

The Parable of the Sower

Grades
5-6

PARABLE

MATTHEW 13:1-9, 18-23

What is happening in this story?

This story takes place midway through Matthew and at a turning point in Jesus' ministry. The crowd includes people who are already following him, those trying to decide whether to follow, and those who are against Jesus entirely. This parable names all of that out loud in metaphorical fashion, forcing introspection for listeners, and revealing to everyone that Jesus is acutely aware of who is with him.

Why does this story matter for kids?

By preschool, and certainly beyond, kids have likely planted seeds, or at least have noticed how plants grow. They can picture a farmer tossing seed all around—explain that this is how planting used to be done—and can grasp that God tosses love around just as freely. Careful explanation can help kids understand how our hearts are like soil where God's love longs to take root, but that sometimes unhelpful things in the world get in the way. Even if "birds" or "thorns" block the growth of God's love in us one moment, Farmer God gives us sowing love.

Why this theme?

Parables can be confusing—just ask the disciples! However, they are meant to take ordinary objects—things we understand—and use them to describe concepts that might otherwise be difficult. Parables can be very useful in helping kids grasp the large, abstract concepts of faith.

AGE LEVEL TIP

Comparing and contrasting different things comes naturally for kids in this age group, and they are starting to be able to recognize and understand symbolism. Both of these qualities are essential for studying parables, which use familiar objects and ideas to express truth about God.



GENERAL SUPPLIES

- Pens
- Scrap paper
- Colored pencils

LESSON SUPPLIES

- Backpack
- Sticky notes (4 per kid)

Do some kids arrive early? Try this.

Help kids understand parables by experiencing one. Place a backpack, scrap paper, and pens near the door with these instructions: "Worry can weigh us down. Write down something 'heavy' that's bothering you and drop it in this backpack. Jesus will carry your worries for you."

Circle up with kids for an opening conversation.

Many of Jesus' teachings are parables. A *parable* helps us understand something unfamiliar by explaining it through a story that uses everyday people and common things. Jesus used parables to help people understand God, and he used examples from everyday life to do it. Can you think of any? Listen for responses. Today, we're going to read and talk about the parable of the sower. That's **sow**, **s-o-w**, not **s-e-w**. The sower in this story is someone who plants (or sows) seeds, not someone who sews fabric or clothes.

Pray together: **Dear God, thank you for sending Jesus to help us know you better. Be with us today as we explore how parables help us understand things that are difficult to comprehend. Amen.**

Pass out leaflets and colored pencils.

You have something in common with everyone else in this room: you're a human being. But you also have characteristics that make you unique and wonderfully complicated. In the space on your leaflet, draw one or more common objects or write simple words to describe yourself to someone who has never met you. What image or word would give someone you don't know a good sense of who you are? Check out the images around the panel for ideas. Give kids a chance to work. Encourage them to think symbolically rather than simply describing themselves. (For example, "I am like a dog, because I'm loyal and active.") Invite kids to share their ideas.



Gather kids around the screen where you'll watch the video.

Parables put complicated ideas in simple terms. But if you're not ready to understand the complicated idea, you can get stuck thinking that the simple terms are the point of the story. Let's watch Gabe and Ruby work through a parable.

View Episode 3, "Seeds to Heed," on the Year Gold Spring Grades 3-6 DVD.

Ask kids these questions about the video:

- How does Gabe understand Jesus' parable?
- Why does Ruby use social media to explain the same parable?
- How do you understand Ruby's version? What is she trying to say?
- Why can't Ruby make a sports version work?
- When have you understood something complicated when it was explained in a story or a simple illustration?



Open your Whirl Kids Study Bibles.

Today's passage is in the book of Matthew. It's in the New Testament in the Gospels and Acts section of the Bible. Invite kids to check out the book introduction and comic on page 1156.



The parable of the sower is the first in a series of parables Jesus uses to teach a group of people who had come to see him while he was near the Sea of Galilee. Look at the map on page 1528 and check out the physical proximity of the Sea of Galilee to Jerusalem. The distance is about seventy miles; it would take about a week to walk that far.

Help kids find Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23 and read it in this creative way together: Ask for two volunteers to read; give each one a section of the reading (verses 1-9 and 18-23). **Listening is an important part of parables. Jesus even mentions it in this reading! As our volunteers read, listen carefully for the everyday things that help you understand what Jesus is talking about.**

Invite kids to check out what Ruby says about Matthew 13:4-8.

Ask these questions after you read the story:

- **What words jumped out at you? How did they help you understand what Jesus was saying?**
- **In the parable, who is the sower? What are the seeds? Who is the soil?** (The sower is God; seeds are God's word; the different soils are people who hear God's word.)
- **According to Jesus' parable, why is it important for a plant to have strong roots? What is he really telling his listeners?**
- **What are like thorns in your life? How do the "thorns" make it hard to hear God's word?**
- **When you hear God's word, how do you respond?**

Make your mark on the Wall Chart.

Look at the chart and find the theme for today. Give kids time to find the word *Parable*. Because listening is so important to understanding parables, let's draw an ear in the box by *Parable*.



BIBLE BIT

Many of Jesus' parables have agricultural themes because they would have appealed to his audience. Even fishermen would have understood the work necessary for an abundant crop.

WATCH IT AGAIN

If you watch the video again, pause and share ways that you could use social media to teach others about God.

OUR CHURCH

The next time you're in worship, listen for different ways the preacher explains the scripture. What everyday images does he or she use to help you understand the Bible?

RESPOND 10

Open leaflets and pass out pens and sticky notes.

Tear off leaflet square.

1. We can all strive to be the “good soil” in the parable—to let God’s word grow inside of us and to share it with others. But there are times when we don’t understand, like the path. Or we get sidetracked, like the rocky soil. Or we allow the cares of the world to distract us, like thorns.
2. Fold your leaflet in half twice, so you can only see one of the images.
3. I’m going to read some modern-day scenarios. After I do, fold your leaflet to show the image of the kind of ground (path, rocky ground, thorns, good soil) that represents the situation, and hold your leaflet up in the air. After each situation, discuss which type of ground kids selected and why.
4. You try to explain a new game to a friend, but they don’t understand.
5. A different friend says they love that game and can’t wait to play it with you, but then they don’t show up.
6. A third friend actually shows up, but then just sits there and doesn’t want to play. The friend seems distracted.
7. A fourth friend shows up, wants to play, and has some ideas that make the game even more fun!
8. Now find a partner and think of four new examples of your own. Write each example on a sticky note and place them on the appropriate images on your leaflet. When kids have finished, have them share what they came up with.
9. Jesus talked about the different kinds of soil being like people, but people can change! Some days we may be like one kind of soil, and some days, like another. How do people change for the better?

LAUNCH 10

Circle up with kids for a quick review.

Sometimes parables can be confusing. But they can also help us understand difficult things. What did you learn from today’s parable?

Return to the leaflet panels and pass out pens.

Think of a movie you’ve seen that functions as a parable to explain something else. Work with a partner and write about it on your leaflet. Invite kids to share their parables.

Send kids out with a blessing.

Circle up with kids. **God blesses all of us. And that means me** (place a hand on your chest). **And that means you** (place your other hand on the shoulder of the kid next to you). Each kid passes the blessing by repeating those words and actions. When the blessing makes it back to you, say, **Go and bless the world.**

Thank kids for coming today. Remind them of the Family Square on the other side of the leaflet.