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**OPEN THE CONVERSATION**

Take some time to build relationships with the students:

* Ask for each student’s high and low from the week.
* Today’s RBQ (Relationship Building Question): **If you could instantly grow any plant or tree in your backyard, what would it be and why?**

**INTRODUCTION**Do you remember the first time you heard the Gospel? I don’t. I do know that for a while, I didn’t receive it. It was like I had never even heard it before, although I most certainly had. Once I did hear the Gospel, I would be excited for a short time but it would ultimately fall to the wayside. As I got older, temptations, life situations, and friends would all too easily draw me away from God until, eventually, I made the decision that I was going to surrender to God fully. This was a process and it took time.

Did you know you can grow an avocado tree from a pit? If you put the seed in water and wait, roots will form, and then a sprout will form. But here’s the catch—it can take 13 years before you ever see fruit! The same is true when we share the gospel. Sometimes we don’t see fruit quickly. Sometimes we don’t even see it in our lifetime. But our job isn’t to make things grow—our job is simply to plant the seeds and trust God with the results.

If we are going to be used by God, we must first examine our hearts to see if we are in good ground, because only good ground bears good fruit.

**Do you ever wish that it were your job to make people believe in Jesus? Have you ever tried to share the gospel before? How’d that go?**

**READ Mark 4:1-20**

1. Which soil best describes your heart right now?
2. What does this parable teach us about sharing Jesus with others?
3. Why do we sometimes run away from God’s call to share with others?
4. Who in your life seems like “bad soil,” but God may want you to share with anyway?
5. What would it look like for you to faithfully “sow seeds” at school or with friends

**WRAP UP**

Let’s put today’s lesson into action: How can you live out what we’ve talked about today?

Ask for any prayer requests and pray for one another.

**THIS WEEK’S CHALLENGE**

Write down 1-3 names of people you know who don’t have a relationship with Jesus. This week, pray for them every day. Ask God to allow you to share His love with them.

**EXTENDED CUT**

Did you know that you can grow an avocado tree from an avocado pit? Stick toothpicks in the seed, put it in some water and, after about eight weeks, roots will begin to grow, then a sprout. Once the seedling grows enough leaves and roots, you can transfer the pit to a pot to continue its journey as your future guacamole supplier, conveniently located in your backyard.

But there is a catch. Growing an avocado plant from a seed can take thirteen years or more before your first avocado harvest. Depending on how long you live in your home, if you began this process today, you might not even be around to see (and eat) the fruits of your labor.

The same is true for the eternal garden God has called us to labor in. When we sow seeds of the gospel, we won’t always know when and if our efforts bear fruit. In fact, if we are obediently sowing seeds of the gospel, we won’t know the full impact this side of heaven, and that’s okay. Preston Perry, a modern evangelist, says, “God wants to raise up a generation of evangelists who are OK with not seeing the fruit of their work.”

Our job isn’t to change hearts and make the gospel bloom in someone’s life, that’s God’s job. Our job is simply to sow.

In the parable of the sower, the sower scattered seeds indiscriminately—even in areas where it doesn’t seem like a plant would be likely to thrive: a path, rocky ground, among thorn bushes. Similarly, we are called to plant seeds of the gospel indiscriminately, wherever we go, even if it doesn’t seem like the recipients might be open to the message. Our job is to sow; it’s the Lord’s job to change hearts.

We have a choice: We can be obedient, working in God’s field as sowers, or we can be disobedient, sowing no seeds as we go.

The parable of the sower is one of the most well-known parables in the Gospels. Our account today is from the Gospel of Mark, but it is also recorded in Matthew and Luke. Some scholars believe Jesus likely taught this parable many times as He traveled throughout His ministry, so the disciples were familiar with it.

If Jesus did, in fact, teach this parable many times, we can gather that it is important. Either way, we know Jesus wanted to emphasize this teaching as He began with “Listen!” and ended with “Let anyone who has ears to hear listen.”

Jesus opened by telling His audience that a sower went out to sow seeds. As the sower went, he tossed the seed indiscriminately. First, he tossed some seed on the path. A path doesn’t seem like a good place for plants to grow, but the sower scattered seed there anyway.

Next, he tossed seed on rocky ground, where there wasn’t much soil. Rocky ground is also not the ideal setting for growth, yet the sower scattered seed there anyway. He tossed some seeds among the thorns. This also doesn’t seem like a good place to plant, and yet, the sower scattered seed there anyway.

Lastly, the sower tossed some seed on good ground. Now this makes sense. If we were sowing seed and wanting it to flourish, we would focus on this type of area, right? But that is not what the sower in Jesus’s parable did.

If the sower’s goal was to toss seeds where they are most likely to grow, he is not very good at his job. It doesn’t make sense to expect seeds to grow on a path, or on rocks, or among thorns. Something might grow in rare instances, but this seems to be a poor strategy for a successful harvest.

The goal of Jesus’s sower seems not to be sowing only where he thinks he can reap the most but rather sowing everywhere he goes. The sower went on the path, so he sowed there. The sower went to rocky ground, and even though it didn’t seem like there was much soil there, he sowed there. The sower passed by the thorns, so he sowed there. The sower walked through good ground, and he sowed there too.

Jesus is the true Sower of the gospel message. None of us receive the message of salvation apart from Him. As those who have received his message, we now act as His ambassadors and “co-sowers” of the gospel message. Whatever your job is, all followers of Christ are called to be sowers of the gospel. In the Great Commission, Jesus commanded us to go and make disciples of all nations, and in the parable of the sower, Jesus presented an example of a sower with a similar goal—sowing everywhere he went. In the Great Commission, Jesus didn’t say “Go but only talk to the people you think will want to hear the good news.” No, we are called to sow the seed of the gospel indiscriminately, even in places that may not make sense to us.

Our job is to sow wherever we go. It’s the Lord’s job to change hearts. In the parable, the seed doesn’t prosper in the places that aren’t ripe for growth, but the beautiful reality is that the Holy Spirit can work to change hearts even on the path, the rocky ground, and among the thorns.

There are countless stories of people who seemed unlikely to accept the gospel message who ultimately placed their faith in Jesus because someone was willing to share with them. Our goal is not to determine or control the outcome. Our goal is to share obediently.

The Lord had a mission for Jonah: go to Nineveh and preach. God had taken note of Nineveh’s wickedness and was calling them to repent by sending His prophet, Jonah, to speak on His behalf. Jonah, however, did not share the Lord’s compassion for the city. When God charged Jonah with going to the gentile city of Nineveh, Jonah hopped on a ship headed in the opposite direction to Tarshish, hoping to flee the Lord’s presence.

To connect this to the parable of the sower, if there was ever a location that seemed thorny—consumed with pride, wealth, and power, and therefore an inhospitable recipient of the Word of God—Nineveh would be it.

God sent a storm to Jonah’s boat, and Jonah was thrown out into the sea and swallowed by a fish. Jonah was eventually vomited back out and, when God came calling again, Jonah went but not with a submissive heart. Jonah delivered possibly the worst sermon ever: “In forty days Nineveh will be demolished!” Yet, God used it to bring the people of Nineveh to repentance, and God spared them.

This is a perfect example of God working in all circumstances, even when our words are not the most convincing, or our hearts aren’t quite in the right place, but He can do much through us when we are willing and obedient.

The book of Jonah acts as a mirror for us to hold up and see ourselves honestly. Do we see ourselves in Jonah? When God tells us to do something, are we obedient and submissive, or do we flee in the opposite direction?

We looked at this parable from the perspective of the sower earlier, and now we’ll look at it from the perspective of the soil. Jesus explained what this parable means: In some instances, when the good news is shared, Satan interferes, and it doesn’t take root; persecution or hardship drive some to abandon Jesus; and wealth and power push some to pursue their own desires over following Jesus. These are the three soils that ultimately don’t receive the message and grow.

However, some hear the good news and welcome it. They embrace Jesus and live for Him, and when they do, they join in the work of sowing the seed and the good news of the gospel is multiplied.

Consider your heart. If you don’t yet know Jesus, what type of soil might be represented by your heart? Will you shut out the good news or embrace it? Are you open to learning more about Jesus and hearing more about what salvation means?

If you already know and follow Jesus, are you bearing the kind of fruit Jesus described? Are you living out the Great Commission? Are you sowing seeds of the gospel everywhere you go?

In the parable of the sower, Jesus painted a picture of someone sowing seeds in places not primed for growth. The sower scattered seeds on a path, on rocky ground, and among thorns, even though common sense tells us a harvest isn’t likely to be plentiful there. But the sower’s goal was not what we might think. The sower’s goal wasn’t to only sow seeds where they were likely to flourish, his goal was to sow seeds everywhere he went.

In the Great Commission, Jesus commanded us to go and make disciples of all nations, and in the parable of the sower, He presented us with a model of what that looks like. Like the sower who scattered seed indiscriminately—on the path, on rocky ground, among thorns, and on good soil—we are to sow seeds of the gospel indiscriminately. We sow even in the places that don’t make sense to us, rather than choosing who we think might respond positively.

It’s our job to sow seeds of the gospel wherever we go; it’s the Lord’s job to change hearts.

Just as we are faced with a choice of whether to share the gospel today, the prophet Jonah was faced with a similar choice. At first, Jonah chose disobedience and fled in the opposite direction of God’s call. He didn’t think the Ninevites deserved God’s mercy, and he didn’t want God to relent.

If we don’t know Jesus yet, we are called to respond to the message of the gospel. If we already know Jesus, we are called to obedience. Will we be like the seed sown on fertile ground, spreading more seeds and planting more plants wherever we go? What choice will we make today?