THE GOSPEL OF MARK

VOLUME 2 / SERMON-BASED DISCUSSION GUIDE · FALL 2026, WEEK 4

FALL SEASON Sep 27 – Dec 6 / **WINTER SEASON** Jan 11 – Mar 14

AT A GLANCE

MAIN TEXT

Mark 4:1–20

Also: 2 Corinthians 13:5; Matthew 7:21–23

MAIN IDEA

Genuine faith is more than initially receiving the gospel or knowing about Jesus. When God's Word truly takes root in our hearts, it transforms our lives and produces lasting fruit.

ANNOUNCEMENTS / EMERGENCE.CHURCH/DIGITAL-BULLETIN

01 Family Dedication · Oct 22 & 25 · Both Campuses By publicly declaring their intent to raise their kids to love Jesus, parents will be encouraged to keep that commitment in the highs and lows of parenting. A great opportunity for those families to invite family/friends to hear the Gospel. Sign up on the Digital Bulletin!

02 Redemption & Recovery · Tuesdays 7 PM · Totowa Redemption & Recovery is a weekly gathering for those struggling with addiction, unhealthy anger, anxiety, resentment, pride, or other life challenges seeking healing & growth. This space is for anyone seeking a safe community to work through life's struggles in a deeper way.

LAST WEEK'S GROWTH STEP FOLLOW-UP

OUTWARD ACTION

Make intentional time this week to be with Jesus in Scripture and prayer, and look for one opportunity to serve someone in His name.

INWARD PRAYER

Ask God for the humility to receive correction, the wisdom to recognize unfair criticism, and the confidence to find your identity in Christ rather than people's opinions.

SERMON DISCUSSION

01 Don't Run From the Checkup

READ Mark 4:1–15; 2 Corinthians 13:5

Jesus tells a parable about a farmer scattering seed onto four different types of soil, representing different responses to God's Word. Pastor Ryan compared this passage to an annual physical, where Jesus calls us to honestly examine the condition of our hearts. Rather than avoiding the examination or thinking about which soil describes someone else, we're invited to allow God's Word to reveal what's happening in our own hearts.

01 Jesus repeatedly calls people to listen, saying, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear." What's the difference between simply hearing God's Word and having a heart that genuinely wants to receive it?

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02 Can you think of a time when God's Word challenged something you believed, wanted, or were doing? How did you respond?

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02 When Life Gets Hard

READ Mark 4:16–17

The rocky soil represents those who initially receive the gospel with joy, but whose faith never develops deep roots. When persecution or suffering comes, they fall away. Trials often reveal what's really happening beneath the surface of our faith. When life gets difficult, do we draw closer to Jesus or begin to pull away from Him?

01 Why do you think trials and suffering can reveal things about the depth of our faith that we might not recognize when life is going well?

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02 Have you ever experienced a “storm of life” that revealed your faith wasn’t as deeply rooted in a particular area as you thought? What did that experience expose, and how did you respond?

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03 Choked Out by the Things of This World

READ Mark 4:18–19

The third soil represents those who hear God's Word but become consumed by the worries, riches, and desires of this world. Pastor Ryan pointed out that sometimes it's not the trials of life that pull us away from Jesus, but the toys. The deception is that we convince ourselves we're putting Jesus on the back burner temporarily, but one season becomes another, and before we know it, years have passed without Him at the center of our lives.

01 Considering these two middle soils, which do you think poses a greater danger to your faith right now: the difficulties of life that test your trust in God, or the comforts and pleasures of life that slowly draw your attention away from Him? Why?

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02 Have you ever found yourself saying, “Once I get through this season, I’ll have more time to prioritize Jesus”? What are the dangers of that way of thinking, and how can we recognize when it’s happening?

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03 If you took an honest look at your time, priorities, and desires right now, are there any “thorns” that might be crowding out your relationship with Jesus? What would it look like to begin removing them?

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ADDITIONAL REFLECTION NOTES / QUESTIONS FOR GROUP

04 A Faith That Bears Fruit

READ Mark 4:20; Matthew 7:21–23

Unlike the other soils, the good soil receives God's Word, allowing it to take root and produce abundant fruit. Pastor Ryan explained that genuine salvation changes us. Good works don't earn our salvation, but they do reveal the transforming work of Jesus in our lives. Jesus warns that knowing things about Him, or even doing religious activities in His name, isn't the same as genuinely knowing and following Him.

01 Jesus says that good soil produces fruit. What kinds of fruit should we expect to see in the life of someone who follows Jesus? How is this different from simply being a religious or morally good person?

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02 If you look at your life over the past several months, rather than just years ago, where have you seen evidence of Jesus changing your heart, desires, priorities, or actions?

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03 Where would you most like to see Jesus continue producing fruit in your life? What's one step you could take to intentionally grow in that area?

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05 Keep Scattering the Seed

READ Mark 4:3–9, 14, 20

The sermon ended by returning to the farmer, who generously scatters seed across all kinds of soil. Pastor Ryan encouraged us to do the same with the gospel. We can't control how people respond to God's Word, and we know there's spiritual opposition. Yet we can faithfully share it, pray for people, and trust God to work in their hearts. Even those who seem completely hardened toward Jesus are not beyond His power to save.

01 Knowing that Satan is actively working against God's Word, how should that shape the way we pray for people and depend on God when sharing the gospel?

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02 Do you ever hesitate to share the gospel because you're worried about how someone will respond, or whether your efforts will make a difference? How does the farmer's example challenge that thinking?

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GROWTH STEP THIS WEEK

OUTWARD ACTION

Share honestly with a trusted Christian friend about your walk with Jesus. Share where you're seeing fruit, where you're struggling, and ask them to help keep you accountable.

INWARD PRAYER

Ask God where there is hardness, shallowness, or distraction that needs attention. Pray, "Jesus, help me hold on to Your Word, grow deep roots of faith, and keep bearing fruit that lasts."

UP NEXT Mark 4:21–34