**Live in Community**



Small Group Study

**Volume Overview**

**Stand Firm**

Put on every piece of God’s armor so you will be able to resist the enemy in the time of evil. Then after the battle you will still be standing firm. ([Ephesians 6:13](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.Eph6.13))

*The world thinks of power as action. Powerful people are able to take control, able to change things. But Jesus blessed the meek, the hungry, and the poor. There is a power this world overlooks. There is power in standing firm in faith. Christians have long stood their ground, not to gain this world’s power but as witnesses to a better world to come. So we stand strong, committed, and bear witness to the world.*

**Session Overview**

**Grow Deeper**

**Biblical Encounter:** The Parable of the Sower ([Mark 4:1–20](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.Mk4.1-20))

**Outcome:** Let God’s Word take root in your life and produce growth regardless of life’s challenges.

*In this session, we’ll look at a parable Jesus shared about a farmer who scattered seeds that fell on different types of soil. Like all parables, His story had a deeper meaning. Whether you’ve ever planted seeds or not, His parable will cause you to think deeply about the “soil” of your own life and how you can better receive the “seeds” of God’s Word. Allowing God’s Word to take deep root in your life, even when circumstances are difficult or when obstacles get in the way, can yield so much growth and fruit!*

|  |
| --- |
| First time leading *Live* for Adults? Check out the [Facilitator Guide](https://0b769b0ed3569ef9d18b-f88d8272f61086866d50d048b43ef630.ssl.cf2.rackcdn.com/sites/biblengagementproject/Listen_Facilitator_Guide.pdf). |

To access session content and videos from a computer, visit: [BibleEngagementProject.com/downloads](https://bibleengagementproject.com/downloads)

**Engage**

|  |
| --- |
| **QUESTION**  Have you ever tried to grow anything (vegetables, a plant, flowers, etc.)? If so, how did it go? |

Today, the distance between what we eat and where it came from is usually quite significant. Unless you live on a farm or grow a large garden, you might not be aware of the hard work, patience, and time it takes to plant, grow food, harvest it, and prepare it for selling.

We don’t often get our hands dirty with the soil of the earth unless we have a gardening hobby. But farmers whose livelihoods depend on successful crops need a full understanding of seeds, soil preparation, weather patterns and seasons, pesticides, farm equipment, and more, in order to provide food for those of us who don’t have that knowledge.

In Jesus’ day, many people were much less separated from the processes of raising crops than people today are. A majority of the people grew their own food and understood farming techniques and the whole process from farm to table. That’s probably why Jesus chose planting seeds to illustrate His points.

Jesus loved to speak to people on their level. He was brilliant at making spiritual connections to their everyday lives. Keep that in mind as you read today’s passage and consider what His words might have meant to the crowds in His day.

**Watch**

As we watch this video, think about your answer to this question: With so many distractions in life, how do you keep growing deeper in your relationship with Jesus?



|  |
| --- |
| **QUESTION**  With so many distractions in life, how do you keep growing deeper in your relationship with Jesus? |

**Consider What the Bible Says**

In [Mark 4](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.Mk4), Jesus was already established in His teaching and healing ministry. He had performed some signs and wonders, and people were curious to meet Him and listen to what He had to say. Because Jesus attracted such large crowds, He would sometimes get into a boat and push away from the shore so more people could see and hear Him teaching. This was the method of teaching Jesus used when He shared the Parable of the Farmer Scattering Seed.

Jesus loved to use parables, stories about common things that illustrated spiritual points He wanted to make. Jesus knew the importance of capturing the attention of the crowds with things they could relate to from their everyday life. Through these stories, people could better understand different principles He was teaching them, and the crowds were captivated.

**Jesus Shared a Parable about a Farmer**

Read [Mark 4:1–9](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.Mk4.1-9).

The crowds were likely anxious to hear what Jesus would share next. They would have been able to relate to this farming method as well as the frustration of the farmer when his seed didn’t produce.

Jesus’ reasons for teaching in parables could have included getting people to think and ask questions about the deeper meaning. Perhaps He was hoping that they would remember His stories and meditate on them. It’s also possible that Jesus shared parables and concealed the deeper meaning to keep the religious leaders from understanding His lessons. Then they couldn't accuse Him of false teaching.

|  |
| --- |
| **QUESTION**  Jesus was not a farmer that we know of. How do you think it made farmers and others who grew their own food feel to know that this religious Teacher was willing to explain things in terms they understood? |

|  |
| --- |
| **QUESTION**  Do you think most people in the crowd understood the spiritual points Jesus was trying to make through this parable? Why or why not? |

**Jesus’ Disciples Asked about the Meaning**

Read [Mark 4:10–13](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.Mk4.10-13).

When the disciples asked about the meaning of the parable, Jesus responded in an interesting way. He quoted from a passage in Isaiah in the Old Testament ([Isaiah 6:9–10](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.Is6.9-10)). Isaiah had prophesied that people wouldn’t understand what Jesus would have to say. This Isaiah passage speaks of people who were unable to learn the truth because they didn’t believe.

Jesus saw this same unbelief in the crowds He taught. They wanted to be entertained rather than to seek deeper understanding and open their hearts to change. He also seemed to be a little frustrated that His disciples didn’t understand this parable. Jesus challenged His disciples to do the hard work of seeking out the true meaning of what He shared.

|  |
| --- |
| **QUESTION**  After Jesus shared this parable, how did the disciples’ response compare to that of the crowd? |

|  |
| --- |
| **QUESTION**  What should be our response when we don’t understand what God is telling us today? |

**Jesus Explained the Parable**

Read [Mark 4:14–20](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.Mk4.14-20).

Jesus then no longer spoke in “code,” but fully explained this parable to His disciples. At least they were bringing their questions to the right Person! He explained that the parable focused on sharing God’s Word. It takes more than just the transmission of His message for it to take root. Each person must prepare their life to receive it and thrive. Jesus was looking for hearts that were prepared to be the type of soil where His Word could take root and produce fruit.

|  |
| --- |
| **QUESTION**  Why do you think the disciples had to seek Jesus out later to explain the parable? |

|  |
| --- |
| **QUESTION**  Do you think Jesus was waiting for them to ask? Why or why not? |

|  |
| --- |
| **QUESTION**  Compare Jesus’ explanations of the four types of soil. Can you relate to each type of soil at some point in your spiritual journey? |

**Did You Know?**

*During biblical times, farming was an important and large part of day-to-day life. Of the three main Jewish yearly festivals when Israelites were required to worship at the temple in Jerusalem, two were celebrations of harvest. The Feast of Tabernacles, known as Sukkot, celebrates the autumn harvest. The Feast of Weeks, known as Shava’ot or Pentecost, celebrates the spring wheat harvest.*

**Reflect**

**Let God’s Word take root in your life and produce growth regardless of life’s challenges.**

As you dive deeper into Scripture, ask the Holy Spirit to help you understand how you can apply His principles to your life. Ask yourself, *“What kind of soil am I when I hear God’s Word? Do I hear and read the Bible and then forget it immediately? When challenges come, does my faith wilt away? Do the cares of the world choke out what God is trying to do in my life? Or am I actively creating an environment in my life for His Word to take root, grow, and multiply by truly applying it?”*

Life will throw many things at you! You will find excuses, challenges, and difficult circumstances that make it hard to follow God’s Word and apply His principles to your life. Being aware of these difficulties can help you to resolve to be like the good soil. Nourish your soil by actively hearing and applying God’s truth, not allowing challenges to knock you off course. Let His Word take root, grow, and multiply to help you in your journey to know God better.

**Listen to God**

Let’s pause and listen to what God might want to say to us about what we have read and shared. Be silent for a few moments and reflect on the following questions. Respond to the one that most resonates with what God is saying to you now. Then complete the others during Day 1 of your devotion time this week.

**Personal Reflection Questions**

*Record your answers to the following questions in the space provided or in your personal journal.*

|  |
| --- |
| **QUESTION**  Currently, what is your greatest challenge in seeking to grow in your understanding of God’s Word? What seems to knock you off course at times? |

|  |
| --- |
| **QUESTION**  How are you fertilizing the “good soil” in your life? What are you doing consistently that’s working well as you allow God’s Word to take root and grow? |

|  |
| --- |
| **QUESTION**  What soil in this parable most accurately describes your life right now? What needs to change in order for God’s Word to take deeper root in you? |

**Activate**

Regardless of whether farming is your thing or not, we can learn much from Jesus’ parable. God wants His Word to take root in the rich, nourishing soil of your heart, a heart that is humble, curious, receptive, and eager to learn and grow. Distractions and challenges will come your way, but having a desire and hunger for God’s Word will allow it to take root and flourish.

**Challenge**

Being hungry for God’s Word can take many forms, including personal Bible reading, participating in small group Bible studies, reading Bible-based devotionals, and listening to sermons and Bible-based podcast studies.

This week, challenge yourself to take in more of God’s Word than you ever have before. Pray before you read and listen to what the Word is telling you. Study with a friend, and ask the Holy Spirit to shine His light on areas where you need to grow. Ask Him to give you greater understanding and to help you be more receptive to His heart-shaping work in your life.

**Prayer Requests**

|  |
| --- |
| Note any requests from the group and pray together. Also remember to pray for them during the week. |

We always want to be open to God’s Spirit with each of us having a hungry heart to learn from Him. Personal devotions are provided here as an extension of this discussion.

**Live on Your Own**

|  |
| --- |
| *Before you begin each devotion, pray and ask God to speak to you through His Word. Record your answers to the following questions in the space provided or in your personal journal.* |

**Day 1: The Parable of the Sower**

Read [Mark 4:1–20](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.Mk4.1-20).

Look back over Live in Community and complete your responses to the Personal Reflection Questions. Plan how to complete the Activate component if you haven’t already done so. If time permits, reread the Scripture too.

|  |
| --- |
| **QUESTION**  What is God speaking to you regarding how to allow His Word to take root in your life and grow, no matter what? |

**Live on Your Own**

**Day 2: A Hungry Heart**

Read [Psalm 63:1–8](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.Ps63.1-8).

Part of being “good soil” is having a hungry heart, a desire to know God more. We need to recognize how much we need Him and long for His presence in our life. Only God can truly satisfy our needs and give us the love and purpose we desire.

If your desire to understand His Word more does not feel as strong as you’d like, start by asking God to increase your hunger for Him.

|  |
| --- |
| **QUESTION**  What needs to change in your life to allow more room for God? |

|  |
| --- |
| **QUESTION**  Think of someone in your life whose deep relationship with God inspires you. What can you ask that person about their walk with God that might help you in your desire to grow? |

**Live on Your Own**

**Day 3: Lighting the Way**

Read [Psalm 119:105–112](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.Ps119.105-112).

Obeying God’s instructions is the delight of the author of this psalm! He calls God’s Word “a lamp to guide my feet.” We need a light to guide us through the darkness when we are lost or unsure of our way. This can easily happen in life—we can lose our purpose or put our hope in the wrong things. God’s Word is the answer; it is a treasure we can seek and delight in. When we obey what it says, our path becomes clearer, and we can live in confidence that we are following the One who knows the way.

|  |
| --- |
| **QUESTION**  In what ways is the Bible your instruction guide for life? |

|  |
| --- |
| **QUESTION**  How can you grow in your delight in God’s Word? What might help you better understand it? |

**Live on Your Own**

**Day 4: When Challenges Come**

Read [1 Peter 1:6–9](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.1Pe1.6-9).

In the Parable of the Sower, Jesus told us that some of the seed took root, but the roots were not deep enough to survive when problems and challenges came.

In this passage, we are challenged by Peter, one of Jesus’ disciples, to look at our trials as a way of testing and purifying our faith. If our faith can remain strong even when challenges arise in our life, we will have joy and great rewards. We are sure that difficult times will come, but having this mindset of genuine faith and trust will help us look to Christ to help us through anything we face. We need more of His Word to give us this mindset. Being “good soil” includes persevering when these difficulties come, obeying God’s Word, and allowing God to grow wonderful fruit within us that will multiply!

|  |
| --- |
| **QUESTION**  Why do you think trials and challenges help purify and solidify our faith? |

|  |
| --- |
| **QUESTION**  What difficulties in your life right now are making it challenging to stay strong in your faith? According to this passage, what can help you have the right mindset to keep growing? |

**Live on Your Own**

**Day 5: Multiply!**

Read [John 12:20–26](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.Jn12.20-26).

This is another passage of Scripture that uses the language of seeds and soil, but Jesus had a slightly different message that He was communicating here. He said a seed had to be planted and then die in order to produce more seeds. The seed Jesus is talking about here is the sacrifice of His own life so that more people could receive life through Him.

When we allow our faith to grow deeper even in the midst of challenges, it also means that we learn to die to our self, our own will, and our desires. Jesus can multiply our life and produce a greater harvest from just this one “seed” if we’re willing to lay our life down for Him. It’s this eternal perspective of living for Christ that brings such fruit and so much joy!

|  |
| --- |
| **QUESTION**  Can you think of someone you know who has multiplied their life in this way (dying to self, living for Christ, and producing a harvest)? When you look at their life, what about the way they live stands out to you? |

|  |
| --- |
| **QUESTION**  What do you need to die to today in order to allow yourself to be planted and produce a harvest that is greater than what you can do alone? |