

## The Story of Jesus

### Part 8: Why did Jesus teach in parables?

Mark 4:1-20 NLT - [watch online](#)

**Summary:** Why did Jesus use parables? What do they even mean? In this short section of Jesus' parables in Mark, Jesus is doing a little show and tell for his audience. He invites us into a new way of seeing and experiencing life in the Kingdom of God. This week (in the parable of the Sower) we'll do some soil analysis and find that our "soil" determines our experience in the Kingdom of God.

#### Video Content:

[00:39] What to expect...

[01:30] Exercise 1: FOOD

[03:00] Exercise 2: DIRT

[05:25] How's our soil today?

[06:45] The parable - what and how

[09:34] The parable Jesus tells

[10:30] Exercise 3: Reflection

[11:14] Jesus explains the parable... kinda

[15:00] Why this parable is foundational.

[16:00] A practice: Franciscan Reading

[18:00] Our "soil" determines our experience in the Kingdom of God.

#### Invitation: [18:40]

We can work with God & others to enrich our "soil"

Continue to practice Franciscan Reading this week

Ask: "God, how's my soil? What do you want me to do with it? "

With others, maybe in Connect Group, share your experience so far.

#### Discussion Questions

1. Re-read Mark 4:1-20 as a group. What's your reaction to this week's message and/or passage?
2. How do you feel about Mark 4:10-12- Jesus speaking in parables that not everyone can understand? Why do you think he did that?
3. Share your "product" and/or experience from your Franciscan Reading, including experiences with your bag of soil during and since the message. Remember, no judgment of other people's work! :)
4. What parallels can you draw between the idea of enriching physical soil for better plant growth and enriching your spiritual "soil" for a richer relationship with Jesus?
5. How can your group pray for you and your "soil" this week?

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#### Transcript

Bit different than usual:

- "You can take the teacher out of the classroom, but you can't take the classroom out of the teacher".
- Since this is not my usual way of teaching, I'll be reading lots from the paper and looking up as I can. Bear with me.

- Here's where you're invited to participate today/what you can expect :
  - Doing a “Warm-up” with a paper and some soil
  - Practicing a centuries-old Bible-reading technique as a group: “Franciscan Reading”
  - Later: sharing your experience with Connect Group/others

### Warm-up

1. Get on the same page with our brains ready. Grab 2 things if you can- a piece of paper and some soil (houseplant or bit of garden soil in small dish/bowl works). Pause me, I'll wait.
2. Next? Write the name of your favorite food (a fav food if you have too many)
  - a. Ex. Chicken soup
3. List the ingredients to this food as best you can
  - a. Ex. Stock, chicken, noodles, vegetables
4. On your paper, \*ingredients from the ground (Ex. noodles from grain = \*; chicken? Tricky. Eat some plants & seeds = \*)
5. All of the \* ingredients come from the ground, the soil. What if the soil was bad and that ingredient couldn't grow? You'd lose those ingredients, so cross out every single ingredient from the soil/ground.
6. Would that make it so your fav food wouldn't be the same? For most foods, it certainly would!
7. Look at your soil. Spend 30 sec individually observing it:
  - a. Look like?
  - b. Feel like?
  - c. Smell like?
8. If you just glance at soil, the ground, it doesn't SEEM alive, right? As one of my fav authors, Wendell Berry puts it, though:
  - a. “The earth is not dead like the concept of property, but is as vividly and intricately alive as a man or woman and... there is a delicate interdependence between its life and our own.” - Wendell Berry
 Couple scientific facts about soil:
  - i. 1 teaspoon of soil contains 1 billion individual cells & 10,000 different species.
    1. Life! Diversity!
  - ii. Can take up to 1,000 years for a single inch of topsoil to form. WOW! Takes time...
9. This soil is very special; from our garden; I can tell you a short story of how it's formed & what's in it:
  - a. Putting in raised beds in new house
  - b. Need to fill with soil. Let's use plant compost! Yards & yards
  - c. How plants did that first year. WHY? Compressed wet muck, like wet leaves on ground, 18 in deep
    - i. Needed more N, air spaces & water retention without saturation.
  - d. Added vermiculite, perlite, chicken manure. Year after? AMAZING!!
10. Where am I going with this? Ask us: How's our soil? Ok, great, needs some nutrients or lots of work?

### Lesson - Setting the stage

- Another teacher named Jesus used soil in a lesson 2,000 years ago. If He were here teaching you today, might have taken a similar approach to mine, maybe way different. Just my attempt at giving you some background on soil [get it, background?] by putting you in the shoes of Jesus' audience- 1st century Jews from farming region of Galilee. They were soil experts and depended on soil for not just fav food, but actual lives. They interacted with it all the time.

- Jump in, strategy of “choral read” = read out loud with me (get more out of a reading if it’s spoken, seen, & heard). Might feel weird at first, but I encourage you to try it now & in your individual reading time 4:1-2
- Here in Mark, Jesus is going to teach a parable to help his listeners (including us today) about what K o G is really like. 2 things of note, there’s a “WHAT” and a “HOW” to Jesus’ message:
  - WHAT: What is the Kingdom of God like?
  - HOW: What’s a parable and how does it work?
- WHAT: What is the Kingdom of God like?
  - Talk a lot about this here at Crosscreek
  - 1st Century Jews expecting immediate change and revolution- overthrow Romans who had invaded; finally make things right. Kind of like another deep thinker, Pedro Sanchez, said : “If you vote for me, all of your wildest dreams will come true”. Lots of different hopes and expectations based on OT.
  - Don’t quite get K o G? I wonder how much I get about it. These 1st Century Jews didn’t get it all, either, so I think that puts us in good company. Tough to understand that the K o G is something that is “already here AND not yet here”.
    - As we have been studying the book of Mark we are learning that The K o G doesn’t look like anyone expected.
- HOW: Parable
  - What’s a parable and how does it work?
    - Dallas Willard
      - Jesus tells at least 40 parables in NT writings
      - Remember “show & tell” from 2nd grade? Bring in fav stuffed animal and tell story about where and how you got it? Jesus doing “show & tell” using context & concrete examples from people places and things the immediate / original audience can see, hear and smell.
      - **Parable** from Greek *paraballein* = to throw one thing down alongside another. To me, like a set of **parallel lines**- heading in the same direction but NOT the exact same line
      - Help us understand something difficult (K o G) by placing it beside something familiar, specific
    - Geek-out learning/brain connection: Jesus was and is working with us and in sync with our minds- in educational literature one of the most effective teaching techniques for human brain is comparison.

### The parable of the sower, seed, & soils

- Choral read 4:3-9
- Wow! What does this all mean? Focus on what comes to mind for you right now. Jot down answers to the questions on your paper. There are no wrong answers right now (except blanks), just what you’re thinking:
  - What do you think the farmer/sower represents?
  - What do you think the seed represents?
  - What do you think the 4 different types of soil represent?
- This puts us very much in the sandals/shoes of the original audience, wondering what this all means. Jesus explains...

### Parables- what’s the deal, Jesus?

- Choral read 4:10-12

- Wait, what!
  - Doesn't it bother you that not everyone seems to "get" what Jesus is talking about? It sure bothers me!
  - Doesn't God want everyone to hear the gospel, the good news about Jesus- that we can be included with Jesus, God, and the Holy Spirit in the wholeness of the beautiful dance of the Trinity? If so, why does he use parables that not everyone can understand?
  - If Jesus came to seek and save the lost, why does He seem ok with some lost never being found?
- Remember who's in the crowd
  - some people who really want to know and follow Jesus.
  - some people who think he's ushering in a political coup to take back their country from Rome and are ready to grab their battle gear and slash and kill their way to Jerusalem and beyond.
  - some people who are trying to trap Jesus so they can put him on trial and get rid of him.
  - some people who were just trying to get healed or see what the deal was with this Jesus guy.
  - You get the picture, lots of different types of people.
- As much as I would want everyone to get what Jesus is really saying here, the best way I can make sense of the fact that Jesus is teaching in a parable and expects some won't understand is... Sometimes people aren't ready to fully understand the K o G yet. They are just not there. Remember: The K o G doesn't look like they or we expected. When we're curious, we can think on Jesus' teachings more. When we are ready to do that, we can dig in and I will be challenged- more growth is available for me. If not, this is just a curious teaching by a divisive rabbi for now, and that's just how it is. I don't think I personally could handle the full understanding of the K o G, my brain might explode. Instead, God gives me and us bits at a time, like bites of a feast, not the whole feast in 1 bite.
- Bottom line? Jesus uses parables to challenge his listeners, including us. It's up to us to choose a reaction or choose not to react at all.

### What do this and other parables mean?

- Choral read 4:13-20
- A few things to notice:
  - This parable is foundational to understanding all the other parables. Who says so? Jesus.
  - The sower/farmer is the person who takes God's word/truth to others- Jesus, then us
  - The seed is that word/truth
  - The seed reproduces- it's God's word/truth that gets passed along through place & time
  - The harvest depends on the soil the seed grows in (and if it's surrounded by weeds)
- Most importantly, the seed is "the message" and "God's word". Hear me. Are you listening? A key aspect of the gospel (good news), itself, is that it is NOT dead words printed in a book, but instead a LIVING relationship between us and a LIVING God!

### Feeling like you want to DO something with what you just heard? Working through it?

- Ready to try something with me? FRANCISCAN READING. We're already partway through it, so might as well go all the way:
  - Form of interaction with God using text based on St. Francis of Assisi (1181/2 - 1226)
  - Entering personally into the text, not just reading words on a page, but participating in some way(s) and seeing it in our everyday existence
  - Based on primary Franciscan spiritual qualities:

■ Action, spontaneity, love, praise, beauty, delight in creation

■ Fluid encounter with God. Emotional expression. Experience saturated in prayer.

■ Examples if message is about soil, seed, and a sower:

● Hold some soil in your hand

● Sing/ listen to a hymn about topic- "Lord, Let My Heart Be Good Soil"

● Write a poem about soil/seeds growing

● Sketch pictures of seeds growing in 4 different types of soil or just the fertile soil

- Prayer = God, as we interact with You and Your living word, connect us to You and one another. Amen!
- [2 min of practice during song] Try/get started on an option from above: look at soil, sing/listen, write, sketch while interacting with God through your expression.

### Communion (in person)

- Everyone welcome to participate in communion. Get a piece of bread and a cup of juice, then sit back down and I'll lead us through taking it together
- These things come from the soil, too! Bread from wheat; juice from grapes (vines)
  - The soil gave up this wheat. Jesus also gave His body for us. This bread represents the broken body of Jesus given for us. Remember His sacrifice as we eat the bread together.
  - The soil gave up this juice. Jesus also gave His blood for us. This juice represents the blood of Jesus given for us. Remember His sacrifice as we drink this juice together.

### Main Point & Application

- I've thought a lot about this over the past few weeks, and I've got some great news for you!

○ Our "soil" determines our experience in the K o G

■ How we discover, enjoy and share it

○ Soil has both individual AND community aspects

■ It can be found in a single, individual location, like individual people

■ It is also connected to, part of, blended with, and related to other nearby locations in a "community" of soil; 1 square foot of fertile soil is good for a plant or few; a couple of square miles is enough to feed a city and beyond

○ We can work with God & others to enrich our "soil"

■ Art of following Jesus

■ Continue to practice Franciscan Reading this week

● Interact with your bag of soil

○ Put it in your pocket, where you have your morning Bible time, tape to the dashboard of your car, etc.

○ Sing, Write or Sketch

■ Share/interact

● With God through reading/meditation/prayer

○ "God, how's my soil? What do you want me to do with it? "

● With others, maybe in Connect Group, share your experience so far.

### Suggested Readings & Music

- The Divine Conspiracy, by Dallas Willard, or a good starter summary article here....  
<https://theimaginativeconservative.org/2023/05/the-divine-conspiracy-of-dallas-willard.html>
- The Spiritual Formation Bible, Zondervan (a Bible with reflective/imagination prompts)
- Bach: Sonatas & Partitas for Unaccompanied Violin, performed by Sergiu Luca