

Lesson Two: The Story of the Soils

Main idea: We sow the seed of Truth into every kind of heart, just like God does.

Teacher preparation:

- Read Scripture references, Galatians 5:22-23
- Gather: Bible; dry erase markers or chart paper and markers; rice; sunflower or pumpkin seeds; small rocks, gravel, or glass marbles used in vases; feathers; small fake flowers; a large, shallow tub or box. It must be big enough for all your kids to get around. Or use smaller, individual boxes; scissors, coloring tools
- Take time to meditate on this week's Scripture and think about your own life. What kind of soil do you most often tend to be? Do we allow God to harvest the unbelievably huge harvests that he can get out of the good soil, or do we have to break up the soil of a hard heart, and rip out the thorns of worry and doubt? Really think about dirt for a minute. Any gardener will tell you that the smelliest compost makes the best fertilizer. Sometimes we look at the sin and dirt in our lives and don't see anything good. God sees our dirty hearts and sees a good place to plant his Word. We don't have to "clean up" our lives in order to be fruitful for Christ. We simply have to let him use the dirt of our lives for his glory.

Scripture references:

- Matthew 13:3-9, 18-23
- 1 Peter 5:7
- 1 Timothy 2:4

Game: Seed hunt

This takes some preparation, but your class is sure to enjoy it. Make a garden sensory bin for the kids to explore. Use uncooked rice (brown is best here) as a base, the basic "soil" for all the other items. To this "soil," add sunflower or pumpkin seeds to represent the seeds from the story, use small rocks, gravel or marbles for vases to represent the rocky soil. For the seeds that fell along

the path and were taken up by birds, add colorful craft feathers. To make the thorns, remove the flowers from a bunch of cheap, plastic flowers. Cut up the green plastic stems into ½ pieces or so for the thorns. Add in the flowers to show what can grow up from good soil. Mix all of these into a large, shallow tub. A box lid would work too. Make sure it's large enough for all your students to gather around and play in, or make smaller sets for two or three students to share. Let the kids explore the sensory bin freely, and if you want, play a "seed hunt game." To play, time the children and see who can find the most seeds in one minute. For added difficulty, they must use only a plastic spoon to scoop out one seed at a time and place it in front of them.

For a free game, play a round of telephone. Remind children that we tell the Word of God truthfully, to everyone.

Message:

Open in prayer, then say, Last week we started a new series of lessons, all about the parables. Parables are stories Jesus told to teach us important lessons about the Kingdom of Heaven. We have a LOT of ground to cover in today's lesson, so let's get started! Today's parable is found in Matthew 13, starting in verse three. Listen as I read, and picture the story in your mind. (Read Matthew 13:3b-9 with good inflection. As you read, draw a picture of each type of soil on the board. This doesn't have to be a masterpiece. Draw basic pictures to help the children remember the four types of soil.)

"Listen! A farmer went out to plant some seeds. ⁴As he scattered them across his field, some seeds fell on a footpath, and the birds came and ate them. (Draw two parallel, slightly squiggly lines with little seeds on it, and birds nearby.) ⁵Other seeds fell on shallow soil with underlying rock. The seeds sprouted quickly because the soil was shallow. ⁶But the plants soon wilted under the hot sun, and since they didn't have deep roots, they died. (Draw gravel with seeds in it. Draw a few wilted, sad looking plants with the sun above them.) ⁷Other seeds fell among thorns that grew up and choked out the tender plants. (Draw small flowers surrounded by large thorns all around it.) ⁸Still other seeds fell on fertile soil, and they produced a crop that was thirty, sixty, and even a hundred times as much as had been planted! (Draw a bunch of happy flowers with a wavy line at the bottom to represent the dirt.) ⁹Anyone with ears to hear should listen and understand."

Who can sum this story up for me? (Allow the children to retell the story in their own words. This helps you gauge their understanding and helps them remember the story better.) This is a great parable for us to start with in our study of the parables, because it deals with our hearts and how we hear the word of God. Jesus explains this parable perfectly, after the disciples asked him why he speaks in parables. We talked about why Jesus speaks in parables last week, so let's skip ahead to his explanation of this parable. We find it in Matthew 13:18-23. (Read, or have a child read, this passage.)

¹⁸“Now listen to the explanation of the parable about the farmer planting seeds: ¹⁹The seed that fell on the footpath represents those who hear the message about the Kingdom and don't understand it. Then the evil one comes and snatches away the seed that was planted in their hearts. (Point to the first picture, with the birds, as you read this.) ²⁰The seed on the rocky soil represents those who hear the message and immediately receive it with joy. ²¹But since they don't have deep roots, they don't last long. They fall away as soon as they have problems or are persecuted for believing God's word. (Point to the picture of the rocky soil.) ²²The seed that fell among the thorns represents those who hear God's word, but all too quickly the message is crowded out by the worries of this life and the lure of wealth, so no fruit is produced. (Point to the picture with thorns.) ²³The seed that fell on good soil represents those who truly hear and understand God's word and produce a harvest of thirty, sixty, or even a hundred times as much as had been planted!” (Point to the last picture, with the happy flowers.)

So what does the seed represent? (Allow a student to respond.) The seed is the word of God. What do the four different kinds of soil represent? (Allow a child to respond.) The four different soils are the four different ways people react to hearing the Gospel, the word of God. We can imagine our hearts, and the hearts of everyone in the whole world, being like a garden patch, like one of these types of soil. Let's talk about the different ways people respond when they hear the message about the Kingdom.

Jesus said that one way people respond is to not understand. (Point to the first picture, of the hard path with the birds.) Sometimes when we hear the word of God, we don't get it, and we soon forget about it because the evil one, the devil, comes and takes away the words, like a bird taking seeds off a sidewalk. The seeds can't grow on the sidewalk, so the birds take it away. These people don't understand because they have made their hearts hard toward God. The Bible can be confusing sometimes, and it's important for us

to keep trying to understand what it has to say. But some people don't want to know what the Bible says, or give up trying to understand because they don't think it's worth their time. They have decided they don't want to really get to know Jesus, so they cannot understand the Bible. They have chosen to not understand, and chosen to live in their sin instead. These aren't bad people. Sometimes, Christians think about "sinners" as "bad people," when the truth is, we are all sinners. The only difference is, Christians are saved by grace, and people who aren't Christians, are not saved by grace, and therefore stuck in their sin. (Under the first picture, write "Hearts hard because of sin.")

The second way we can respond is to get really excited right away about the Gospel. (Point to second picture, of rocky soil.) Sometimes, people respond right away to the Bible. They think following Jesus is a great idea, so they start trying to live like the Bible tells us to live. But then something happens. Look back at your Bible, in verse 21 of Matthew 13. What happens to this group of people when they hear the word of God? (Allow children to respond.) When problems arise, or when they are persecuted, or judged, for believing in God, they stop following him. Why do they do that? Well, let's think of the garden picture again. If you plant seeds in gravel, there isn't enough good soil for the roots to get down good and deep. Plants need good, deep roots to get water, stay strong when it's windy, and to grow bigger. Without roots, plants die really quickly. People who hear the word of God and get really excited right away don't always have the deep roots, the understanding and experience, they need to stick with Jesus when times get tough, so they stop doing the things the Bible tells us to do. (Write "fall away when problems come" under second picture.)

The third group has some interesting problems too. Who can tell me, from verse 22, what happens with the third group of people who hear the message of the Kingdom of Heaven? (Allow a student to respond.) The third group also hear the word of God. It gets down into their hearts and they too, think it's a good idea. But then they leave church Sunday afternoon, or go out into the world, and they start to worry about life and making money. What are some things you think they worry about? (Allow children to respond. Almost any answer is acceptable. The children are likely to share things they worry about or think their parents worry about, so listen closely and get to know your students a little better.) When we worry about things, we don't leave room for God. God has something to say about worry in the Bible. Let's have a sword drill to find out what. Take all fingers and bookmarks out of your Bible and hold it above your head. When I say go, look up 1 Peter 5:7. Go! (Read, or have a student read, this verse.) "Give all your worries and cares to God, for

he cares about you.” Instead of letting worries choke out our belief in God, like thorns choke out a growing flower, we need to give all our worries to God. He will take care of everything, because he cares for us! (Under the third picture, with the thorns, write “worry.”)

There is one more type of soil for us to look at today. It’s the good soil. (Point to the last picture, of the good soil.) Who is the good soil, according to Matthew 13:23? (Allow children to respond.) The good soil is the people who really understand God’s word and produce fruit. What kind of fruit do you think we produce when we really understand God’s message about the Kingdom of Heaven? (Write the children’s answers under and around the picture of good soil. Think of the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22-23, and prayer, helping others, attending church, reading our Bibles, etc.)

Now that we thoroughly understand the parable of the soils, let’s talk about the point. What’s the point? Why did Jesus tell us this important story? (Allow the children to answer, and respond to their ideas before continuing.) There are a lot of good points we can get out of this parable. One lesson we can learn is to try to be the good soil. Are some people just born the good soil, while everyone else doesn’t stand a chance to understand the Bible? Absolutely not. The Bible says in 1 Timothy 2:4 that God “wants everyone to be saved and to understand the truth.” I have been every single one of these soil types at some point in my life. I have chosen my sin instead of the love of God. I have gotten really excited about God, only to turn away from him when the going got rough. I have started to love God, and then let the worries of this world bring me down. I have trusted in God and let him grow good fruit in my life. Everyone is every type of soil, at one time or another, and that is okay.

Now that we know about the different kinds of soil we can be, we have a responsibility to do our best to be the good, fruit-bearing soil. How can we try to NOT be the first type, the hard soil, where we choose sin? (Let the children respond.) Instead of choosing sin, we can choose to repent and ask God to forgive us. What about the second type, where the seed falls on rocky soil and we let the problems of this world kill our faith? (Allow children to respond.) We can read the Bible and trust that what it says is true. We can be patient and let the word work its way into our hearts. We can pray that God would make us strong in the tough times. And the third soil? What do we do to avoid the thorny worries of this world? (Allow children to respond.) We do just what 1 Peter 5:7 tells us to do. We give all our worries to God and trust him to take care of us. These things aren’t always easy to do. We won’t always be good

soil, but we can do our best to keep our hearts soft and ready to hear the word of God.

There is one more very important thing I want you all to know before we wrap up today. In this story, we can picture God as the farmer, the one throwing these seeds into all these types of soil. God doesn't pick just the good soil. God wants EVERYONE to hear the good news about his son Jesus, so he tells everyone. God knows what kind of soil we are, he knows our hearts. Even when we are not good soil, God still plants the seeds of his truth in us. Now as Christians, it is our job to tell everyone about how Jesus died on the cross to save us from our sins so we can live forever in the Kingdom of Heaven. We don't pick who we share the seeds of truth with. We tell the whole world! Let's move on to our craft now, where we will make a storybook to remind us of this important parable.

End in prayer.

Craft: Soils Mini Book

Every week, students will make a mini book that retells the parable in very basic terms. This second mini book in their library sums up what the parable of the soils is about, and how we can be the good soil. To begin, demonstrate how to fold the book. Fold along the solid lines. Start by folding the long side to the long side. Crease well. Keep it folded, then fold in half, crease well, and fold in half again, creasing well. Now unfold it all the way and fold it in half short side to short side, so the dotted line in the center is folded in half. Cut along this dotted line. Do not overcut! Now unfold the paper and fold it in half again, this time long side to long side. Now for the tricky part. Pinch both short ends of the paper, with the crease facing up. Bring your hands together, causing the cut in the middle of the paper to open up. You should have a plus sign now. The last step is to press all the pages down so the cover is on top. Mush the pages down and crease all the folds. You may need to use a marker or pencil for these creases, as they are all now stacked up on each other. Now that you have a little book, have the kids write their name on the cover. Read each page and have the children illustrate it accordingly.

Jesus told a story about four different kinds of soil. We react in different ways to the seed, the Word of God, depending on the type of soil our hearts are.

Story Time With Jesus

Lesson Two

The Parable of the Soils

Name: _____

The first soil is a hard path, like a sidewalk. Seeds can't grow there, so birds come and take them away. When our hearts are hard, the devil takes the Word away from our unbelieving hearts. We should repent of our sins and ask God for soft hearts.

The second type of soil is shallow and rocky. Seeds start to grow, but die quickly because they can't get deep roots. Our hearts are like this when we start to do what God says, but then change our minds when it's hard to follow Him. We need to trust that the Bible is true, and pray that God would give us strength during tough times.

Matthew 13:3b-9
"Listen! A farmer went out to plant some seeds. As he scattered them across his field, some seeds fell on a footpath, and the birds came and ate them. Other seeds fell on shallow soil with underlying rock. The seeds sprouted quickly because the soil was shallow. But the plants soon wilted under the hot sun, and since they didn't have deep roots, they died. Other seeds fell among thorns that grew up and choked out the tender plants. Still other seeds fell on fertile soil, and they produced a crop that was thirty, sixty, and even a hundred times as much as had been planted! Anyone with ears to hear should listen and understand."

The last type of soil is the good kind, where the seed gets deep roots and grows well, and lots of fruit comes from it. Our hearts can be like this when we hear and understand the Bible, and do what it says. We tell everyone about the Kingdom of God, no matter what kind of soil their hearts may be like.

The third type of soil is full of thorns, so when the seeds start to grow up, they get choked out. When we let the worries of the world into our hearts, the Word of God gets choked out, like the seeds. To avoid the thorny worries of the world, we can cast our cares on God.

Sower and the Seed Word Search

G A R D E N R O O T S L Y E W
J T V B W G R P J R P L R L T
S D N A T S R E D N U E W B H
H E T I K W F K T L M Z O A O
N E E C A R X I N R E E R R R
R R O D U L S R A E H S G A N
P R A I S H P F L S H O S P S
V O T E F V W X P O R W E O A
N F R D L E I Y E I L E W K N
Q A R C M P R A Y L A R J L Y

crop

explain

farmer

fruit

garden

grow

hears

learn

lesson

parable

plant

pray

rocks

roots

seeds

soil

sower

thorns

understands

water

yield

