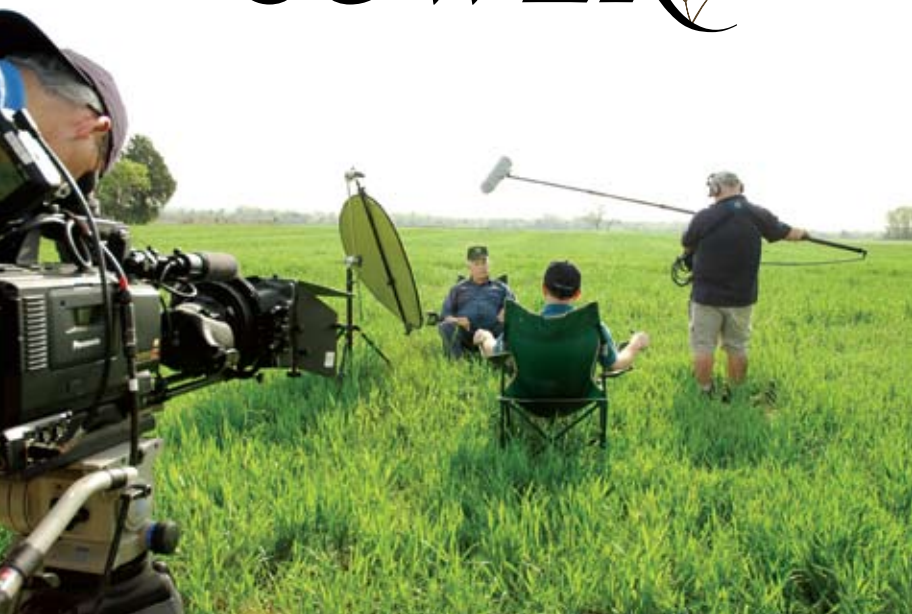


[D O W N L O A D]

The SOWER



MODERN PARABLES™ | **VOLUME 1 LESSONS 9 & 10**
LIVING IN THE KINGDOM OF GOD | Based on Matthew 13:1-23

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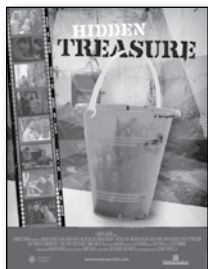
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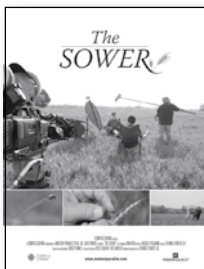
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*“What shall we say the kingdom of God is like,
or what parable shall we use to describe it?”*

MARK 4 : 30

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Modern Parables provides free downloads of additional teaching and study materials on its website. In particular, overviews of Understanding the Parables and Living the Parables are available in additional teaching materials at:

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Introduction

A New Kind of Study

Modern Parables is a new kind of Bible study. From one perspective, it's a study that uses short films of the parables to teach the Bible.

But from another perspective, it's something unique. *Modern Parables* employs a new method of understanding the Bible through films that explain the biblical text. It uses modern stories that recreate in the viewer the same responses that the original audiences of Jesus' parables might have experienced. In other words, *just watching the films* begins to explain the historical, grammatical, contextual and interpretive elements of Jesus' parables. The films help people grasp the parables at an immediate, gut level. This emotional immediacy enables them to engage the Bible in a powerful and compelling new way.

At its heart, *Modern Parables* uses film to drive people deeper into Scripture. To borrow a phrase from the poet Horace, it seeks "to please and instruct." The films are intended to be

both entertaining and educational at the same time.

Most people – churchgoing people, at least – would agree that Jesus’ parables are important. Yet, if asked further, most would say that His parables are nice stories intended to teach universal moral lessons. If you understand the moral of the story, you’ve gotten the parable.

There’s one problem with that explanation: it doesn’t square with what Jesus Himself said about His parables. Rather than trying to create a set of nice stories for the world, Jesus bluntly said that He taught in parables so that His hearers *wouldn’t immediately understand* His teaching (Matt 13:13).

But the problem goes beyond that. When you start looking at His parables, a lot of them aren’t nice stories at all: a king destroys an entire city for speaking out against him; a manager cheats his master out of money and is praised by Jesus for it; a fig tree is cursed for not bearing fruit.

When taken at face value, the parables can be confusing and hard to understand. In fact, to get a nice moral out of some of them requires a good bit of twisting. Parables are not simple moral stories that teach a lesson.

So what are parables?

The Bible explains that Jesus had specific purposes for teaching in parables. Matthew tells us that in at least one instance He spoke to the crowd *only* in parables and said nothing without a parable (Matt 13:34). Why is this?

As Jesus said in Mark, “What shall we say the kingdom of God is like, or what parable shall we use to describe it?” (Mk 4:30) It is important to understand that the parables cannot be separated from Jesus’ teaching on the Kingdom of God. If detached from His larger teaching ministry, they don’t make sense. Rather, the parables are like different

lenses used to view different aspects of the Kingdom of God. Jesus Himself often started His parables with, “The Kingdom of God is like...”

To Jesus, parables are comparisons between the natural and spiritual realms that teach His followers different aspects of the Kingdom of God. In this sense, parables are keys to understanding the things Jesus wanted His followers to know about His Kingdom. On the one hand, they are like little instruction manuals explaining what God is like and how He acts, as well as how people in His Kingdom *ought* to live. On the other hand, they describe how people inside or outside the Kingdom *actually* do live.

The reason Jesus spoke in parables was that He knew they were the best method for teaching about the Kingdom He was inaugurating with His life, death, and resurrection.

How the Study Works

Modern Parables, Vol I explores six different parables. In this study, *The Sower* is covered in two lessons. The first lesson is called “Understanding the Parable.” In this lesson you’ll be watching the film, then doing some basic study on the parable itself. The second lesson is called “Living the Parable.” In this lesson you’ll be watching an application video taught by Dr. Frank Lewis, then discussing how to apply the teaching of the parable in your day-to-day life.

Modern Parables seeks to recreate the immediacy of the gut-level reaction of the first-century audience hearing Jesus’ parables. The parable films are simply teaching tools that, after being used, will fall away to leave the Biblical text for people to understand and apply. In the long run, the only thing that matters is the Bible, so it is important to keep the parable

films in their proper context as tools and not the purpose of the study.

There are three levels that the study moves through:

LEVEL 1 - THE DRAMATIC STORY

A parable is a story. The reader (or viewer) must understand a parable at the level of plot and character before he or she can understand anything else about it. This first level refers to the essential story line of a parable.

LEVEL 2 - THE BIBLICAL PARALLEL

Once you understand the story, you will be able to step back and look at the parable film side-by-side with the original parable of Jesus. We designed each film to parallel the original parable as closely as possible in a modern re-telling of the story. The hope is that the parallels make it much easier for a modern person to bridge the 2,000-year gap from when the parables were originally told.

LEVEL 3 - THE PRACTICAL APPLICATION

The part of the study known as “Living the Parable” is dedicated to the practical application of the parables. In general, it is necessary to understand a Biblical text before applying it. Going back to the days of the Apostles, pastors have had a responsibility to teach and apply the Bible to the church. *Modern Parables* recognizes pastors’ foundational role in guiding people into the truth, and has incorporated their teaching into a key aspect of the study: the Application Video. The parable film has a related Application Video that explains what it means to live out the parable in daily life.

Bonus Lesson: Cinematic Theology

For those who are interested, we have provided an additional lesson that explores the world of cinema and theology in greater detail. The lesson on *The Sower* is found on page 47 of this guide. The lesson consists of watching the Director's Commentary for the film, then talking through the questions provided.

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In closing, thank you for purchasing *Modern Parables*. We hope that this study is a helpful tool for expanding your understanding of these parables as they relate to the broader Kingdom of God.

Matthew 13:1-23

Mark 4:13-20

Luke 8:11-15

STUDY MATERIAL

Lesson Nine

UNDERSTANDING THE PARABLE

That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat by the lake. Such large crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat in it, while all the people stood on the shore. Then he told them many things in parables, saying: "A farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants. Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop—a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown. He who has ears, let him hear."

The disciples came to him and asked, "Why do you speak to the people in parables?"

He replied, "The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them. Whoever has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him. This is why I speak to them in parables: Though seeing, they do not see; though hearing, they do not hear or understand. In them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah:

'You will be ever hearing but never understanding; you will be ever seeing but never perceiving.

For this people's heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes.

Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn, and I would heal them.'

But blessed are your eyes because they see, and your ears because they hear. For I tell you the truth, many prophets and righteous men longed to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it." MATTHEW 13:1-17

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"Listen then to what the parable of the sower means: When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is the seed sown along the path. The one who received the seed that fell on rocky places is the man who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. But since he has no root, he lasts only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, he quickly falls away. The one who received the seed that fell among the thorns is the man who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke it, making it unfruitful. But the one who received the seed that fell on good soil is the man who hears the word and understands it. He produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown." MATTHEW 13:18-23

Then Jesus said to them, "Don't you understand this parable? How then will you understand any parable? The farmer sows the word. Some people are like seed along the path, where the word is sown. As soon as they hear it, Satan comes and takes away the word that

was sown in them. Others, like seed sown on rocky places, hear the word and at once receive it with joy. But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away. Still others, like seed sown among thorns, hear the word; but the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for other things come in and choke the word, making it unfruitful. Others, like seed sown on good soil, hear the word, accept it, and produce a crop—thirty, sixty or even a hundred times what was sown.” MARK 4:13–20

“This is the meaning of the parable: The seed is the word of God. Those along the path are the ones who hear, and then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved. Those on the rock are the ones who receive the word with joy when they hear it, but they have no root. They believe for a while, but in the time of testing they fall away. The seed that fell among thorns stands for those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by life’s worries, riches and pleasures, and they do not mature. But the seed on good soil stands for those with a noble and good heart, who hear the word, retain it, and by persevering produce a crop.” LUKE 8:11–15

Introduction

Some things seem simple on the surface. But once you look into them you realize more is there than you originally thought. Simplicity can be deceptive: by focusing on what you think you understand, it is possible to miss what is really there.

The parable of the sower is like that. What can be more simple than to talk about a man going out to sow seed in different soils? It seems so obvious. Yet after Jesus told the parable to the crowd, His disciples came to Him and asked

what it meant. Jesus often berated His disciples for being slow to understand, but these were not unintelligent men. Rather, as the New Testament writings of John and Peter demonstrate, many of them were quite brilliant.

The only explanation is that there is much more to the parable of the sower than many of us realize, and that Jesus is teaching something that is not as patently obvious as we may be led to believe. The fact is, the parable of the Sower is an extraordinary piece of genius that explores the whole of Christian history from beginning to end, including the way the Kingdom of God will grow, the obstacles it will face, and the wonderful ending that will inevitably come.

Setting and Context

This parable is the first among the parables. It is one of only a handful of parables included in all three synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke). It is the same parable that all three gospel writers use to introduce the rest of Jesus' parables. And it is one of just a few parables that Jesus explains in detail. No other parable holds all these distinctions, and because of that, we should take special consideration not to pass it by too quickly.

Matthew tells us that when Jesus told this parable, He had been teaching by the Sea of Galilee. On this particular day, the crowds had swollen to such a size that Jesus got into a boat and pushed a little way off shore. The slope of the land down to the water's edge, combined with the acoustic properties of sound on water, created a natural amphitheater.

The people who sat on the shore were a mix of the local population. Some would have traveled from little villages all around to hear the new rabbi teach on God and His Kingdom. They were mostly peasants, many of them farmers. As they

traveled to see Jesus, they would have had to walk down paths and roads between the countless fields that spread across the countryside.

Matthew tells us that Jesus began to teach them in parables starting with the parable of the sower. He later says that “Jesus spoke all these things to the crowd in parables; he did not say anything to them without using a parable.” (Matt 13:34) We saw in the passage above that this method intrigued His disciples and they asked Him why He taught that way. His answer was rather unexpected, and it should still give us pause:

He replied, “The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them. Whoever has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him. This is why I speak to them in parables: ‘Though seeing, they do not see; though hearing, they do not hear or understand.’” MATT 13:10-13

It is important to recognize that Jesus’ first-century Jewish audience already had strong opinions about the Kingdom of God and the coming of the Messiah, just as Christians today hold very strong opinions about the second coming of Christ. From their interpretation of the Old Testament, everyone expected a powerful Messiah to come suddenly, wipe out the Roman oppressors, then quickly set up a magnificent, visible kingdom here on earth. Luke reveals this popular mentality when he writes: “[Jesus] went on to tell them a parable, because he was near Jerusalem and the people thought that the kingdom of God was going to appear at once.” (Luke 19:11)

The problem with this popular interpretation was that it was wrong. In complete disregard of everyone’s assump-

tions and expectations, God sent a suffering servant to establish a spiritual kingdom that would slowly grow to fill “the entire earth” (Dan 2:35). This true Kingdom would certainly have physical manifestations – but not those assumed by Jesus’ audience.

That was the secret. *Unless listeners understood that the parables were all about Jesus and His unique ministry, they could not understand the parables.*¹ The secret that had been revealed to the disciples was Jesus Himself and His unexpected method of redemption. The people who came to hear Jesus this particular day were expecting a conquering king who would set up His Messianic kingdom in great splendor from Jerusalem. Instead, Jesus told them that the Kingdom would spread like seed from the hand of a sower. That’s a radical difference.

But how is it that this knowledge had been given to the disciples and not to the people? Jesus explains this later in an exchange with Peter. “Who do people say that I am?” Jesus asked. The people had many wrong answers: He was John the Baptist come back to life, or Elijah, or some other prophet. Peter, however, said: “You are the Christ [Messiah], the Son of the Living God.” Jesus’ response explains the true source of Simon Peter’s wisdom: “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven.” (Matt 16:17)

In other words, God Himself had personally revealed the truth about who Jesus was to the disciples. It was a spiritual revelation via a direct action of God. The rationale behind it was that these same disciples were eventually going to take this mysterious message Jesus had taught in parables and explain it clearly to the people. This would happen *after* Jesus’ death and resurrection. We see it happening in Acts. The death and resurrection of Jesus was the great key un-

locking the general teaching of the parables, but it was too much for the people to understand right then.² In fact, it was too much for anyone to understand; just look how often the disciples misunderstood Jesus!

But we shouldn't be too hard on them. The Holy Spirit, whose role is to guide people into the truth, had not yet begun to indwell believers like He did after Jesus' resurrection. (John 16:13) The only reason Jesus' first coming seems clearer to us now is *because* God's plan worked out as He intended. Furthermore, the Holy Spirit has been poured out across the earth ensuring that countless people will understand Jesus for who He truly is: the Son of God. But at the time Jesus was telling the parables to the people, these things were not at all clear.

Jesus anticipated this, of course. In Luke's version, after Jesus finished explaining the parable of the sower to His disciples, He told them a few more things to consider: "No one lights a lamp and hides it in a jar or puts it under a bed. Instead, he puts it on a stand, so that those who come in can see the light. For there is nothing hidden that will not be disclosed, and nothing concealed that will not be known or brought out into the open. Therefore consider carefully how you listen. Whoever has will be given more; whoever does not have, even what he thinks he has will be taken from him." (Luke 8:16-18)

When He said this, Jesus was referring to the upcoming world-wide proclamation about Him after His resurrection: the lamp is the message of the gospel; it will not be hidden anymore but will be put on a stand for all the world to see its light. In other words, the teaching that is hidden in the parables will be brought out into the open. Those who have been given this teaching by God will be given salvation and

much more; those who have not been given this teaching, who do not understand who Jesus is, will have what they think they have (which is really nothing) taken away in the Judgment.³

This context is very important to recognize when looking at the parable of the sower. At its heart, it is about how the message of the Kingdom goes out and how people respond to it. Jesus' quotation from Isaiah 6 is not immediately encouraging:

You will be ever hearing but never understanding; you will be ever seeing but never perceiving. For this people's heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn, and I would heal them.

The quotation comes from Isaiah's commissioning as a prophet: God will judge the people for their hardened hearts and closed ears. For hundreds of years the people had rejected God and His law, so the time of judgment had come. Isaiah, however, was a prophet of both judgment and hope. Immediately after God said in chapter 6 that He would judge the people by wiping out their cities, He follows it by graciously predicting (in the next chapter) that a "holy seed" would grow into a new tree, and that "a virgin shall be with child."

What was Jesus communicating when He quoted these verses? Those who will not submit to His message will be judged, and His manner of presenting the message (in parables) will enforce that judgment. Is it not interesting, therefore, that the parable concerns itself with four types of hearers?

Jesus went on to explain the specific parallels between the soils and the hearers. Mark tells us that right before He explained the parable, He criticized the disciples for their lack of comprehension: if they didn't understand that parable, "how then will

you understand any parable?” (Mark 4:13) In other words, “listen up, because I’m going to explain how parables work.”

The parable is clearly allegorical. That is, specific elements in the story symbolize specific things Jesus is trying to teach. The natural world (a sower, seed, soil) is being compared to the spiritual world (Jesus, word of God, hearers). There is a clear tit-for-tat comparison. As we have seen previously, not all of Jesus’ parables have this clear a comparison between two specific things. The fact that this one does shows us that Jesus did not want us to miss anything.

So what exactly is the parable talking about?

The Sower

A farmer went out to sow his seed. MATT 13:3

JESUS’ INTERPRETATION:

Listen then to what the parable of the sower means: When anyone hears the message about the kingdom... MATT 13:18-19

The farmer sows the word. MARK 4:14

This is the meaning of the parable: The seed is the word of God.

LUKE 8:11

First-century Israel was an agricultural community. A large majority of the population was directly involved in farming, and those who were not were immersed in the agricultural society. The Jewish religious calendar included seven great feasts, two of which reflected God’s blessings on the harvest cycle (the Feasts of Firstfruits and Weeks). Just as everyone today is familiar with a grocery store, everyone then was familiar with the wheat farmer: he provided people with their daily bread.

In the film *The Sower*, Mr. Dement points out that wheat is

a winter annual. In the Northern Hemisphere, it is sown in early Autumn, left to develop slowly through the Winter, then in the Spring grows quickly until the harvest in early Summer. The farmer in the parable would have followed this same growing schedule. During his planting he would have used a canvas bag slung over his shoulder and filled with wheat seed from the prior year's harvest.⁴ He would then have spread the seed by hand as he walked from one side of his field to the other. It is a picture that Jesus' audience would have seen countless times.

It is a simple picture. Yet it is this simplicity of the parable *in light of what Jesus is comparing it to* that makes it so intriguing and unexpected. In contradiction of every contemporary expectation, Jesus is saying that the new world-transforming force of His Messianic kingdom will move through the earth just like a sower spreads his seed – and nothing more dramatically than that.⁵

It mystified Jesus' audience. Wasn't the Messiah supposed to be a conquering king who, like Alexander the Great, would roll back his enemies with effortless ease? According to this parable, no: the Messiah will spread His Kingdom like a man sowing his seed. To be more specific, Jesus – the one spreading the message of the Kingdom – is comparing Himself to an ordinary farmer; and His message of the Kingdom is like seed falling on soil. Instead of battles and trumpets, Jesus is saying that the word of God is the most important thing in the Kingdom's spread.

But what a radical claim! Standing two thousand years after Christ's inauguration of His Kingdom, we enjoy much of the fruit of the success of His word as it has spread through the nations. Yet even today many people overlook the fact that it is the word of God that is the dynamic force behind the spread of the Kingdom of God. Not church events, not

programs, not exciting music – it is the message of the Kingdom that matters.

That said, what does this parable teach us about the word of God and the one who spreads it?

First, the Kingdom is actively being planted and grown for the harvest. Jesus is personally pushing along its growth through His disciples who act as local sowers wherever they may be. He started this with His earthly ministry and continues it from heaven to this day. His goal is to spread His Kingdom across the entire earth.

Second, the seed has within it the potential to grow an entire harvest out of just one seed. There is enormous genetic complexity within a seed: by simply putting it in the soil and adding the right elements, it naturally grows into a new plant, multiplying itself enormously. Think of Mr. Deмент holding up the wheat plant with twelve tillers coming out of one seed. Each tiller will bear heads of wheat, and those heads have within them the potential to grow more and more wheat, all following the law of exponential return.

The word of God found in the Bible has the same compact potential. Christ has grown His entire Church from this single book that carries His message of the Kingdom in it. Everything necessary for limitless growth is found within those pages. And as the history of the church clearly demonstrates, it has grown from Jerusalem, to Samaria, to the ends of the earth. (Acts 1:8)

Third, the seed and the soil were made for each other. There is a perfect balance and unity in their relationship. So too, the word of God and man were made for each other. The primary purpose of the word of God is to create new life in the hearts of men, women and children everywhere. It was

designed to change people dramatically, to take the elements of their personalities and bear more fruit for the Kingdom.

Fourth, there is an important sense of time passing in the parable. Most of us living in the modern world have little contact with agricultural society. As a result, it is easy to overlook this aspect of the story. But time plays a key role in the world of the farmer since plants do not grow in a day. Rather, many months pass from the time the seed goes into the ground to the time of the harvest.

This passage of time in the parable provides an important commentary on the chronology of the Kingdom. Just as the sowing marks the commencement of the crop, so too does Jesus' preaching mark the commencement of the Kingdom. In the same way, the harvest marks the end of the season just as the final Judgment will mark the end of the age and the consummation of the eternal Kingdom. The sequence of events in the parable is a wonderful picture of the present and future aspects of the Kingdom. It began at a specific time, continues through the present, and will be consummated in the future at the harvest.

After all, the ultimate goal of planting the seed is the great and fruitful harvest. This is the only reason the seed is being planted: to grow up and bear a crop for the farmer. There are really only two ends the parable entertains: being fruitless or fruitful. And although there are some instances of the former, the latter is assured in great measure.

Along the Path

As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. MATT 13:4

JESUS' INTERPRETATION:

When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is the seed sown along the path. MATT 13:19

Some people are like seed along the path, where the word is sown. As soon as they hear it, Satan comes and takes away the word that was sown in them. MARK 4:15

Those along the path are the ones who hear, and then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved. LUKE 8:12

As Mr. Dement explained in the film, it is natural to have seed fall on the roadways bordering fields. Such an overflow is a consequence of seeding by hand. In the first century, the land was divided up into arable portions with paths running between them for access or for travelers. It is a simple picture to imagine the seeds falling on the hard-packed ground, then being trampled by feet (as Luke tells us) and eventually eaten by birds.

The first comparison is between the hard path and those who reject the word of God immediately. Jesus' own ministry was filled with people who were hard paths. Just a few chapters before, Matthew recounts how Jesus proclaimed woes on a number of the cities who did not repent even though they had seen many of Jesus' miracles. (Matt 11:20-24)

The second comparison is between the birds and Satan. Jesus tells us that as soon as some hear, Satan comes and takes away the word. Exactly how he does this is not said, but clearly he has spiritual influence over those who are his. This actually explains a lot about those people who reject Christianity out-of-hand, almost without thinking about it. Some of us

today don't like to consider the spiritual powers that surround us, and although they certainly can be taken out of context, in instances where people are blatantly rejecting the word, Jesus tells us that Satan has a direct hand in this rejection. As we learn from the Apostle John, Satan "leads the whole world astray." (Rev 12:9)

This should remind us that there are two kingdoms at war in the world. The kingdom of Satan strives against the Kingdom of God, and there are gains and losses on both sides. We know from the Bible that Christ's Kingdom is already victorious — but it does not mean that Satan and his minions have given up the fight. Satan wants as many hearts and minds as he can have before the end.

Matthew gives us additional insight into what happens in the heart of this type of hearer: he does not *understand* the word of God. A spiritual comprehension of the things of God is necessary to accept them. Isaiah prophesied this lack of understanding in the passage Jesus quoted between His telling and explanation of the parable. The verb "to understand" can also be translated "to grasp" or "to comprehend" and refers to taking Jesus' teaching to heart, to living it, as opposed to merely listening and not letting it go any deeper.⁶

The Rocky Soil

Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. MATT 13:5

JESUS' INTERPRETATION:

The one who received the seed that fell on rocky places is the man who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. But since he has no root, he lasts only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes

because of the word, he quickly falls away. MATT 13:20-21

Others, like seed sown on rocky places, hear the word and at once receive it with joy. But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away. MARK 4:16-17

Those on the rock are the ones who receive the word with joy when they hear it, but they have no root. They believe for a while, but in the time of testing they fall away. LUKE 8:13

In many of the fields near where Jesus preached were large slabs of limestone lying just beneath the surface of the soil. During the summer months, the limestone soaked up the heat of the sun and retained it. In early autumn, the sower planted his seed, then the rains came to water the soil. As the temperature dropped, the layers of rock beneath the ground would continue to release heat into the soil causing the seeds above them to grow quickly due to the presence of warmth and moisture, faster even than the seed in the better soil surrounding them.⁷

But it was a deceptive growth. After the winter thaw, the spring came and the heat of early summer. Because of the rocky substratum, the wheat plants couldn't grow the roots necessary to soak up water and nutrients for long-term growth. As the days grew hotter, the plants in shallow soil would eventually die.

This second type of soil represents those in the church with shallow belief. Their quick growth corresponds to the initial joy and excitement of some new believers. This does not mean that all early joy is superficial, but rather that some excitement masks the lack of true growth in some new believers and will reveal itself with time.

The rocks correspond to the things inside their hearts

that keep them from growing roots and deepening in their faith. This has nothing to do with good intentions, for some people mean well when they come into the church. They have seen the fruit borne by true believers and have sensed their own need for Jesus Christ.

But deep inside they will not accept parts of the gospel. There is a lack of genuine submission to God and His word in their lives. As a result, when the world tests their level of commitment to God, they are found wanting. This testing can come through social pressures from family members, friends, co-workers or spouses. It often requires making decisions for the Kingdom that are uncomfortable or even painful. In these cases, the young plants wither and die under the heat of persecution.

The Weeds

Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants.

MATT 13:7

JESUS' INTERPRETATION:

The one who received the seed that fell among the thorns is the man who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke it, making it unfruitful. MATT 13:22

Still others, like seed sown among thorns, hear the word; but the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for other things come in and choke the word, making it unfruitful. MARK 4:18

The seed that fell among thorns stands for those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by life's worries, riches and pleasures, and they do not mature. LUKE 8:14

In the film *The Sower*, Mr. Dement explains how “competition” from the weeds can choke out the good plants. This is an excellent perspective on the third type of soil. It is fertile, it has plenty of moisture and depth, and it allows the plants to take root. Yet it is not what the soil *lacks* but what it has *in addition* to the seed that is the problem.⁸

The issue is that the weeds compete for the nutrients and light, and essentially take away the strength of the growing wheat plant. Furthermore, weeds often grow much faster than the wheat. If steps are not taken against them, they will swarm up over a crop and choke it out.

As Jesus explained, the weeds correspond to the worries of life, the deception of riches and pleasures, and the desires for things other than God. All these work together to keep a healthy plant from bearing fruit. It is as if the plant does everything *but* the one thing it is supposed to do. Instead, it slowly stops growing and becomes ineffective.

Of the three types of soils, this type is the one that has the most parallels in the modern Christian church. What are the worries of this life? Anything that causes us to lose focus on God’s provision for us, whether it is our work, our family, or our own lives. All of these things are good when looked at in light of the Kingdom of God, but on their own, outside of God’s word, they become a source of worry. Such concern is a debilitating factor, something that mortgages today on behalf of an uncontrollable tomorrow. As Jesus told His disciples, “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat; or about your body, what you will wear. Life is more than food, and the body more than clothes.” (Luke 12:22-23)

Jesus next labels riches, wealth, and pleasures as factors that will choke out the life of a believer. Although it would be

convenient to say that only those at the highest income bracket fall in this category, Americans as a whole are some of the wealthiest Christians in the world. Other nationalities can quickly see how Americans are plagued by their riches. Again, it comes down to competition: do financial means occupy one's focus more than bearing fruit for the Kingdom? *How much* you have isn't really the issue so much as whether or not you treat financial or material concerns as more important than the Kingdom of God. If you do, you won't bear fruit.

The Good Soil

Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop—a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown. MATT 13:8

JESUS' INTERPRETATION:

But the one who received the seed that fell on good soil is the man who hears the word and understands it. He produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown. MATT 13:23

Others, like seed sown on good soil, hear the word, accept it, and produce a crop—thirty, sixty or even a hundred times what was sown.

MARK 4:20

But the seed on good soil stands for those with a noble and good heart, who hear the word, retain it, and by persevering produce a crop. LUKE 8:15

As we arrive at the fourth type of soil, we come to the purpose of the sower's work: to produce a bountiful crop. Jesus gives us specific figures for returns on what was sown. As Mr. Dement explained, this refers to the amount of grain harvested based on how much was sown. In modern times, a 40-60 times increase is excellent. Jesus says that the spiritual harvest could

be even greater than that at 100 times the return.

How is this possible? Again, as Mr. Dement showed in the field, one seed of wheat will grow into a crown that has multiple tillers growing out of it (in the case of the film, a dozen tillers were growing from one crown). Each tiller has the potential to produce a head of wheat, which in turn can have 10 or more grains of wheat in it. Obviously, not all seeds produce this many tillers (especially if they are planted close together), and not all tillers produce heads of wheat. Some produce more than others, as Jesus' numbers seem to indicate. When all are taken together, however, there is a marvelous and miraculous crop.

Although we don't see the harvest in this parable, it is clearly implied since one has to harvest the crop to know how much it has provided. Again, the harvest is where everything is headed: it is the point of bearing fruit.

The comparisons continue at this simple level. In this case, the good soil is compared to those with a noble and good heart – in other words, those who understand the word, who take it inside and retain it, and who persevere in their faith. All these attributes are found in the hearers who are like good soil; they are true disciples of Jesus. As Jesus told His disciples, "This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples." (John 15:8)

And what is that fruit? It stems from a heart transformed by the Holy Spirit. Jesus explained in the Sermon on the Mount that the true fruit is being poor in spirit, sorry for one's sins, meek toward others, hungry for righteousness, merciful, pure in heart, and a peacemaker. These are the things that matter to God. Furthermore, such fruit is how Jesus spreads His Kingdom: as St. Francis of Assisi said, "Preach the gospel at all times, and when necessary use words."

Having Ears to Hear

He who has ears, let him hear. MATT 13:9

The use of ears as a symbol for hearing has a long precedent in the Old Testament. Jesus was not the first to use this phrase: all of the great prophets used variations on it; it is found in the Wisdom books; and it goes all the way back to Deuteronomy, when Moses tells the people, "with your own eyes you saw those great trials, those miraculous signs and great wonders. But to this day the LORD has not given you a mind that understands or eyes that see or ears that hear." (Deut 29:3-4)

The idea behind the symbol is fairly straightforward: those who listen and obey God from their hearts have ears to hear; those who do not have either "stopped up" their ears or simply don't have ears with which to listen to God. This is an example of using the natural world to reflect something spiritual. It is the people's responsibility to recognize that He is the Messiah. Their own unrealistic expectations and sinful rejections are all signs that they cannot hear what He is saying.

There are, however, those who can hear Him. The disciples have been given ears to hear. And there are many others in the New Testament who listen to what Jesus is saying *and change their lives as a result*.

Hearing is not about registering the words but about taking them in, truly understanding and bearing fruit. If a person does not bear fruit as a result, that person does not have ears to hear. Sadly, there are some in the church today who listen to many true things, but by virtue of being hard ground, or rocky soil, or covered in weeds, they do not have ears to hear.

Summary

In closing, we see in this parable the history of the world from the start of Jesus' ministry to the end of time. The Kingdom will advance not by swords and outward battles, but by the simple preaching of the word of God. There will inevitably be some losses (and disciples should expect this), but those losses pale in comparison to the great and wonderful harvest that will ultimately result. The four types of soil describe all the potential hearers of the gospel message. But only those who hear, and act on what they hear by bearing fruit, are truly part of the Kingdom.

PARALLELS

ORIGINAL PARABLE	PARABLE FILM
The sower.	Jesus or one of His disciples.
Sowing the seed.	Preaching the message of the Kingdom.
The seed.	The Word of God or the message of the Kingdom.
The path.	Those who do not accept the Word at all.
Birds flying down and eating up the seed.	Satan coming and taking away the Word that was sown in them.
The rocky soil.	Those who hear the Word and receive it with joy. But since they have no root, they last only a short time.
The heat of the sun.	Trouble or persecution.

The weed-infested soil.

Those who hear the Word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke it, making it unfruitful.

The weeds.

The worries of this life, deceitfulness of wealth, and desire for other things.

The good soil.

Those who hear the Word and understand it because they have a noble and good heart. They produce a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown.

The crop.

The good works of the Kingdom.

Endnotes

¹ Herman Ridderbos, *The Coming of the Kingdom* (P&R, 1962), 123.

² Ridderbos, 135.

³ Ridderbos, 134-135.

⁴ Simon J. Kistemaker, *The Parables* (Baker, 2006), 32.

⁵ Ridderbos, 132.

⁶ Arland Hultgren, *The Parables of Jesus* (Eerdmans, 2002), 195.

⁷ Kistemaker, 38.

⁸ Kistemaker, 39.

Matthew 13:1-23

Mark 4:13-20

Luke 8:11-15

STUDY MATERIAL

Lesson Ten

LIVING THE PARABLE

See the Biblical Text on pp. 9-II.

TRANSCRIPT OF APPLICATION VIDEO

Las transcripciones del vídeo de aplicación están disponible en español y puede ser descargado a: modernparable.com/materials

Living out The Sower – Dr. Frank Lewis

Dr. Frank Lewis is Senior Pastor of First Baptist Church in Nashville, Tennessee.

Introduction

The first time I saw the film *The Sower*, I was amazed at how much Mr. Dement knew about wheat. He knows not only how to plant it, but he knows how to nurture it. He knows how it grows, he knows how to watch for every stage of its development. And he's real excited about the harvest when that time comes.

I got to thinking about it, and even though I'm not a farmer, Mr. Dement and I have a lot in common. As a pastor,

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God has called me to work in His field. I sow seed everywhere I go. Sometimes it's through the pulpit. Sometimes it's in the daily interactions I have with people downtown or in the office, or in the hospital. Lots of places where I go, I always find myself broadcasting that seed as I take my steps around.

Seeing Ourselves as Soil

You see, when Jesus paints this picture of our hearts being like soil, it is an accurate picture of the way every one of us finds ourselves. When we think of our hearts being hard, or stony, or weed-infested, or good soil, the important thing for us to consider in this parable is, "What kind of soil am I?"

First of all, there are limitations to comparing the human heart to soil. Soil doesn't really change that much. But because of the powerful work of the Holy Spirit, the heart can change—it can radically change. I think that's one of the reasons why Jesus uses this portrayal of the sower. It's such an accurate depiction of what happens when the seed of the Gospel is sown. Jesus uses this as both a warning as well as an instruction. Our hearts are either going to be the hardened soil, the rocky soil, the weed-infested soil, our hearts may be good soil. What kind of soil are you?

The Hard Path

When Jesus tells this parable, He makes the point that Satan comes in to the hard heart and removes the seed before the seed ever has the opportunity to put down its roots and grow. Sometimes as we're sharing the Gospel and doing those acts of kindness to minister to people, we will find or sense that they are rejecting us. They're mad, they're angry, they hold the message of God with great contempt in their life—they don't

want to hear it. They'll even tell us so. Sometimes our tendency might be to feel like they're rejecting us, but the truth is, they're rejecting our message.

When that happens, it's very important for us, if we're going to be faithful to the task of sowing seeds, to do a couple of things. One, we should try to be very sensitive to their response and not treat them in the same way. Their anger and frustration with the message is not the same thing we need to give back to them. Instead, we should follow Jesus' example and pray for these people. We should remember that Satan is at work in their lives and their hearts are hard, and the Holy Spirit may not have begun His work of softening their hearts to respond to the Gospel. By praying for them, there is no telling how their hearts are going to be moved and what forces God may use to bring change to the soil of their lives.

The Rocky Soil

The next soil we come to is the rocky soil. It may not look like it, but as Mr. Dement said, the rocks are beneath the surface. When seed gets scattered on soil like this, it may spring up quickly, but the roots go down and encounter resistance. When that happens, there's no chance for them to grow: they sprang up quickly, but there was no opportunity for them to produce fruit.

As a new Christian comes to this new experience of faith, it seems like there are times when the joy and the enthusiasm of the Christian life springs up quickly, but then suddenly they find themselves without that joy. One of the reasons that happens is because of rejection—their friends, their family, the people that were closest to them before they

came to know Christ have suddenly rejected them because of this newfound faith.

It also happens when we encounter times of testing and trial. Maybe a crisis comes into a person's life and shakes their faith. Some of the best things that you can do today are to surround yourself with some of the Christian disciplines that will help in times like these.

Pastorally, I want to guarantee something to every one of you, especially those of you who are new Christians. You are going to experience times of testing and trial. You're going to go through a crisis sooner or later, and when that happens the disciplines you've incorporated in your life are going to keep you from withering like these plants.

First, make a commitment to read the scriptures daily. Read the Bible. Find out what it is that God's Word has to say to you. In God's Word is life, you'll grow, you'll discover more about this wonderful gift of salvation that is yours. Spend some time everyday in prayer. Prayer is simply communication with your Father. As His child, He wants to hear from you. Just spending time with your Heavenly Father—what a joy that is. Then there's also fellowship with other believers. If you're new to your faith, look for someone in your church or small group whose spiritual maturity is an encouragement to you. Find someone who has already been there and done that. Find someone who has gone through some trials, who has endured some tough times. And you'll find great encouragement in getting to know them and learning their stories. Even ask them if it's possible to maybe spend one day a week just talking to them about what it really means to be a believer or learning how to pray.

Jesus wants us to grow. He wants us to produce a full

harvest. The best way for this to happen in our lives is to put Bible study, prayer, and fellowship with believers as the top priorities.

The Weed-Infested Soil

The third kind of soil in the parable is soil that's become infested with weeds. As you can see, we're standing right at the edge of Mr. Dement's field where he has planted some crops, but the weeds here are so strong they've taken over. There's no way other plants can grow because these weeds are stealing all the nutrition.

When Jesus tells this parable to the people who are His first audience, as well as when we hear it in our day and time, it's not hard to miss the application. We hear the good news of the Gospel, it's life changing, our hearts resonate with it, but if we're not careful the concerns of this world will just take over everything.

In American Christianity, it seems that we are even guilty of this addiction to technology, an addiction to materialism. We want more, bigger, better, faster. It seems we always have to take something to the next level because what we have is just not good enough. Jesus knows that about us.

In addition to that, some doctors even have diagnosed some people with what they call "hurry sickness." Hurry sickness is when there's so much on your schedule there's not time in your day to write one more appointment. You're so anxious about getting to the next place, you're flying through life without ever stopping to realize that you're living. Jesus knows that this tendency to be consumed by other things will kill off the potential of the Gospel to take its root and develop fruit-bearing Chris-

tians. Remember, you cannot bear the kind of fruit Jesus wants if weeds have snuffed out all the vitality, which leaves us wilting and dying. Jesus wants us to be fruitful.

The Good Soil

We finally come to the seed that's fallen on good soil—and that one tiny seed produces a crop much, much, much, greater than itself. I think the final thing that we need to remember about this parable is to ask ourselves the question "what kind of soil are we?" We're either hard soil, we're soil with rocks just beneath the surface, we're soil with weeds crowding out the good things of the gospel, or like good soil, the Holy Spirit takes the Word of God, applies it to our hearts and we become part of this harvest that's vast beyond measure.

I'm reminded of a couple things as I reconsider this parable today. One is that there are people all around me who are at any one of these stages. Some are hardened to the Gospel. Some are so enamored by material things that they can't even listen to the ideas of the Kingdom of God right now. And yet I have the privilege of sowing the seed, thus bringing forth the harvest that He chooses. The other thing that I have to remind myself is that my heart must always be soft to hear the whisper of God.

Today, wherever you are, whoever you are, as you study this parable, I hope you'll remember that you have a part in God's Kingdom.

ADDITIONAL VERSES FOR STUDY AND REFLECTION

LUKE 4:14-30

ACTS 2:14; 40-41

ACTS 17:32-34

Matthew 13:1-23

Mark 4:13-20

Luke 8:11-15

TEACHING MATERIAL FOR A CLASS

Lesson Nine

UNDERSTANDING THE PARABLE

PREP BEFORE CLASS:

- **WATCH THE FILM *THE SOWER*.**
(13 minutes)
- **REVIEW ALL OF LESSON 9 (THIS SECTION).**
(Approx 10 minutes)
- **READ ALL OF LESSON 9 IN THE STUDY MATERIAL (P.9).**
(Approx 20 minutes)

WHAT TO DO DURING CLASS:



STEP 1: WATCH THE PARABLE FILM *THE SOWER*
(13 minutes)

Play parable movie.



STEP 2: ASK QUESTIONS ABOUT THE FILM
(5 minutes)

Often comments and discussion points will arise out of your audience naturally. However, if they do not, here are some questions that will help people to start thinking deeper about the film.

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1. What are a few things you just learned about wheat that you find interesting?
2. Many of you are probably familiar with this parable. Do you have a new perspective on it, and if so, how has your view changed?



STEP 3: TEACH ABOUT THE PARABLE

(20 minutes)

1. Read the Biblical Text (see pp. 9-11).

2. Teach about the Parable

1. Introduction

1.1. Some things are deceptively simple: so obvious that it's possible to miss what is being taught. The parable of the sower is often overlooked because it seems simple.

1.2. The parable of the sower explores the whole of Christian history from beginning to end, including the way the Kingdom will grow and where it is headed.

2. Setting and Context

2.1. First among the parables. Contained in all three synoptic gospels and one of the first parables they mention. One of only a handful of parables explained in detail by Jesus.

2.2. Jesus was in Galilee and spoke from a boat.

2.2.1. Begins to teach the people, but He only tells them things in parables. He explains to His disciples that they know the secret of the kingdom, but the people do not.

2.2.2. Jewish contemporary expectation was that the Messiah would come with judgment and his kingdom would appear at once; the people wanted a conquering king.

2.2.3. Jesus and His unique ministry were the real secret. Unless listeners understood that the parables were all about Jesus and His unique ministry, they could not understand the parables.

2.3. Jesus quoted Isaiah 6 to explain why the people would not understand.

2.3.1. Those who will not submit to His message will be judged. Jesus' manner of presenting the message (in parables) will enforce that judgment.

3. The Sower – Matt 13:3

3.1. The spread of the Kingdom is like a farmer sowing seed.

3.1.1. It is not dramatic, but simple and goes against what was expected.

3.1.2. It is this simplicity of the parable in light of what Jesus is comparing it to that makes it so intriguing and unexpected. In contradiction of every contemporary expectation, Jesus is saying that the new world-transforming force of His Messianic Kingdom will move through the earth just like a sower spreads his seed.

3.1.3. Just as there are naturally many kinds of soils, so too are there many kinds of hearers.

3.2. Jesus explains the comparisons

3.2.1. Sower = Christ, either literally, or through His disciples.

3.2.2. Seed = Word of Christ: the essence of what will grow His Kingdom. His word is found in His preaching and in the Bible.

3.2.3. The situation assumes there will be a time of growth between the sowing and the harvest.

3.3. The joining of seed and soil together brings forth something new: a plant that is a combination of the seed and the soil. The crop is what the sower wants, which in turn can be harvested and used to grow many more plants.

4. Along the Path – Matt 13:4

4.1. Natural to have seed fall on it because it bordered the fields; simply part of life.

- 4.2. Path is hard and the seed sits on the surface; there is no plowing done on the path.
- 4.3. Birds would sweep down and eat up the seed since it was easy to see and take away.
- 4.4. Jesus explains the comparisons.
 - 4.4.1. Path = those with a hardened heart who do not understand the word, who may not believe.
 - 4.4.2. Birds = Satan, who actively works to thwart the growth of that seed. Jesus explains that Satan can spiritually take away the word thereby preventing those with hardened hearts from coming to faith. He “leads the whole world astray.”
 - 4.4.3. Two kingdoms at war: the Kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan. There are casualties of that war, especially those who do not understand the word of God.

5. The Rocky Soil – Matt 13:5

- 5.1. In fields there are places where the soil sits shallowly above layers of rocks that cannot be seen, but are underneath the land.
- 5.2. The rock grows warm in the summer, then releases its heat in the early winter causing the seeds to spring up quickly, even quicker than the seeds around it in better soil.
- 5.3. But the plant cannot develop a root system against the rock, and so dies when the heat of the sun comes the following spring and summer.
- 5.4. Jesus explains the comparisons.
 - 5.4.1. Plants over rocky soil = shallow belief.
 - 5.4.2. Quick growth = initial joy that is superficial; all joy is not superficial, but there is some that only reveals itself with time.
 - 5.4.3. Rocks = something inside them that keeps them from growing roots/deepening in their faith.
 - 5.4.4. Heat of the Sun = persecutions and troubles because of their belief.

5.4.5. Withering = falling away from the faith.

5.5. The rocks correspond to those things inside their hearts that keep them from growing roots and deepening in their faith. As a result, when the world tests their level of commitment to God, they are found wanting. This testing can come through social pressures from family members, friends, co-workers or spouses.

6. The Weeds – Matt 13:7

6.1. Weeds allow growth, but compete for the nutrients and light, and essentially take away the strength of the growing plants.

6.2. Jesus explains the comparisons.

6.2.1. Thorns/Weeds = worries of life, deceitfulness of wealth, riches, and pleasures, and desires for other things.

6.2.2. Choke the word = chokes out the gospel message that has been growing. The weeds are not an internal problem, but an external one.

6.2.3. Unfruitful = the result of the seed and the soil is a plant, but it cannot grow to its full measure. It is ineffective.

6.3. The weedy soil has the most parallels in the modern Christian church.

6.3.1. What are the worries of life? Anything that causes us to lose focus on God's provision for us, whether it is our work, our family, or our own lives. All of these things are good when looked at in light of the Kingdom of God, but on their own, outside of God's word, they become a source of worry.

6.3.2. Do financial means occupy our focus more than bearing fruit for the Kingdom? How much we have isn't really the issue so much as whether or not we treat financial or material concerns as more important than the Kingdom of God.

7. The Good Soil – Matt 13:8

7.1. The purpose of sowing is to produce a bountiful crop.

7.2. There is a wonderful process of multiplication in the plants.

7.2.1. If one sows 1½ bushel an acre, 40-60x what was sown is possible in modern times

7.2.2. Each seed puts out various tillers, which in turn all grow many other seeds.

7.3. Jesus explains the comparisons.

7.3.1. Good soil = those with a noble and good heart. They hear the word, retain it, and persevere to produce a crop

7.4. And what is that crop? It stems from a heart transformed by the Holy Spirit. Jesus explained in the sermon on the mount that the true fruit is being poor in spirit, sorry for one's sins, meek toward others, hungry for righteousness, merciful, pure in heart, and a peacemaker. These are the things that matter to God.

8. Having Ears to Hear

8.1. 'Ears' as a symbol for hearing has a long precedent in the Old Testament.

8.2. The idea behind it is that those who listen and obey God from their hearts have ears to hear. Those who do not have either "stopped up" their ears or simply don't have ears with which to listen to God.

8.3. Hearing is not about registering the words, but about taking them in, truly understanding and bearing fruit. If a person does not bear fruit as a result, that person does not have ears to hear.

8.4. Sadly, there are some in the church today who listen to many true things, but by virtue of being hard ground, or rocky soil, or covered in weeds, do not have ears to hear.

8.5. Although there will inevitably be some losses (and disciples should expect this), those losses pale in comparison to the great and wonderful harvest that will ultimately result. A bountiful harvest in spite of how things momentarily appear is certain to occur.

**STEP 4: END WITH DISCUSSION/QUESTIONS**

(5-10 minutes)

For the final part of the class, you can cover any questions that might come up or discuss an aspect of the parable that you feel is important to stress. Feel free to use the parallels chart on pp.29-30 to assist in your discussion.

Matthew 13:1-23

Mark 4:13-20

Luke 8:11-15

TEACHING MATERIAL FOR A CLASS

Lesson Ten

LIVING THE PARABLE

PREP BEFORE CLASS:

- **WATCH THE APPLICATION VIDEO FOR *THE SOWER*.**
(11 minutes)
- **REVIEW ALL OF LESSON 10 (THIS SECTION).**
(Approx 10 minutes)
- **READ ALL OF LESSON 10 IN THE STUDY MATERIAL (P.31).**
(Approx 10 minutes)

WHAT TO DO DURING CLASS:



STEP 1: RE-READ THE BIBLICAL TEXT

Matt 13:1-23; Mark 4:13-20; Luke 8:11-15 (See Biblical Text on pages 9-11.)



STEP 2: PLAY THE APPLICATION VIDEO

(11 minutes).

Play application video.

Pastor Info: Frank Lewis, D.Min., Senior Pastor of First Baptist Church, Nashville, Tennessee.

You can review the text of Dr. Lewis' application video in Lesson 10 of the Study Materials.



STEP 3: ASK QUESTIONS ABOUT THE APPLICATION VIDEO (10-15 minutes)

Use this time to dig into what the pastor was saying in the application video. You can create your own questions or choose a few of the questions below to ask. You will likely not have time to ask all the questions, so during the prep time, select those that most interest you.

1. In this parable, Jesus is talking about a farmer scattering seed. This gives us a vivid picture of how the Kingdom of God spreads and grows. Every other kingdom spreads by force, but the Kingdom of God spreads and grows organically.
 - a. What does this organic growth look like in our church? In our community?
 - b. How is our church purposefully, organically growing and spreading the Kingdom of God?
 - c. Why is slow, organic growth sometimes frustrating for us?
2. How do the worries of this life make us unfruitful and unproductive? What would "weeding the garden" look like for us as individuals? As a church?
3. Some hear the message of the Kingdom of God and receive it with joy, but they have no real root, and so their joy dies. Why then should we be careful about giving and receiving the Gospel as if we are at a pep rally – with great zeal because we're caught up in the moment, but quickly dying enthusiasm?
4. Although the Gospel planted in our hearts does bring about real change, it must be watered with spiritual dis-

ciplines. What are those disciplines? And how are you implementing them in your lives?



STEP 4: REVIEW THE FILM/DISCUSS THE PARABLE.
(15-20 minutes)

This is the final section to talk about the parable. You can use the parallels table found in the Study Materials to lead a discussion about the parable. Or you can watch sections of the film again by skipping to the particular scene you want to discuss. A breakdown of the scenes is listed below:

- Chapter 1 – Introduction
- Chapter 2 – A farmer went out to sow his seed.
- Chapter 3 – As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path.
- Chapter 4 – Some fell on rocky places where it did not have much soil.
- Chapter 5 – Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants.
- Chapter 6 – Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop – a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown.
- Chapter 7 – The harvest. He who has ears, let him hear.

Cinematic Theology

AN ADDITIONAL LESSON ON FILM STYLE AND CONTENT

In order to explore the world of film and theology in greater detail, the writer, producer and director of *Modern Parables* has provided a Director's Commentary on *The Sower*. This commentary can be found as an additional track on the downloaded file.

The commentary runs the length of the film. We recommend that you play the commentary, then use the questions/ideas on the following pages during the class to encourage discussion.

TO ACCESS THE DIRECTOR'S COMMENTARY:

Using Quicktime Format: You will need to play the HD or DVD films with Apple iTunes 7.6 or later. (iTunes is a free download from apple.com/itunes)

1. Drag the film or application video file into Apple iTunes.
2. Select: Movies (in the left-hand column)

3. Select the film or video file you want to watch and double click it.
4. In the video window that appears, there is a control bar at the bottom when the cursor arrow is over the video. (If the separate video window does not appear, but begins playing in the left-hand corner of iTunes, double click where it is playing for it to appear in a window of its own.)
5. On the right-hand side of the control bar, there is a small icon that looks like a talking bubble. Click on that icon to choose Film Audio or Director's Commentary.

Using Microsoft WMV format: You will need to play the HD or DVD films with Windows Media Player 10 or later. (Windows Media Player is a free download from microsoft.com/windows/windowsmedia)

1. Double click on the WMV film or application video file. Windows Media Player should automatically open. (If it does not, then perhaps your extensions are not properly set. You can open Windows Media Player, then drag the file into it.)
2. Once the file opens, it should begin playing.
3. Double click (or right click) on the video to enter Full Screen mode. Right click on the full screen video to get a selection menu.
4. Go to Play > Audio and Language Tracks.
5. English (United States) should be selected. Choose the other language choice and the Director's Commentary will begin playing. To take it off the Director's Commentary, choose English (United States) again.

If you have problems accessing the Director's Commentary, see the FAQ on the Digitals Download page of modernparable.com.

The **SOWER**

Based on various documentary film styles.



STEP 1: WATCH DIRECTOR'S COMMENTARY

(13 minutes)

Play Commentary (on DVD main menu).



STEP 2: DISCUSSION

Feel free to pick and choose from the questions below to initiate discussion.

1. The director talks about "structure" being one of the most important aspects of a documentary. How does a documentary filmmaker mimic God's creative action by creating a documentary out of raw footage? How does structure create meaning?
2. The structure of this film is a combination of following the parable and personal details of Mr. Dement's life. Why is this important to making an interesting film? That is, why is the reality of Mr. Dement's life fascinating, and what kind of commentary is there on us getting to know the details in people's lives?
3. The music in the film (by 19th-century composer Niccolò Paganini) is said to stand for Mr. Dement because it is both rustic and articulate. What do you think the director means by that, and how is it possible that music can reflect personality?

4. The director says that God's creation is inherently interesting, that the details in it are far more complex than any of us realize, and that documentary film is a good way to explore this. Is this true, and if so, why?
5. Do we as individuals take time to appreciate the detail in God's creation? What does that attention to detail tell us about God?
6. The director talks about a "typology of nature" (*typology* is the study and interpretation of types and symbols in the Bible). What do you think of the idea that God has embedded theological concepts about Himself and redemption in the fabric of the world? Some examples might be sheep, wheat, marriage, the seas, storms, among many others. Can you name some? And if God did do this, why did He do this?
7. How does documentary film go hand-in-hand with creation?
8. How does the shot that shows Mr. Dement demonstrating the wheat and the chaff tell us more about Jesus' use of those images in His preaching?
9. The director sees Mr. Dement as a symbol of Christ when he talks about enjoying farming and loving the harvest. Does this symbolism work?

TEACHING MATERIAL FOR A FAMILY

INCLUDES :

Introduction

General Discussion/No Preparation Teaching Time

Biblical Study/Parental Preparation Teaching Time

INTRODUCTION

Modern Parables lessons can be used in a family setting in a variety of ways. We have been told by our customers that even young children (such as ages 4 and 5) have enjoyed some of the films and profited by them.

The application videos, on the other hand, are aimed at an older audience (such as Middle School students to adults) and would possibly bore or confuse young children - something that should be avoided when teaching anyone about the Bible.

We have therefore provided some possible scenarios for using Modern Parables in a variety of family settings. It will be up to you to determine how best to use the material in your particular situation.

(Please note: Additional teaching sequences for home school students and others are available online at modernparable.com under Additional Materials)

1. GENERAL DISCUSSION/NO-PREP TEACHING TIME

Pre-planning: not necessary



STEP 1 - WATCH *THE SOWER*.



STEP 2 - READ THE ORIGINAL PARABLE FROM MATT 13:1-23, MARK 4:13-20 AND LUKE 8:11-15.



STEP 3 - DISCUSSION

- What are some things you learned about wheat farming that you didn't know before?
- What is Jesus comparing the seed to? Why is this a good comparison?
- What happens when the seed falls on hard ground? What is Jesus comparing this to?
- What happens when the seed falls on shallow ground? What is Jesus comparing this to?
- What happens when the seed falls on ground with weeds? What is Jesus comparing this to?
- What happens when the seed falls on good ground? What is Jesus comparing this to?
- What is the harvest a comparison to?
- What did you think about the one seed having many tillers growing from it?
- Why would Jesus compare Himself to a farmer?
- How do you think Jesus is sowing His word today? How is His Kingdom spreading and growing?

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Depending on time, you can either move to the application section or wait for another time to do Step 4 and following.

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STEP 4 - WATCH *THE SOWER* APPLICATION VIDEO



STEP 5 - DISCUSSION:

Note that you can consult the speaker's transcript starting on p. 31 for help in answering these questions as well as the Overview on Living the Parables (available for free download in the Additional Materials section of modernparable.com).

- Dr. Lewis says that he and Mr. Dement have a lot in common. How are pastors like farmers?
- If Jesus was saying that everyone's heart is like some type of soil, what type of soil are you?
- Sometimes people reject God's word almost immediately, with anger and frustration. What is going on in their hearts?
- Like young plants growing in the hot sun, are times of testing and trial common to all young believers?
- What does Dr. Lewis say are disciplines or practices that can be included in our lives to help keep us from withering? Are you including these practices in your life?
- What happens in the weed-infested soil? Why is this a good comparison to the "cares of this world?"
- Do you have weeds in your life that are choking out the growth of your spiritual life?
- What does Jesus say good soil is like? How can you become good soil?
- Where is the harvest headed? Why do you think Mr. De-

ment likes the harvest so much? Why does Jesus like it?



STEP 6 - PRAY AS A FAMILY TO CLOSE OUT THE TEACHING TIME.

2. BIBLICAL STUDY/PARENTAL PREP TEACHING TIME

Lesson 9 – Understanding the Parable

Pre-planning: Watch the film, then read the Lesson 9 Study Material at the front of this booklet. Review the outline on p. 38 and following.



STEP 1 - WATCH *THE SOWER*



STEP 2 - READ THE ORIGINAL PARABLE FROM MATT 13:1-23, MARK 4:13-20 AND LUKE 8:11-15.



STEP 3 - GO TO P.38 AND TEACH AS MUCH OR AS LITTLE AS YOU DESIRE FROM THAT OUTLINE. FEEL FREE TO ENCOURAGE YOUR CHILDREN TO ASK QUESTIONS ABOUT ANYTHING AND FOLLOW THAT LINE OF DISCUSSION.



STEP 4 - REVIEW THE HIGHPOINTS OF THE OUTLINE AND ASK QUESTIONS FOR VARIOUS POINTS TO ENSURE UNDERSTANDING.



STEP 5 - PRAY AS A FAMILY TO CLOSE OUT THE TEACHING TIME.

Lesson 10 — Living the Parable

Pre-planning: Watch the Application Video, then review the questions from p. 45 or those listed above. Choose the questions you'd like to ask.



STEP 1 - READ MATT 13:1-23, MARK 4:13-20 AND LUKE 8:11-15.



STEP 2 - WATCH THE APPLICATION VIDEO.



STEP 3 - ASK QUESTIONS YOU'VE SELECTED FROM P.45 OR FROM ABOVE AND DISCUSS THE ANSWERS.



STEP 4 - REVIEW WHAT YOU'VE LEARNED.

How can we apply this parable to our individual lives?

How can we apply it as a family?

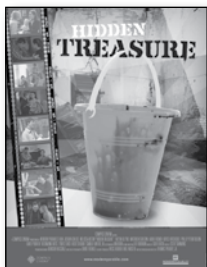
How can we apply it at our church?



STEP 5 - PRAY AS A FAMILY TO CLOSE OUT THE TEACHING TIME.

Thank you for purchasing and using Modern Parables.

Please see the back of this booklet for additional products.



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES AND MATERIALS

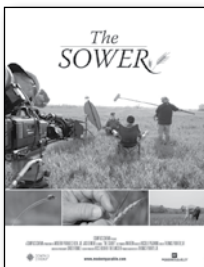
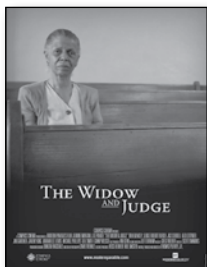
Go to www.modernparable.com
to take advantage of online resources on the parables
as well as to purchase additional materials.

INDIVIDUAL DVD'S
STUDY BOOKS
LEADER'S GUIDES
GROUP STUDY DVD BOX SET

DIGITAL DOWNLOADS

MOVIE POSTERS
(FOR USE IN ANNOUNCING THE CLASS)

BOOKS ON THE PARABLES



*Actual posters will include space at the bottom
for writing class information.*

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