

KINGDOM.

LESSON 3

1	PRAYER
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Group leader. Pray for God's guidance through his Spirit, for awareness of his presence and for listening to his voice. Commit your group and this lesson about preaching God's kingdom to the Lord.

2	SHARING (20 minutes) <i>[QUIET TIMES]</i> EXODUS 1 - 4
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Take turns and share (or read from your notes) in short what you have learned from one of your quiet time with God out of the assigned Bible passages (Exodus chapters 1, 2, 3 and 4). Listen to the person sharing, take him serious and accept him. Do not discuss what he shares. Take notes.

3	MEMORISATION (5 minutes) <i>[THE KINGDOM OF GOD]</i> (3) MATTHEW 24:14
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Review two by two:

(3) Preach the gospel of the kingdom. Matthew 24:14. This gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.

4	TEACHING (85 minutes) <i>[THE PARABLES OF JESUS]</i> THE SOWER
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“The parable of the sower” in Matthew 13:3-23 is a parable about THE WORD OF GOD IN GOD'S KINGDOM.

“A parable” is an earthly story with a heavenly meaning. It is a true-to-life story or illustration designed to teach a spiritual truth. Jesus used the commonplace and the events of everyday to illumine the mysteries of the kingdom of God and to confront people with the reality of their situation and their need for renewal.

We will study this parable by using the six guidelines for studying parables (See manual 9, supplement 1).

Read Matthew 13:1-23, Mark 4:1-20 and Luke 8:1-15.

1. Understand the natural story of the parable.

Introduce. The parable is told in figurative language and the spiritual meaning of the parable is based on that. Therefore we will first study the words and the cultural and historical facts of the background of the story.

Discuss. What are the true-to-life elements of the story?

Notes.

Sowing. It was customary for wheat and barley to be sown by hand.

The path. Sowing by hand made it unavoidable that a portion of the seed fell along the footpath on which the sower was walking through the field. The footpath had not been ploughed or too many feet had walked over it, so that the soil was too hard for anything to fall *into* it.

The birds. Birds love to come to new fields that have just been sown with seed, because there is food to eat. Matthew uses a word that says that the birds ‘gobbled the seed down’.

Rocky places. Some of the seed fell on rocky places. It is typical of Palestine and the surrounding countries that a considerable portion of its arable soil is found on top of layers of rock. Only a thin layer of earth covers the rocky places. Thus plants cannot get firmly rooted. In the hot sun they get scorched quickly.

Thorns. Some of the seed fell among the thorns. Thorns and weeds generally grow faster than wheat. They rob the water and sunlight so that the plant gets choked.

Good soil. Some of the seed fell on the good soil. “Good soil” is not *hard* as a path; not *shallow* as the soil on a layer of rock and not *defiled* as the soil full of thorns and weeds. Good soil is fertile and produces fruit.

Hundred, sixty and thirty times. Even different kinds of good and fertile soil produce different amounts of fruit. In most parts of the world the yield is not uniform even on the same piece of soil.

2. Examine the immediate context and determine the elements of the parable.

Introduce. The context of “the story” of the parable may consist of “the setting” and “the explanation or application” of the parable. The setting of the parable may state the *occasion* for telling the parable, or describe *the circumstances* at the time of telling the parable. The setting is usually found *before* the story of the parable and the explanation or application is usually found *after* the story of the parable.

Discover and discuss. What is the setting, the story and the explanation or application of this parable?

Notes.

(1) The setting of the parable is contained in Matthew 13:1-2,10-17.

A boat. Jesus preached and taught in a variety of situations: in the synagogue (Mark 1:29), in the temple (John 18:20), on a mountain (Matthew 5:1), in a house (Mark 2:1), by the seaside (Mark 4:1), in the desert (Mark 8:1) and even in a cemetery (John 11:38). Jesus told this parable while sitting in a boat (Matthew 13:2).

Parables. Jesus used different kinds of figurative language in his teachings, for example: proverbs, similes and metaphors. In Matthew chapter 13 he told *seven* (or eight, Matthew 13:52-53) parables!

By this time, there were among the followers of Jesus those who believed him, understood him and were ready to accept more of his teachings. But there were also others, who constantly opposed him, hardened their hearts against his teachings and were always ready to reject whatever he said. “A parable” is an *earthly* story with a *heavenly* meaning. In order to understand a parable, one must not only understand the earthly story, but also the heavenly meaning! People who were *responsive* to Jesus, understood the heavenly meaning, but people who were *unresponsive* to Jesus, did not understand the heavenly meaning. Thus, by telling parables, Jesus *further revealed* the truth to those who accepted him and his teachings, while he *further concealed* the truth from those who constantly refused to accept him and his teachings.

The kingdom of God. In general the kingdom of God is the kingship or sovereign reign of God over everyone and everything, from eternity to eternity (Psalm 24:1; 145:13). In particular, the kingdom of God is the kingship or sovereign reign of God through Jesus Christ (Matthew 28:18). The kingdom is based on the completed work of salvation of Christ (Acts 2:36) and the application of that work in believers through the Holy Spirit (Romans 14:17). The kingdom is recognised in the hearts of believers (Luke 17:20-21) and operative in their lives. The kingdom of God is manifested in four visible areas: in the complete salvation of believers from beginning to end (Mark 10:25-26), the constitution of believers as one Church on earth (Matthew 16:18-19), the good works (influence) of believers in every aspect of human society (Matthew 25:34-40), and finally in the redeemed universe or the new heaven and the new earth at the second coming of Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 15:24-26).

The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of God. The word “secret” or “mystery” (Matthew 13:10-11; Romans 16:25-26; Ephesians 3:2-12; Colossians 2:2-3) generally means something which not everyone knows or is supposed to know. Unless a secret is *revealed*, it cannot be known. Jesus reveals the secrets of the kingdom of God to his own people and therefore, they know and understand it. “The secrets of the kingdom of God” are the messages that God reveals through the first coming of Jesus Christ and particularly through his preaching of the parables of the kingdom. The secrets reveal who God is, what God’s plan is and how God wants his people to live under his rule. The central message is that Jesus Christ died for the sins of people, so that whoever believes in Jesus Christ, will not perish, but have eternal life.

Why is the knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of God only given to the disciples and not to others? Is this not very unfair? Jesus does not reveal these secrets of the kingdom, that is, the meaning of the message of the New Testament, to just everybody. Not only the contents of the message is important, but also the condition and attitude of the mind and heart. Although many people hear the gospel and the message of the New Testament, they do not want to believe it and they do not want to turn to God. The reason is that some people have hardened their hearts against God and his word! There are people, who have hardened their hearts so long that they can no longer understand, repent and believe (Hebrews 6:4-8; 10:26-31)!

Jesus quotes the words of Matthew 13:13-15 from the Old Testament, from the prophet Isaiah. In Isaiah 1:2-4 is written that the children of Israel rebelled against God. They did not know their Master and they did not obey God’s words. They were evildoers, corrupt and turned their backs on God. Then God’s judgement followed. In Isaiah 6:9-10 God says, “Make the heart of this people callous; make their ears dull and close their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts, and turned and be healed.” These words of God are *words of judgement!* By their own choice the people of Israel had hardened their hearts against God. The Israelites of the Old Testament period *had seen* so many miracles during their exodus from Egypt. And the Israelites of the New Testament period saw with their own eyes so many miracles of Jesus. And yet did not believe in God!

So God allowed them to become what they wanted to be. God made their eyes even more tightly shut! The Israelites heard God’s words - they heard the Ten Commandments and all the words of the prophets with their own ears and yet did not obey God! So God caused them to become what they chose to be. God made their ears even more tightly shut! God punished them by letting them have their own way. What they sowed, they reaped (Galatians 6:7-8)! They

hardened their hearts against God and then God caused their hearts to be so hard that they could no more repent and turn to God! This was a terrible judgement! That is why so many times in the Bible God warns, “Today if you hear God’s voice, don’t harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion” (Hebrews 3:15). God’s grace and patience has divine limits. A person can harden his heart against God so persistently and so long that he reaches a point of no return. The purpose of this threat is to warn people not to postpone their repentance and faith. Everyone who sincerely repents and believes need not fear that his heart will be hardened.

Why does Jesus judge people in the New Testament in the same way as God in the Old Testament?

Before Jesus told the parable of the sower many Pharisees also *saw* the miracles of Jesus, but they refused to believe in Jesus. They *heard* the gospel, but refused to turn from their sin to God. Instead, they criticised and accused Jesus. Then they plotted to kill Jesus and called his work the work of the devil. These Pharisees had the wrong attitude towards Jesus. They repeatedly hardened their hearts against Jesus. And so the same judgement fell on them. They had hardened their hearts continually against God and now God caused their hearts to become so hardened that they could no longer understand, repent or turn to God! They could not be saved any more (Matthew 11:19,20; 12:2,10,14,24, 31,39! They had transgressed the limit of God’s grace and patience (cf. Genesis 6:3)!

Will Jesus judge us Christians in the same way today? Yes. That is why Jesus tells the parable of the sower! Every person is responsible how he responds to God’s Word. If our attitude is like that of the Pharisees and we constantly criticise Jesus or repeatedly refuse to believe what he says, then our hearts will be hardened too. Then we will eventually not be able to see God’s kingdom nor understand God’s words anymore.

However, every one of us who sincerely wants to hear and understand God’s Word does not need to have any fear. Every good and clean heart will respond to God’s Word, will grow and will bear fruit! Everyone who continues to follow Jesus will also know the secrets of the kingdom of God (that is, will understand the message of the New Testament)! Everyone who hardens his heart against God and God’s Word will eventually become so hardened that he can no more hear the Word of God. But everyone, who gives his heart to Jesus Christ and continues to respond to God’s Word, will understand God’s Word, will grow and will bear fruit! (Proverbs 1:22-33; 4:23; 23:26; Matthew 7:24-27). But every person who hardens his heart against God and God’s Word will ultimately be so hardened that he can no longer hear or understand God’s Word.

(2) The story of the parable is contained in Matthew 13:3-9.

(3) The explanation or application of the parable is contained in Matthew 13:18-23. See point 6.

3. Identify the relevant and irrelevant details of the parable.

Introduce. Jesus did not intend every detail in the story of the parable to have some spiritual significance. The relevant details are those details in the story of the parable that reinforce the central point or main theme or lesson of the parable. Therefore, we should not ascribe independent spiritual significance to every detail of the story of the parable.

Discover and discuss. Which of the details in the story of this parable are really essential or relevant?

Notes.

Is Matthew 13:3-23 a historic event, an allegory or a parable? The answer will have significant consequences for identifying the relevant details. This passage does not describe an historic event. But is it an allegory or a parable?

“An allegory” is an extended comparison, in which several elements of the allegory represent several truths (e.g. John 10:1-16; John 15:1-17). “A parable” is a true-to-life story, while an allegory need not be that. Although both might have a main theme, a parable is created to make one principle point, whereas an allegory might be created to teach many related or even unrelated truths.

In Matthew 13:3-23 it seems as if the story is an allegory rather than a parable, because in Christ’s explanation of the four kinds of soil, he makes a spiritual application of virtually every point in the story: “The seed” represents the message of the Bible. “The birds” represent the devil. “The hard soil” represents a hardened heart, etc.

Nevertheless, the story of the sower is a parable, because the explanation clearly indicates one single theme. The theme is, “The result in one’s life depends on the response one gives to the Word of God. And the response one gives to the Word of God depends on the condition and attitude of one’s heart.” Jesus deliberately designed many of the details in the story of the parable (the four kinds of soil) to reinforce that main message (namely, only one kind of soil is good). Jesus is the creator of the story and only he has the wisdom and right to give several details of his own story a specific meaning. This fact, however, does not give Christians the right to give a specific meaning to the details in the stories of the other parables in the Bible. Jesus does not do it! To try and find a spiritual meaning in almost every word in the Bible is “to allegorise”.

Allegorising. Although Thomas Aquinas (1227-1274) has written other valuable things, he gives this parable a meaning that cannot be deduced from the context and therefore must be rejected. He interpreted the parable as follows: “The parable is a picture of threefold perfection in the spiritual life: *Thirty* fold represents the usual and average spiritual attainment. *Sixty* fold represents those who attain much more. While *hundred* fold represents those who have

progressed so far in their spiritual life that they experience a foretaste of ultimate salvation.” This interpretation must be rejected.

The seed. The seed represents *the Word of God* (Luke 8:11; Mark 4:14), *the message of the kingdom* (Matthew 13:19). According to the explanation of Jesus, “the seed” is a very essential or relevant detail in this parable. It is not the response of people to your words when you evangelise, but rather your response to the Word of God that is so important! The Word of God can be sown in many different ways in your life: other people can sow God’s Word in your life by preaching or teaching it to you. You yourself can sow God’s Word in your life by hearing, reading, meditating, memorising or studying the Bible by yourself.

The soil. The soil represents *the heart of a person, whether Christian or non-Christian* (Matthew 13:19). The different kinds of soil represent *different kinds of conditions* or the *different attitudes of the human heart* towards the Word of God. The condition and the attitude of the heart determine the effect that the Word of God will have on a person. The main message of the parable is that “the condition and attitude of one’s heart determine the response he gives to the Word of God. And the response he gives to the Word of God determines the result in his life”. The response you give to the Word of God determines whether you bear fruit or not. It also determines how much fruit you bear! *The condition of the soil* is therefore a very essential or relevant detail in this parable.

The Sower. In the parable of the sower, it is not explained *who* the farmer or sower is. But in the parable of the weeds among the wheat, the Sower is Jesus himself (Matthew 13:37). Day by day during his ministry on earth, Jesus Christ himself was sowing his teachings, especially his teachings about the kingdom of God.

However, the farmer or sower may also be any Christian who proclaims or teaches the message of Jesus Christ to other people (Matthew 10:40). Of course, generally speaking, the sower is important, but in the explanation of this parable, the sower is not an essential or relevant detail. The explanation emphasises that the result is determined, not by the sower, but by the condition and attitude of the heart of the receiver or hearer of the Word of God! What the receiver or hearer does with what he hears is very important! Matthew 13:19 says, “When anyone (at any time) *hears* the message about the kingdom” Thus, a person who read, meditates or studies the Word of God by himself is the sower on his own heart. How he hears, that is, how he responds to the Word of God, is all important for the result (fruit) in his life!

Hearing and understanding. According to the explanation (Matthew 13:18-23), the reaction (response) to the Word of God is a very essential or relevant detail in the parable. The three Synoptic Gospels mention seven important reactions:

- *the Word of God* (not another spiritual book)(Matthew 13:19; Mark 4:13)
- *hearing* (Matthew 13:19,23)
- *understanding* (Matthew 13:19,23)
- *receiving* (Mark 4:16)
- *in a clean (noble and good) heart* (Luke 8:15)
- *retain* (Luke 8:15)
- *by perseverance produce a crop* (Luke 8:15), thirtyfold, sixtyfold and hundredfold (Mark 4:20).

4. Identify the main message of the parable.

Introduce. The main message of the parable is found either in the explanation or application or from the story itself. From the way Jesus Christ himself explained or applied the parables, we know how we should interpret parables. A parable normally has only one main lesson, one central point to make. Therefore, we should not try to find a spiritual truth in every detail of the story, but instead look for the one main lesson.

Discuss. What is the main message of this parable?

Notes.

The parable of the sower in Matthew 13:3-23 is a parable about “the Word of God (the Bible) in God’s kingdom”.

The main message of the parable is the following. “The condition and attitude of your heart determines the response you give to the Word of God. And the response you give to the Word of God, determines the result in your life”.

This is true of all people in the world non-Christian and Christian. The condition and attitude of their heart will determine their response to the Word of God and that will again determine the result in their life.

Responding to the word of God is one of the fundamental characteristics of God’s kingdom. The genuine people of God’s kingdom continually respond to the Word of God, that is, to all the commands and teachings in the Bible.

This parable also teaches that the preacher or teacher of the Word of God should expect different results due to the different conditions and attitudes of people’s hearts. A part of his work as preacher or teacher will not bear fruit – not because he is sowing in the wrong place (that is not the intention of this parable), but because of the condition, attitude and response of the hearers of the Word are so different! While a part of his work will not have results, “the Word of God will never return empty to God” (Isaiah 55:10-11)!

5. Compare the parable with parallel and contrasting passages in the Bible.

Introduce. Some parables are similar to one another and can be compared. However, the truth in all the parables has parallel or contrasting truth taught in other passages of the Bible. Try to find the most important cross-references that help us to interpret the parable. Always check the interpretation of a parable with the direct clear teaching of the Bible.

Discover and discuss. How does what other Bible passages teach compare to what the parable of the sower teaches?

Notes.

Matthew 7:24-27. The emphasis in the parable of the wise and foolish builders is on putting the Word of God (teachings of Jesus Christ) *into practice*. But the emphasis in the parable of the sower is on *the kind of response* given to the Word of God.

Matthew 13:24-30. In the parable of the weeds among the wheat, the devil *sows weeds* (unbelievers together with their lies) among the wheat (the believers together with their truth). But in the parable of the sower, the devil *snatches away* the Word of God from the heart that does nothing with the Word of God, so that the person would not believe and be saved (Luke 8:12).

Mark 4:26-29. The parable of the seed growing in secret stresses *the responsibility or action of God* to give to the Word of God the potential power to make God's kingdom grow and bear much fruit. But the parable of the sower stresses *the responsibility of man* to respond to the Word of God.

1 Corinthians 3:6-9. Christian workers, whether they evangelise the lost or disciple the saved, are *God's fellow workers*. *The real Worker* is God! While Christians plant the seed and care for the plants, it is God who gives the growth and the results!

6. Summarise the main teachings of the parable.

Discuss. What are the main teachings or messages of this parable? What did Jesus Christ teach us to *know* or to *believe* and what did he teach us to *be* or to *do*?

Notes.

(1) The main message or central lesson.

The parable of the sower in Matthew 13:3-23 is a parable about "the Word of God in God's kingdom".

The main message or central lesson is the following. "The condition or attitude of your heart determines the response you give to the Word of God. And the response you give to the Word of God, determines the result (fruit) in your life".

Or: "The result (fruit) in your life depends on the response you give to the Word of God. And the response you give to the Word of God depends on the condition or attitude of your heart."

The four possible conditions of the heart of every non-Christian or Christian on any day of their lives determine the four different responses each one gives to the Word of God on that day.

(2) "The one with whom (the seed) is sown along the path" (verse 19).

He is person who in his response to the Word of God resembles the effect of the hardened soil of the path on the seed. The seed lies on top of the path until the birds come and eat them up.

This is a picture of an insensible and hardened heart that does not respond to the Word of God. This part of the parable deals with attitude and response. By constantly thinking that the Word of God contains nothing of importance for him, this person's heart becomes more and more indifferent. By making no effort to understand or grasp the message (Isaiah 6:9-10), his heart becomes dull. By continually putting off a response to the Word of God, because he regards it as inconvenient (Acts 24:25), his heart becomes more and more careless. By constantly criticising the Word of God and substituting it with his own opinions (Romans 11:7-10; Hebrews 3:7-8), his heart becomes hardened. By repeatedly rejecting the messenger or the message, because he does not like what he hears (John 8:37), his heart becomes hostile. Satan knows that people, who accept the Word of God, will believe and will be saved (Luke 8:12). And because Satan fears the power and effect of the Word of God on people's hearts, he is ever ready to snatch away what is left unaccepted!

The main lesson is to make every effort to understand God's Word (the message of the Bible) (Matthew 13:23c) and then to accept it (Mark 4:20b) whenever you hear, read or study it! You must immediately deal with your attitudes of indifference, procrastination or hostility!

(3) "The one with whom (the seed) is sown on rocky places" (verse 20).

He is the person who in his response to the Word of God resembles the effect of the rocky soil on the seed. The seed (plant) cannot grow deep roots and is soon scorched by the sun and withers.

This is a picture of the impulsive and shallow heart in which the Word of God cannot take root. This part of the parable deals with depth and duration. This is a person, who acts on the spur of the moment, immediately and without considering the consequences and without counting the cost. When he hears the Word of God, he is thrilled or enthusiastic. But this person has "no root", that is, he lacks perseverance, the ability to stick to the Word of God under

all circumstances. He is not willing to bear up under the trouble and persecution that come due to the Word of God. He lacks the love to suffer for Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 13:3). Although he initially follows Christ outwardly, he is never a genuine follower of Christ. His confessions concerning the Christian faith do not spring from his inner conviction. He fails to consider the consequences of accepting the Word of God. He does not consider the fact that “true discipleship” implies self-surrender, self-denial, sacrifice, service and suffering. When trouble or persecution comes, he quickly falls away. The original word means that he quickly gets ensnared or lured into sin or he quickly gets offended at God’s Word and as a consequence stumbles over it and falls away. Examples of such people are: the man who wants to be a disciple of Jesus without counting the cost (Matthew 8:19-20); the rich young man who did not want to let go of his wealth (Matthew 19:16-22); Judas Iscariot who betrayed Jesus for a sum of money (Matthew 26:14-16) and Demas who loved the present world (2 Timothy 4:10).

The main lesson is to retain God’s word (Luke 8:15c) and to persevere to believe and to obey it under all circumstances! You must immediately deal with your tendency only to be emotionally touched when you hear God’s word!

(4) “The one with whom (the seed) is sown in the thorns” (verse 22).

He is the person who in his response to the Word of God resembles the effect of the soil infested with weeds and thorns on the seed. The seed (the plant) is choked and remains fruitless.

This is a picture of the divided and pre-occupied heart that is biased against the Word of God. This part of the parable deals with preparation and priority. This is a person, who is has not prepared or deliberately chooses the wrong priorities in life. As a consequence, his heart has no room or time for the calm and serious meditation and application of the Word of God. He not only opens his heart for the Word of God, but also opens his heart for the worries of life, the deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for other things that do not please God (Luke 8:14). Worries can destroy the physical health and prevent concentration on God (Matthew 6:25-34). Riches can become a root of all kinds of evil, as the following examples show: the rich fool (Luke 12:13-21), the rich show-off and the beggar Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31), the rich young ruler (Mark 10:17-23). “Other desires or pleasures” can become entanglements that ruin your soul: Pleasures that are wrong in themselves are: drunkenness, drug addiction, gambling, lotteries, games of chance, sexual immorality, etc. Pleasures that become wrong when a person over-indulges in them are: eating, drinking, sleeping, sports, entertainment, watching television, reading novels, internet or even work when you are a workaholic. The person, whose heart is pre-occupied with other things, so that it has no time or place for the Word of God, never grows to spiritual maturity and therefore he can never bear “fruit for eternal life” or “lasting fruit” (John 4:36; 15:16) in his life. The sinful desires of the heart, the lust of the eyes and the boasting of the mouth about what he has or does or has accomplished are things that do not come from God, but from the world. All these things will pass away (1 John 2:15-17)!

The main lesson is to keep your heart clean, honest and good (Luke 8:15a). You must keep it free from the worries of life, the deceitfulness of wealth, the pleasures of the world and the wrong desires. You must immediately deal with your worries, your tendency to be materialistic and with your wrong desires and wrong priorities.

(5) “The one with whom (the seed) is sown on the good soil” (verse 23).

He is the person who in his response to the Word of God resembles the effect of good (clean and deep) soil on the seed. The seed (plant) grows and bears much fruit.

This is a picture of a well prepared heart that responds in the right way to the Word of God and bears fruit. This part of the parable deals with motivation and quality. It is the central point or main message of the parable.

In contrast to the first heart, this person:

- hears
- the Word of God
- understands what he hears (Matthew 13:23) and
- accepts it (Mark 4:20). He does this so that God’s Word may save and transform him (Luke 8:12).

In contrast to the second heart, whenever this person hears God’s Word, he first considers the cost of believing and obeying these words. He counts the cost, because he wants to persevere being a believer, even when he faces difficulties or persecution. He

- retains God’s Word deep in his heart and clings to it under all difficult circumstances (Luke 8:15).

In contrast to the third heart, this person:

- keeps his heart prepared and clean and free from whatever can choke God’s Word (Luke 8:15). For example, he keeps it clean from worries, money and worldly pleasures.

The fourth heart represents the person, who responds to God’s Word with a good and noble heart: he hears, understands, accepts, with conviction holds on to God’s Word and

- bears fruit with effort and perseverance (Luke 8:15). The fruit may be conversion and spiritual growth (Colossians 1:6). The fruit may be good works (Luke 3:8-14). The fruit may be growth in spiritual character (Galatians 5:22-23). Or the fruit may be a fruitful ministry in other people’s lives (disciple making) (John 15:16). The difference in the

degree of fruitfulness (thirty, sixty or hundred fold) (Matthew 13:23; Mark 4:20) is due to the fact that not all Christians are equally penitent, trustful, loyal, courageous, meek or obedient.

(6) The key to understand all other parables.

Mark 4:13 says, "Don't you understand this parable? How then will you understand any parable?" Jesus teaches that the parable of the sower is the key to understand all the other parables of Jesus Christ and the whole Bible as well! Why? Because "the condition or attitude of your heart determines the response you give to the Word of God. And the response you give to the Words in the Bible determines the result in your life!"

That is why Proverbs 4:23 says, "Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the well-spring of life." How can a person guard his heart? Proverbs 23:26 says, "My son, give me your heart and let your eyes keep to my ways." Only when you have given your heart and life to Jesus Christ, will you be able to guard your heart and make the best responses to God's Word!

5	PRAYER (8 minutes) [REACTIONS] PRAYER IN RESPONSE TO GOD'S WORD
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Take turns in the group *to pray short* to God in response to what you have learned today.
Or divide the group into two's or three's and pray to God in response to what you have learned today.

6	PREPARATION (2 minutes) [ASSIGNMENT] FOR NEXT LESSON
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(Group leader. Give the group members this preparation for at home in writing or let them copy it down).

1. Commitment. Be committed to make disciples, build the Church and preach the kingdom.
2. Preach, teach or study "the parable of the sower" together with another person or group of people.
3. Personal time with God. Have a quiet time with God from half a chapter of Exodus 18, 20, 32 and 33 each day. Make use of the favourite truth method. Make notes.
4. Memorisation. (4) Never look back from serving in the kingdom: Luke 9:62.
Daily review the last 5 memorised Bible verses.
5. Bible study. Prepare the next Bible study at home. Romans 1:18-32.
Make use of the five steps method of Bible study. Make notes.
6. Prayer. Pray for someone or something specific this week and see what God is doing (Psalm 5:3).
7. Update your notebook on preaching God's kingdom. Include your notes on quiet time, your memorisation notes, your teaching notes and this preparation.