

# The Sower: Four Kinds of Hearts

*What Jesus' parable teaches about how we hear God's Word, and why we keep sowing it*

*But he who received seed on the good ground is he who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and produces: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.*

MATTHEW 13:23

## AT A GLANCE

|                      |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
|----------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>BIG IDEA</b>      | The same seed, God's Word, falls on four kinds of hearts: hard, shallow, crowded, and good. Only the good soil hears, understands, and bears fruit. Jesus asks two questions: What kind of soil am I? And will I keep sowing the seed? |
| <b>SCRIPTURE</b>     | Matthew 13:1-23 · Colossians 1:6 · Romans 10:8-17                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| <b>LENGTH</b>        | About 25 minutes                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| <b>BEST FOR</b>      | Middle school and high school (easily adapted for children)                                                                                                                                                                            |
| <b>YOU WILL NEED</b> | Bibles; four cups: one with packed hard dirt, one with a rock under a thin layer of soil, one with weeds, and one with good potting soil, plus a few seeds                                                                             |

## Start here: one seed, four results

Show the four cups and drop seeds in each one. Ask: "Which one will grow?" Then read Matthew 13:1-9. In Jesus' day, a farmer walked through his field throwing handfuls of seed. Some landed on the hard footpath, some on rocky ground where a thin layer of soil covered the limestone underneath, some among thorn roots, and some on good soil.

Jesus explained this parable Himself in verses 18-23, so we don't have to guess what it means.

| IN THE STORY                   | WHAT IT MEANS                                                                                |
|--------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>The seed</b>                | "The word of the kingdom" (v. 19): the good news about Jesus                                 |
| <b>The sower</b>               | First Jesus Himself, and now every believer who shares His Word                              |
| <b>The birds</b>               | "The wicked one," Satan, who snatches the word away                                          |
| <b>The sun on rocky ground</b> | "Tribulation or persecution... because of the word" (v. 21), including today's peer pressure |
| <b>The thorns</b>              | "The cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches" (v. 22)                            |
| <b>The good ground</b>         | A heart that hears and understands                                                           |
| <b>The crop</b>                | A life that believes and grows, producing fruit                                              |

## Four kinds of hearts

### 1. The hard path: outright rejection

"When anyone hears the word of the kingdom, and does not understand it, then the wicked one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart" (v. 19). The seed never gets in. Some people have heard about Jesus so often, or are so set against Him, that the message just bounces off.

### 2. The rocky soil: joy, then walk away

This person "hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; yet he has no root in himself, but endures only for a while. For when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he stumbles" (vv. 20-21). It's the student who is excited at camp, but when friends make fun of them on Monday, the faith withers. Nothing went deep.

### 3. The thorny soil: the thrill, then crowded out

"The cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful" (v. 22). The seed grows, but so do the weeds. Worry, busyness, wanting more stuff, and chasing the next thing slowly crowd Jesus out. Riches are "deceitful" because they promise happiness they can't deliver.

### 4. The good soil: understand and believe

This person "hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit" (v. 23). A normal harvest then was maybe sevenfold or tenfold. Thirty, sixty, a hundredfold was astonishing. When God's Word takes root in a ready heart, the results are far bigger than we'd expect.

#### HOW THE SEED GROWS: ROMANS 10

Paul shows the same process. "Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Romans 10:17). Hearing leads to believing and confessing: "If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved" (10:9). And the promise is wide open: "Whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved" (10:13). This is a natural place to invite students to receive Christ.

## What kind of soil am I?

A field can change. Hard ground can be plowed, rocks can be removed, and weeds can be pulled. Ask God to soften your heart, to send your roots deeper, and to show you the thorns that need to go.

## Keep sowing!

If you share Jesus with your friends, this parable is for you too. Three out of four soils didn't produce a crop, yet the harvest was huge. Don't get discouraged when people reject the message. Your job is to sow; God makes it grow. Paul rejoiced that the gospel "is bringing forth fruit... since the day you heard and knew the grace of God in truth" (Colossians 1:6).

#### TALK IT OVER

1. Which of the four soils do you see most often among students? Why?
2. What kinds of "persecution" or pressure make young believers wither today?
3. What "thorns" compete for your attention and crowd out God's Word?
4. What can a person do to become good soil?
5. How does this parable encourage you to keep sharing Jesus, even when people say no?

#### TAKE IT HOME

Read Matthew 13:1-23 again this week. Ask God to show you which soil best describes your heart right now, and one specific thorn or rock to deal with. Then plant one seed: share a verse or your story with a friend, and leave the growing to God.

*Same seed, different soil. Be good ground, and keep sowing.*

From fifty years of youth ministry by **Ron Whittam**. Share freely with your students and leaders. · The Youth Ministry Living Room · [yprogramming.com/livingroom](http://yprogramming.com/livingroom)

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