

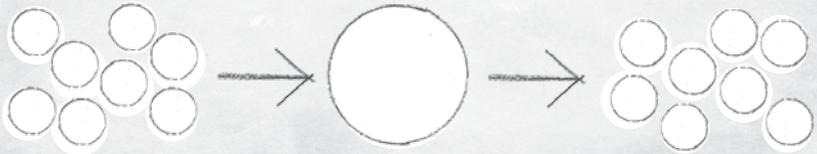
Parable of the Sower

- 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.

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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

- **Move around the room:** As you tell the story, walk through the audience as though you are the sower scattering seed. Walk up and down rows of kids.
- **Use sound effects:** Call for volunteers to make sound effects as you describe the types of soil. Direct them to caw like birds, make sizzling sounds like the hot sun, stomp their feet for the thorns, and clap for the good ground.

Parable of the Sower

Matthew 13:1-9,18-23

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
BIBLE EXPRESS!**

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, invite them to share if they have ever planted a garden. How did they do it? What did they plant? What grew best?

Activity page (5 minutes)

- “Action Reaction” activity page, 1 per kid
- pencils or markers

Invite kids to complete “Action Reaction” on the activity page. Kids should draw a face to show how each situation might make them feel. Then guide them to compare their reactions with a friend.

SAY • Did all of your reactions match your friend’s reactions? Why do you think that is? Today we are going to hear a Bible story about four ways people react when they hear the truth about God.

Session starter (10 minutes)

OPTION 1: Zoom, zip, wham

Guide kids to stand in a circle. Explain that kids will pass an imaginary ball by pointing. One player will begin by pointing at a second player in the circle and saying,



“Zoom!” The second player should respond by raising his hand and saying, “Zip!” Players on each side of the second player must react by pointing at the second player and saying, “Wham!”

The second player then passes play by pointing to someone else and saying, “Zoom!” Play continues around the circle with players reacting correspondingly. Begin slowly. Then, as players master the moves, encourage them to play faster.

SAY • You had to listen carefully and respond to the other players in this game. Today’s Bible story is about a story that Jesus told. Jesus explained how different people respond when they hear the gospel. Let’s find out what He said.

OPTION 2: What does it mean?

Form groups of three or four kids. Distribute pencils and the “What Does It Mean?” printable. Challenge kids to figure out what the letters stand for in each puzzle. Point out the example. (66 B of the B = 66 books of the Bible) After a few minutes, review the answers with the group.

SAY • How many of the puzzles did you figure out? How many did you have trouble understanding?

Today we are going to hear about a story Jesus told. Not everyone understood the story, but Jesus explained to His disciples what it meant.

- “What Does It Mean?” printable
- pencils

Transition to large group

Large Group LEADER

SESSION TITLE: Parable of the Sower

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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: Simulate a campsite by assembling a small tent at the front of the room. Position camping supplies near the tent: an electric lantern, a hiking backpack, a sleeping bag, and a small bench or chair.

Consider covering the wall with a dark green bedsheet, or project the theme background slide. Arrange a small pile of logs or sticks nearby to serve as the campfire.

Countdown

- countdown video
- “The Big Story” video

Show the countdown video as your kids arrive, and set it to end as large group time begins. Then begin the session by showing the video “The Big Story.”

Introduce the session (3 minutes)

[Large Group Leader enters wearing hiking boots and a backpack containing a Bible. Leader holds a small shovel.]

- leader attire
- backpack
- Bible
- small shovel or trowel

LEADER • Howdy hey, boys and girls! I’m [*your name*]. Raise your hand if you have ever been camping. Well, I am so glad you have joined me today. I just finished setting up my campsite. This shovel here helped me dig a pit in the dirt for a campfire. That was some tough soil!

What kinds of things do you like to do when you go camping? [*Call on volunteers to share.*] That sounds like fun! One of my favorite camping traditions is telling stories around the campfire. That's what we are going to do today and the next several times we meet. [*Remove backpack and retrieve the Bible.*]

Big picture question (1 minute)

LEADER • The Bible contains stories that tell us about God's plan to send Jesus to save people from sin. Did you know that it also tells stories about stories? That's right. Some of these Bible stories are about stories Jesus told. Jesus' stories are called *parables*.

As we hear them, let's see if we can figure out the answer to our big picture question: ***Why did Jesus tell parables?***

Giant timeline (1 minute)

Point to the giant timeline or big story circle.

LEADER • Check out the stories on our timeline. There are so many! All these smaller stories in the Bible fit together to tell one big story—the story of how God the Father sent His Son, Jesus, to rescue people from sin. Jesus taught people about God and His kingdom. Sometimes Jesus told stories to do that. Today we are going to hear about one story, or parable, called the “Parable of the Sower.”

• Giant Timeline or Big Story Circle

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.”

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

LEADER • In Jesus' story, when the man scattered the seeds in the field, they fell on four different types of soils. Can you name the four types? [*Call on volunteers to answer.*] (*the path, rocky ground, ground among thorns, good ground*)

Now, Jesus wasn't giving the people a lesson in farming. It might have seemed that way, but Jesus used the stories He told to teach people what is true about God and His kingdom. The seed is like the truth about God. Jesus explained that the seeds that fell along the path are like people who hear the truth and do not understand it.

If you tell them about Jesus, they might say, "That doesn't make any sense!"

The seeds that fell on the rocky ground are like people who hear the truth and believe it right away, but when life gets hard, they stop believing.

If you tell them about Jesus, they might like what they hear until something hard happens in their life, like pain or suffering. Then they might say, "I can't believe in a God who would let this happen to me."

The seeds that fell among the thorns are like people who hear the truth, but they have a hard time believing because they worry about life instead of trusting God.

But the seeds that fell on the good soil are like people who hear the truth and believe it.

If you tell them about Jesus, they might say, "What good news! I believe that Jesus is my Lord and Savior." The truth changes their hearts, and they grow to know and love Jesus.

Christ connection

LEADER • Jesus is the Sower who shared the truth about God’s kingdom. People who hear the good news about Jesus respond in different ways. **Not everyone who hears the gospel believes it.** Some reject Jesus, and some trust in Him. Jesus’ followers continue to share the truth today, and those who understand and believe the gospel become more like Jesus.

Did you know that everyone is born a sinner? Our hearts are like hard, rocky, weed-infested soil. God softens our hearts and breaks up the soil to make it fertile and open to the gospel. Then when we hear the good news about Him, we are happy to believe it and trust in 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.

Key passage (5 minutes)

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

LEADER • People followed Jesus almost everywhere He went. Jesus was never annoyed or angry at the people. He cared about them. Jesus saw that the people needed help. When sheep don’t have a shepherd, they wander around aimlessly.

Like sheep, the people needed someone to rescue them, take care of them, and lead them. Jesus even called Himself “the good shepherd.” We can look to Him and trust Him.

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 • Have you ever seen people react differently to the same news? Why would that happen? Think about

- “Unit 22, Session 1” discussion starter video

that as you watch this.
Show the “Unit 22, Session 1” discussion starter video.
Then guide kids to discuss the following questions:

- All the kids heard the same news. How did they respond?
- Why do you think they responded differently?
- When we tell someone about Jesus, are we responsible for how that person responds?

LEADER • **Not everyone who hears the gospel believes it.**

But just like a reporter tells the news to everyone, we should tell the good news about Jesus to everyone—even if we don’t think people will believe it. We can pray that God would change people’s hearts so they would believe the good news about Jesus and be saved from their sin. We can trust God to work out His plan for salvation.

Sing (4 minutes)

• “The Kingdom of Heaven” song

LEADER • Let’s sing our unit theme song together.

Lead boys and girls in singing “The Kingdom of Heaven.”

Pray (2 minutes)

Invite kids to pray before dismissing to small groups.

LEADER • Lord God, thank You for sending Jesus to save people from sin. We ask that You would change the hearts of people who reject You so that they would believe the truth about Jesus and love Him. Help us believe, too. Help us grow to know and love You more. Amen.

Dismiss to small groups

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.

Tip: 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
- chalkboard or dry erase board
- chalk or marker

Write the key passage on a chalkboard or dry erase board. Leave out several key words and draw blanks in their places. Guide kids to read the key passage together. Write in the missing words as they supply them.

SAY • When people came to hear Jesus teach, He cared about them and taught them many things. In today's Bible story, Jesus told a parable to show that **not everyone who hears the gospel believes it.**

Bible story review & Bible skills (10 minutes)

- Bibles, 1 per kid
- Main Point Poster
- paper
- markers
- tape

Label four pieces of paper with the following descriptions: *seeds on the path*, *seeds on rocky ground*, *seeds among thorns*, and *seeds on good ground*.

Tape one paper in each corner of the room. Distribute Bibles and instruct kids to find Matthew 13.

SAY • Does anyone know what part of the Bible this story is in? (*the New Testament, the Gospel of Matthew*)

Retell or review the Bible story in your own words, or use the bolded text of the Bible story script. Then invite kids to play a game of "Four Corners."

Direct kids to stand in the center of the room. Read the

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

following descriptions, one at a time. Kids should move to the corner best described by the statement. Reveal the answer, and then instruct kids to return to the center of the room to hear the next description.

1. These seeds sprouted quickly, but they did not have any roots. (*seeds on rocky ground*)
2. Other plants kept these seeds from growing. (*seeds among thorns*)
3. These seeds grew and produced a crop. (*seeds on good ground*)
4. This is like people who don't understand the truth about God's kingdom. (*seeds on the path*)
5. This is like people who give up when hard times come. (*seeds on rocky ground*)
6. This is like people who worry too much. (*seeds among thorns*)
7. This is like people who accept the truth, and it grows in their lives. (*seeds on good ground*)

SAY • Jesus didn't tell this story to teach people about farming. Jesus told a parable to show that **not everyone who hears the gospel believes it**. Think about the four places the seeds fell. These places describe our hearts:

- Do you have trouble understanding the gospel?
- Do you want to give up on God when life is hard?
- Do you worry about life and love money more than you love God?
- Do you understand the gospel and love Jesus?

Encourage kids to talk to a parent, teacher, or friend if they have questions about the gospel.



LOW PREP

• “Tell Me About It”
printable

Tip: Consider
providing copies of
*Leading a Friend to
Christ* (005147983).

- Allergy Alert download
- large seeds (sunflower seeds, pumpkin seeds, corn kernels)
- large plastic bowl
- plastic spoons
- paper cups
- marker
- timer (optional)

Activity choice (10 minutes)

OPTION 1: Practice sharing the gospel

SAY • If you are a believer, God wants you to tell others the good news about Jesus. You can be a sower too! Have you ever told someone about Jesus? Let’s look at one way we can talk to our friends or family members about Jesus.

Give each kid a “Tell Me About It” printable. Briefly review the steps and encourage kids to find a partner and practice sharing the gospel. Emphasize that **not everyone who hears the gospel believes it**, but we can pray and ask God to change the hearts of people who reject Him.

SAY • When we understand and believe the gospel, God wants us to become sowers too. We can share the good news about Jesus with others. Remember, God asks us to share the good news. Only God can change people’s hearts.

OPTION 2: Seed scoop relay

Pour a variety of large seeds into a large plastic bowl. Position the bowl on a table at one side of the room. Write the types of seeds on separate paper cups and arrange them in a row at the other side of the room.

Form groups for each type of seed. Assign at least two kids to each group. Explain that when you say “go,” the first player on each team will walk quickly to the bowl and scoop out one seed of his assigned variety. He should race back and drop the seed into his team’s cup. Then the next players will take a turn.

Teams will play until one team collects 10 seeds. You may also use a timer for teams to race against a clock. Call on the first team to finish to answer the big picture

question: *Why did Jesus tell parables?*

SAY • *Jesus told parables to teach people about God and His kingdom.* The parable of the sower wasn't just a story about planting seeds. Jesus explained the story to His disciples so they would know that **not everyone who hears the gospel believes it.** But that doesn't mean we shouldn't tell someone the gospel if we think they won't believe. God calls us to be sowers of the good news, to share the gospel with others and trust Him to change people's hearts.

Option: Review the gospel with boys and girls. Explain that kids are welcome to speak with you or another teacher if they have questions.

Journal and prayer (5 minutes)

Distribute journal pages and pencils. Encourage kids to think about how they respond to the gospel. Do they believe the good news about Jesus? Do they have questions? Do they doubt Jesus when life is hard? Do they reject it?

Guide them to journal their thoughts. Explain that **not everyone who hears the gospel believes it.**

SAY • Jesus wants everyone who loves and trusts in Him to tell others about Him. He wants us to be like the man who was scattering seeds—to go and tell everyone about Jesus!

Lead kids in prayer. Pray that God would change people's hearts so they would believe the good news about Jesus and be saved from their sin.

As time allows, lead kids to complete "Scattered Seeds" on the activity page. Direct kids to unscramble the letters for each of the missing words to answer the question. (Answer: *A parable is a story Jesus told to help people understand the kingdom of God. Jesus told a parable about how people respond to the gospel.*)

- pencils
- Journal Page
- "Scattered Seeds" activity 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.