

Lesson 12

Parable of the Sower

The Sower and the Seed
(Matthew 13:1–9)

How to Use This Lesson

- Core Presentation
- Parable: A parable is a metaphor that uses short narrative fiction to reference a transcendent symbol, which in the Gospels is generally the Kingdom of Heaven. The Godly Play approach to parables includes six guiding parables in gold boxes, parables about parables, side-by-sides, the parable cards, and the parable games (which include all the Parables of Jesus and his “I Am” statements). The materials are generally flat as opposed to the three-dimensional materials used for the Sacred Stories.
- As the twelfth lesson in Volume 3 of *The Complete Guide to Godly Play*, it may be presented at any time, preferably in sequence with other parables.
- It is part of a comprehensive approach to Christian formation that consists of eight volumes. Together the lessons form a spiral curriculum that enables children to move into adolescence with an inner working knowledge of the classical Christian language system to sustain them all their lives.

The Material

- Location: Parable shelves (Parables may be displayed in any order, but ideally they are displayed on the top shelf of the Parable Shelf Unit because they are of equal importance.)
- Pieces: Gold-painted box with light brown felt dot; gold box of birds, three earth images (rocky soil, thorns, good earth), three bags of grain, one sower
- Underlay: Light brown strip of felt (approximately fifty-seven inches by twelve inches or one hundred and forty-five centimeters by thirty centimeters)

Background

This parable is found in all three synoptic gospels and in the Gospel of Thomas (Mark 4:1–9; Matthew 13:1–9; Luke 8:4–8; Gospel of Thomas 9). The parable is followed by an allegory that expresses the concerns of the first century Church and the Church in every age. But we will leave the parable open as when Jesus first told it.

Why tell parables? In parables, we enter with wonder to live the question. Parables question our everyday view of life. They wake us up to see in life what we have not seen before. Parables question the status quo, the order imposed by tradition, power or class. That is why Jesus' parables often got him into trouble, and why Christians ever since have tried to make parables more benign, so they will not disrupt our comfortable worldviews.

Notes on the Material

Find the material in a gold parable box with a light brown felt dot, located on the top shelf of one of the Parable shelves. The underlay is a long strip of light brown felt (approximately fifty-seven inches by twelve inches or one hundred and forty-five centimeters by thirty-one centimeters). There are three individual flat pieces with images representing the rocky soil, the thorns, and the good earth. As you tell the parable, lay out the matching images for the kind of soil being described.

Three flat bags of grain, in increasing sizes, represent the harvests of thirty, sixty, and one hundred measures. There is also a little gold box full of birds and the figure of the sower (all flat).

Special Notes

You'll find the introductions to each parable very similar. You need not repeat the words exactly the same each time, but do try to make your introductions similar. The repetition serves in the same way as the phrase "once upon a time" in many stories. This formula signals that something out of the ordinary is about to happen.

Movements

Go to the Parable shelves and pick up the gold parable box. Point to the light brown felt dot on the box that identifies it. Bring the parable box to the circle of children and place it in the middle.

Sit back and reflect for a moment about what might be inside. This is not a hypothetical exercise on the part of the storyteller. You have no guarantee that what you take out will be a parable. Even if you are ready, there are days when you will not find the presentation to be a parable.

After using some or all these introductions, sit back a moment and reflect again on whether there is a parable inside the box. After a moment or two, you seem to have an idea.

Move the parable box from in front of you to your side. Remove the lid and lean it up against the box on the side where the children are sitting in the circle. This will help them keep focused on what is being presented rather than what is to come out of the box, and it helps keep the box more mysterious.

Words

Watch where I go to get this material.

Look. The box is the color gold. There may be a parable inside because parables are as valuable, or even more valuable, than gold.

The box also looks like a present. Parables are presents. They were given to you before you were born. They are yours, even if you don't know what they are.

The box looks old, and parables are old. Maybe there really is one inside.

Do you see the lid? It is like a closed door. Sometimes parables seem closed to us, even if we are ready to enter them. You need to keep coming back to them, and one day they will open.

I know. Let's look inside and see if there's a parable there.

Movements

Take out the underlay. Leave it in a crumpled heap in the middle of the circle. As you talk about it, begin to smooth it out.

Take the sower out of the box and place him on the underlay at your right facing toward the children.

Move the sower along the brown strip, scooping seeds from his basket with your hand, and sowing them along the underlay from your right to left. The sower stops.

Take the gold box full of little birds from the parable box. Place it on the underlay between you and the "path." Remove the lid carefully.

Take out the birds one by one and place them along the underlay (farthest from you) from your right to left. These are the birds who have come to eat the seeds.

Words

I wonder what this could really be? It doesn't look like much now. Hmmm. It is certainly brown. It is all brown. Everywhere there is anything, there is brown. Let's see if there is anything else in the box that can help us tell the parable.

There are many things here to help us tell the parable, but nothing else to put down to help us begin. All we can do then, is just begin.

There was once someone who did such amazing things and said such wonderful things that people followed him. As they followed him, they heard him speaking about a kingdom. The kingdom was not like the one they lived in. It was not like a kingdom anyone had ever visited. It was not like any kingdom anyone had even heard of, so they had to ask him, "What is the Kingdom of Heaven like?"

One day when they asked him that, he said, "The Kingdom of Heaven is like when a sower, someone who plants seed, goes out to sow.

And as he sows some seeds fell on the path."

"And the birds of the air came . . ."

". . . and ate the seeds."

Movements

Take out the figure for the rocky ground and place it to your left of the birds that you lined up along the underlay farthest from you. Move the sower along that piece scattering seeds from the bowl among the stones.

The pushing down of the roots can be expressed with your hands by opening them and trying to push your fingers down among the stones.

Place the figure of the thorns to your left of the stones. Move the sower along the thorns, sowing as he goes.

The choking can be expressed by your hands. Clench both fists and twist them.

Place the figure of the good earth to your left of the thorns. Move the sower along the good earth and scatter seeds with your hand, scooping seeds from the bowl the sower carries.

Use your fingers again to show the roots going down into the earth.

Move your flat hand like a sharp blade across the top of the good earth figure to show the cutting off of the ripe grain during the harvest.

Take out of the parable box the figures for the thirty, sixty, and one hundred bushels and place them from your right to your left in

Words

“Some of the seeds also fell among the stones.”

“When the seeds tried to put their little roots down among the stones they could not push them all the way in. When the sun came out it scorched the seeds and they died.”

“Some of the seeds also fell among the thorns.”

“When the seeds tried to push their little roots down among the thorns, they could push them part way in, but the thorns choked them, and they died.”

“Some of the seeds fell in the good earth.”

“When the seeds pushed their little roots down into the good earth, they could go all the way in, so they grew and grew.”

“When they were all grown up, they were ripe for the harvest. Then they were cut off and gathered up.”

Movements

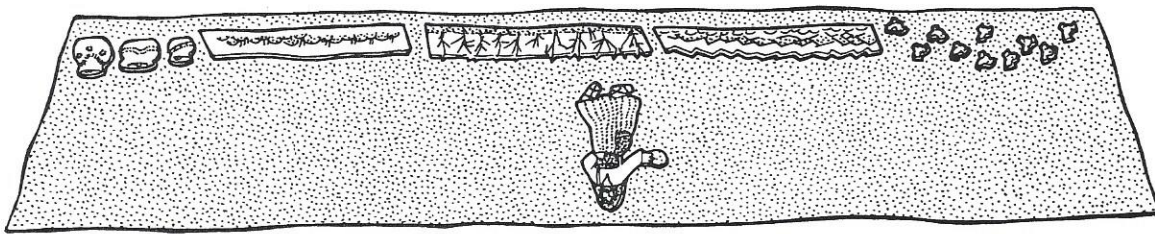
ascending order along the underlay farthest away from you. "Fill" the bags by scooping up the harvest with your hand and "pouring" it into the containers, being sure the picture side is toward the children.

Pause for a moment after placing the containers of the harvest. Prepare yourself for the wondering. When you and the children are ready, begin. Move the sower to the middle.

Words

"And the harvest was thirty, sixty, and one hundred bushels."

Now, I wonder if the person had a name?



The Parable of the Sower (Storyteller's Perspective)

I wonder who the person could really be?

I wonder if the person was happy when the birds came and ate the seeds?

I wonder if the birds were happy when they saw the sower?

I wonder if the birds have names?

I wonder what the person was doing when the little seeds could not get their roots in among the stones?

I wonder what the person was doing when the little seeds were choked by the thorns?

Movements

Move the sower from your right to left as you wonder.

Move the thorn figure above the stone figure and then put the good earth above the thorns. Then move the thirty bushels to the left of the stones, the sixty bushels to the left of the thorns, and the one hundred bushels to the left of the good earth.

Put the thirty bushels by the good earth and the sixty by the stones and the one hundred by the thorns. Continue moving the harvest baskets until all possible combinations are completed.

Move everything back to its place. Then move the harvest bags to the middle between you and the soil strips. Touch each bag as you wonder how the harvest was used.

When the wondering winds down, begin to put all of the pieces of the parable carefully back in the parable box. Name the things as they are put away. Ask the children to begin thinking about what work they are going to get out during the response time.

Words

I wonder what the person was doing when the little seeds were growing in the good earth?

I wonder what the harvest could really be?

Was it like this?

Or could it really be like this?

I wonder how much the sower used for seed?

I wonder how much the sower sold?

I wonder how much the sower kept for food?

I wonder if the sower was surprised at the harvest?

I wonder what part of the whole thing surprised the sower most?

Movements

When all is put away, replace the parable box on the shelf. Return to the circle of children and help them decide what work they would like to get out.

Words

I wonder what your work will be today? You might make something about this story, or another story that you know.

Maybe you want to work with something else. There are so many things you can choose from. Only you know what is right for you.