

groups

For the next few months we will be going through the Gospel of Mark. These discussion guides will follow along with the sermon series by either using the main passages from the weekend messages or using another passage on the same topic.

These guides will be organized using the acronym HEAR as a way to teach people to read the Bible. HEAR stands for **H**ighlight the passage, **E**xplain the passage, **A**pply the passage, and **R**espond to the passage.

Each week there will be a page to print off for each member of your group. The printed sheet will have the Bible passage you will discuss and some questions in the margins to guide them in examining those verses.

Additionally, there will be a leader's guide that will give you helpful notes on the passage (i.e. background information and definitions) as well as discussion questions to lead your group. These don't need to be printed for each member of your group.

These guides are designed to be discussed BEFORE the sermon so the group can discuss the passage before the pastor shares his insights. However, they can just as easily be used after the weekend message.

Our hope is these tools will (a) help your group members learn to study/read their Bibles outside of the group and (b) give you a helpful outline for facilitating the group discussion. If you have comments or questions about the discussion guides we would love to hear your constructive feedback. Send your feedback to us at

groups@foresthill.org.

How to Use This Discussion Guide

- Print off the "Life Group Member Guide" for each member of your group – or email it to them in advance.
- Use the main idea for each week to quickly understand the text's theme. You can use that as a reference point to help guide your discussion or bring it back if your group begins to get off topic.
- Use the respond section at the end of each guide to help you close in prayer.

Additionally, here are some tips and guidelines to help you lead these discussions:

1. **Choose the questions that best fit your group and your time constraints.** There are a lot of questions in this guide and your group may not be able to discuss them all. That's okay! You don't have to ask all of them. Before your group begins, choose the questions that are most likely to help your group understand what God is saying in the text and how to apply it to their lives.
2. **Prepare for your group time by reading the passages and the notes in a study Bible.** A good study Bible can give you some insights into the passages and how they connect to the whole book or the whole story of the Bible.
3. **Begin every group meeting with prayer.** We can only understand and apply God's Word with the help of the Holy Spirit. So, invite the Spirit to open your hearts and minds to what He says to His people.
4. **Keep the conversation focused on Scripture as much as possible.** Some people may want to bring in their opinions or continually refer to what the teaching pastor said during his message. This is helpful in small doses, but the goal of this discussion guide is to help you determine what God is saying in His Word. Encourage the group to continue to return to the Scripture. One way to do that is by saying, "That's a great insight! Where do you see that in the Scripture we're studying?"
5. **Encourage participation, but don't let anyone dominate.** Encourage everyone to share insights, ask questions, and read aloud. Don't allow any one person – even yourself, the leader – to monopolize the time. Some people are just unaware of themselves and how much they speak, so gently encourage them to listen and make space for others to talk.
6. **Help your group members to be specific in the application of Scripture.** It is easy to generalize when we talk about the Bible and how to apply it. So ask your group members specific questions – for example, "What part of the world do you sense God wants you to pray for? How will you do that? How will you make that a habit?"

We pray that you will hear God speak through Scripture and that His Spirit will move you to obey Him as you build bridges with others in your sphere of influence. May this discussion guide help you and your Life Group to become more engaged with His Word and lead you on in a dynamic life in Christ.

Date of Sermon: April 5

Topic of Sermon: Parable of the Sower and the Seed

Main Passage: Mark 4:1-20

BEFORE your group meeting:

- Look up the main passage in a study Bible and read the study notes.
- Print or send the “Group Member Guide” (last page) to your group members.
- Review the “Group Member Guide” for yourself.
- Have enough pens for each group member.

Main Idea: The condition of the heart equals the condition of the soul

Icebreakers (optional)

- Have you ever planted a garden or been on a farm during planting season? If so, share an experience with growing something.
- What kind of grocery shopper are you, do you inspect it closely or do you just grab and go?

Leader’s Note: Introduce the next part of the group meeting. You can read this introduction or put it in your own words:

“Take a few minutes to read through the printed passage and then we will discuss it as a group. Focus primarily on the instructions in the “Highlight” and “Explain” sections. Bear in mind that all the passages just before and after these verses help to understand the context. This passage deals with opposition that Jesus encountered early in his ministry which even included his own family.

When you come back together, use the questions below to guide the discussion.

HIGHLIGHT the Passage

- What key ideas, words or phrases stood out to you from the passage? What is the significance of those?
- Did this passage raise any questions for you?
- How would you summarize this passage in your own words? Would anyone else add or emphasize something to that summary?

EXPLAIN the Passage

- What are some things this passage revealed about people around Jesus?
- What is a parable? How do you think Jesus is using parables to teach to the crowd?
- What do the soil and the seed represent in life?
- What is the harvest of the good soil? Is this a normal amount?
- Why is the Kingdom of God a secret? Who understands the secret? What is essential about the Kingdom of God?
- As Jesus explains to the disciples and those around him he changes ‘the seed’ to ‘the word’, what does that change in the way you read the passage? How does that change the fruit?
- What do you think is the real heart of this issue that Jesus addresses?

APPLY the Passage

- What kind of soil would you identify with when you first heard about the good news of Jesus? How did your heart receive it?
- What does your fruit look like? How has that changed or how would you like it to change in the future?
- What truth from this passage do you need to cling to? What makes this truth significant to you?
- By God’s power, what is God calling you to change in how you think, speak, or act?
- How does hearing and reading this passage encourage you to surrender something in your life?

RESPOND to the Passage

- Take a few minutes in prayer to thank God for facing opposition, for standing on the truth and fulfilling His mission. Ask Him for His help in handling those who are in opposition to your faith and how to respond in humility.

COMMENTARY NOTES ON THE MAIN PASSAGE

4:1 Parables. Jesus teaches in parables both as a judgement against those “outside” and as a means of instruction for those “inside” his newly formed messianic community of faith.

4:2 Mark provides several examples of Jesus teaching in parables. To the hard-hearted, parables are a warning; to those who are open-hearted, parables illustrate principles of the messianic rule of God. A parable consists of a story and its corresponding intended message.

4:3-7 A sower went out to sow. Using a common farming method of the time, the sower sows the seed without first plowing the ground. Thus the seed fell on various kinds of ground that had not been prepared to receive the seed.

4:8 The good soil facilitates the **growing, increasing, and yielding** of much fruit. Thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold. Typical agricultural yields ranged from about fivefold to fifteenfold, with a tenfold return considered a good crop, though some historical reports tell of extraordinary yields up to a hundredfold (see Gen 26:12, where hundredfold fruit represents the blessing of God).

4:9 Having ears to hear involves surrender of proud self-reliance and submission to God. (cf. Isa 6:10, 43:8, 44:18)

4:10 Those who are with the twelve disciples (see 3:14) receive insight into the content of Jesus’ parables.

4:11 Many parables illustrate aspects of the secret of the kingdom of God, i.e., the nature of the rule of God over individuals and the community of God (see note on Matt 13:10-11). Those who do not yet participate in the messianic community are outside.

4:12 hear but not understand. Since Isa 6:9-10 describes the hard-heartedness of Israel, its citation here emphasizes the fact that Jesus speaks the parables to outsiders as a form of prophetic warning. Jesus warns of the serious consequences for all, both Gentiles and Jews, who do not open their hearts to him. And, yet, there is still room for repentance (See note on Mark 4:33).

4:13 How then will you understand. Jesus hints that even the disciples may suffer from hard hearts (see 8:17-18).

4:14-20 The sower in the parable (vv 4-8) primarily represents Jesus but in a secondary sense every faithful preacher of the gospel. The various soils represent human hearts. The inhospitable hearts in the parable gradually become more receptive (from indifferent, to opportunistic, to very interested), but nevertheless remain preoccupied with the cares of their present life in rebellion against God’s true purposes. The good soil represents a consistently attentive and accepting heart. (See further the extended explanation in the note on Luke 8:15).

Commentaries taken from ESV Study Bible.

Focal Passage: Mark 4:1-20 CSB
Passage in Context: Mark 4 (CSB)



Bible-Reading Tip: The use of parallel passages such as occurs throughout the Gospels helps to give a bigger and fuller context of the stories, encounters and events in the Bible. For example, we see the context for the writing of many of Paul's letters (that became known as the Pastoral Epistles) by reading the Book of Acts.

¹ Again he began to teach by the sea, and a very large crowd gathered around him. So he got into a boat on the sea and sat down, while the whole crowd was by the sea on the shore. ² He taught them many things in parables, and in his teaching he said to them: ³ "Listen! Consider the sower who went out to sow. ⁴ 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 didn't have much soil, and it grew up quickly, since the soil wasn't deep. ⁶ When the sun came up, it was scorched, and since it had no root, it withered away. ⁷ Other seed fell among thorns, and the thorns came up and choked it, and it didn't produce fruit. ⁸ Still other seed fell on good ground and it grew up, producing fruit that increased thirty, sixty, and a hundred times." ⁹ Then he said, "Let anyone who has ears to hear listen."

¹⁰ When he was alone, those around him with the Twelve asked him about the parables. ¹¹ He answered them, "The secret of the kingdom of God has been given to you, but to those outside, everything comes in parables ¹² so that

they may indeed look,

and yet not perceive;

they may indeed listen,

and yet not understand;

otherwise, they might turn back

and be forgiven."^{[a][b]}

The Parable of the Sower Explained

¹³ Then he said to them: "Don't you understand this parable? How then will you understand all of the parables? ¹⁴ The sower sows the word. ¹⁵ Some are like the word sown on the path. When they hear, immediately Satan comes and takes away the word sown in them.^[c] ¹⁶ And others are like seed sown on rocky ground. When they hear the word, immediately they receive it with joy. ¹⁷ But they have no root; they are short-lived. When distress or persecution comes because of the word, they immediately fall away. ¹⁸ Others are like seed sown among thorns; these are the ones who hear the word, ¹⁹ but the worries of this age, the deceitfulness^[d] of wealth, and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful. ²⁰ And those like seed sown on good ground hear the word, welcome it, and produce fruit thirty, sixty, and a hundred times what was sown."

HEAR Bible Reading Method

HIGHLIGHT the passage

- Underline any repeated words or key ideas you see.
- Note any questions you have about what you read.
- In 2-3 sentences, summarize what was said or what happened.

EXPLAIN the passage

- What was revealed about God? His character, desires, and/or actions?
- What was revealed about people? What we are/do or what we should be/do?

APPLY the passage

- From this reading, what truth do you need to embrace?
- By God's power, how will you THINK, SPEAK, or ACT differently based on what you read?

RESPOND to the passage

- Talk to God about what you've seen and learned in this passage.
- Ask Him to help you apply the truth to your life.