



## IDENTIFY VS. INVEST

MARK 4:1-25

OCTOBER 25, 2020 | PASTOR MATT WHITEFORD



**GET TO KNOW EACH OTHER** (USE JUST ONE OR ALL OF THESE QUESTIONS TO CONNECT AS YOU START YOUR CONVERSATION)

**1** Who would consider themselves to have a green thumb, when it comes to gardening?  
Who would consider themselves to have a brown thumb (having a tendency to kill green things)?

**2** Comparing your spiritual life to a plant, would you say you are currently thriving or struggling?  
Explain.

The first few chapters of Mark's Gospel letter help us see the dividing line between those who followed Jesus and those who opposed Him. To further describe the different responses to Jesus and His message, He told a parable about different types of soils. Jesus followed that up with a parable about a lamp on a stand. The parable of the soils teaches us that the condition of a person's heart determines how they respond to the Gospel message. The lamp on a stand takes the idea even further to teach that a person is responsible for the light or message a person has received. Those whose hearts receive the redemptive message of salvation are not to keep it to themselves but must sow seeds and spread light to a difficult and dark world.

**QUICK REVIEW** (OPPORTUNITY FOR PEOPLE TO SHARE WHAT MOST STOOD OUT FROM SUNDAY'S MESSAGE)

Looking back at your notes from this week's message, was there anything you heard that caught your attention, encouraged, challenged, or confused you?

**DIG DEEPER** (OBSERVATIONS FROM THE SCRIPTURE OR COMPLEMENTARY SCRIPTURES FROM SUNDAY'S MESSAGE)

**1** Someone read **Mark 4:1-9**.

### **The Parable of the Sower**

<sup>1</sup> 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. <sup>2</sup> And He was teaching them many things in parables, and in His teaching He said to them: <sup>3</sup> "Listen! Behold, a sower went out to sow. <sup>4</sup> And as he sowed, some seed fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured it. <sup>5</sup> 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. <sup>6</sup> And when the sun rose, it was scorched, and since it had no root, it withered away. <sup>7</sup> Other seed fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no grain. <sup>8</sup> And other seeds fell into good soil and produced grain, growing up and increasing and yielding thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold." <sup>9</sup> And He said, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear."

**Describe the four soils Jesus identifies in the parable. What happens to the seed in each of the four soil types?**

**What has most helped the seed of the Gospel to thrive and grow in you? Have there been times when the Gospel didn't thrive in you? What hindered the growth?**

There is more to this story than appears at first. Jesus uses the exhortation, “Listen!” to warn the hearers that they must think about this or they will get it wrong. There is one seed, cast indiscriminately. Whether the seed takes root and grows, however, is another matter. Seed that fell on hard path was eaten up by birds. Seed that fell on rocky ground failed to take root and withered away. Seed that fell among thorns was choked out and failed to produce any fruit. Seed that fell on good soil took root, grew, and yielded a spectacular crop. This is where the emphasis in the parable lies: not with the unproductive soil, but with the miracle crop.

## **2** Someone read **Mark 4:10-20**.

### **The Purpose of the Parables**

<sup>10</sup> And when He was alone, those around Him with the twelve asked Him about the parables. <sup>11</sup> And He said to them, “To you has been given the secret of the Kingdom of God, but for those outside everything is in parables,<sup>12</sup> so that “they may indeed see but not perceive, and may indeed hear but not understand, lest they should turn and be forgiven.” <sup>13</sup> And He said to them, “Do you not understand this parable? How then will you understand all the parables? <sup>14</sup> The sower sows the word. <sup>15</sup> And these are the ones along the path, where the word is sown: when they hear, Satan immediately comes and takes away the word that is sown in them. <sup>16</sup> And these are the ones sown on rocky ground: the ones who, when they hear the word, immediately receive it with joy. <sup>17</sup> And they have no root in themselves, but endure for a while; then, when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately they fall away. <sup>18</sup> And others are the ones sown among thorns. They are those who hear the word, <sup>19</sup> but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it proves unfruitful. <sup>20</sup> But those that were sown on the good soil are the ones who hear the word and accept it and bear fruit, thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold.”

**According to Jesus, why does God’s Word not take root at all in some people (v. 15)?**

**Why did Jesus speak to people using parables? What was His desired outcome of telling these stories?**

Both in biblical times and today, people do not want transformation of their spirits, which is the real problem to be solved. So, to capture their attention, Jesus told the truth in parables. If they wouldn’t listen one way, He would take the time and invest in them by going at it from another direction with the exact same message. Parables are designed for the uninterested, those who’ve tuned the truth out.

**What can we learn from Jesus’ intentional investment He made in the lives of those who were slow to understanding His message?**

## **3** Someone read **Mark 4:21-25**.

### **A Lamp Under a Basket**

<sup>21</sup> And He said to them, “Is a lamp brought in to be put under a basket, or under a bed, and not on a stand? <sup>22</sup> For nothing is hidden except to be made manifest; nor is anything secret except to come to light. <sup>23</sup> If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear.” <sup>24</sup> And He said to them, “Pay attention to what you hear: with the measure you use, it will be measured to you, and still more will be added to you. <sup>25</sup> For to the one who has, more will be given, and from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away.”

When God reveals truth to you, do you typically share that with other people (put that “light” on a lampstand) or keep it to yourself (hide your “light” under the bed)? Why?

What did Jesus mean in v. 24 when He said, “With the measure you use, it will be measured to you”?

What differences have you noticed in your life when you apply God’s Word and live in His truth, compared to times when you stray from it?

### **LIVE IT OUT** (DISCUSS HOW YOU CAN LIVE OUT THE TRUTHS YOU JUST OBSERVED IN SCRIPTURE)

- 1** Have you considered that receptive soil necessitates productive soil? What might it mean about your relationship with Christ if you think of yourself as receptive to His Word but are not producing any fruit?
- 2** Matt asked this question on Sunday: “How is your life influencing the state of others’ soil?” So often we come to church to “be filled.” How could church be different if we attend with the intent of investing or pouring into others to help their soil become more receptive to the Gospel?
- 3** What might it look like to lay down your agenda to painstakingly invest in those whose soil is so poor that the truth can’t even land in their lives?

### **CLOSING PRAYER**

Close your time in prayer with your group.

### **NEXT WEEK:**

Read **MARK 5:1-43** before Sunday and your home group. Remember to take good notes so you are ready to add to the discussion your home group will have! *FYI – be on the lookout for a video teaching in the middle of the week on Mark 4:26-41. It should be available on our website, Facebook, Instagram, and the email newsletter. There will not be a discussion guide available for the video teaching.*

### **PRAISE/PRAYER REQUESTS** (TRY TO HAVE ONE OR A FEW PEOPLE PRAY FOR ONE TOPIC AT A TIME)

Use this space or the back of this paper to write the requests and find a way to share those with the group so you can be praying for each other during the week.

## TIPS ON GROUP PRAYER

Prayer is an important part of being in a Home Group. Here are some tips to help make group prayer be a life-giving aspect of your group.

**PRAY FOR ONE TOPIC AT A TIME:** Anyone in the group is free to introduce a prayer request or praise during the prayer time. Once a topic is introduced, the group focuses on that request alone. Once it's covered, the group moves on to the next request or praise.

**PRAY MORE THAN ONCE:** If your group is focusing on one topic at a time, each person is encouraged to pray several times during the prayer time for those topics they feel most led to pray about. No one should be required to pray.

**KEEP PRAYERS SHORT AND SIMPLE:** Group prayer goes better when members keep their prayers short and to the point. When someone prays for a long time, it's hard for the other members to stay focused and long prayers tend to intimidate those who are just learning to pray out loud in a group. No one should be required to pray out loud.

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### How to Use this Discussion Guide

The guide is meant to serve you and your group as you intentionally create a healthy environment for Gospel community, growing in friendship, and living like Jesus together. Use the guide as a tool to help your unique group.

With that in mind, please review the guide before your group meets to see if some content or questions might resonate more or less with your group. Don't feel pressure to read all the content during your group discussion or to hit on all the questions. The guide is not meant to be something you power through for the sake of completing. Pick the content from the guide you feel will help your group grow in Gospel community.

In addition, spend some time praying for your group each week, preparing your heart, and asking God for wisdom and guidance as you lead. We are praying for you too!

Visit [cpmodesto.org/groupleaders](http://cpmodesto.org/groupleaders) to download the sermon discussion guide every week. Not in a Home Group, but want to be in one? Visit [cpmodesto.org/homegroups](http://cpmodesto.org/homegroups) and use the Home Group Finder!

## COMMENTARY

### MARK 4:1-25

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**4:1.** Surrounded as usual by the crowds, Jesus taught from a boat while the people listened from the shore of the lake. This would allow a greater number of people to see and hear. He sat in the boat. Teachers traditionally sat when they taught.

**4:2.** The word "parable" literally means "to throw alongside." Thus, a parable is an extended metaphor comparing a spiritual truth with something from the listeners' everyday world. The phrasing here means that Jesus' speaking in parables was a repeated action, something that took place on more than just this occasion.

**4:3.** The word "Listen!" introduces the rest of the parables in the chapter. It invites the listeners to participate, drawing them into the story. It arrests people, stops whatever other conversations are going on. It says, "Pay attention because this is important." This first parable is the key to the other parables. It does not describe the Kingdom of God as the other parables do. Rather, it describes the condition of the hearers. This first parable also followed directly on the heels of the religious leaders' misunderstanding of the person of Jesus. Jesus was describing their spiritual condition. He set the scene by referring to something His hearers were familiar with: a farmer sowing seed.

**4:4.** Sowing during this time period was done by hand rather than machine. Therefore, it is easy to see how some seed would end up on the path. There was nothing there for the seed to grow in, so the seed remained on the path until the birds ate it up.

**4:5-6.** Nothing would grow on rocks, so it was important for farmers to remove the rocks from their fields before planting. No matter how diligent a farmer was, however, it would be almost impossible to get them all out. Seeds scattered on the rock would spring up quickly in the shallow soil that covered the rock. However, when the sun scorched the seedlings, they would die because they did not have a root system.

**4:7.** Some of the seed was scattered among thorns and weeds. Again, these seed grew because of the life of the seed, but they yielded no harvest.

**4:8.** Good soil produces good crops with an abundant return. This is truly a sign of the Kingdom of God. There will be a glorious return on the scattered seed, a literal filling of the storehouses of Heaven.

**4:9.** Because this parable describes the hearers, Jesus gave it this special ending. This ending sets the tone for the entire chapter. Everything that follows must be seen in the light of this verse. While this verse is only listed once in this chapter, each parable has the feeling of the words of the verse. It is a phrase that seems to be echoed throughout the entire New Testament. This verse calls for the hearers to evaluate their own response. What does Jesus mean by the parable? And if they know, the next question becomes, “What kind of soil am I for the Word of God?”

**4:10-11.** As soon as the disciples got Jesus alone, they asked Him why He was teaching in parables and what this particular parable meant. Jesus acknowledged that the mysteries of His Kingdom were being revealed to them and not to everyone. The disciples were privileged to hear Jesus interpret this parable. This was not because of their superior spiritual state, but because the Lord Jesus had chosen them.

For every parable there are two levels of understanding: the physical and the spiritual. Everyone received the parable at the physical level, but the disciples were granted understanding at the spiritual level. The disciples—and this now includes us as believers—had been chosen, as were the chosen people of God in the Old Testament. We have been given a sacred responsibility.

**4:12.** The outsiders Jesus referred to are probably the religious leaders who accused Him of acting by the power of Beelzebub. They would not understand; they would not hear. They were responsible for the truth they had heard and rejected.

The theme of secrecy runs throughout Mark’s Gospel, and it is no different here. Parables, which typically revealed truth, are shown in this context to conceal it. Is this a contradiction? No, because parables are more than illustrations; they are also spiritual tests. They hide the truth from those who do not seek truth, but they reveal truth to those who seek it.

**4:13.** Jesus’ question was a gentle rebuke to the disciples. If they did not understand this parable, the key to all parables, how would they understand the rest of them?

**4:14.** The word that the sower sowed may be understood in two ways. It may be the Word of God that Jesus had been preaching. This was the message of John the Baptist: Repent for the Kingdom of God is at hand. “Word”, however, may also refer to the person of Jesus. The word “sown” would therefore be the people’s response to Jesus: would they accept Him or not? At this very moment, Jesus was sowing the Word. He was preaching to the people. His miracles had preached to them. What kind of soil would they prove to be? Note that there are really only two types of soils—productive and nonproductive. But Jesus gave three examples of the nonproductive type.

**4:15.** The Word of God never makes an impact on some people. It rests on the hardened soil of their hearts until Satan comes and snatches it away. These are the people who will never even think to question their response to the Gospel.

**4:16-17.** The seed sown on rocky soil is like those who hear the Word and accept it gladly. Their faith seems to shoot up overnight, and they have great joy in the Lord. Some of Jesus’ audience may have been in this category. These are the people who followed Jesus from place to place and longed to have Him heal them or feed them.

But Jesus’ teaching eventually became too demanding for them (compare John 6:66), and they turned away. There was not much moisture in their soil. When the going got tough, they got going. Persecution, trouble, or even hard teaching shriveled the Word until it became as nothing in their hearts.

Some people might think that this means Christians can lose their salvation. The parable, however, does not teach this. The parable actually encourages those who will be sowing the Word in the future. Jesus was saying that we are to sow without looking at the results. Sometimes the results will be snatched away and sometimes the results will be shriveled because of circumstances. But at other times, our efforts will mesh with God’s divine activity and a rich harvest will result.

**4:18-19.** The seed sown among weeds at first grew and looked like a healthy plant. But worldly things choked the life out of this hearer. Worries represent a lack of faith—unbelief in the One Who said not to worry because God would take care of us. Wealth gives people a sense of self-sufficiency and little need of God. We are to ask God for our daily bread and live in the knowledge of His mercies which are “new every morning.” Wealthy people do not need to live hour to hour because they believe their needs are taken care of. Likewise, their desire for the things of this world crowd out the things of the heavenly world. Jesus declared that we cannot serve two masters. The soil or wealthy hearer in this parable had chosen what master it would serve.

**4:20.** Others hear the Word and act upon it. They produce fruit by increasing numbers. God will take what we give Him and produce a bountiful crop from it. The average yield of a crop is seven and one-half times more than the seed that were sown. The huge numbers

reported here—thirty, sixty, or even one hundred times what was sown—show that the harvest provided by the Lord is miraculously abundant.

The harvest is typically symbolic of divine activity, and here we have the key to the parable. The parable encourages Christians who have not fallen away, those who remain at Christ's side—then as well as now. While we may get discouraged that our evangelistic efforts are not producing the fruit we would like, we can be encouraged that God is working in the harvest and that it will be a rich harvest. The emphasis in the parable is not on the soils but on the harvest. In spite of failures, setbacks, and even persecution, there will be an abundant harvest for those who remain faithful to God.

**4:21-23.** These parables would be obscure for those who failed to seek the truth in them. For those who will not accept Jesus Christ, there is no understanding of spiritual things. The passage does not teach that each person is predestined to a certain soil. Jesus is reminding us that we are sowing seeds and spreading light to a dark and difficult world. We are not in a country club where each person has his or her own opinion and nice people do not argue about them. No, we are in a war, a spiritual battle, against evil. God guarantees that though some people will be destroyed in the battle, God will win.

Jesus' words here declare that a person is responsible for the light or knowledge he or she has received. One does not take a lamp and hide it. Therefore, a person does not take the truth and deliberately obscure it. If that is true of humans, it is even more so with God. But whatever is hidden will be revealed. In fact, the disciples found things they did not understand revealed fully with the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

Jesus is the light that is hidden from some eyes because they refuse to see, but He will be revealed in glory to all: to the disciples in their lifetimes and to the Pharisees at the final judgment.

**4:24-25.** Notice the phrase, "Consider carefully what you hear." "Hear" in the Bible also carries the meaning of "act upon." Jesus was telling us to pay attention to what we hear and beware how we act upon it. These verses came after Jesus' confrontation with the religious leaders when they accused Him of acting by Satan's power.

Maybe you have heard the story about two men, one a baker and the other a butcher. Rather than charging each other, they would trade their goods to each other. But the butcher became angry because the pound of flour he was given for his pound of meat always came up short of a pound. He confronted the baker. The baker told him, "I don't have a measurement on my scale, but a balance, so I always used your pound of meat on one side of the balance." His point was clear. The butcher had been trying to cheat him by giving him less meat, but he did not want the same standard of measurement used against him!

What measure were the religious leaders using? If they were using the Law, then the Law would become their judge, because the Law pointed to Jesus Christ. If we use the truth we have received to condemn others instead of attracting others to Jesus, this measure will be used upon us. To those who use the truth they have been given appropriately, more will be given. As with the good soil, their crop will increase to a hundredfold. But to those who oppose the truth—and the Pharisees must be counted in this condemnation—whatever they have will be taken away. Their love of the Law will disintegrate, and they will be left in darkness.