

## SESSION

### I

# THE SOWER

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Focus Scriptures: Mark 4:3-20

**Session Goal:** To help group members understand the meaning of the parable of The Sower.

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## OPENING OUR MINDS

### *Option 1*

Begin by asking your group the following:

- **Have you ever tried telling someone something but they refused to listen? What made them resistant to your message?**
- **What makes a person resistant to some messages and receptive to other types of messages?**
- **Can a person become open to a message that they had been closed to before? If so, how?**
- **Are there some messages a person must be prepared to hear? If so, what are they?**
- **How does God prepare a person to receive His message?**

## *Option 2*

We often refer to the message of salvation as “good news.” It is considered good news because through Jesus Christ’s life, death, and resurrection God offers the forgiveness of sins and restoration of relationship between himself and humankind. If people turn from their sins, repent and daily follow Him, they will receive eternal life with God.

Ask,

- **Why is God’s offer of salvation through Christ considered “good news”?**
- **Since it is considered good news, does that mean that everyone is receptive to its message? If not, why?**
- **What are some of the barriers to sharing the good news?**
- **What might be some barriers to hearing and being open to the message of good news?**

## OPENING THE WORD

### *Understanding Mark 4:3-20*

There are two parts of this parable—the story and the explanation of the story. In verses 3-9 Jesus begins this parable summoning people to listen! He uses familiar language that the crowd gathered would be able to identify with—farming. The farmer sows the seeds for a harvest. However, not all seeds produced growth. Some seeds were devoured, some fell on rocky soil, and some fell among thorns. Yet, some seeds fell on good soil and grew crops. He ends the story by spurring them on to hear the message—a deeper listening with both their heart and mind.

In verses 10-20 Jesus takes the story a step further and explains the story. He doesn't leave them wondering or confused, but explains this parable so that those listening will understand its message. The seed is the Word and the soil is the receptivity of the people's hearts to the message of Jesus. The parables are not meant to leave people in state of confusion, but to lead them to ask "How does this story relate to me?" and "What is my response?"

### *Option 1*

Share with people that this is the first parable of seven parables of Jesus. A parable is a "short story from everyday life used to teach a lesson."<sup>1</sup> Jesus often used parables when teaching about the kingdom of God.

Read Mark 4:3-9.

- **Who does the sower represent?** (The messenger of the Word)
- **What do the seeds falling on the path represent?** (Those who the Word cannot penetrate their hearts.) **Who is the bird?** (Satan)

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1. Eby, J. Wesley. ed. *A Dictionary of the Bible & Christian Doctrine in Everyday English* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 2004), p. 210.

- **What do the seeds that fall along the rocky places represent?** (Those who accept the message, but only in a shallow way. It begins to grow, but doesn't take root.)
- **What do the seeds that fell among thorns represent?** (Those who accept the message but allow outside influences to choke it out.)
- **What do the seeds falling on good soil represent?** (Those who hear the Word, accept it, and take it to heart.)

Read vv. 10-20.

- **Why do you think Jesus explained the story to those in the crowd?**
- **Why is it important to not only hear the parable, but also to understand it?**
- **What is the purpose and message of this parable?**

### *Option 2*

Parables are stories used to teach a lesson. Jesus often used parables when explaining what the kingdom of God was all about. The parable of the sower was the first kingdom parable recorded in Mark. Before you begin reading today's Scripture, invite your group to close their eyes and imagine they are in the crowd and Jesus is telling this story. Read Mark 4:3-20 and ask,

- **Who are the main characters in the story?**
- **What does each character represent?**
- **What is the message, or messages, of this parable?**

### *Imaginative Option*

Divide everyone into several groups. Give each group a piece of paper and pen/pencil. Invite each group to read Mark 4:3-20 and then rewrite the parable in modern day language. Allow sufficient time for discussion. Then bring everyone together and ask each group to share their story. Follow up by asking: **What is the message, or messages, of this parable?**

## OPENING OUR HEARTS

### *Option 1*

Read Mark 4:3-20 again. As the Scripture is being read, invite your group to imagine themselves as the sower and to think about those in their world who represent the seeds. Jesus' message for us today is that people's hearts are like soil and the truth of His Word is like a seed. If we allow our hearts to harden, the Word cannot penetrate it. If we only accept the truth at a surface level and it stays there, it's like the seed that fell on the rocky ground and will eventually die. If we let the influences of the world distract us away from God, it's like the seed that fell on the thorny ground and will be choked out. However, if we are open to the truth and follow it, our lives will grow in Christ.

Invite everyone to get quiet before God. Ask your group to silently reflect on which part of the story represents their life: the sower, the path, the rocky place, among thorns, or the good soil. Then close in prayer asking God to show them how they can incorporate the truth of this parable into their lives this week.

## *Option 2*

Close your time together by asking your group to silently reflect on the following questions:

- *One way I can be a sower in my world this week is by . . .*
- *I would like God to help me be more open to the truth of His Word by . . .*
- *One way I can help others, through the leading of the Holy Spirit, be receptive to God's message is by . . .*

## **Connect** -----

### **WEEK 1**

#### *The Sower*

THIS WEEK: Jesus told a story about a farmer who sowed some seeds. This week we will look at the message of this parable. Before our time together, read Mark 4:3-20. Consider all the ways God's message is spread to people in your world.

THINK ABOUT THIS: In what ways am I spreading the good news of God in my world?

PRAYER CONCERNS: