



The Parable of the Sower – Mark 4: 1-20

Icebreaker:

1. Who told you the best stories when you were a kid? What made them memorable?
2. What experience, if any, have you had farming or gardening? Do house or garden plants tend to thrive or die under your care?

Read Mark 4:1-20

Exploring the Word

1. Where does this story take place and how would you describe Jesus' ministry at this time?
2. What are the four types of soil on which these seeds fell?
3. What kind of growth occurred in each soil type?
4. What were some of the external influences that affected the soil?
5. What do you think the "secret of the kingdom of God" is that Jesus was referring to (v 11)?
6. Why do you think Jesus considered Isaiah's words relevant to His teaching about the kingdom of God?
7. What are some obstacles that prevent people from accepting the gospel or growing in their faith (v 15-19)?
8. What are the characteristics of the good soil (v 20)?
9. What would it look like in your life to have soil which is: (a) on the path, (b) rocky, (c) thorny, and (d) good soil?

Applying the Word

1. Which soil best describes your response to the gospel in the past or today? What kind of soil do you desire to have? What kind of crop have you been producing lately? How does one become the good soil?
2. What is the biggest lesson you've learned from this parable? How can you apply this to your life?
3. In your circle of influence, which kind of "soil" do you most often see in people's hearts? What does this parable teach you about success and failure in seeing people put their faith in Christ?
4. What "thorns" have cropped up in your life within the last few years which threaten to "choke out" the fruit of spiritual growth? How can you make sure that the worries of life, the deceitfulness of wealth, and the other desires of the world will not choke the life out of your relationship with Jesus?



My Own Story

If you had to divide up your life from BIRTH to RIGHT NOW into four quarters (like four quarters of a football game), how would you describe each quarter as far as your responsiveness to the spiritual values that Jesus preached and lived? On the line below, fill in the four quarters of your life – starting with CHILDHOOD as your first quarter. Then, for each quarter, jot down one of the four soils:

P = PATH R = ROCKY T = THORNY G = GOOD

CHILDHOOD

First Quarter Second Quarter Third Quarter Fourth Quarter

- a. In the period of your life where you have had the best crop, what was the key contributing factor?
- I was around a spiritual community of people
 - I was daily seeking the will of God
 - I had very few distractions in my life
 - I had my priorities in order
 - I was communicating with God (prayer, the Word) regularly
 - Other _____
- b. In the period of your life where you had the poorest crop, what was the key contributing factor?
- I had a whole lot of problems
 - I didn't know anything about Christ
 - I knew about Christ, but I was taken up with other things
 - I didn't have a supportive community
 - I was living my way
 - Other _____
- c. If you were to take God seriously for 30 days, what would it mean in practical terms?
- plowing up the soil and starting over
 - removing a few rocks
 - doing some serious weeding
 - letting God do His thing
 - Other _____
- d. Which of these “farm trivia” facts encourage you the most as you “sow” the “seed” of the gospel? Why?
- Seed can germinate after being stored for centuries
 - A seed of grain can yield 100 times its weight
 - Spring wheat is planted in the fall
 - The crop yield cannot be determined as the seed is planted



The Parable of the Shepherd and His Flock – John 10:1-18

Icebreaker:

1. When you were a kid, what was your favorite pet? How did this pet respond when it heard your voice?

Read John 10:1-18

Exploring the Word

1. Who did Jesus say was a thief and a robber (v 1)?
2. What kind of relationship do sheep have with their shepherd (v 2-4)?
3. Why don't sheep follow a stranger (v 5)?
4. What did Jesus say He was (v 7)? Why do you think He called Himself that?
5. What did Jesus say would be the result of entering through Him (v 10)?
6. How did Jesus contrast His coming with the coming of a thief (v 10)?
7. Compare and contrast the good shepherd and the hired hand (v 11-13).
8. What type of relationship did Jesus say He had with His sheep (v 14)?
9. What two things did Jesus say He does for His sheep (v 14-15)?
10. What else did Jesus say He has (v 16)?
11. Why did Jesus say the Father loved Him (v 17-18)?
12. What kind of authority did Jesus have and what does that show us about His love for us (v 18)?

Applying the Word

1. In what ways is Jesus like a gate? How has He been a gate in your life?
 2. In what ways is Jesus like a shepherd? How has He been a shepherd in your life?
 3. How are we like sheep?
 4. How can we better hear and discern the Lord's voice from so many others that vie for our attention? What do these other verses say about hearing the Lord's voice (Hebrews 3:7-13, Revelation 3:19-20)? How does this apply to our lives today?
 5. What turning point was significant for you in terms of hearing "God's voice" and responding? What turning point is needed or may be coming in your life?
 6. How do you discern His voice from those of so many others that vie for your attention? What will I start doing today to start to better hear and obey God's voice?
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The Parables of the Lost Sheep and Lost Coin – Luke 15: 1 - 10

Icebreaker:

1. During your childhood, was there ever a time when you got lost? What was it like?
2. What do you know about how sheep and how they live and what they need?

Read Luke 15:1-10

Exploring the Word

1. Who was Jesus telling this parable to? Why was He criticized? Why do you think He was focusing his efforts on these types of people (see also Luke 5:32)?
2. What does a conscientious shepherd do when he notices that one of His sheep is missing (v 4)?
3. What does the shepherd do when He finds that one sheep (v 5)?
4. What does it mean to repent (see also II Chronicles 7:13-14, Acts 26:20, Romans 2:4, 2 Corinthians 7:10, I Thessalonians 1:9)? How does heaven react when a sinner repents (v 7)?
5. How do we know that the woman lost something valuable, and what steps does she take to find it (v 8)?
6. What did the woman do when she found the lost coin (v 9)?
7. How does this compare to how far God will go to seek sinners and how the angels in heaven react?
8. What do the following verses say about how much God loves and values people?
 - John 3:16, Romans 5:8, Jeremiah 29:11-12, John 15:13, I John 3:1

Applying the Word

1. How do these two parables make you feel about your value to God? What difference should this make in your life? If we really believe that God loves us and other people so much, how should it impact our daily life?
2. Where are you today in your relationship with God? In what ways do you stray from God? What does God do to bring you back?
3. Do you have any friends or acquaintances who have strayed away from God? What can you do to help them come back?
4. What preventative measures can you take in your life to help keep yourself from straying away from God or others in your life from straying away from God?
5. Who can you share with in the near future about the good news of God's persistent and rejoicing love? How can you?



The Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard – Matthew 20:1-16

Icebreaker:

1. What is the most generous thing which anyone has ever done for you?
2. What do you think of death-bed or death-row conversions?

Read Matthew 20:1-16

Looking into the Word (Discussion)

Denarius: A denarius was the usual pay for a day's work. A Roman soldier was paid one denarius per day.

1. How much did the landowner say he would pay the workers?
2. At what times during the day did the landowner look for more workers and what did he agree to pay them?
3. At the end of the day, how did the landowner go about paying the workers?
4. Why did the workers in the parable grumble at their payments at the end of the day (v 11-12)?
5. How did the landowner answer them (v 13-15)?
6. How does Jesus' statement about the first and the last relate to this parable and relate to our lives?
7. In a spiritual sense, who do each of the characters in this parable represent, and what is their significance?
8. What do the following verses say about God's faithfulness/grace/mercy or His justice?
 - Lamentations 3:22-23
 - Numbers 23:19
 - Romans 3:21-26

Applying the Word (My Own Story, My Own Life)

1. What can we learn about mercy, grace, and justice from this parable, and how can we apply it to our lives?
 2. What other spiritual truths can we learn from this parable of Jesus? How does it apply to our life?
 3. What is the biggest take-away which you should apply to your life from this parable regarding God's grace and mercy? How then shall you live?
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4. If you were to evaluate your life today, where would you say you are regarding knowing Jesus and working and laboring for Him?

- Running as far away as I can ...
- Working as hard as I can against Him or trying to torpedo His efforts ...
- Over by the swimming pool sipping lemonade ...
- In some other field somewhere else working for some other master ...
- I thought about working in His field once but got distracted and never showed up ...
- I started working one day but gave up ...
- I want to work in His field, but I can't find the field and don't feel like I'm qualified ...
- Willing and ready ... No task too small or too big by God's grace and power ...
- Ready to work all day, every day (24/7) if need be
- Other _____

Where do you want to be?

In what way can you thank God today for His amazing grace in your life?

What would you like to do for Him today to thank Him for His amazing grace?



The Parable of the Lost (Prodigal) Son – Luke 15: 11-32

Icebreaker:

1. In what ways did you and your siblings compete or get along with each other?
2. How do you feel when other people get rewards greater than they deserve? How do you normally react when you feel you are treated unfairly (either worse or better than deserved)?

Read Luke 15:11-32

Exploring the Word

1. Why do you think the prodigal son ran away?
 - a. to grow up
 - b. to get away from his father's values
 - c. he wasn't appreciated at home
 - d. to try to make it on his own
 - e. to get away from his older brother
 - f. other
2. What did the prodigal son ask his father to do (v 12-13)?
3. What did the prodigal son do after arriving in the distant country (v 13)?
4. How did the prodigal son live once he was out on his own (v 13-20)?
5. What do you think made the prodigal son return to his senses and return home (v 17-19)?
 - a. homesickness
 - b. guilt for what he had done
 - c. feeling sorry for himself
 - d. feeling sorry for his father
 - e. hunger pangs
 - f. realization that he was stupid
 - g. he "hit bottom"
6. What was the prodigal son's and the father's attitudes when the prodigal son returned home (v 18-21)?
7. Why did the father call for a celebration (v 22-24, 31-32)?
8. What was the older brother's attitude about his brother returning and the celebration afterward (v 28-30)?
9. What are the characteristics of the father, the prodigal son, and the older son? How would you describe the love of the father, the love of the lost son, and the love of the older son?



Applying the Word to Your Life

1. What does the forgiving love of the father in this story represent? How have you personally experienced this kind of love (or need to)?
2. If the father had a pretty good idea where his son had gone, do you think he should have gone after him? Why or why not?
3. Who do you relate to most now in this story? Who did you relate to most 5, 10, 20, or 30 years ago? Why?
4. If you had to compare your spiritual journey to the Prodigal's journey, where are you now?
 - a. at home but not too happy
 - b. in a far country
 - c. coming to my senses
 - d. on my way back home but not sure what I'll find
 - e. just arrived and feeling great
 - f. enjoying the fatted calf and the party
 - g. other _____

Where would you like to be?
5. How does this parable help you better understand the unconditional, forgiving love of God? How should you live in response to the gracious love of God which He pours out on us?
6. What is the biggest lesson you've learned from this parable? How can you apply this to your life?
7. How can you guard yourself against feeling resentment when God shows mercy to people you think don't deserve it?
8. To what "undeserving" person can you extend God's love and forgiveness this week? How? What degree of God's love and forgiveness do you need in your own life today? Why and How?



The Parable of the Good Samaritan – Luke 10: 25 - 37

Icebreaker:

1. What are the greatest inconveniences and interruptions in your life? How do you respond to them?
2. Has anyone ever really gone out of their way to help you? How did it make you feel?

Read Luke 10: 25 - 37

Looking into the Word (Discussion)

Mark Yes or No and why

1. Do you think Jesus knew about the Samaritans – that they were social outcasts because they had intermarried with the wrong people? Yes or No
2. Do you think Jesus knew about the road from Jerusalem to Jericho – that it was the most dangerous road in Judea with robbers posing as wounded people? Yes or No
3. Do you think that Jesus knew about the Old Testament rule that anyone who touched a dead person was “unclean” for several days? Yes or No
4. If there was a good chance that the wounded person was only faking it in order to trap the priest and Levite, do you think they were justified in passing by the wounded man? Yes or No
5. If the priest and Levite were taking the dangerous road because they were in a rush to get to their religious duties in Jericho, do you think they could be justified in passing by the wounded man? Yes or No
6. Why do you think the Samaritan stopped when the others “passed by on the other side”?
 - a. he was more sensitive
 - b. he didn’t care about or wasn’t aware of the problems of touching a dead corpse
 - c. he knew what it meant to be a hurting person and have people pass by
 - d. he didn’t have much to lose
7. Why do you think Jesus told this parable in response to the lawyer’s question, “And who is my neighbor”?
 - a. to let the lawyer answer his own question
 - b. to catch the lawyer in a moral dilemma
 - c. to use a “case history” approach that lawyers use
 - d. for some other reason _____
8. What other things stuck out to you from the parable of Jesus?
9. What do the following verses say about how we should treat our neighbors and enemies?
 - Matthew 5:43-48, John 13:34-35, Romans 12:17-21



Applying the Word (My Own Story, My Own Life)

1. What do you do when people come up to you on a street corner asking for a handout?
 - a. ignore them
 - b. take a look at what they are wearing
 - c. give them money without any questions
 - d. get to know their situations and then decide
 - e. assume I'm being conned
 - f. find some excuse not to give
 - g. offer to take them to the grocery store and buy them what they need
 - h. share the Gospel with them and pray for them
 - i. take them to your pastor who is better equipped to handle the problem (or is he)
 - j. report them to the police
 - k. other _____

2. Now that you've read this parable, who would you say is your "neighbor"?
 - a. someone like me with a need
 - b. anyone who approaches me with a need
 - c. only reputable charitable organizations
 - d. those I have reasonable hope of helping
 - e. the ones I'm most afraid of helping

3. If you had to call someone outside of your family at 3 o'clock in the morning because of a deep personal problem, who would you call?
 - a. my pastor/priest
 - b. professional counselor
 - c. my friend _____
 - d. someone who had the same problem
 - e. someone who had conquered this problem
 - f. someone who didn't know me

4. What is the biggest take-away which you should apply to your life from this parable regarding **really** "loving our neighbor"? How then shall you live?

5. What steps can you take in meeting someone else's needs by God's grace and power?