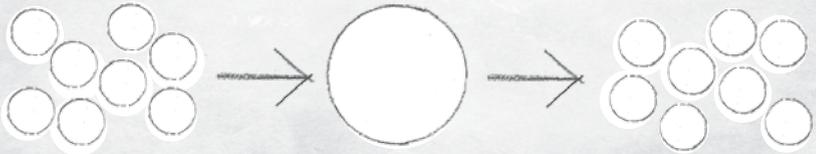


Parable of the Sower

- BIBLE PASSAGE:** Matthew 13:1-9,18-23
MAIN POINT: Not everyone who hears the gospel believes it.
KEY PASSAGE: Mark 6:34
BIG PICTURE QUESTION: Why did Jesus tell parables? Jesus told parables to teach people about God and His kingdom.

SMALL GROUP OPENING (10–15 MINUTES) **PAGE 10**
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Leader BIBLE STUDY

The Gospels record dozens of Jesus' parables. A parable is a story Jesus told to help people understand the kingdom of God. Each parable taught a lesson and revealed secrets of God's kingdom for those who would understand. (See Matt. 13:10-13.)

The parable of the sower would have resonated with those listening because they would have been familiar with the practice of sowing or planting seed. But the parable had a deeper meaning. It contained a lesson about God's Word and the responses of those who hear it.

In the parable, a sower's seeds fell in four different places.

Some of the seeds fell along the path, where they were eaten by birds. Other seeds fell on rocky ground. Those seeds had no roots, so they withered in the sun. Other seeds fell among thorns, and they were choked out. Other seeds fell on good soil, and they produced a crop—a hundred, sixty, or thirty times what was planted.

After Jesus told the parable, He explained it to His disciples. The soil represents people's hearts, and the seed is the word about God's kingdom. The person whose heart is like the hard soil hears the good news about God, but he does not understand it or he rejects it. The person whose heart is like the rocky soil is quick to receive the truth, but when life gets hard, he falls away. The person whose heart is like the thorny soil cares more about the things of the world than the good news about God, and the seed cannot grow. The person whose heart is like the good soil hears the good news about God and receives it. He bears fruit, more than what was planted. In the life of a believer, the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23) is evident.

Still today, people respond to the gospel in various ways. As you prepare to teach the parable of the sower, pray for the kids you lead. Pray that God will give them receptive hearts so that they will hear, understand, and be changed by the good news about Jesus.



MINISTRY GRID
training made simple

Additional resources for each session are available at gospelproject.com. For free training and session-by-session help, visit www.ministrygrid.com/web/thegospelproject.

The BIBLE STORY

Bible Storytelling Tips

Parable of the Sower

Matthew 13:1-9,18-23

• Wander the room:

As you tell the story, wander through the audience as though you are the sower walking along scattering seed. Walk up and down rows of kids.

• Use sound effects:

Play sounds to represent the parts of the story. Try playing the sound of a bustling crowd for the people listening to Jesus, a crow cawing for the seeds that are eaten, a crumbling sound for the rocky soil, a sizzling sound for the sun withering seeds, and so forth.

Jesus traveled around from one town and village to another. In each place, He preached the good news about the kingdom of God. Crowds of people came to listen to Jesus' teaching. **One day, Jesus was sitting by the sea. So many people came to hear Him that Jesus got into a boat and sat down to teach.** The crowds stood on the shore to listen.

Jesus said, "A sower went out to plant seeds. As he was planting, some seeds fell along the path. Soon, the birds came and ate up the seeds from the path. Other seeds fell on rocky ground where there wasn't much soil. The seeds sprouted quickly, but they did not have any roots because the soil was shallow. When the sun came up, the plants withered. Other seeds fell among thorns. The thorns grew, and they stopped the seeds from growing. But some of the seeds fell on good ground. Those seeds grew and produced a crop, more than what was planted!"

Then Jesus explained the parable to His disciples. He said, **"Some people hear the truth about God's kingdom, but they don't understand it.** The Evil One comes and takes away what was planted in their hearts. **Those people are like the seeds that fell on the path.**

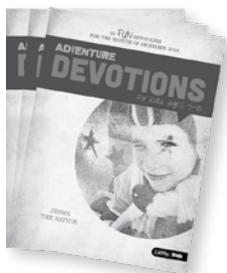
"Some people hear the truth about God's kingdom, and they are happy to accept it. But when hard times come, they give up. Those people are like the seeds that fell on rocky ground.

"Some people hear the truth about God's kingdom, but they worry about this life and they love money too much. The truth cannot grow. Those people are like the

seeds that fell among thorns.

“But some people hear the truth about God’s kingdom, and they understand it. They accept the truth, and it grows in their lives. **Those people are like the seeds that fell on good ground.** Those seeds produce a crop, more than what was planted.”

Christ Connection: Jesus is the Sower who shared the truth about God’s kingdom. His followers continue to share the truth today, and those who understand and accept the gospel become more like Jesus.



**WANT TO
DISCOVER
GOD’S WORD?
GET
ADVENTURE!**

Invite kids to check out this week’s devotionals to discover that Jesus taught that not everyone who hears the gospel believes it. But anyone who does believe in the Lord Jesus will be saved. (Acts 16:31) Order in bulk, subscribe quarterly, or purchase individually. For more information, check out www.lifeway.com/devotionals.

Small Group OPENING

SESSION TITLE: Parable of the Sower

BIBLE PASSAGE: Matthew 13:1-9,18-23

MAIN POINT: Not everyone who hears the gospel believes it.

KEY PASSAGE: Mark 6:34

BIG PICTURE QUESTION: Why did Jesus tell parables? Jesus told parables to teach people about God and His kingdom.

Welcome time

Greet each kid as he or she arrives. Use this time to collect the offering, fill out attendance sheets, and help new kids connect to your group. As kids arrive ask them if they have ever planted a seed. Discuss the different kinds of seeds they know about (fruits, flowers, vegetables, and so forth).

SAY • People plant many kinds of seeds. Flower seeds grow into beautiful plants for decoration. Vegetables seeds become food to eat. Today we will learn about a new kind of seed that God wants us to plant.

Activity page (5 minutes)

Invite kids to complete the “Plant Power” activity page. They should number the pictures in order from 1 to 5 to show the stages of the plant’s life cycle (seed, sprout, budding flower, bloomed flower, withered flower).

SAY • When seeds are planted in a place with the right amount of water and sunlight, they grow to produce more seeds! In our session today, listen to see what Jesus said seeds can teach us about God.

- “Plant Power” activity page, 1 per kid
- pencils or markers

Session starter (10 minutes)

OPTION 1: Grow, growing, grown

Ask each kid how tall he is. Write down what he says. If kids don't know, ask them to guess. Then invite each kid to lay on a large sheet of paper. Mark where his feet and head are. Allow each kid to measure how tall he is according to the marks on the large sheet of paper. Next, ask kids to mark lines showing how small they think they were when they were born and a line to show how tall they think they will grow.

SAY • Just about everyone starts small and grows bigger.

Seeds are no different. Today we will learn about a kind of growth that is also like seeds, but it isn't our bodies' growth. What kind of growth do you think we will hear about?

OPTION 2: Weed pull

Before class, tie a scarf or bandanna to the center of a length of rope. In the center of the room, mark two lines about three feet apart.

Form two equal teams of kids. Lay the rope across the floor so that the scarf is between the two lines of tape. Instruct each team to grasp one end of the rope. When you say go, both teams will pull until the scarf crosses one of the lines of tape. Whichever team pulled the scarf across the line of tape closest to them wins.

SAY • Weeds can keep seeds from growing. Sometimes weeds are very difficult to pull, though! Today we will learn about a story Jesus told and what a kind of "weed" disturbs a special seed we can plant.



- large sheets of paper, 1 per kid
- pencils or markers
- tape measure

- rope
- scarf or bandanna
- tape

Transition to large group

Large Group LEADER

SESSION TITLE: Parable of the Sower

BIBLE PASSAGE: Matthew 13:1-9,18-23

MAIN POINT: Not everyone who hears the gospel believes it.

KEY PASSAGE: Mark 6:34

BIG PICTURE QUESTION: Why did Jesus tell parables? Jesus told parables to teach people about God and His kingdom.

- room decorations
- Theme Background Slide (optional)

Suggested Theme Decorating Ideas: Decorate your room to look like a campsite. Set up a small tent in the center and place camping supplies around it, such as a lantern, camp chair, and sleeping bag. Arrange firewood with orange, yellow, and red tissue paper to look like a fire. You may also show the theme background slide.

Countdown

- countdown video
- “The Big Story” video (optional)

Show the countdown video as your kids arrive, and set it to end as large group time begins. Consider starting this quarter by showing “The Big Story” video to help kids see where these stories fit within the chronology of Scripture.

Introduce the session (3 minutes)

- leader attire

[Large Group Leader enters wearing hiking boots and a large backpack.]

LEADER • Hello there, kids! The park ranger mentioned that my campsite was right next to some friendly folks. That must be all of you!

I just got my tent up and built a fire. I don't know about you, but my favorite part of camping is sharing stories around the fire. It looks like you don't have a

fire built. Would you like to join me around mine? I have some wonderful stories from the Bible to tell you. [Allow responses.] Oh, wonderful! I was hoping you'd agree!

Big picture question (1 minute)

LEADER • The Bible contains many stories, but they are all connected to tell one big story about Jesus. Over the next few weeks, we will be learning about stories Jesus told to teach people about Him and God's kingdom. These stories are called *parables*. To help me focus on the big picture while we talk about Jesus' parables, I like to ask a big picture question. The question is, *why did Jesus tell parables?* You'll have to listen closely to learn the answer.

Giant timeline (1 minute)

LEADER • Over the last few weeks, you learned about Jesus' growing up and about the people Jesus met during His ministry on earth. Now we will learn some of the stories Jesus told to teach people about God. This week we will learn a story Jesus told about a man who sowed seeds. To sow seeds is sort of like planting. It means to scatter the seeds on the ground so they can grow. Our story is called "Parable of the Sower."

• Giant Timeline

Tell the Bible story (10 minutes)

Open your Bible to Matthew 13:1-9,18-23. Use the Bible storytelling tips on the Bible story page to help you tell the story, or show the Bible story video "Parable of the Sower."

LEADER • My goodness! What a story. In Jesus' parable,

• Bibles
• "Parable of the Sower" video
• Big Picture Question Poster
• Bible Story Picture Poster

the man scattered seeds around. The seeds fell into different kinds of soil or dirt. Each kind of soil had a different effect on the seeds. The seeds that fell on the path were eaten by birds. Those that landed in the rocky soil grew quickly but withered under the hot sun. Seeds that fell in thorns were choked out. Finally, Jesus spoke of seeds that fell in good soil and grew to produce even more crops!

Although it may sound like this is a story about being careful where you farm, it's actually about people who hear the truth about God! Jesus used this parable to help people understand what it is like to share the gospel. Sadly, **not everyone who hears the gospel believes it.**

When we share the gospel with others, they react in different ways, like the four kinds of soil. Some people won't understand the gospel, like the seed snatched up before it got a chance to sprout. Others will accept the truth right away but will give up when life gets hard. Still others hear the truth, but they have trouble believing it because the worries of life distract them. Finally, some people will hear the good news about God and they will believe it fully. They will grow in their faith and then spread more seeds of truth as they tell others about Jesus!

Tip: Use Scripture and the guide provided to explain how to become a Christian. Make sure kids know when and where they can ask questions.

Christ connection

LEADER • Jesus is the Sower who shared the truth about God's kingdom. His followers continue to share the truth today, and those who understand and accept the gospel become more like Jesus. We are called to tell the world about Jesus and leave the results up to

God. In the parable, the sower did not go back to double check on each individual seed, but continued scattering the seed as much as possible. In a similar way, we cannot control how people react to the good news about Jesus. Whether people accept it or reject it, we can keep telling the gospel to everyone around us!

Key passage (5 minutes)

Show the key passage poster. Lead the boys and girls to read together Mark 6:34.

LEADER • As Jesus traveled around teaching about God, many people followed Him. He did not grow frustrated with them or wish they would go away. Jesus loved them and saw that they needed Him to be their leader the same way sheep need a shepherd to help them find places to eat grass and rest in safety. Jesus provides salvation for everyone who believes in Him. He died on the cross and rose again to pay for our sins and give us salvation.

Lead boys and girls in singing “He Saw a Huge Crowd.”

- Key Passage Poster
- “He Saw a Huge Crowd” song

Discussion starter video (4 minutes)

LEADER • When you hear about something, do you always react the same way as everyone around you? Think about that as we watch this video.

Show the “Unit 22, Session 1” discussion starter video. Ask kids why the boys and girls in the video responded differently to the same news. Did the reporters know which kids would respond which way? Discuss what would happen if the reporters decided not to tell anyone about the news.

- “Unit 22, Session 1” discussion starter video

LEADER • God wants us to share the good news about Jesus with everyone, even though we don't know who will believe it and who will ignore it. **Not everyone who hears the gospel believes it**, but we trust God to do the work of making seeds of truth sprout and grow into faith. God will work out His plan for salvation in the whole world.

Sing (4 minutes)

LEADER • It's so good that we can trust in God to help us share the gospel with everyone. Let's take some time to sing about God's goodness and thank Him for sending Jesus to teach us about His Kingdom.

Sing together "The Kingdom of Heaven."

Pray (2 minutes)

Invite kids to pray before dismissing to small groups.

LEADER • Father, we love You and are so thankful that You sent people to plant the seeds of the gospel in our lives. Thank You for growing those seeds. Help us to be fruitful and share the gospel with everyone we know, like the seeds in the parable that grew into plants and produced even more seeds. We love You. Amen.

Dismiss to small groups

• "The Kingdom of Heaven" song

The Gospel: God's Plan for Me

Ask kids if they have ever heard the word *gospel*. Clarify that the word *gospel* means “good news.” It is the message about Christ, the kingdom of God, and salvation. Use the following guide to share the gospel with kids.



God rules. Explain to kids that the Bible tells us God created everything, and He is in charge of everything. Invite a volunteer to read Genesis 1:1 from the Bible. Read Revelation 4:11 or Colossians 1:16-17 aloud and explain what these verses mean.



We sinned. Tell kids that since the time of Adam and Eve, everyone has chosen to disobey God. (Romans 3:23) The Bible calls this sin. Because God is holy, God cannot be around sin. Sin separates us from God and deserves God's punishment of death. (Romans 6:23)



God provided. Choose a child to read John 3:16 aloud. Say that God sent His Son, Jesus, the perfect solution to our sin problem, to rescue us from the punishment we deserve. It's something we, as sinners, could never earn on our own. Jesus alone saves us. Read and explain Ephesians 2:8-9.



Jesus gives. Share with kids that Jesus lived a perfect life, died on the cross for our sins, and rose again. Because Jesus gave up His life for us, we can be welcomed into God's family for eternity. This is the best gift ever! Read Romans 5:8; 2 Corinthians 5:21; or 1 Peter 3:18.



We respond. Tell kids that they can respond to Jesus. Read Romans 10:9-10,13. Review these aspects of our response: Believe in your heart that Jesus alone saves you through what He's already done on the cross. Repent, turning from self and sin to Jesus. Tell God and others that your faith is in Jesus.

Offer to talk with any child who is interested in responding to Jesus. Provide *I'm a Christian Now* for new Christians to take home and complete with their families.

Small Group LEADER

SESSION TITLE: Parable of the Sower

BIBLE PASSAGE: Matthew 13:1-9,18-23

MAIN POINT: Not everyone who hears the gospel believes it.

KEY PASSAGE: Mark 6:34

BIG PICTURE QUESTION: Why did Jesus tell parables? Jesus told parables to teach people about God and His kingdom.

Key passage activity (5 minutes)

- Key Passage Poster
- “Key Passage Flip Cards” printable
- heavyweight paper

Before class, print the “Key Passage Flip Cards” double-sided onto heavyweight paper. Make enough copies for each kid to have one, and then cut them out. Give each kid a key passage flip card and help her fill in the missing words on each of the different levels without peeking at the previous level.

SAY • Our key passage reminds us that we are like sheep. We need Jesus to lead us just as sheep need a shepherd. Jesus saves us from sin and helps us know more about God.

Bible story review & Bible skills (10 minutes)

- Bibles, 1 per kid
- Main Point Poster

Distribute a Bible to each kid. Instruct the kids to look up Mark 4:1-20 and Luke 8:1-15 to read the parable of the sower in the other places it is recorded. Then ask them the following questions:

1. How many kinds of soil did Jesus talk about seeds falling into? (*four—along the path, rocky soil, among thorns, and good soil; Matt. 13:4-8; Mark 4:4-7; Luke 8:5-8*)
2. What happened to the seeds that did not land in

good soil? (*They were eaten by birds, withered, or were choked out. They did not produce a crop; Matt. 13:4-7; Mark 4:4-6; Luke 8:5-7*)

3. What did the good soil represent? (*People who hear and believe the gospel. Their lives are changed by the truth; Matt. 13:23; Mark 4:20; Luke 8:15*)
4. What happened to the seeds that fell in good soil? (*They grew and produced a large crop; Matt. 13:8; Mark 4:8; Luke 8:8*)
5. ***Why did Jesus tell parables? Jesus told parables to teach people about God and His kingdom.***

SAY • In Jesus' parable, the sower did not stop when seeds fell in bad soil. He kept moving to scatter more seeds! In a way, this shows us how to share the gospel: as often as we can with as many people as we can, no matter how they react. This doesn't mean we shouldn't take time to help people who want to understand the Bible. We should help other people understand the gospel when we can, but Jesus' parable reminds us not to stop sharing the gospel just because some people disagree with it or reject it. **Not everyone who hears the gospel believes it.**

Option: Retell or review the Bible story using the bolded text of the Bible story script.

Activity choice (10 minutes)

OPTION 1: Protect the seeds

Place a hula hoop in the center of the room. Place a small handful of sunflower seeds in the hula hoop. Select one kid to be the "farmer." Her job will be to keep the seeds in the hula hoop; however she cannot step into the hoop to protect the seeds. The rest of the class will try to remove seeds from the hula hoop. If the farmer tags another player before he captures a seed, that player must sit out. If a



- hula hoop
- sunflower seeds
- Allergy Alert download

player removes a seed, he can give it to an adult leader and go back for another seed. The game ends when either all players are tagged out by the farmer or all the farmer's seeds have been taken. For an added challenge, help the kids keep track of who has the most seeds at the end of the game.

SAY • In the parable Jesus told, the seeds had no control over where they landed or what happened to them after they landed. In our lives, we can take actions to protect the seeds of truth God sows in our lives. We can pray, read our Bibles, and go to church to help us remember the truth about God. Most importantly, Jesus sends us the Holy Spirit, who helps guide us to grow in our faith and live for God. Enemies of God don't want us to believe the truth, and they will try to attack us to keep us from believing God. We trust that God will protect us and give us the strength to obey Him and cling to His truth.

OPTION 2: Seeding the word

Provide a selection of seed packets for kids to choose from. Once each kid has selected a seed packet, encourage him to decorate his packet with markers or other craft supplies. Kids can use their seed packets as bookmarks to keep track of where they are in their Bible reading, or they can take them home to plant their seeds to grow a crop!

SAY • In the parable, the seeds were God's truth. The sower represents Jesus, spreading the message of the gospel to the people. **Not everyone who hears the gospel believes it**, but those who do grow strong in their faith and produce a new crop. They tell others the good news Jesus had told them, spreading more seeds of truth!

- seed packets
- craft supplies
- markers

You can take your seed packet home to plant and see what grows, or you can use it as a bookmark to help you keep track of your time in the Bible. Either way, remember to share the gospel with anyone anytime. God knows that some people will reject the truth and others will accept it. We can trust Him to work out His plan for salvation in the world. As we share the gospel, we leave the results up to Him.

Journal and prayer (5 minutes)

Distribute each child's journal. Ask the kids to write about or draw a picture of a person they can share the gospel with this week.

SAY • We all have a responsibility to tell others about Jesus. Sometimes that is scary or difficult, and we may not see people react the way we think they should. We can always trust that God's plan is working, even if we can't see it. God loves people and wants everyone to hear His truth. When we believe the truth, we grow and can produce a crop by telling others about the truth.

Make sure each child secures this week's sheet in the journal, and then collect them. Keep the journals in the classroom so they will be available every week or as often as you wish to use them.

If time remains, take prayer requests or allow kids to complete the Bible story coloring page provided with this session. Pray, asking God to work in the lives of your group. Ask God to prepare the good soil of their hearts to receive the gospel and to help them share the gospel with others around them boldly.

- markers or crayons
- Journal Page
- Bible story coloring page, 1 per kid

Tip: Give parents this week's *Big Picture Cards for Families* to allow families to interact with the biblical content at home.