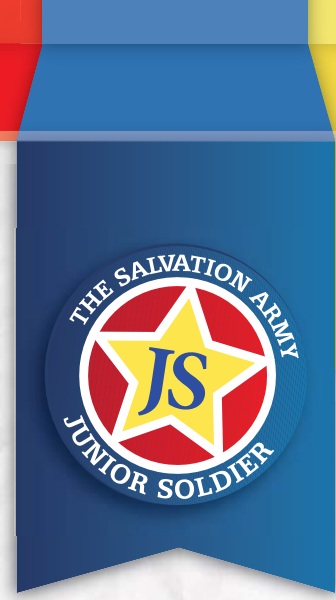


# Junior Soldiers

Unit 12 : Lesson 5

## Parable of the Seeds and Soils



**PURPOSE :** For the children to explore and understand that it is not only important to hear the message of God but to understand it, keep it in your heart, live it out as a good witness and share the message with others.

*'The seeds that fell on good ground are the people who hear and welcome the message. They produce thirty or sixty or even a hundred times as much as was planted.'*

**Mark 4:15 (CEV)**

*'But the seed on good soil stands for those with an honest and good heart. They hear the message. They keep it in their hearts. They remain faithful and produce a good crop.'*

**Luke 8:15 (NIRV)**

## Consider & Prepare

**Read:**

Luke 8:4–18 (NIRV)

Mark 4: 1–34 (CEV)

Jesus was one of history's greatest teachers and he used a range of methods to teach people, including public lectures and private talks, asking rhetorical questions and quoting scripture. He is, however, perhaps most famous for using 'parables'—a symbolic story told by Jesus with a deeper meaning or teaching—that grasped a topic or item of daily relevance (a shepherd, a coin, a Samaritan traveler, a rich landowner etc.) and used it to illustrate a divine truth.

This lesson features the parable of the soils (sower/farmer) and explores different ways people respond to the gospel message. We will be looking at the difference between hearing and listening and how that may impact what God is trying to tell us. We would like the children to explore and understand the importance of listening to God's word and keeping it in our hearts while being faithful to him.

We also want the children to understand that if we remain faithful to God, he will honour our faithfulness and we will have a part in seeing the Church grow with people who love God and want to be in relationship with him.

### What you will need:

#### For 'Connecting In'

- A set of walkie-talkies

#### For 'The Main Thing'

- 20 balloons (not blown up)
- Pin for popping balloons
- Bibles
- Four trays to scatter the soil on
- Seeds for scattering
- Grass seeds
- Sandy soils
- Rocks
- Prickles or a prickly branch
- Good soil

#### For 'Tying In'

- Butchers paper
- Textas
- Plastic sups
- Good soil
- Seeds to plant (sugar peas are quick growing seeds)
- A3 sheet
- Wooden icy-pole sticks
- Water

#### For 'Home & Beyond'

- Print off the 'Home & Beyond' cards for each child.



## Connecting In

The object of both the 'Connecting In' activities below is for the children to explore the difference between 'hearing' and 'listening'.

### Chinese whispers...

Place the children in a line and explain that they need to pass on a message exactly as they have heard it to the next person in the line by whispering that message into their ear. Give the first child in the line the message that they will need to pass on. When they have finished passing along the message, get the last person in the line to share what the message was that they were told and see if it was the same one you started with. You might like to use the following messages to pass along (this will help link this activity with the lesson content later):

- You use your ears to hear but you use your heart to listen.
- There is a lot of difference between listening and hearing.
- The seeds grew and produced a hundred times as many seeds.
- Those seeds that fell on good ground are the people who listen to the message.

**Link:** 'Well, we have just had a fun game that I am sure you have all played at some point of time, I wonder if our message got to the end of the line the same way that it started. Sometimes it happens okay but most of the time it will get changed along the way; sometimes just a little and sometimes completely.'

- I wonder how you might have felt when you couldn't hear the message well but you had no choice but to pass on what you had heard.
- Some of the messages that were passed along talked about the difference between hearing and listening; I wonder if you think there is a difference between hearing someone and listening to someone. *(Share.)*
- I wonder if you have ever heard one of your parents say to you, 'How many times have I said that to you?' or 'How many times have I told you that?' These are some examples of the difference between hearing and listening. I wonder if you can think of any more.



'Today we are going to explore a passage from the Bible that you may have looked at or read before that talks about this very thing. Jesus uses it as an illustration to help people understand the importance of not only hearing things but understanding them and responding to them.'

### Walkie-talkies...

If you have a small group of children this activity might be a better choice for the 'Connecting In' section. Using a set of walkie-talkies you will need to place yourself in a different part of the building or the other end of the room (outside the door would work best) and attempt to have a conversation with a child or children at the other end. Discuss the importance of hearing and listening but make sure that you don't use the walkie talkie properly so that the child gets confused and can't hear what you are trying to say. After a few minutes of conversation, meet together and discuss how the activity went.

**Link:** 'How cool are walkie-talkies? I love using them and have had great fun playing with them with friends.'

- Can you tell me about the conversation we were having through the walkie talkie?
- Did it make sense? Could you hear me properly and what I was saying?
- I wonder how you might have felt when you couldn't hear the message clearly.
- Some of what I was communicating was talking about the difference between hearing and listening; I wonder if you think there is a difference between hearing someone and listening to someone. *(Share.)*
- I wonder if you have ever heard one of your parents say to you, 'How many times have I said that to you?' or 'How many times have I told you that?' These are some examples of the difference between hearing and listening. I wonder if you can think of any more.



## The Main Thing

### Balloons...

For this activity you will need to have at least five other children or adults apart from yourself. If you have a small group of children you might like to enlist the help of some of their Big Buds for this session. The object of this activity is to blow up as many balloons as possible and for children to experience how hard this task can be depending on the circumstances.

You will need to set out four piles of five balloons (not blown up) and assign one child/Big Bud to each pile of balloons. Speak privately to each child/Big Bud, giving them the following instructions:



- The first child should try to blow up their balloons with their hands behind their back.
- Tell the second child that you will give him/her a chocolate bar (or other reward) if he/she won't successfully blow up any balloons at all.
- The third and fourth children should blow up their balloons.
- Assign a fifth child or leader to (carefully) pop the third child's balloons (using a pin) when they are halfway blown up.
- Ask the remainder of the children to cheer for the fourth student as they blow up their balloons.
- Say 'Go!'
- The activity is over when the fourth student has all their balloons blown up.



**Link:** 'Wow! What a lot of fun trying to blow up balloons. I am sure at first this may have been thought of as a fairly easy task but because of the circumstances it was not an easy task for everyone and some of you may have even found it very frustrating.

- I wonder how you think each child blowing the balloons up might have struggled in some way.
- Which person do you think was the most successful in blowing up their balloons? Why?

'Well, we have been looking at balloons and the difficulty of completing what seemed to be an easy task—we are going to explore in a moment a parable that Jesus told that looks at how difficult it can be for some people—depending on their circumstances—to hear, understand and respond to the truth about God. It is not always easy for some people to hear the message of God and for it to become an important part of who they are and how they think, speak or act. There are certain things in our lives that can stop us from hearing the message and truly listening to the message and from making it an important part of who we are. In a moment we will have a look at this parable and explore why this is and to also help us to think about the difference between 'hearing' and 'listening'.

We are going to explore a passage that talks about soils and sowers and seeds that is found in Mark but this parable that Jesus tells can also be read in Matthew and Luke.

Read Mark 4:4–15 together. Emphasise the words 'hear' and 'listen', you might even like to have some actions or sounds that the children make when you say/read these words. You might like to read through the passage more than once so that they can listen differently the second time (this also helps them to connect into one of the key themes for this passage).

### **A Story About a Farmer**

*When a large crowd from several towns had gathered around Jesus, he told them this story: 'A farmer went out to scatter seed in a field. While the farmer was doing it, some of the seeds fell along the road and were stepped on or eaten by birds. Other seeds fell on rocky ground and started growing. But the plants did not have enough water and soon dried up. Some other seeds fell where thornbushes grew up and choked the plants. The rest of the seeds fell on good ground where they grew and produced a hundred times as many seeds.' When Jesus had finished speaking, he said, 'If you have ears, pay attention!'*

### **Why Jesus Used Stories**

*Jesus' disciples asked him what the story meant. So he answered: 'I have explained the secrets about God's kingdom to you, but for others I can only use stories. These people look, but they don't see, and they hear, but they don't understand.'*

### **Jesus Explains the Story about a Farmer**

*'This is what the story means: The seed is God's message, and the seeds that fell along the road are the people who **hear** the message. But the devil comes and snatches the message out of their hearts, so that they will not believe and be saved. The seeds that fell on rocky ground are the people who gladly **hear** the message and accept it. But they don't have deep roots, and they believe only for a little while. As soon as life gets hard, they give up. The seeds that fell among the thornbushes are also people who **hear** the message. But they are so eager for riches and pleasures that they never produce anything.*

*Those seeds that fell on good ground are the people who listen to the message and keep it in good and honest hearts. They last and produce a harvest.'*

You might like to read through the passage a couple of times for the children to truly hear what God is wanting them to explore or you may also wish to watch the Max 7 YouTube clip on 'The Parable of the Soils' together as a group to help children visualise the parable.



For this next section you will need to have four trays that you can place the different types of soil on and some seeds to scatter so that you can explore the parable together.

#### **Sandy soil...**

You will need one tray and some sand to be scattered over it for this section. Ask one of the children to come and scatter some sand over the tray so that you can explore this section of the parable together.

'In the parable it talks about the seed that fell on the road; this tray has sand scattered on it to represent our road.

- What happened to the seed that fell on the road?
- What did Jesus mean by this part of the parable?
- I wonder what that might look like in someone's life today.' (*Explore this with your children.*)

#### **Rocky soil...**

You will need a tray and some rocky soil for this section. Ask one of the children to come and scatter some of the rocky soil over the tray so that you can explore this section of the parable together.

'In the parable it talks about the seed that fell on the rocky soil (*scatter some seed over the soil with some landing on the rocks*).

- What happened to the seed that fell on the rocky soil?
- What did Jesus mean by this part of the parable?
- I wonder what that might look like in someone's life today.' (*Explore this with your children.*)

Jesus explains that people who gladly hear God's message and accept it but have no deep roots will believe for a little while but when life gets hard they will give up. Now highlight the seed and how it cannot grow good roots among the rocks.

#### **Prickly soil...**

You will need a tray with some prickly soil for this section. Ask one of the children to come and scatter some of the rocky soil over the tray so that you can explore this section of the parable together.

'In the parable it talks about the seed that fell on the prickly soil (*scatter some seed over the soil with some landing close to the prickles*).

- What happened to the seed that fell on the prickly soil?
- What did Jesus mean by this part of the parable?
- I wonder what that might look like in someone's life today.' (*Explore this with your children.*)



Jesus talks about people who hear the message of God and accept it but are so busy with riches/having lots of money and things and too busy with having lots of pleasures in life, that they don't produce anything. You may like to have a discussion about what some of these riches or pleasure in life could be. Be aware that having riches or pleasures in life is not a bad thing but it is how you prioritise them that will determine whether they come between you and God or not. Now highlight the seeds that will not grow well amongst the thorns.

### Good soil...

You will need a tray with some good soil for this section. Ask one of the children to come and scatter some of the good soil over the tray so that you can explore this section of the parable together.

'In the parable it talks about the seed that fell on the good soil (*scatter some seed over the soil*).

- What happened to the seed that fell on the good soil?
- What did Jesus mean by this part of the parable?
- I wonder what that might look like in someone's life today. (*Explore this with your children.*)



## Tying In

For this activity it would be best to divide your group into small groups and provide them with some butchers paper and textas to write and draw their ideas on. You will also need some plastic cups, good soil and some seeds to plant.

In their small groups, encourage all the children to fill a plastic cup with some good soil and plant some seeds.

- 'What else will the seed now need to help it to grow? (*Discuss.*)
- Just like seeds and other plants need water, sun etc. in order to grow, I wonder if you can think of what sorts of things might help us grow closer to Jesus and be strong Christians.' (*Discuss. Reading the Bible, talking to Jesus, praying, spending time with other Christians and talking about Jesus, coming to church or Junior Soldiers, listening to Christian music, reading a Christian book etc.*).

'Remember earlier, we talked about the difference between hearing and listening. Just like the parable, if we listen to God's message of love, not just hear it but really listen with our hearts and minds and we feed our hearts with things that helps us grow as a Christian, we will be effective in helping other people to also know Jesus as a friend.

'The heart that is "made of good soil" is the heart that tells the Lord it wants to not only listen to his word but obey it, a life that reflects the message of Jesus by the things that it thinks, says and does, a heart that wants to be made more like Jesus. We need to prepare our hearts to receive God's Word. Just like some very small seeds can grow into a huge plant or tree, we can also grow into a person with a huge faith and love for Jesus that others can see.'

Hand out a wooden icy-pole stick to each child to place in their cup of soil near the seeds that they plant. Ask them to first choose a verse from the parable that they have read today and write the verse on the stick (encourage them to look up the Bible themselves and choose a verse to remind them of the story and what God is sharing with them).

### Prayer...

As the children are holding their cups, talk to them about prayer and how prayer can make us grow and stay connected with God more. Take time to pray together. Encourage the children to hold their plant while they pray and encourage them to each share a prayer from their heart. (You may like to go outside if you have a suitable garden/tree and pray together there.)

Allow the children to take their plants home to water and place in the sun (all those good things that they need for the plant to grow). Suggest to the children that every time they water their plant they remember to do something at home that will help them grow closer to God, i.e. read their Bible, talk to Jesus, listen to some Christian music, talk to a family member or Big Bud about God, draw a picture about Jesus etc.

You may like to ask the children to bring their plants back or a photo of it in a month's time to see how much their plant has grown and multiplied, and then ask them: 'How much you have grown as a follower of God in this time?'



## Home & Beyond


Print off the 'Home & Beyond' cards attached. The children might like to keep these in their journals or notebook where they could write or stick the challenges, reflect, answer questions or complete activities each week.

### Sharing the message with others...

- Share the parable with your family or Big Bud and why you have planted seeds.
- You may like to involve your family in helping to look after your seeds as they grow.
- Choose a couple of activities that you can do together as a family or with your Big Bud that will help you grow closer to Jesus.
- As your seeds grow and multiply you may like to plant God's message in the heart of a friend by inviting them to church or Kids Church to hear about God's love and how to be a friend of Jesus.









# Home & Beyond

Sharing the message with others...



- Share the parable with your family or Big Bud and why you have planted seeds.
- You may like to involve your family in helping to look after your seeds as they grow.
- Choose a couple of activities that you can do together as a family or with your Big Bud that will help you grow closer to Jesus.
- As your seeds grow and multiply you may like to plant God's message in the heart of a friend by inviting them to church or Kids Church to hear about God's love and how to be a friend of Jesus.



# Home & Beyond

Sharing the message with others...



- Share the parable with your family or Big Bud and why you have planted seeds.
- You may like to involve your family in helping to look after your seeds as they grow.
- Choose a couple of activities that you can do together as a family or with your Big Bud that will help you grow closer to Jesus.
- As your seeds grow and multiply you may like to plant God's message in the heart of a friend by inviting them to church or Kids Church to hear about God's love and how to be a friend of Jesus.



# Home & Beyond

Sharing the message with others...

- Share the parable with your family or Big Bud and why you have planted seeds.
- You may like to involve your family in helping to look after your seeds as they grow.
- Choose a couple of activities that you can do together as a family or with your Big Bud that will help you grow closer to Jesus.
- As your seeds grow and multiply you may like to plant God's message in the heart of a friend by inviting them to church or Kids Church to hear about God's love and how to be a friend of Jesus.



# Home & Beyond

Sharing the message with others...

- Share the parable with your family or Big Bud and why you have planted seeds.
- You may like to involve your family in helping to look after your seeds as they grow.
- Choose a couple of activities that you can do together as a family or with your Big Bud that will help you grow closer to Jesus.
- As your seeds grow and multiply you may like to plant God's message in the heart of a friend by inviting them to church or Kids Church to hear about God's love and how to be a friend of Jesus.

