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JESUS TEACHES



What's the most fun you've had learning something new?

QUESTION #1

#BSFLJesus

THE POINT

Obeying Jesus' teachings leads to fruitful living.



THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

Think back to a favorite teacher: elementary school, high school, college, or on-the-job training. You probably enjoyed that instructor so much because he or she fell into one or more of these groups: teachers who know their subject inside and out, teachers who love the subject and are passionate about it, and teachers who truly care about their students.

Many of us got into a particular profession because just such a teacher motivated us to pursue that field. And many teachers became teachers themselves because other exemplary teachers inspired them. Learning isn't always easy, but great teachers help us develop the desire to learn.

Jesus taught with all three of these characteristics. During His earthly ministry, Jesus certainly knew what He was talking about, He taught with passion, and He genuinely loved those He taught. But Jesus' teaching has another vital element: His teaching is life-changing. In fact, as we'll see when we continue in the Gospel of Mark, Jesus' teaching is eternally life-changing, and it leads us to fruitful living.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

Mark 4:1-2a

¹ 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. ^{2a} And he was teaching them many things in parables,

At this point in Jesus' public ministry, such a large crowd had gathered for His teaching that He had to get on a boat and push off into the lake so they all could see Him and hear Him. Interestingly, we know these people were amazed at Jesus' teaching because it was unlike anything they'd heard before (see Mark 1:22), but we see no indication they acted on what He said.

The same is often true today—many people in our culture believe Jesus was a great moral teacher, but they miss the transformational truth behind His teachings. We need to understand that Jesus took the time to teach so people would rightly know who He is, who God is, how to live in a right relationship with God and others, and how to experience abundant life.

One key way Jesus taught was through parables, which are short stories designed to teach a meaningful point. The Greek word for “parable” carries the idea of something being laid alongside something else for the purpose of comparison. It's often hard for a Western audience to understand why Jesus chose to teach important truths in parables rather than just coming out and explaining what He meant, but the people of Jesus' day were familiar with this method of communication.

The modern, Western mind thinks in terms of lists and logic, but the ancient, Jewish mind thought in images and examples. Parables didn't bury the truth; rather, the principle in a parable was “hiding in plain sight” in such a way that those who understood what Jesus was saying would understand *exactly* what He was saying.

What are the benefits and challenges of using stories to reveal truth?

QUESTION #2

When we study any of Jesus' parables, we need to keep four things in mind:

1. A parable is a story with a plot.
2. A parable refers to a real-life scenario that would have been familiar to Jesus' audience.
3. A parable is for the purpose of instruction, not entertainment.
4. A parable teaches one truth. It's not an allegory with many truths hidden inside of it.

What Jesus wants us to understand is already in front of us. We each have access to the truth about God; the burden is on us to lay hold of that truth and do the hard work of applying it to our lives.

Mark 4:2b-7

^{2b} 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.

Those who first heard Jesus tell this parable would have understood immediately the four types of soil included in these verses. Growing crops in Palestine wasn't easy. A farmer would put a sack of seed on his back, reach back into it, and fling the seed far and wide so that it would reach as far as possible on the land.

The condition of the soil meant that not every seed would be productive, so his goal was to broadcast as much seed as possible.



Here are the first three types of soil Jesus described:

- ▶ **Hard Soil.** The first soil represents the hearers of the Word who have hardened hearts. Such people have no desire for God, so His truth is unable to penetrate and take root. They hear the Word and say: “No thanks. It’s not for me.”
- ▶ **Rocky soil.** Some of the soil in Palestine is just a few inches thick. It looks promising on top, but when the plant’s roots meet bedrock, there’s nowhere for them to go. The first hint of foul weather causes them to wither. In the same way, many of those interested in following Jesus offer only a superficial acceptance and belief. They don’t last.
- ▶ **Thorn-infested soil.** Jesus used this soil to describe those who hear His Word, yet allow other things steal their focus: “the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word” (v. 19). People trying to have it both ways will find any potential fruit choked out by their devotion to something other than Christ.

These three soils can be grouped together as one type of soil: unproductive. It’s clear from Jesus’ teaching that, although everyone has access to God’s truth, not everyone responds to it the same way. Not everyone will trust God, obey His word, and let it take root.

Thankfully, there’s one other type of soil.

Where do you see each of these soils represented in our culture?

QUESTION #3

Why is it important for us to understand that different people will respond to God’s truth in different ways?

QUESTION #4

Mark 4:8-9

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."

- ▶ **Good soil.** The remaining soil is different from the others: resilient and receptive to the seed and free of rocks and thorns, it becomes productive. It is, quite simply, "good soil." True disciples of Jesus hear the Word and receive it, let it spring up in their hearts, and carefully avoid anything that will stifle its growth.

Considering the condition of the soil in Palestine and the way they sowed the seed, farmers typically expected a ten-fold return in their crops at best. But Jesus took them far beyond those expectations. When God's Word takes root in a person's life, He declared, it produces fruit that increases "thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold."

Interestingly, Mark recorded this parable of the soils before he wrote about Jesus' other parables and specific teachings. This parable provides a key to Jesus' other teachings because it addresses our hearts. It's not enough just to know what Jesus said; what makes a difference is what we do with that truth.

Jesus began this parable in verse 3 with a singular command: "Listen!" He ended the parable with the same instruction: "He who has ears to hear, let him hear." In Scripture, to hear something means more than just detecting the sounds; it carries the idea of understanding and responding. When the Bible says God hears our prayers, it means He answers. (See 1 John 5:14-15.) In the same way, we're called to hear what God is commanding us to do—and to respond accordingly.

God can do great things in our lives by making us fruitful and abundant for His kingdom, but those results all depend on what we do with His Word. Knowing what the Bible says is important, but it's only life-changing when we obey. Let's hear what Jesus says to us—and let's obey Him.

What's our responsibility in the process described throughout this parable?

QUESTION #5

GOOD SOIL?

What makes a person ready to receive the gospel message? Use the spaces below to record specific characteristics or circumstances that would make someone "good soil" for the gospel. (An example has been provided.)

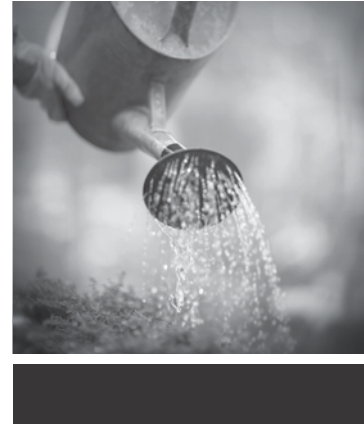
Humility

Based on the list above, who are some examples of "good soil" you've encountered in recent years?

LIVE IT OUT

How will you obey God's Word? Consider taking one or more of these steps in the days to come:

- ▶ **Weed.** What in your life is hindering your ability to hear and obey God's Word? Ask God to help you remove anything keeping you from fully trusting and following Him.
- ▶ **Water.** Make Scripture reading a daily part of your life. Start a journal. Each day, note what God says in His Word and consider what you need to do to obey Him.
- ▶ **Sow.** Create a plan for sharing what God is teaching you through His Word. Use social media to tell others. Meet someone for lunch whom you can encourage to read Scripture and obey God's teaching.



The idea of teaching others about Jesus may feel intimidating or even out of reach. But if you are willing to hear God's Word and obey His instruction for your life, He will guide you the rest of the way.

My thoughts

Share with others how you will live out this study: **#BSFLJesus**