GENERATIONS OF GRACE

YEAR 3 · LESSON 9

Jesus' Parables

Matthew 13:23

QUESTIONS

AGES 3–5

1. What was the first soil, and what did it represent? *The first soil was the hard path that the seeds couldn't get into, and birds ate them. That is like people who do not even want to understand God's Word.*
2. What was the second soil, and what did it represent? *The second soil was the dirt with rock underneath that sprouted but died when the temperature rose. This is like people who like the good news but don't trust God when life gets hard.*
3. What was the third soil, and what did it represent? *The third soil was thorny soil where the seed grew but produced no fruit. This is like people who love other things more than Jesus.*
4. What was the fourth soil, and what did it represent? *The fourth soil was good soil. This is like people who believe God's Word and bear fruit. They will be harvested and welcomed into God's kingdom.*

AGES 6–8

1. What is a parable? *A parable is a simple word picture that explains a spiritual truth.*
2. Why did Jesus not explain His parable to the crowd? *Jesus spoke in parables because most people rejected the truth He had already taught. His parables hid the truth from unbelievers.*
3. Do parables only hide the truth? *No, Jesus used parables to teach the truth to those who wanted to hear and understand.*
4. What is the main point of this parable? *The four soils show that people respond to God's Word in different ways and there is only one correct response.*

AGES 9–11

1. Why did Jesus use parables to teach His listeners? *Jesus used parables to teach spiritual truths, to impart moral lessons, and at times to expose unbelief.*
2. What did the soil and seed represent? *The soils represented different people with different hearts and minds, and the seed represented the gospel of Christ.*
3. What difference does it make how you respond to God's Word? *How we respond to God's Word determines whether we enter God's kingdom or not.*

4. Why is the fourth soil the only one that represents true believers? *True believers persevere (continually trust) and bear spiritual fruit.*

INTRODUCE

AGES 3–5

ON TARGET

While the sowing of seeds was a common metaphor in the first century, it is foreign to many today. Give the children an opportunity to be the "farmer" who is trying to sow his seed in the best possible soil. Use a sheet of construction paper to create a field with a section of good soil, surrounded by weeds and thorns, and hard soil. Have the children scatter their seed and count how many fell in the various types of soil.

DIFFERENT REACTIONS

Hold up objects to solicit different responses from the children: a piece of candy, a picture of a puppy, a can of green beans, and a pair of socks. Talk about the different ways the children responded to each object. Next, hold up your Bible and see how the children respond. Tell the class that today we are going to learn about the four ways people respond to the message of salvation contained in God's Word.

AGES 6–8

A MODERN PARABLE

A parable is a simple story with a lesson. Jesus taught many spiritual truths about God in parables. To introduce the children to this concept, you may want to read a modern parable at the beginning of class and then ask them what the story teaches us. A good example would be "Twice Mine" by Paul Hinton, a book from the Adam Raccoon series.

WELCOME TO THE FARM

Come to class dressed like a farmer. Ask the children: "Did you know that your Sunday School teacher is like a farmer who sows seeds?" Each week when the teacher tells the children about God's Word, he or she is planting seeds (God's Word) into their hearts. What type of ground do you think the seed is falling on? Today you will hear the lesson Christ gave about seed falling on different types of ground and what resulted when the plant started to grow.

AGES 9–11

BLIND, DEAF, OR BELIEVING

Select three children. Blindfold the first, place earplugs in the second's ears, and allow the third to both listen and watch the story. Read an unfamiliar story (with pictures) to the three children while the class observes. After reading the story, have each child retell the story in his or her own words. Ask the class to judge which child retold the story most closely to the original version. The third

child should come closest to an accurate retelling, as his or her vision and hearing were not hindered. Use this game to introduce the concept that Jesus taught in parables so that only believers would truly understand the meaning behind the lesson. Explain that the two children with the blindfold and earplugs represent people whose hearts are hardened to Jesus' message and don't understand.

MAKE AN ANNOUNCEMENT

Make an announcement in another language and wait for the children to respond. Repeat it a few times and watch their reactions. After a few minutes, give them instructions they understand. Then talk about what happened. Explain what it means to hear but not to understand, and when you do not understand, you cannot do what you are asked.

ILLUSTRATE

AGES 3–5

READ AND RESPOND

Break the class up into four groups, one for each of the different types of soil. As you read each part of the lesson, have the children make their noise and action. For the pathway, have the children make a bird noise and flap their wings. For the stony soil, have the children clap their hands once and say "ouch." For the thorny soil, have the children make a choking sound and hold their throats. Finally, for good soil, have the last group say, "aaaaaah" and pretend that they are growing big and tall.

SEE THE SOIL?

Bring in some seeds and a plant. Explain that the type of soil in which the seeds are planted will make the difference whether the seeds will grow and produce fruit. Illustrate this by bringing in four clear containers filled with the four different types of soil: (1) Hard path: empty container (seed fell on path, not soil), (2) Rocky soil: soil with rocks, (3) Thorny soil: soil and weed plants, and (4) Good soil. Bring in other props for gardening: trowel, fork, gardening gloves, and watering can. Explain that each of these soils determines if the seed will grow.

AGES 6–8

SEEDS AND THE SOILS

In preparation for this week's lesson, place lima beans in plastic bags between wet paper towels. Leave them in a warm place such as a windowsill. Once the plants have begun to sprout, place them into each of the situations from the lesson. For the seeds by the road, place the sprouting lima bean in some gravel. For the stony soil, pebbles could be used. For the thorny soil, use pipe cleaners or wire to show what a vine choking the plant may have looked like. For the good soil, use a rich, dark potting soil. Allow the children to observe the different environments. Ask them which soil they think will provide the best soil for the young plants.

HOW DOES THAT FIT?

Jesus' parables were somewhat like a set of puzzle pieces which became clear as they were fitted in place. Cut a picture of a farmer into pieces and paste them randomly on the board. As you progress through the lesson, begin to position the pieces in the correct place until, at the end, the children can clearly see the image of the farmer.

AGES 9–11

HEY, I WANT TO SEE TOO

Jesus explains that the purpose of teaching in parables was so that spiritual truth could be revealed to some, while hiding it from others. This concept could be incorporated into your teaching time by starting to teach the lesson to the whole class and showing pictures to them all. Midway through, the teacher can gravitate to one portion of the class and show the pictures in such a way that the others cannot see. The class will quickly object that they cannot see. This will provide the perfect opportunity to explain how Jesus taught in parables that made it difficult for some to understand.

SPIRITUAL FRUIT

The seeds sown in the good soil bore fruit (Mark 4:8), and so do those who have heard and accepted God's Word (4:20). Illustrate the reality of spiritual fruit by sharing about the person or persons whom God used to bring you the message of salvation. Ask the children to name someone who shared the gospel with them. Finally, ask the children if they have ever shared the message of salvation with any family or friends.

WHICH ONE?

Which soil best represents your heart? Are you unwilling to even consider what Jesus has to say in the Bible, through your Sunday School teachers, and pastor (pathway)? Are you willing to listen to God's Word, but afraid of what others may say if they found out you believed it (rocky soil)? Have you heard the gospel and made a profession of faith, but find yourself consistently choosing to do, say, and think things you know the Bible says are wrong (thorny soil)? Finally, have you accepted Jesus as your Lord and Savior, welcoming His Word into your life (good soil)? If so, can you identify any spiritual fruit in your life? Are you striving to obey your parents and teachers? Do you spend any time reading the Bible? When was the last time you told someone about Jesus? If you have a very honest group of students, these can be asked aloud, but for many groups, having them write down their answers will foster more truthful answers. The goal is for them to consider where they truly are before God, not to get the correct answers or embarrass them if they are not saved.