

# **THE PARABLE OF THE SOWER AND THE SOILS**

**by Patrick Mease and Carol Duerksen**

## **KEY VERSE:**

“Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God.” Luke 8:11

## **FAITH STORY:**

Luke 8:4-15

## **FAITH FOCUS:**

In this passage Jesus, tells a parable to a crowd that had gathered from various cities.

The parable is about a sower who sows seeds. Some falls on the path, some on rocks, some among thorns, and some on good soil. Only the seeds planted on good soil produced a crop. Jesus’ disciples didn’t understand the meaning of the parable, so when they were alone they asked him what it meant. Jesus explained to them that the seed is the word of God, and the different soils represent things that prevent the word from bearing fruit in people’s lives.

## **SESSION GOAL:**

To encourage students to nurture their own “soil” and the “soil” of their community.

## **SESSION OBJECTIVES:**

### **By the end of this session, the students will:**

- Students will read the three versions of this parable.
- Students will articulate that they can be the soil or the sower.

## **MATERIALS NEEDED AND ADVANCE PREPARATION:**

- 1** 40 Balloons
- 2** 1 paper or plastic cup per student
- 3** Potting soil
- 4** Flower seeds
- 5** Pens or pencils for each student
- 6** String to tie someone’s hands behind back
- 7** Bibles for each student
- 8** A stick pin
- 9** A candy bar or some other form of “bribery” for one student
- 10** Poster paper, glue, colorful markers, scissors, yarn
- 11** Teen magazines

## SESSION OUTLINE

### **FOCUS: (10 minutes)**

Set out four piles of balloons and assign one student to each pile of balloons. Speak privately to each student, giving the following instructions: The 1st student should try to blow up their balloons with their hands tied behind their back. Tell the 2nd student that you will give him/her a candy bar (or other reward) if they won't blow up any balloons at all. The 3rd and 4th students should just blow up their balloons. Assign a 5th student to pop the 3rd student's balloons (using the stick pin) when they are half full. Tell the remainder of the students to cheer for the 4th student as they blow up their balloons.

Say "Go!" The exercise is over when the 4th student has their balloons all blown up.

### **CONNECT: (5 minutes)**

Ask each person how many balloons they filled with air and why they were or were not successful.

Then ask the students if they can think of a Bible story that might have similarities to the balloon exercise. Encourage students to guess before inviting them to turn to the passages in their Bibles.

### **EXPLORE THE BIBLE: (10–15 minutes)**

**Divide the class into three groups and assign each group one of the passages that tells this parable:**

Matthew 13:1-9 and 18-23

Mark 4:1-20

Luke 8:1-15

**After each group has read their passage, ask: How does this parable compare to the balloon activity we did? Students should make the following comparisons:**

- The person who had to blow up the balloons without using their hands was like the seeds that fell upon the path—they didn't even have a chance to take root and grow.
- The person whose balloons were being popped was like the seeds that fell on the rocky ground—they had no roots and therefore didn't last long.
- The person who took the candy bar instead of blowing up the balloons was like the seed that fell among the thorns—"for the pleasures of this world choked them out."
- The person who was being encouraged was the seed that fell upon the good soil.

### **Discuss:**

- What differences did students notice in the three versions of the parable?
- Who is the sower in this story?
- What is the seed?
- What do you think the rocks represent?

- What do you think the path represents?
- What do you think the thorns represent?
- What do you think the good soil represents?

**APPLY: (10–15 minutes)**

Instruct students to create a poster that illustrates how this story fits into their lives. They may utilize any of the supplies, including the potting soil and the flower seeds.

**Share these thoughts with students to get them thinking about what they might illustrate on their poster:**

- What kind of soil are you? Are you flourishing and producing fruit? What is that fruit? Are you being scorched by the hardships of this life? What are those hardships? Are you being lead astray by the busy pleasures of this life? What are those pleasures and distractions?
- Are you a farmer who plants the seeds? How do you share God’s good news with others? How do you help nurture people who are already Christians? Or do you hinder people from growing as Christians?

**RESPOND: (10–15 minutes)**

Instruct students to fill a cup \_ full with potting soil and put several seeds in the cup.

Ask students to spread out in the room so they are alone (or go outdoors or to another part of the church if you have time) and to take their cup and a marker with them. During this quiet time alone, ask them to think about one thing they are willing to do in order to be good soil or a good sower. Ask them to write a word on their cup that summarizes what they are willing to do.

**When students return, gather in a circle with students holding their cups. Offer this prayer:**

God, we stand here as different sowers and different soils. Use us. Use us to plant your word as well as to be receivers of your word. May we all bear fruit—not the same fruit, but all good fruit. Give us honest and good hearts. May your Son shine on us. Amen.

**Ask students to write this phrase on their cup: “Let the Son Shine”**

**Say:** Take your cups home. Water them. Watch the seeds grow. Pray for God’s word to grow in you, and let the Son shine through you.

**INSIGHTS FROM SCRIPTURE:**

This passage is often referred to as the Parable of the Sower. Biblical scholars say that Jesus is apparently reflecting on his mission and the results of his mission. It is clear to him that there will be opposition to his ministry and that only a limited number of people in Israel are going to hear and respond to the gospel of the Kingdom. He draws a parallel between a farmer sowing seed and a teacher of the gospel—both spread the seed knowing that it will not all bear fruit. The sower must not be discouraged or try to take responsibility for the seed bearing fruit. It is up to the sower to be faithful in sowing the seed and to leave the rest up to

God. The same holds true for Christians today—we are called to spread God’s word and sow the seeds but we cannot force the seeds to take root and grow.

Another approach to this passage would focus on the soil. After all, the sower does not change, nor does the seed. They both remain constant, which infers that the results are not the fault of the sower, but of the soil on which the seed falls. So, the passage may more appropriately be called The Parable of the Soils. The sower doesn’t determine ahead of time which soil will grow the seed and which soil will not grow the seed. Instead, the sower spreads the seed on all four soils, hoping it will grow.

Both of these interpretations are valid and give us much to think about and strive for as followers of Jesus. Jesus expects us to be good soil and receivers of the Word, as well as to be sowers of his Good News for all.

**WORK CITED:**

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**The Interpreter’s Bible, Luke-John,** Abingdon Press, 1952