

Intergenerational Bible Study

Matthew 13:1-9; 18-23



Sow

Grow

Show

Va. Conf. UMC Board of Discipleship

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Lesson 1 The Sower Matthew 13: 1-9

Group Leader Helps

- Pray for the guidance of the Holy Spirit and pray for each participant in the group.
- Take time to study the parable again prior to leading the group. Pray for new insights, particularly about God as sower.
- Have a white board or poster board available along with post it notes and pencils, pens or markers.
- Have seeds (we suggest green beans as they grow quickly and are low maintenance), potting soil, and cups for planting
- Supply the group with different Bible translations and Bible paraphrases or encourage the group to bring their favorite translation or paraphrase. They can also use a Bible App, such as “YouVersion” on their phone.
- Remember, you don’t have to have all the answers, your job is to facilitate the discussion

Session Goals

As a result of this Bible Study of the parable of the sower, participants should begin to understand:

- What the definition of “soil” means to an individual and to a congregation
- What the idea of God as sower and human beings as seeds might look like in the context of their own life and in their congregational setting.
- What John Wesley’s means of grace are and which ones are most evident in their personal life and in the life of their congregation.

Biblical Foundation

“Then Jesus told many things in parables saying: “A farmer went out to sow his seed.”

Matthew 13:3

Lesson Outline

Have the participants answer the question: Regarding house plants, do you...

1. Talk and sing to them like friends

2. Forget about them until their leaves fall off
3. Just hope no one gives you one.

Have an area for each answer marked by a poster board sign. Have the participants introduce themselves to others who have answered in the same way.

Come back to the large group, be seated and share the following prayer:

Help us, O God, to be ever mindful of the beauties around us. May we grow with our flowers in gentleness, patience, courage, laughter, and religion. As we turn the brown soil and plant our seed, may we learn faith... faith in the goodness of the earth, the clemency of the sun, the fullness of the clouds. May we be grateful for the privilege of being coworkers with God in the creation of even one tiny flower; and grant that we may know the great joy that comes from sharing with others. Amen.

--Julie Howard Motherall Adopted in 1983

Reading and Study of Scripture

The parable of the sower appears in the three Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke). Have a participant read one of the three accounts. What are similarities and differences in the three readings.

Matthew 13:1-9

Mark 4:2-9

Luke 8:5-8

Do all three accounts have a later section that explains the parable to the disciples?

What is the setting for each parable?

What does it mean for God to be the sower or the farmer?

What does it mean for people to see themselves as seeds?

What is the crop that the seed is supposed to produce?

Hands on Activity

Give each participant a planting cup and have them put their initials on the bottom or the side of the cup. Have each person fill their cup 3/4 full with potting soil. Have each person put 3 or 4 seeds in their cup. Have each person water their soil. Have participants place their cups near a window.

Group Decisions

Are we going to leave our planting cups in the meeting room or take them home with us?

If we leave them in the meeting room, who will water the plants?

Who will make sure the temperature is consistent in the room?

If we take them home, how will we show and tell progress notes to the group?

Break

The Parable and Me

Give each person a piece of paper and a pencil.

Have them draw a timeline horizontally in the middle of the page. Divide the line into four parts. Label the parts first quarter, second quarter, third quarter, fourth quarter – with first quarter being childhood, and fourth quarter being present day.

Have each participant label each quarter with one word – hard, rocky, thorny, or good.

(Hard would produce the poorest crop.

Rocky would produce a limited crop.

Thorny would produce an average crop.

Good would produce the best crop.)

Answer the following the questions...

In the period of your life where you indicated the best crop, what was the contributing factor?

In the period of your life where you indicated the poorest crop, what was the contributing factor?

A Spiritual Practice

John Wesley, founder of the Methodist movement, identified a variety of behaviors and disciplines that helped individuals grow closer to God in daily life. He called these behaviors the means of grace. These means of grace can be divided into two groups. Works of Piety that involve connecting the person to God and Works of Mercy that involve caring for others.

Give each participant one or more 3x5 cards with a working word or phrase written on each of them. Have them place their card or post it under one of two headings, Works of Piety and Works of Mercy. Hint: There are eight words for each heading and a card may not be placed under both headings.

Word or phrase for each card...

Meditate on Scripture

Visit the sick

Share your faith

Give generously

Visit prisoners

Help the poor

Help the poor

Pray

End discrimination

Worship

Participate in Communion

Study Scripture

Seek justice

Live healthy

Experience a fast

Feed the hungry

Have each participant choose a Means of Grace that is their strength, and one that is their growing edge.

Have participants choose a Means of Grace that is their congregation's strength, and one that is their congregation's growing edge.

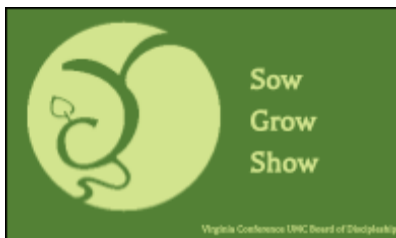
Closing

Read Matthew 13:1-9 again.

Share joys and concerns among the group, and pray as individuals and as a congregation that we become more fruitful in sharing the good news of God's Kingdom.

Homework: Choose a Means of Grace to work on this week and share your journey at the next session.





Lesson 2 Sowing Seeds Matthew 13:1-9; 18-23

Group Leader Helps

- Pray for the guidance of the Holy Spirit and pray for each participant in the group.
- Take time to study the parable again prior to leading the group.
- Supply the group with different Bible translations and Bible paraphrases or encourage the group to bring their favorite translation or paraphrase. They can also use a Bible App, such as “YouVersion” on their phone.
- Remember, you don’t have to have all the answers, your job is to facilitate the discussion.

Session Goals

As a result of this Bible Study of the sower, participants should begin to understand:

- Who is the sower?
- What does it mean to sow seeds spiritually?
- What is the connection between sowing activity and discipleship?
- How do you know when God is sowing in your life?

Biblical Foundation

“When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what is sown in the heart; this is what was sown on the path.” **Matthew 13:19-20** (NRSV)

Open with Prayer

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Have a bit of fun by singing a children’s song with different words!

“Sow the Word” by Craig *Sung to the tune of “Row, Row, Row Your Boat.”*

**Sow, sow, sow the Word, Precious seeds of Faith;
Some that fall along the path are quickly snatched away.**

**Sow, sow, sow the Word, Precious seeds of Truth;
Some that fall on rocky soil, Won't last the whole day
through.**

**Sow, sow, sow the Word, Precious seeds of Hope;
Some that fall among the thorns, Grow weak from fear and
woe.**

**Sow, sow, sow the Word, Precious seeds of Life;
Some that fall into good soil, Will live a life for Christ.**

Reading and Study of Scripture

Have someone read Matthew 13:1-9; 18-23. To help gain new insights into the parable, use a translation or paraphrase different from the one(s) used in the previous sessions.

Following the reading of the scripture, tell the group that the focus of this session is on the sower, the action of sowing, and discipleship. God is the sower and he is sowing His Word among the people of the world. Sowing is God's on-going gracious activities in both our past, present, and future. The parable demonstrates the response of the human heart to receiving the word of God.

When God shares (sows) his Word with us, we can choose to embrace it or we can choose to ignore it. In our parable, these decisions are represented by the different kinds of soil into which the seeds are scattered. Notice that discipleship requires "good soil" to grow. Discipleship will not flourish without the hard work of following Jesus.

A disciple of Jesus may be defined as: *A lifelong learner who influences others to serve.* (Virginia Conference UMC)

Another definition of disciple: *A disciple is a follower of Jesus who is committed to (1) being part of the body of Christ; (2) becoming more like Jesus; (3) being Jesus in ministry.* (Phil Maynard)

Ask the class to compare and contrast these definitions. What is the same? What is different? Notice that with each definition, becoming a disciple (discipleship) is not passive. Intentional action is required to become more like Jesus.

Regular practice of the Wesleyan Means of Grace allows the seed of God's Word to take root, grow and flourish.

Wrapping Up

Additional reflection questions:

Identify a time when God was sowing in your life.

Does your church have an intentional pathway to discipleship? If not, how could you help develop one?

Hands on Activity: Seed Balls

A seed ball is a marble sized ball made of clay, dirt and seed. It is best used when the seeds are from native/natural plants and are thrown into areas where the natural flora has been destroyed. The traditional method of broadcasting seed comes with several major drawbacks such as seeds being washed away, baked dry, blown away or eaten by wildlife. (Sound familiar?) Making seed balls avoids these problems because the clay offers protection from the elements and the wildlife.

To make seed balls, you will need:

- 2 parts potting soil
- 5 parts pottery clay mix from your local art store
- 1-2 parts water
- 1-2 parts seeds of your choice
- Large tub for mixing
- Large box for drying and storing

Directions:

- Mix the soil, clay and 1 part water thoroughly. Slowly add more water until the mixture is the consistency of modeling clay.
- Add seeds, kneading mixture.
- Take small pieces of the mixture and roll into a ball about 1 inch in diameter. If balls are crumbly, add more water.
- Dry balls for 24-48 hours and then toss in desired area. Do not bury or water.

Homework prior to Session 3

Continue the chosen Wesleyan Means of Grace or choose a new one to experience “sowing” in your life.

Close with Prayer

Share prayer joys and concerns among the group. Pray: Lord we thank you for your faithfulness to your word. You are the sower, and I thank you for all the seed you have placed in my heart. By your faith in me, may I show faith in you. Amen.





Lesson 3

The Four Types of Soil

Matthew 13:1-9; 18-23

Group Leader Helps

- Pray for the guidance of the Holy Spirit and pray for each participant in the group.
- Take time to study the parable again prior to leading the group. Pray for new insights, particularly about the four soils.
- Have a white board or poster board available along with post it notes and pencils, pens or markers.
- Supply the group with different Bible translations and Bible paraphrases or encourage the group to bring their favorite translation or paraphrase. They can also use a Bible App, such as “YouVersion” on their phone.
- Remember, you don’t have to have all the answers, your job is to facilitate the discussion.

Session Goals

As a result of this Bible Study of the four soils, participants should begin to understand:

- What the definition of “soil” means to an individual and to a congregation.
- What the four soils might look like in the context of their own life and in their congregational setting.
- What it might look like in the context of their own life and in their congregational setting to produce thirty, sixty or even one hundred times more than was planted in good soil.

Biblical Foundation

“But as for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and yields in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty.” Matthew 13:23 (NRSV)

Open with Prayer

God of all creation, we come before you, asking you to prepare the soil of our hearts to receive the seeds of your word in our study and our conversation. As we share and reflect together, we pray new insights will take root in us so we can become more faithful and fruitful disciples in your name. Amen.

Reading and Study of Scripture

Have someone read **Matthew 13:1-9; 18-23**. To help gain new insights into the parable, use a translation or paraphrase different from the one(s) used in the previous sessions.

Following the reading of the scripture, tell the group that the focus of this session are the four conditions or types of soils. "Soil" can be defined as our ability to receive the good news of God's kingdom. People and congregations are like the four soils with some being more open to the good news of God's kingdom than others. Ask the group to define what they believe "soil" means to them personally. Then ask them to define what they believe "soil" means in the context of their congregational setting.

Draw on a white board or poster board four columns. Label the columns 1. Hard Soil 2. Rocky Soil 3. Thorny Soil and 4. Good Soil. Talk about what it means to be each type of soil.

As individuals and in the congregational setting:

1. What would a hard soil where birds steal seed look like?
2. What would rocky soil look like?
3. What would thorny soil look like?
4. What would good soil look like?

Pass out pens and post it notes to the group. Have the group write on post it notes their experiences and results of planting seeds in each of the four soils, either as individuals or as a congregation. When they are finished, have them step forward and post their examples in the columns.

After reflecting on the results of this exercise, study the last column "good soil" and talk about what thirty, sixty and even one hundred times more than was planted could look like in your congregational setting and community context?

Wrapping Up

Additional reflection questions:

Can unproductive soil be changed? If so, in what ways can it be changed?

Who is responsible for soil improvement?

What covenant will you make with God for creating "good soil" in your individual life? In the congregation's life?

Hands on activity: If your group planted seeds, check the seeds planted and note the result is different when the soil was improved.

Take a soil sample on the congregation's land to send off for a report.

Take a verbal sample from different groups in the congregation as to the harvest they have seen in their activities.

Homework prior to Session 4

Encourage the group to practice at home reading **Matthew 13:1-9; 18-23** using Lectio Divina or Divine Readings.

(<https://www.umc.org/en/content/spiritual-moments-on-the-go> has a short video on Lectio Divina including the five steps used in this spiritual practice)

Close with Prayer

Share prayer joys and concerns among the group and pray that as individuals and as a congregation we become more fruitful in sharing the good news of God's kingdom.





Lesson 4

My Congregation's Garden

Matthew 13:1-9; 18-23

Group Leader Helps

- Pray for the guidance of the Holy Spirit and pray for each participant in the group.
- Take time to study the parable again prior to leading the group. Focus on the description of the garden.
- Supply the group with different Bible translations and Bible paraphrases or encourage the group to bring their favorite translation or paraphrase. They can also use a Bible App, such as “YouVersion” on their phone.
- Remember, you don't have to have all the answers, your job is to facilitate the discussion.

Session Goals

As a result of this Bible Study of the sower, participants should begin to understand:

- How can we compare our church to a garden?
- What is the condition of our church (garden)? What is needed to make our garden healthier?

Biblical Foundation

“When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what is sown in the heart; this is what was sown on the path.” Matthew 13:19-20 (NRSV)

Open with Prayer

Use the familiar hymn, “In the Garden,” (UMH #314) as the opening prayer. Sing or recite the verses. Provide a brief background on the hymn: C. Austin Miles composed the hymn in April 1912 after seeing a vision of Mary Magdalene and the risen Jesus as told in John 20. This hymn celebrates the joy of seeing Jesus alive again after he was crucified and buried in the tomb. Grief has turned to joy!

Reading and Study of Scripture

For the final time in our study, have someone read Matthew 13:1-9; 18-23. To help gain new insights into the parable, use a translation or paraphrase different from the one(s) used in the previous sessions.

Following the reading of the scripture, tell the group that the focus of this session is on the garden. The garden is a powerful biblical theme that resonates deeply with growth of discipleship. The Bible contains many stories about gardens. From the beginning – “The Lord planted a garden in Eden, in the east; and there he put the man whom he formed” (Genesis 2:8) – to the end – “On either side of the river is the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations” (Revelation 22:2) – the Bible speaks of gardens, gardeners and growing things.

For most people living in ancient, Israel plant cultivation would have involved growing edible plants on strips of land just outside their city/town or village. The ground (soil) would be cultivated by hand-hoes or ploughs pulled by cows. This land would be sewn with wheat and barley for winter crops, and millet and beans for summer cropping.

Healthy soil and good seed are prerequisite to healthy plants. Gardeners spend much energy and expense improving the soil of their gardens. Doing so creates an environment conducive to vibrant growth. Churches that thrive are constantly evaluating the methods they are using to teach spiritual truth and provide faith-based insight to people. Healthy churches know that growing disciples of Christ requires the deep, rich soil of worship, learning, service, hospitality, and generosity. By concentrating on these areas of discipleship, churches are able to produce mature believers. Our fallow churches might consider what it would look like to go “deeper” and not simply “wider” in their approach to ministry.

Finally, gardeners must consider the location of their garden to achieve maximum productivity. The sensible gardener knows to pay attention to climate, sun, shade, and water requirements as well as other associated factors. So it is with healthy churches as they understand the importance of the unique location and culture of their church. It is imperative that church leadership account for these distinctions when planning for church growth and productivity. Further, the factors associated with church growth may vary within the church just as soils and other conditions may vary within a garden. You may have vegetables on one side of the garden plot and fragrant flowers on the other side. Is your church a healthy garden of God’s sowing activity?

Wrapping Up

Additional reflection questions:

What type of garden is found in your congregation? Is there more than one type of garden? More than one type of soil?

If you take a walk through your church's garden, what would you expect to find? What discovery might surprise you?

Homework Moving Forward

Share your insights from this class with several others in your congregation. As you share, decide what will be your next steps in growing your church "garden."

Prayer

Share prayer joys and concerns among the group. Pray:

God of grace, in the story of creation, you made the earth a garden and entrusted it to us to till and to keep, a place of peace and beauty where we could walk with you. In the story of redemption, the one who died for us was buried in a garden, and there you raised him up to greet us with new hope and risen life. In the story of the Church, you tend us as a garden, a place of careful pruning and abundant harvest, where we can work with you. Meet us, we pray, in all the gardens where we go for nourishment, refreshment and prayer, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

