

Discover Jesus

The Four Soils

Mark 4:1-20

Again, Jesus began to teach by the lake. The crowd that gathered around him was so large that he got into a boat and sat in it out on the lake, while all the people were along the shore at the water's edge. ² He taught them many things by parables,¹ and in his teaching said: ³ "Listen! A farmer went out to sow his seed. ⁴ As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the **path**, and the birds came and ate it up. ⁵ Some fell on **rocky places**, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. ⁶ But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. ⁷ Other seed fell among **thorns**, which grew up and choked the plants, so that they did not bear grain. ⁸ Still other seed fell on **good soil**. It came up, grew and produced a crop, some multiplying thirty, some sixty, some a hundred times.... ⁹ Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear."

¹⁰ When he was alone, the Twelve² and the others around him asked him about the parables.... ¹³ Then Jesus said to them.... ¹⁴ The farmer sows the word. ¹⁵ Some people are like seed along the **path**, where the word is sown. As soon as they hear it, Satan comes and takes away the word that was sown in them. ¹⁶ Others, like seed sown on **rocky places**, hear the word and at once receive it with joy. ¹⁷ But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away. ¹⁸ Still others, like seed sown among **thorns**, hear the word; ¹⁹ but the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for other things come in and choke the word, making it unfruitful. ²⁰ Others, like seed sown on **good soil**, hear the word, accept it, and produce a crop—some thirty, some sixty, some a hundred times what was sown." (NIV)

¹ Jesus spoke in parables, or metaphorical stories that require thinking to understand. In other words, those who have "ears to hear," or who put time and thought into understanding Jesus's teachings will grow in wisdom and knowledge. The use of parables was a common practice among Jewish teachers and something familiar to the people of his time.

² The "Twelve" refers to the first twelve men that Jesus anointed with power to preach, drive out demons, and follow him in Mark 3:13-19. This included Simon (Peter), James (son of Zebedee), his brother John, Andrew, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James (son of Alphaeus), Thaddaeus, Simon the Zealot, and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him.

Get it!

1. Are there any phrases or words that you need defined?
2. Jesus is speaking to a crowd of people from many cities who were likely familiar with farming. He describes how a farmer is sowing his seed on a path, on rocky places, among thorns, and in good soil. Close your eyes and imagine what this farmer is doing. Describe what you see. (vv. 3-8)
3. Imagine you were the farmer. Where would you sow your seed and why? Consider your time, energy, amount of seed you have, and your production needs.
4. As the farmer, maybe you're not sure which soil will produce a crop and which soil will not. How would you find out? What would you do during the next season?
5. In this parable what is the seed? (vv. 4, 14) What do you think the soil represents? (vv. 15-20)

Think about it!

1. Jesus compares the four types of soil to four hearts: the path, the rocks, the thorns, and the good soil. Let's consider a person whose heart and response to the Word is like a path.
 - a. What is the purpose of a path? How is a path formed or created? What kind of dirt is used and why? Feel free to search for your answer online!
 - b. Even though paths can soak in water, why would you not sow seed on a path?

2. Think about the purpose of a path and its characteristics and about how it is made and formed.
 - a. What type of person is Jesus's describing?
 - b. How do you think they respond to good advice or truth?
 - c. How do you think they live their life and respond to the problems in their life?
 - d. Based on your understanding of a person whose heart is like a path, why do you think they don't receive the Word or allow Satan to take it away quickly. Describe what this might look like.
 - e. What do you think this person needs to be able to hear the Word and grow fruit?
3. Think about the person whose heart and response to the Word is like a rocky place.
 - a. What does it mean to have a quick but shallow response to the Word? (vv. 5, 16) What might this look like?
 - b. What does it mean to have no root? (v. 6) How does a person develop roots after they hear the Word of God?
 - c. Why does this seed die? (v. 16-17) Do you think this could be prevented? If so, how?
4. Think about the person whose heart and response to the Word is like the thorny place.
 - a. What thorns in life choke this seed and keep it from bearing grain? (vv. 7, 18-19)
 - b. What worries, desires for other things, sins, and distractions do you think keep people from loving, reading, and obeying the Word of God? (v. 19)
 - c. What does Jesus mean by the deceitfulness of wealth? How can this affect our walk with God? Give examples.
 - d. What happens to this person and their relationship with God? (vv. 7, 19)
 - e. What do you think this person needs to be able to bear grain?
5. Think about the person whose heart and response to the Word is like good soil.
 - a. Describe this person. What is the evidence that a person has good soil? (vv. 8-9, 20) Make a list of characteristics that you think reflects a person with good soil.
 - b. Why is it important that a grain crop bears grain? What does it mean for a follower of Jesus to bear grain? Describe what this might look like.
 - c. Jesus says, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear" (4:9). What does a person who "hears" look like?
 - d. What happens to a crop that doesn't bear grain? What does the farmer do with this crop? (If you need help, read John 15:2)
6. Which soil are you and why? You can have more than one answer.
7. To be wise farmers, where do you think Jesus wants to focus our efforts and continue sowing seed? How will we recognize good soil?

Live it!

1. Consider the soil of your heart. Share what you need to grow more in the Lord and bear grain.
2. Make a list of people you have or have been sharing the Gospel with.
 - a. What type of soil do they have? What is it in their life or reaction to the Word that makes you think this way.
 - b. How can you help the people in the first, second, and third soils? How can you focus on people in the fourth soil? What will that look like?

Pray it!

1. Pray for the soil of your heart and for your plan to grow and bear grain. Ask Jesus to help you bear grain.
2. Pray for the people on your list and what you want to do to help them grow. Pray to meet fourth soil people who will receive the Word of God, grow, and bear grain.