



# ***UPSTATE GROUP GUIDE***

*Through the Bible*

*August 18 - 24*

*Mark 4*

## *Things to Know*

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**Gospel Connections and Conversations**

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## *Studying God's Word **In Community***

*Reminder: Seek to understand and apply God's word, **not** rehash the sermon.*

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## *Sermon Recap*

1. **The seed is perfect—the soil is the problem.**
  2. **Hearing without doing is no hearing at all.**
  3. **A fruitful heart is a faithful heart.**
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# Discussion Questions

1. **Mark 4:4, 15** – What are some ways you see “the seed” snatched away before it takes root in people’s lives today? How can we guard against this in our own hearts?
  2. **Mark 4:5–6, 16–17** – Why do you think some people respond with joy to the gospel but fall away when life gets hard? How can we develop deeper spiritual roots?
  3. **Mark 4:7, 18–19** – What “thorns” (cares of the world, deceitfulness of riches, desires for other things) are most likely to choke out God’s Word in your life?
  4. **Mark 4:8, 20** – What does it look like in practical terms to “bear fruit thirty, sixty, and a hundredfold”?
  5. **Mark 4:9, 23** – Jesus repeatedly says, “*He who has ears to hear, let him hear.*” How can we train ourselves to be better listeners and doers of God’s Word?
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## Read

**Read Mark 4:1-9 and make observations about the text.**

- What is God teaching us in the passage?
  - What does this reveal about who God is, what God has done, and how I should respond?
  - Which part of the text was most meaningful to you and why?
  - What do you need help understanding about this passage?
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## Scripture

### Mark 4:1-9

#### The Parable of the Sower

**4** Again he began to teach beside the sea. And a very large crowd gathered about him, so that he got into a boat and sat in it on the sea, and the whole crowd was beside the sea on the land. **2** And he was teaching them many things in parables, and in his teaching he said to them: **3** “Listen! Behold, a sower went out to sow. **4** And as he sowed, some seed fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured it. **5** Other seed fell on rocky ground, where it did not have much soil, and immediately it sprang up, since it had no depth of soil. **6** And when the sun rose, it was scorched, and since it had no root, it withered away. **7** Other seed fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no grain. **8** And other seeds fell into good soil and produced grain, growing up and increasing and yielding thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold.” **9** And he said, “He who has ears to hear, let him hear.”

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Mark 4:1-9

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# Living on Mission In Community

The Parable of the Sower reminds us that spiritual growth is not accidental—it's the result of a heart that is soft toward God's Word, free from competing idols, and willing to endure for the sake of Christ. The seed of the gospel has the power to transform, but it must be received with humility and nurtured through obedience, prayer, and community. If we're honest, each of us has areas where the soil has grown hard, shallow, or overgrown with thorns. God is calling us to break up that ground, pull those weeds, and let His Word take root so our lives bear fruit that lasts. What kind of soil will your heart be this week?

*How is God leading me to respond to His Word this week?*

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## Optional Breakout Questions

*Consider making time at the end of the group to break out into groups of 2-4 (keep them gender specific). Have them answer these three questions about their weeks:*

1. How did you feed yourself?
  - *(What have you been doing to feed your spiritual life, and how is it going?)*
2. How did you feed others?
  - *(How did you share the gospel or gospel truth with someone this week?)*
3. How did you feed your flesh?
  - *(What sins did you struggle with this week? How can your friends hold you accountable?)*

# Leader Resources - August 18-24

## Small Group Curriculum — The Parable of the Sower (Mark 4:1–20)

### Session Overview

In this parable, Jesus describes four types of soil, representing four different responses to the Word of God. The condition of the soil determines the fruitfulness of the seed. This lesson will explore what it means to truly hear and receive God's Word, the obstacles that keep it from taking root, and the call to bear lasting fruit. The ultimate focus is on the gospel: only through Christ's transforming work can the soil of our hearts be made good.

### 1. Opening

**Prayer:** Invite God to open hearts and ears to His Word.

**Icebreaker:** Share about a time you tried to grow something (plants, garden, flowers) and what happened. What made it succeed or fail?

**Accountability Moment** (*break into 2–3 person groups*):

- “How has your personal time in God's Word been this week?”
- “Is there any way we can pray for your personal walk with God?”

### 2. Scripture Reading

Read Mark 4:1–20 aloud. Consider having two people read—one reading verses 1–9 (parable) and another reading verses 13–20 (Jesus' explanation).

### 3. Teaching Points

#### A. The Sower and the Seed (vv. 1–3, 14)

- The sower is ultimately Jesus, but by extension, anyone who shares God's Word.
- The seed is the Word of God—the gospel message (v. 14).
- The emphasis of the parable is not on the skill of the sower but the condition of the soil.

#### B. The Four Soils and Their Meanings

##### 1. The Path (vv. 4, 15)

- Hard, unreceptive heart. The Word doesn't penetrate.
- Satan immediately snatches away what is heard.
- Common today: hearing without understanding, distraction, or outright rejection.

## 2. **Rocky Ground** (vv. 5–6, 16–17)

- Shallow, impulsive response. Joyful at first, but with no root.
- Falls away when trials, persecution, or pressure come.
- Faith is revealed not in the moment of excitement but in the endurance of obedience.

## 3. **Among Thorns** (vv. 7, 18–19)

- Crowded heart. The Word competes with worldly concerns, riches, and desires.
- Fruit is choked—not by overt rejection but by divided loyalty.
- This is perhaps the most deceptive soil because it appears to grow but produces no lasting fruit.

## 4. **Good Soil** (vv. 8, 20)

- Open, humble, receptive heart.
- Hears, accepts, and bears fruit—thirty, sixty, or a hundredfold.
- The fruitfulness is supernatural, far beyond natural capacity.

## C. **The Call to Hear** (vv. 9, 23)

- Jesus' repeated refrain: *"He who has ears to hear, let him hear."*
- True hearing is not passive; it is reception that leads to transformation.

## 4. **Discussion Questions**

1. In your own words, what is the main point of the parable of the sower?
2. Which of the soils do you think is most common in our culture today? Why?
3. Which soil do you most identify with in your current season of life?
4. How does this parable challenge the way we share the gospel?
5. What practical steps can we take to cultivate "good soil" in our hearts?

## 5. **Application Points**

1. **Examine Your Heart** – The parable is a mirror. Which soil describes your present receptivity to God's Word?
2. **Fight the Thorns** – Identify the specific "cares of the world" and "deceitfulness of riches" that may be choking your spiritual growth.
3. **Pursue Depth** – Don't settle for emotional highs without deep, rooted discipleship. Build a consistent habit of hearing, studying, and obeying God's Word.
4. **Sow Generously** – Like the sower, keep scattering the gospel broadly. You can't control the soil, but you can be faithful to sow.

**Reflection Question:** *What will you do this week to break up hard ground, pull weeds, or deepen your roots so God's Word can bear fruit in you?*

## 6. **Closing Reflection and Prayer**

- Read v. 20 again.

- Pray that God would make your group “good soil” that hears, receives, and produces fruit for His glory.
- Pray for opportunities to sow gospel seed into others’ lives.

## 7. Memory Verse

**Mark 4:20** — *“But those sown on the good ground are the ones who hear the word, welcome it, and produce fruit thirty, sixty, and a hundred times what was sown.”*

## 8. Leader’s Notes

- **Context:** Jesus tells this parable early in His Galilean ministry. Crowds are following Him, but He knows many are curious rather than committed.
- **Purpose of Parables:** Not just illustrations, but spiritual truths that reveal or conceal depending on the hearer’s heart (vv. 10–12).
- **Gospel Connection:** Only the Spirit can transform a hard, shallow, or divided heart into good soil. This transformation happens through the death and resurrection of Jesus, which gives us new life and the ability to bear fruit (John 15:5).
- **Tips:** Encourage vulnerability—many believers discover they have “thorny soil” areas. The goal is not condemnation but cultivating a heart that is continually soft to God’s Word.

