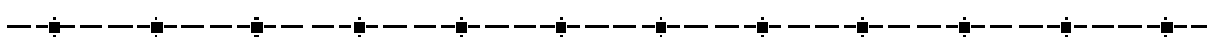


GOD'S BIG PLAN

What Kind of Soil are You? Matthew 13:1-23

Supporting Scriptures: Mark 4:1-25; Luke 8:4-18



Lesson Goals:
To realize the need to approach God with an honest heart.
To realize that church attendance is not sufficient for salvation.
To realize that a true relationship with God bears fruit.

Scripture Memory I am the vine. You are the branches. If anyone remains joined to me, and I to him, he will bear a lot of fruit. You can't do anything without me. John 15:5 (NirV)

NOTE: Familiarize yourself with this story. Don't read it. Tell it as a STORY. To reinforce that these ideas are not your own, hold your Bible as you tell the story.

The Lesson: Let's review what we have learned so far. (Review the previous stories, focusing on the ones that specifically point to Christ's birth. Encourage more and more students to share.)

What did we learn about the devil last week? He had control of a man who lived in tombs. He recognized Jesus. So, is the devil more powerful than God? (No.) Is he equally as powerful? (No.) The devil is not as powerful as God. The devil was created by God as an angel. The devil has to have permission from God to do things. So, does that mean that I can do whatever I want and not worry about the little ol' devil? (No.) The devil is God's enemy and ours. He roams around looking for someone to chew up. We should not even give the devil an opportunity in our lives. But how can we know? Let's look at what happened next in God's big plan!

Jesus traveled from village to village. His twelve disciples went with Him, but others followed, too. Some of the others were women. One was named Mary Magdalene. Another was named Joanna and she worked in King Herod's house. They had both been healed from demons, just like the man who lived in the tombs. These women were so grateful for what Jesus had done for them that they gave their own money to help support Jesus and His disciples.

READ: Matthew 13:2-3a (Hold your Bible open throughout the story.)

Jesus taught by telling stories. The story He told this day was about a farmer. Many of the people listening to Jesus were farmers. They would understand the things He said. And so, His story was this . . .

Listen to this! A farmer went out to his field to plant seed. As he threw the seed out, it scattered. Some of the seed fell on a path where the ground was hard. People walked on it and birds came to eat it up. Some seed fell on the rocky ground. There wasn't much soil there and the plants grew up really fast. But when the sun rose, it burned the plants. They dried up because they didn't have roots or water. Other seed fell in the thorns. The plants grew, but the thorns grew more. The thorns grew so much that they choked the plants and crowded them out. The plants didn't produce the way they should have. Still other seed fell on good soil, soil that was soft. The seeds in this soil grew up and flourished. They produced up to 100 times what was planted. Everyone who has ears should listen!

What a simple story. That's what farmers do - they plant seeds. But did Jesus just want to explain gardening? Not quite. Jesus was trying to teach a lesson by telling this story but His disciples didn't understand what Jesus was trying to say. So, Jesus explained.

Here is what the story means. The seed the farmer plants is God's wonderful message. God's message is to be shared with everyone. The message is the same, but the responses to God's message are different, just like the different soils. So, what is the seed that falls on the path like? God's word is shared, and heard, but not understood. These people have hearts like the hard ground that isn't ready to receive the seed. The words hit their ears, but they aren't ready to accept God's word for themselves. By not being ready to listen to and accept God's word, the devil can come and take away what was heard. He does this so they won't believe in God. If they hear but don't accept, they cannot be saved.

What is the seed scattered on the rocky soil like? The people hear God's message and are excited about hearing it. They listen, and are glad to, but they don't do anything with what they have heard. They don't let God's word change them or grow in them and almost as quickly as they heard, they turn away. They may appear to have accepted, but just like the seed that has no root, they soon fall away because there is no relationship with God.

And what is the seed growing up in the thorns like? These people also hear the message. But life's worries come to them. They get a little wealth and all of its false promises. They also long for other things. All of these things crowd out the message in their life and no fruit is produced; they never reach full growth. Things and experiences become more important to them than God. What looked like a relationship with God is soon choked out. But some of the seed falls on good soil. And what is the seed scattered on good soil like? These people have honest hearts, good hearts. They hear the message like everyone else, but the difference is that these people understand and accept the message. They keep it in their hearts. They grow from it and others grow as well. They mature and tell others who do the same. And Jesus reminded them, "Everyone who has ears should listen!"

Review:

Let's review what you have learned. Who would like to retell the story? (Ask your group if anything was left out or told inaccurately.) Would anyone else like to retell the story?

How about you? Which soil are you? Are you the pathway or sidewalk? Have you heard God's word without really listening? Have you walked away and not cared what God says? Or are you the rocky soil? You have heard God's word, too, but when you walked away, you forgot what it was that you heard. Or maybe you are the thorny ground. If you are, you worry more about food and clothes and money than you care about God. Things are more important to you. If you are any of these, stop now, take Jesus' advice and listen to what He has to say. God wants a relationship with you. Just saying you're a follower isn't enough. Just going to church isn't enough. God wants you! If you truly want to follow Him, be good soil.

And if you are good soil, your heart is honest and good. You have heard God's word and you have accepted it. But even more than that, you are telling others. You realize that you have the best news anyone could ever hear, and now, instead of just being good soil that seed can fall onto and grow, you are scattering the seed of God's good news for others to hear and accept. Keep up the good work!

Planning for Next Week
Lesson 36 • Jesus Has Power Over His Creation
Matthew 14: 13-33

PRESCHOOL LESSON

SING: “The B-I-B-L-E”

SHARE: Jesus taught by telling stories. He told a story about a farmer. “Listen to this!” Jesus said. “A farmer went out to his field to plant seed. As he threw the seed out, it went everywhere. Some of the seed fell on a path where the ground was hard. People walked on it and birds came to eat it up. Some seed fell on the rocky ground. There wasn’t much soil there and the plants grew up really fast. But when the sun came up, it burned the plants. They dried up because they didn’t have roots or water. Other seed fell in the thorns. The plants grew, but the thorns grew more. The thorns grew so much that they choked the plants and crowded them out. The plants didn’t produce the way they should have. Still other seed fell on good soil; soil that was soft. The seeds in this soil grew. Everyone should listen!” Jesus said.

Jesus explained the story. “The seed,” He said, “is God’s wonderful message.” So, what is the seed that falls on the path like? People hear God’s word, but don’t understand. They have hearts like the hard ground that isn’t ready to receive the seed. The words go in one ear and out of the other. By not being ready to listen to and accept God’s word, the devil can come and take away what was heard. He does this so they won’t believe in God.

What is the seed scattered on the rocky soil like? The people hear God’s message and are excited about hearing it. But they don’t do anything with what they have heard. They don’t let God’s word change them or grow in them and they turn away from God.

And what is the seed growing up in the thorns like? These people also hear the message, but they worry about and run after a lot of things. They get a little money and they also want other things. Things and experiences become more important to them than God.

But some of the seed falls on good soil. And what is the seed scattered on good soil like? They hear the message like everyone else, but the difference is that these people understand and accept it. They grow from it and they tell others. God wants us to listen when people tell us about Him. After we listen, we should accept what He says and we should follow Him and be obedient. We should also tell other people what we have learned, then they will want to follow Jesus, too.

PRAY: Thank you, God, for sharing your message with me.

LEARNING ACTIVITIES

- **Memory Verse Activity** - On four inch purple circles, print a word each from the memory verse. Practice the verse as you encourage your students to form a bunch of grapes from their purple circle "grapes."
- **Plant seeds.** In four different cups or pots, prepare the "soil." Cup 1) mud that has been allowed to dry, Cup 2) rocks with a little soil, Cup 3) A cup of weeds, Cup 4) good potting soil. Drop seed or two into each cup, water only cups 3 and 4. As you check the growth in each cup, continue reviewing this week's story.
- **Start a visitation program** with your students. Divide your class into small groups, providing a leader for each one. Lead by example; visit other students who haven't come in a while or new people you haven't met yet. Show them how to share God's wonderful message with others, giving them opportunities as well.
- **Make seed bags.** In Jesus' time, farmers didn't have tractors to plant their seeds. They carried a bag and would take seed from the bag and throw it onto their field. A simple bag can be made from letter sized envelopes and string. As you are working on this craft, review the story with your students.
- **Make origami birds.** Review the description of the hard soil on the path. Talk about our need to be receptive to God's word.
- Give each student a rock with the memory verse reference printed on it.
- Wear overalls and a straw hat while telling the story.
- Bring an extra pair of overalls. Let each student who desires to review the story dress up.
- For older students and adults: In light of the lesson, discuss James 1:22-24 from the Message: "Don't fool yourself into thinking that you are a listener when you are anything but, letting the Word go in one ear and out the other. Act on what you hear! Those who hear and don't act are like those who glance in the mirror, walk away, and two minutes later have no idea who they are, what they look like."