**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.

*Today, we’re taking a deeper look at a story Jesus told about a farmer planting seeds. Jesus often told parables that used everyday situations like this to teach a larger lesson about the kingdom of God. In this story, Jesus said that the soil the seeds were planted in represented different types of people hearing God’s Word. We can fail to embrace God’s truth when we give in to the enemy, fail to develop a deep relationship with God, or hold to the desires of this world. Instead, we need to let the Bible take root in our life so that we can grow spiritually. The question is, are our hearts good soil so God’s Word can take root and grow?*

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| ***You Will Need*** *•* ***Group Activity Page****, one per team* *•* ***Group Activity Page Answer Sheet*** *• Pencils or pens, one per team* *• Smartphone or timer* *• Small prizes for the winning team members****Getting Ready*** *• Print copies of the* ***Group Activity Page****, one per team.* *• Print a copy of the* ***Group Activity Page Answer Sheet*** *as needed.* • ***First time leading* Live *for Youth? Look here for 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**

**Welcome**

*Take this time to welcome everyone, introduce new students, learn names, and thank everyone for coming. Your friendliness here can create a comfort level that encourages student participation later.*

**Opening Prayer**

*Prayer thoughts: Before you pray, ask students if they have any specific requests. Then have students pray for the requests that were mentioned. Close this time by asking God to speak to each person in the group and asking Him that today’s discussion would draw everyone closer to Him.*

**Introduction**

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| **QUESTION**Have you ever eaten vegetables and fruit that came directly out of someone’s garden? |

Whether you’ve grown a garden before or not, you probably know that all plants need certain things to grow. Without proper sunlight, water, and soil, seeds just won’t grow. In today’s Bible story, Jesus used seeds and soil to make a point. Like a healthy plant, our faith in God needs certain conditions in order to grow really deep roots and develop well. Today we’ll see that, sometimes, the Word of God doesn’t take root in someone’s life because it isn’t in the right environment.

**Group Activity**

**Garden Guessing Game**

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| ***You Will Need*** *•* ***Group Activity Page****, one per team* *•* ***Group Activity Page Answer Sheet*** *• Pencils or pens, one per team* *• Smartphone or timer* *• Small prizes for the winning team members****Getting Ready*** *• Print copies of the* ***Group Activity Page****, one per team.* *• Print a copy of the* ***Group Activity Page Answer Sheet*** *as needed.* |

Since we’ll be talking about seeds today, I thought it would be fun to see how much we know about gardening. We’ll divide into teams, and each team will get a page full of pictures of random seeds. You’ll have three minutes to match what plant each seed will grow to be and write it on your team’s page. The seeds could be any fruit, vegetable, tree, grain, or weed. Your page shows all the possible answers. The team that identifies the most seeds correctly will win a small prize.

• *Divide group into teams of 4 or 5, or 2 or 3 for smaller groups.*

• *Distribute a copy of the* ***Group Activity Page*** *and a pencil to each team. Then start the timer for three minutes.*

• *When time is up, tally each team’s correct guesses.*

• *Celebrate the winners, awarding a small prize to each member of the winning team.*

Good job! Each seed you looked at has the potential to grow and mature into a well-developed plant. But that will only happen in the right environment. Without the correct soil, nutrients, water, and sunlight, each seed could die before it ever grows roots.

Today we’ll look at how the same is true with God’s Word. When the Bible is planted in our life, it has the potential to grow into a healthy relationship with God, or what we read and hear could wither up before it ever matures. It all depends on the environment and the soil God’s Word is planted in. Let’s watch the video and get started.

**Watch**

**Consider What the Bible Says**

*Ensure each student has access to a Bible, preferably the same version.*

As Jesus’ ministry grew and He gained popularity, the crowds following Him grew larger and larger. On this day, the crowd was so large that Jesus wanted an alternative to standing on land. Instead, He taught from a boat while the crowd listened from the shore.

Jesus often used everyday objects that were familiar to help people understand spiritual ideas and what it meant to be His follower. In His teaching about a farmer spreading seeds, Jesus challenged the crowd to let God’s Word take deep root in their life. Let’s look at what He taught that day.

**Jesus Told a Parable about Seeds**

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

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| **QUESTION**Why do you think such a large crowd was following Jesus in the first place? What might they have been looking for? |

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| **QUESTION**Why do you think Jesus chose to tell this parable to the crowd? |

The crowds that gathered around Jesus included a mix of people who believed in Him, were just curious, or didn’t like Him at all. So, perhaps Jesus knew that some of the people following Him right then wouldn’t follow Him forever. Some might walk away when Jesus was less popular or when things got difficult. Like the seeds that didn’t take root, there were probably people following that wouldn’t stay.

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| **QUESTION**What are the four types of soil that Jesus listed in the story? |

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| **QUESTION**At this point, what do you think the people in the crowd felt and thought as they listened to Jesus’ story? |

As was sometimes the case when Jesus told parables, the crowd probably felt a bit confused. Why had Jesus told them this story? What did seeds and soil have to do with following Jesus?

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| **QUESTION**Do you think the crowd would have understood this parable better or not as well as most people would if they heard it today? Why? |

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| **QUESTION**What do you think Jesus meant in verse [9](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.Mk4.9) when He said, “Anyone with ears to hear should listen and understand”? |

The fact that Jesus said “anyone” shows us that He wants everyone to hear His truth. For us today, this challenge from Jesus can direct us to reading the Bible in order to grow. Anyone who wants to listen, learn, and grow can do it. Right now, as we’re digging into this story, we’re following His instructions!

**Did You Know?**

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| 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. |

**Jesus’ Disciples Were Confused by This Parable**

Read [Mark 4:10–12](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.Mk4.10-12).

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| **QUESTION**Does it surprise you that Jesus’ disciples were confused by this story? Why or why not? |

Thankfully for those of us reading these verses, the disciples didn’t stay confused. Instead, they decided to ask Jesus what He meant after the crowd was gone. And because they asked for an explanation, we get one, too.

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| **QUESTION**In school, when someone is confused by something a teacher says, are they more likely to ask about it while others are listening, ask later, or just stay confused? |

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| **QUESTION**Have you ever been confused by something you’ve read in God’s Word? If so, what did you do about it? |

It’s interesting that Jesus chose to speak in parables even though some people were confused by them. Jesus knew parables like this might help more people remember the truths He shared. After all, they didn’t have a personal copy of the Bible or the Internet to look things up later. So, telling a story like this might help God’s truth stick in their mind, and they could think about it later.

Sometimes Jesus’ parables revealed the heart of those hearing them. Those whose heart was unwilling to listen and learn wouldn’t try to understand Jesus. Thankfully, we don’t have to wonder what Jesus meant with this story because His disciples asked Him to explain it. Let’s look into the meaning of the parable and how it relates to our life today.

**Jesus Explained the Parable**

Read [Mark 4:13–20](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.Mk4.13-20).

The seeds represented God’s Word being sown into the lives of people. This is exactly what Jesus did going from town to town. And just like the seeds in the parable, His words were received in a variety of ways.

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| **QUESTION**What did the seeds that fell on the footpath represent? |

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| **QUESTION**According to verse [17](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.Mk4.17), when did the seeds on the rocky soil die or fall away? |

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| **QUESTION**How do you imagine the disciples responded when Jesus explained the parable to them? |

The disciples learned that this was much more than just a story about a farmer. It was a story about the kingdom of God with meaning packed into every detail. Jesus wanted His disciples to understand the parable, but He didn’t want it to stop there. He wanted them to apply it to their own life.

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| **QUESTION**Have you witnessed people in your life who have received God and His Word with joy but fall away later? What typically causes people to move away from their faith in God? |

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| **QUESTION**What are some examples of the “worries of this life” that might crowd out God’s Word in our life today? |

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| **QUESTION**What happened to the seeds that fell on good soil? |

Even though we live in a different world with different challenges, the truth of this story remains the same for us. We can apply this parable by looking at the soil of our own heart. We can consider what happens to God’s Word in our life.

**Applying the Parable**

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| **QUESTION**What are some different ways that God’s Word can be planted in people’s lives today? |

Make no mistake: God’s mission hasn’t changed. He still wants everyone to be saved and to believe in Him. He still wants to plant His Word in our life today. Reading the Bible on our own or with others, listening to sermons, and listening for the Holy Spirit to speak to our heart are just a few ways the seed of God’s Word can be sown in our life. But like the parable says, how we respond to His Word makes all the difference.

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| **QUESTION**Which type of soil do you think is most common in people today? |

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| **QUESTION**Can you think of someone in your life who is an example of good soil that produces a harvest? |

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| **QUESTION**What does it look like to put down roots in order to grow your faith? |

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| **QUESTION**How does this parable challenge you to change things in your spiritual life? |

**Reflect**

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

What a challenging parable! We should all take a moment to examine the soil of our heart and the root system of our faith. Have you allowed Satan to steal God’s Word from your heart or to weaken you? Have problems or persecution gotten the best of you? Have you allowed the worries of life, the lure of wealth, or the desire for worldly things to keep your relationship with God from maturing and producing good things?

If the answer to any of those questions is yes, then you must decide how to respond. Like Jesus asked the crowd, will we have ears to hear and understand what God is saying to us? Or will we turn our back, going about our daily life and ignoring God’s voice? If we want to stand firm and stay committed to Jesus, it’s time to let His Word put down deeper roots in our life.

**Listen to God**

Let’s take time to consider how our life demonstrates a real trust in the Bible. These questions are meant to serve as a conversation between you and God. Sharing your responses with the group is completely voluntary.

• *Pause for a few moments of silent reflection after reading the questions. Then ask students if they want to share. Sharing your personal response may also be helpful to the students.*

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| **QUESTION**Which type of soil best describes you today? |

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| **QUESTION**Is the Holy Spirit telling you that the soil in your own life needs work? |

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| **QUESTION**What needs to change in your life to have better soil? |

**Activate**

We want to be people who grow in our faith. But it can be difficult to know if our heart is good soil. That’s why God has given us trusted friends, leaders, and the Holy Spirit to help us grow. Choose one other person in the group and share what type of soil describes you and what step you plan to take to have a more fruitful soil. Invite them to check with you during the week to see how you are doing.

**Conclusion**

Sometimes, Jesus’ teachings are challenging, and they push us to change things about our life that are keeping us from growing closer to Him. Whenever the Holy Spirit uses them to challenge us, we can be sure that it’s for our good. He doesn’t just want us to feel guilty or ashamed. He wants us to grow, flourish, and thrive in our relationship with Him.

In the Bible story today, remember how the seed that fell on good soil produced a good crop? When we listen to and obey God’s Word, we will produce a harvest in our own life as well as encourage growth in others. Let’s commit to being people who put down roots and produce a harvest for God’s kingdom.

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| **Salvation Opportunity***Include this if you think there may be some in the group who do not have a personal relationship with Jesus.*Maybe you followed along today and realized that your heart hasn’t been the best soil for faith in God. It’s never too late to invite Jesus to change that in your life. Jesus already finished the work when He died on the Cross and rose from the dead. He invites everyone into a new, flourishing life with Him.**Is anyone here that we can pray for who doesn’t have a relationship with Jesus or wants to renew their relationship with Him?***Take a moment to acknowledge those who respond, and thank them for their desire to make things right between themselves and God. Pray with them as you close in prayer or after the group time is over. Following group time, talk more about where they are in their walk with God and how you might be able to help.* |

**Prayer**

Heavenly Father, thank You for Your Word and how it challenges us to be more like You. We want to be people who let Your Word grow down deep into our heart. Help us to stay committed to You, no matter what challenges we face. Teach us to live that kind of life. In Jesus’ name, we pray. Amen.

**Dismissal**

Remember, there’s a Bible Engagement Project app that will help you develop better soil. Take time this week to engage with God’s Word in the devotions. See you next time!