and practices are brought into submission to God's word....** With the whole heart, with undivided purpose, he is seeking the life eternal, and at the cost of loss, persecution, or death itself, he will obey the truth” (COL 60)
- *Read Matt. 13:1-9, 18-23; Mark 4:13-20; Luke 8:11-15 (Mark and Luke add some further insights not found in Matthew). Preferably let one person read it. Let everyone then put down their Bibles and get the group to reconstruct the passage in their own words. This teaches the group to be careful in quotation Scripture correctly and to use it as the basis of their discussions.*
- **Discussion Questions** (*use only a few*). *The notes in italics after some of the questions below are for the facilitator, and not to be read out to the group.*
  - This parable has often been called the ‘parable of the sower’. What other titles would also describe this parable well?
  - In which way is the Word of God like seed?
  - What happens to the seed in each type of soil?
  - Unpack your understanding of the wayside hearer?
  - Matt 13:19 says that the wayside hearer does not understand the Word? What do you think this means? Is it a reference to people who are ignorant or have no education? (*ask one question at a time*)
  - Matt. 13:19 compares the birds that snatch up the seed to the ‘wicked one’ (Satan). In which ways can Satan snatch up the gospel seed? How can people assist him in this evil work? (*ask one question at a time*)
  - Describe what you understand to be a stony ground hearer?
  - The stony ground hearer fails to count the cost of discipleship. What do you think this practically means?
  - What is your understanding of the thorny ground hearer?
  - How do the cares of life choke out our Christian experience?
  - How can the chasing after riches choke out God’s Word?

- What do you think the pleasures of life refer to? Give some practical examples of modern pleasures that absorb our attention? What are the dangers of chasing these pleasures (*ask one question at a time*)
- What do you think good soil hearers are like?
- Luke 8:15 says that the good soil hearers, bear the Word 'with patience'. In other words, they persevere? Why is this quality so important in order to be good soil?
- In what ways does good soil produce fruit "a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty"?
- How can a person move from one type of soil to another?
- **Application Questions** (*select a few depending on your time. One has to be the I WILL STATEMENT*)
  - What kind of soil are you at the moment? (*this may require some transparency, which is healthy in a small group*)
  - What do you think Jesus would like to you to do in response to this parable?
  - How involved are you in the sowing of the gospel seed? Kindly elaborate?
  - I WILL STATEMENT: Formulate an I will statement in response to what you have discovered in the Word. Let the group's secretary also record these in an A4 notebook. Ensure that everyone gets a chance to give their I WILL STATEMENT. You have to be specific. E.g. "I will sow the gospel seed by sharing a health DVD with colleague this week / I will take stock of my Christian life this week through a personal week of prayer, and ask God to show me which soil is dominating my life, and want to recommit to being good soil."
- 6. **Share** (*Purpose: To be witnesses of our faith*)
  - Do you have anyone you could share today's lesson with this week? *Be specific.*
- 7. **Closing prayer**

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