

THE
WAY
OF
JESUS

AS FOUND IN THE
GOSPEL OF **MARK**

SPIRITUAL GUIDE
FOR JUNE 20-26

READ**MARK 4 : 1 - 2 0**

Again Jesus began to teach by the lake. The crowd that gathered around him was so large that he got into a boat and sat in it out on the lake, while all the people were along the shore at the water's edge. He taught them many things by parables, and in his teaching said: "**Listen! 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, so that they did not bear grain. Still other seed fell on good soil. It came up, grew and produced a crop, some multiplying thirty, some sixty, some a hundred times."**

Then Jesus said, "**Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear.**"

When he was alone, the Twelve and the others around him asked him about the parables. He told them, "**The secret of the kingdom of God has been given to you. But to those on the outside everything is said in parables so that, "they may be ever seeing but never perceiving, and ever hearing but never understanding; otherwise they might turn and be forgiven!"**

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—some thirty, some sixty, some a hundred times what was sown."**

REFLECT

What is the condition of your heart? What is the soil of your heart like?

Jesus tells a parable in Mark 4 about soil, seed and the resulting harvest. It would've been familiar imagery in that context. In fact, Jesus tells lots of stories that use agricultural imagery. The metaphor of seeds was a favorite of his.

The parable of the sower can be read as both a warning and an encouragement. On one hand, Jesus teaches us that not every heart will receive the Kingdom. Some reject it outright, and others appear to embrace it but wither or die shortly thereafter. Typically when we read this story we assume we're in the "good soil" category. With that category comes an encouragement, the promise of a multiplying harvest. But how do we know our hearts are good soil to hear and receive Jesus' words? This is the beauty of this parable.

Jesus words are a reminder and encouragement to care for, and cultivate the soil of our hearts. Without even realizing it, our hearts can become hard and rough. Whether it's because of busyness, wealth, or just apathy towards Jesus and His Kingdom, we can easily neglect the condition of our hearts. Yet for Jesus, this is precisely where the Kingdom takes root - not first in our actions or beliefs but in our hearts, the inner, core part of our being. This is his priority and this parable reminds us it should be our priority too.

LISTEN & PRAY

Allow the words of this song to be your prayer this week as you allow God to cultivate and care for the soil of your heart.



KEEP READING →

PRACTICE

For hundreds of years people have been using the practice of self-examination to care for and cultivate the soil of their hearts. The practice of self-examination is a way of reviewing our day to detect both God's activity and our own brokenness. It's a way of noticing what God's been up to in our lives, as well as noticing where we need his forgiveness and grace. It's a way of paying attention to the ordinary and often subtle moments in each day where we experienced God's goodness and blessing. By reviewing the events of our day in our mind and asking God "Where were you?" we begin to notice the movements of the Spirit in our everyday lives, in ordinary and small ways as well as extraordinary events.

But we also notice our sin. There is just no way to review our day and not see signs of our brokenness. Anger or resentment towards a boss. A comment we made on a facebook thread. Impatience in traffic. And rather than avoid or deny our shortcomings this practice helps us hold our brokenness in the loving presence of God and find deep transformation there.

As we make this rhythm part of our lives, over time we'll become better at noticing God's activity and the areas where we need transformation. There's four movements to this practice. Try this in the evening. Put your phone away and give yourself at least 10 minutes to reflect on your day.

RECALL: Think through key events and emotions of your day. Flip through the events of your day with the question "Where were you God?" in mind. Ask Him to reveal His presence and activity as you recall the events of the day.

REJOICE: Thank God for the moments where you sensed his blessing, presence or nearness. It may be something small and that's okay. Pay attention to where you felt joy or contentment and thank God for those moments.

REPENT: Take note of those moments in the day where you felt distant from God, or missed the mark. Negative emotions, thoughts, or actions may be indicators of an area where you need growth and transformation. Confess your brokenness to God as you see it, knowing He delights in and loves you. Invite him to give you grace.

RENEW: With hope, turn your attention to tomorrow and invite the Spirit of God to fill you with renewed wisdom, strength and resolve to follow Him well. Thank Him as you close.