

Adult Teaching Resources

July 12, 2020



What the World Needs Now...

Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30—"The World Needs Rest"

Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23—"The World Needs the Word"

Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43—"The World Needs Patience"

Matthew 13:31-33, 44-52—"The World Needs Wisdom"

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The World Needs the Word

Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

FIT Teaching Guide

by David Woody

This adult teaching outline is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartledge, printed in *Nurturing Faith Journal*. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Nurturing Faith Journal* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Nurturing Faith Journal* so they can prepare before the lesson.

Bible Background

Key Verse: Matthew 13:23—“But as for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty.”

Jesus loved teaching in parables. He knew the concepts, ideas, and truths he taught needed to be understood. He couldn't simply stand in front of a crowd and tell them what he knew. He had to help them understand what he knew. One of his most effective methods was using parables.

Today, we explore the parable of the sower. As we'll learn, the sower is important, but the soil on which the seeds are planted is even more important.

Opening

After everyone arrives, ask your group to form smaller groups of 3-4. Once the groups are settled, ask everyone to share their experience on planting and growing.

More than likely, we all have at least one story of planting and growing (or hoping to grow) something. Even if we have to think back to elementary school and science class, ask each person to share.

What did you try to grow?

Where did you plant the seed/bulb?

What kind of soil did you use? Why did you use that kind?

How much, and what kind of care, did you give the seed/bulb?

What happened to your seed/bulb?

Give each group time to share with each other. Then, ask for volunteers to share with the larger group their experience with growing plants from seeds/bulbs.

Reading the Bible

Where did Jesus go? (out of the house and sat beside the sea)

What did he do because of the crowds? (he got in a boat and sat there, while the crowds stood on the beach)

How did Jesus teach them? (in parables)

What happened to the seeds that fell on the path? (the birds came and ate them up)

What happened to the seeds that fell on rocky ground? (they sprang up quickly but then were scorched when the sun rose because they had no root)

What happened to the seeds that fell among the thorns? (the thorns grew up and choked them)

What happened to the seeds that fell on good soil? (they brought forth grain)

What happens to anyone who hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it? (the evil one comes and snatches away what is sown in the heart—like the seed on the path)

What happens to anyone who hears the word of the kingdom and immediately receives it with joy but who has no root? (when trouble or persecution arises, the person immediately falls away)

What happens to anyone who hears the word of the kingdom but the cares of the world and the lure of wealth choke the word? (it yields nothing)

What happens to anyone who hears the word of the kingdom and understands it, like the good soil? (it bears fruit and yields much more)

Making Connections

Jesus spoke from a boat. What is the most unique venue you've been a part of for a speaker or presentation? What do you remember about the venue? What do you remember about the presentation? How much of the two are intertwined for you?

What is the most pathetic and sickly flower/plant/crop you have ever seen? What made it so?

What is the prettiest flower/plant/crop you have ever seen? What made it so?

How do you describe someone who is like the seed that fell on the path and the birds came and ate the seed?

How do you describe someone who is like the seed that fell on rocky ground, that sprang up quickly, but had no root structure?

How do you describe someone who is like the seed that fell in the week?

How do you describe someone who is like the seed that fell on fertile soil?

Making Connections *continued*

Our Lesson Writer says, “Jesus told the story with no further explanation other than a warning: “Let anyone with ears listen!” (v. 9).” What does that mean to you?

When was the last time you taught something or explained something using a parable and metaphor? What were you trying to convey? Who was your audience/ What was the result of that approach to teaching?

Do you think parables are a legitimate way of teaching something important, especially deep theological ideas? Why do you say that?

As you read this parable, how much of the different places where the seeds fell can you relate to in your own faith journey? How true is this parable in your own experience?

As you think about the seed, God’s word, in your life right now, what do you need to do to make your soil more fertile and ready to accept the seed that God is planting?

So What?

Ask everyone to gather back in their small groups from the beginning of the lesson. Share with your group that our Lesson Writer explains that few chose to follow Jesus and the path of discipleship he offered. Even decades later, after his faithful followers had been spreading the gospel, the converts were few.

“Jesus—and the author of Matthew—used the parable in part to reassure faithful followers that their work was not in vain as they sowed the seed of the gospel. They would not always get a hoped-for response.”

How would you take this parable and make it understandable and applicable to hearers today?

What metaphor would you use that would be understood by a larger audience?

How would you get that message out to others?

What truth do you want to share from this ancient parable?

Give each group time to think and talk. Then, ask each group to share their ideas with the larger group. Spend time talking about the truths we know and the challenges we face when it comes to sharing our faith stories.

Encourage your group to continue to share and talk, knowing that seeds are going to fall where they fall.

The Challenge

This week, make it a point to share your faith story and the truth of the gospel with someone else. Ask God to provide the right time and place and words for your conversation to land on fertile soil.

Prayer

Loving God, we know that all we can do is plant the seeds and trust that you can work in the lives of those we touch. You've given us the words. You've given us the truth. Help us to find the fertile soil in which to plant our seeds. Amen.

Digging Deeper

by Tony Cartledge

Digging Deeper is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartledge, printed in *Nurturing Faith Journal*. Watch for the “shovel” icon in the THE BIBLE LESSON, and then reference that item in this Digging Deeper resource. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Nurturing Faith Journal* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Nurturing Faith Journal* so they can prepare before the lesson.

The text—The Revised Common Lectionary skips over vv. 10-17, in which Jesus was asked to explain why he taught in parables, focusing on the parable and its interpretation alone. Nevertheless, we will give some attention to those verses, as they help us to understand Jesus’ purpose and strategy in utilizing parables for teaching.

Structure—Matthew 13:1-52 comprises the third of five major teaching discourses apparent in the structure of Matthew. Though Jesus had used analogies before, this is the first time the author uses the word “parable” to describe Jesus’ teaching, and the chapter is a collection of parables having to do with the kingdom, or dominion, of God.

Scholars are divided over whether the chapter contains seven or eight parables, depending on whether v. 52 is regarded as a parable: “And he said to them, ‘Therefore every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like the master of a household who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old.’” The verse clearly contains an analogy, but some see it as a comment on scribes trained for the kingdom of heaven as opposed to being about the kingdom itself.

Here is a representative outline of the structure, drawn from Donald A. Hagner in the Word Biblical Commentary:

- I. The Parable of the Soils (13:1–9)
 - The Purpose of Parables (13:10–17)
 - The Explanation of the Parable of the Soils (13:18–23)
- II. The Parable of the Wheat and the Weeds (13:24–30)
- III. The Parable of the Mustard Seed (13:31–32)
- IV. The Parable of the Leavened Loaves (13:33)
 - Further Comment on the Reason for the Parables (13:34–35)
 - The Explanation of the Parable of the Wheat and the Weeds (13:36–43)
- V. The Parable of the Hidden Treasure (13:44)
- VI. The Parable of the Pearl (13:45–46)
- VII. The Parable of the Dragnet (and explanation) (13:47–50)
 - Concluding Comment on the Scribe Trained for the Kingdom (13:51–52)

Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1–13*, vol. 33A of Word Biblical Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993), 362.

Sow first, plow later—How do we know that ancient farmers may have sown seed before plowing? We find suggestions in several ancient writings.

The apocryphal Jewish book of Jubilees speaks of Mastemah, a mean-spirited angel who tests and tempts humans, as robbing people of their labors in this way: “And the prince

Digging Deeper *continued*

Mastêmâ sent ravens and birds to devour the seed which was sown in the land, in order to destroy the land, and rob the children of men of their labours. Before they could plough in the seed, the ravens picked (it) from the surface of the ground” (From R. H. Charles, *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1913]).

In the Mishnah, tractate Shabbat 7:2 lists 39 categories of labor, beginning with “sowing, plowing, reaping, binding sheaves, winnowing, selecting, grinding, sifting, kneading....” Note that the elements of producing grain and bread making are listed in order, with sowing listed first, before plowing.

Some farmers were apparently more thorough. In the Talmud, b. Shabbat 73b, a commentary on t. Shabbat 7:2, speaks of a practice in which farmers plowed twice, once before sowing and once after.

The secret life of parables—Douglas R. A. Hare explains the role of parables in this way: “The secrets of the kingdom . . . are not *taught* but *revealed*. They are presented in the veiled speech of parables to the crowds who are unable to appropriate them and are explained to the disciples who, because of their commitment to following Jesus, are capable of comprehension” (Douglas R. A. Hare, *Matthew, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*. Accordance electronic ed. [Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1993], 149).

The Hardest Question

by Tony Cartledge

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Could the seeds reflect the *Shema*?

Swedish New Testament scholar Birger Gerhardsson has argued that the parable of the sower and the soils intentionally reflects the *Shema*, the Old Testament commandment found in Deuteronomy 6:4-9 (“The Parable of the Sower and Its Interpretation,” *New Testament Studies* 14:2 [1967-68], 165-193).

The *shema* begins: “Hear, O Israel: The LORD is our God, the LORD alone. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart” (Deut. 6:4-5).

Faithful Jews of Jesus’ day repeated the *shema* twice each day in keeping with the command to recite them “when you lie down and when you rise” (Deut. 6:6-7), and many Jewish people maintain the practice.

Gerhardsson suggested that the *shema* was so well known that Jesus may have intentionally alluded to it in the parable. First, the rejection of the seed by the hard ground contradicted the command to love God with all of one’s heart. Similarly, the shallow ground that did not sustain growth in times of persecution or trouble could indicate an unwillingness to love God with all the soul. Finally, the weed-filled soil that choked out the good seed with worldly cares and selfish attitudes pointed to a failure to love God with all of one’s might.

The *shema* was popularly recited as the greatest of all commandments in the first century, as reflected in Jesus’ conversation with the curious lawyer. That, along with the gospels’ interest in portraying Jesus as the fulfillment of the Old Testament, strengthens the proposed connection. By Jesus’ day, however, Jews had become so Hellenized that it was popular to add the word “mind” to the sequence of heart, soul, and might (Mark 12:30, Luke 10:27), or to substitute it for “might” (Matt. 22:37). This makes the possible comparison less neat, but there still may be value in seeing the parable of the sower and the soils as a call for people to pledge love and loyalty to God through Christ as they had once done through the Deuteronomic covenant.