

SESSION 6

Trust God to Work



QUESTION 1:

What is something you have completed on your bucket list?

THE POINT

Share Christ in all situations, but leave the results to God.

THE PASSAGES

Matthew 13:3-8,18-23

THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

Bucket lists: checklists of activities or tasks people want to complete before they die. Books and blogs abound with ideas: One hundred places to visit before you die. One hundred books to read before you die. One hundred movies ... you get the idea. Some people create their lists as fun escapes, while others take it quite seriously.

Few people complete their bucket lists unless the list consists of only “low hanging fruit”—those things that are easy to grab on to and do. Whether people complete their full list or not, perhaps they should be commended for trying.

One thing that should be on the bucket list of every follower of Christ is to lead others to faith in Christ. That task not only has impact on this life “before you die,” but it also will impact eternity. Unfortunately, although we may do the task, we can’t always complete it. In other ways, just because we share our faith doesn’t mean the person will accept Christ. Matthew 13 helps us see that the full completion of that task is something we leave in the hands of God.

Matthew 13:3-8

3 And he spake many things unto them in parables, saying, Behold, a sower went forth to sow;

4 And when he sowed, some seeds fell by the way side, and the fowls came and devoured them up:

5 Some fell upon stony places, where they had not much earth: and forthwith they sprung up, because they had no deepness of earth:

6 And when the sun was up, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away.

7 And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprung up, and choked them:

8 But other fell into good ground, and brought forth fruit, some an hundredfold, some sixtyfold, some thirtyfold.

Jesus regularly taught in parables, challenging listeners to pay attention to the words He chose, providing illustrations in simple, yet sometimes hidden terms. His parables usually related to common cultural practices and events, and they were tied to the heart conditions of the people He encountered. What He shared may have confused many in His audience due to their hardened or unreceptive hearts (Matt. 13:14-15).

It's hard for a contemporary audience to understand why Jesus would choose to teach such important things in parables instead of simply coming out and explaining what He meant. People today might call His parables cryptic or intentionally tricky, but the people of Jesus' time and area were familiar with the way He communicated. The contemporary mind reasons through lists and logic, but the Jewish mind at that time visualized images and examples. Parables didn't bury the truth; the principle in a parable was "hiding in plain sight" in such a way that those who heard what He was saying would understand exactly what He was saying.

In this particular parable, Jesus used the illustration of seeds and soil with each type representing people and how they receive the message of truth. We will see in the next section how the different soils represent different responses to the gospel, but for the moment, let's focus on what the sower did: he spread the seed. He didn't judge the soils beforehand; he freely and liberally spread the seed over all the soil.

Jesus is certainly the model sower! He took advantage of every opportunity before Him. He had one-on-one conversations with both religious leaders like Nicodemus (John 3:1-21) and despised sinners like the unnamed Samaritan woman (4:1-26). Of course, Jesus had many moments like the one we see in Matthew 13, when He spoke to a crowd. Many times, the crowds came to Him for healing (Matt. 12:15) or to be fed (John 6:26), but whatever their motivation, Jesus used the opportunity to be a sower and teach.

DIGGING DEEPER

SOWING SEEDS

The four kinds of soil on which the seed fell reflected the common experience of ancient farmers, who employed broadcast sowing—scattering seeds in all directions by hand as they walked up and down the stony paths that divided their fields. The imagery of sower and soil was standard in Jewish circles.

Jesus uses this imagery to illustrate the four types of responses people are making to the preaching of God's reign. Once one realizes that Jesus is talking about preaching the word, it is not difficult to see the first three kinds of soils are all inadequate.

None of them stands for people who were ever true believers, despite certain outward appearances. For farmers, only those plants that bear good fruit ("produced a crop," v. 8) count for anything.

The most unusual feature of the parable is the extraordinary crop produced by the seed that fell on good soil. A tenfold to twentyfold yield was often considered superior. Matthew's climactic focus, however, remains on the astonishing impact of those who are faithful. Jesus provides his followers with an important reminder of God's continued blessings on their work.

Craig L. Blomberg, *Matthew*, vol 22 of *The New American Commentary*, David S. Dockery, gen. ed. (Nashville, B&H Publishing Group, 1992) Wordsearch ed.

Jesus provided a model for us to follow. We can seize the opportunities before us to be proactive and intentional in how and when we share. This includes praying for open eyes to see the opportunities God has given us, praying for how we “sow the seed,” and praying for those with whom we share. We should pray daily and expect God to provide opportunities for us to be His messengers. We cannot control others’ responses to what they hear. Our chief concern should be that they hear the gospel.

QUESTION 2:

Why is it important to cast grass seed as widely as possible?

Matthew 13:18-22

18 Hear ye therefore the parable of the sower.

19 When any one heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth it not, then cometh the wicked one, and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart. This is he which received seed by the way side.

20 But he that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it;

21 Yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a while: for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended.

22 He also that received seed among the thorns is he that heareth the word; and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful.

As believers, we hope that everyone who hears the gospel will accept it, but not everyone will receive the message we share. Nevertheless, we should never give up on sharing. God counts on us to sow the seed of the gospel regardless of the hearer’s response.

In Jesus' parable, the different soils represent the various ways people respond to the gospel and to biblical truth.

- ▶ **Hard Soil.** The first soil represents hearers of the Word who have hardened hearts. Just as a seed cannot penetrate hardened soil, when seeds of truth hit a hardened heart, they bounce right off, never taking root. Satan comes to snatch away the message from the hardened heart using doubt, mistrust, and division. This was the same tactic he used in the garden before the fall when he asked Eve, "Yea, hath God said ...?" (Gen. 3:1). Satan twists and distorts truth in his attempts to minimize or take away from God's truth. His tactics cause hearers to ignore and reject the message just as the seeds that fall on the road fail to take root, displaying there is no understanding.

People may have hard hearts through unbelief or skepticism. Perhaps they feel God doesn't care or they've been deeply hurt. Whatever the reason, they have no desire for God, so His truth is unable to penetrate and take root. They hear the Word and say, "No, thanks. It's not for me."

- ▶ **Rocky soil.** Some of the soil in the area where Jesus lived was very shallow. The soil may have looked promising on top, but it was just a thin layer over limestone bedrock. This soil would let seeds get in and be warmed by the sun, but when the plant's roots reached bedrock, they had nowhere else to go. The first hint of foul weather caused them to wither. The one whose heart is represented by the shallow soil hears God's Word and "anon with joy receiveth it," but they shoot up too fast and too wildly to withstand the first sign of trouble. It's just a superficial acceptance and belief, and they quickly fall away.

Perhaps you've seen "the rocky soil" response. Someone attended a Christian revival, concert, or church service who quickly embraced the message. But just as quickly, they became dismayed when life hit them or they experienced "tribulation or persecution" because of their new faith.

- ▶ **Thorn-infested soil.** Some seeds cast by the farmer began to take root. The plants may have looked healthy for a while, but then thorns grew up and surrounded them, choking them out and depriving them of receiving the nourishment from the soil. Jesus used this soil to illustrate those who hear His word, but instead of letting that word take hold in their lives, they let other things steal their focus: “the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word.”

Jesus warned in the Sermon on the Mount that our commitment and devotion cannot be divided. “No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and mammon” (Matt. 6:24). People who try to have it both ways will find any potential fruit choked out by their devotion to something other than Christ.

God gave His only Son because of His love for the world, but the world does not always reciprocate that love. Too many people fall prey to the enemy, give up when hardship hits, or become distracted by the wrong things. So what can we do? We pray—and we keep on sowing.

QUESTION 3:

How do you typically respond when a person is not receptive to hearing the gospel?

Matthew 13:23

23 But he that received seed into the good ground is he that heareth the word, and understandeth it; which also beareth fruit, and bringeth forth, some an hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.

The fourth type of soil represents true disciples who receive the message, accept it, grow in it and lead others to grow in it. Ultimately, our desire when we share the message is that all the seed we sow will be “[sown] into the good ground!” When the truth of the gospel lands on this soil, it produces an abundance of fruit. The good soil is rich for discipleship, for growing in Christ, and for sharing Him with others.

QUESTION 4:

When have you experienced the gospel landing on good soil?

Up to this point, those in the crowd readily would have understood Jesus’ references to the sower, seed, and soils. But now Jesus added something highly unusual: the harvest. Considering the condition of the soil in that area and the way they sowed the seed, farmers typically expected a ten-fold return in their crops at best. It’s more likely they only harvested seven or eight times the amount of seed sown.

But Jesus took them far beyond the ten-fold result of a really good planting season. Jesus taught that these seeds not only would produce a harvest, but they would do so exponentially beyond the norm or average.

When God’s Word takes root in a person’s life, He declared, it “beareth fruit, and bringeth forth, some an hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.”

We are not responsible for the response of the hearer. That person’s acceptance of the truth will depend on how open they are

Share Jesus Without Fear:

Success in Sharing Jesus

Success is sharing your faith and living your life for Jesus Christ. Even if you do not have the privilege to see someone respond when you share, you have not failed, because you were obedient. Leave the results of sharing your faith with God.

to receive God's message and surrender their lives to Him. As His messengers—the sowers—we do not cause transformation; only God does. But when we sow His message—the gospel—we are a catalyst for transformation.

Jesus is the Sower who has provided us with an opportunity to partner with Him in sowing His message. He expects His people to continue to share the seeds of the gospel no matter what, even though we can't always be sure on what type of soil the seeds might fall. The goal of the sowing is to get the message to as many who will hear it. We sow God's Word into the lives of others—and we leave the results in His hands.

QUESTION 5:

How can trusting God with the results impact your attitude toward evangelism?

ENGAGE

What were some of the key seeds sown in your life that helped you hear and understand the truth of the gospel? Record and describe how those seeds “took root” in your heart.

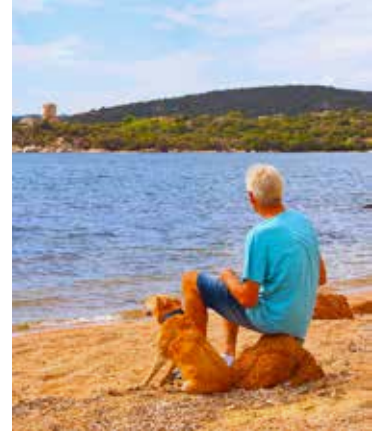
Make a list of all the people who shared the gospel with you in any way prior to your decision to trust Christ.

If possible, contact these individuals and thank them for caring enough to share Jesus with you. Let this activity motivate you to share Jesus with others so that one day you may hear them say “thank you” to you.

LIVE IT OUT

What will you do to sow the seeds of the gospel? We can trust God to produce a harvest of those willing to hear His message. We must be willing to:

- ▶ **Grow.** If you've been distracted or challenged in your walk with Christ, renew your commitment to Him. Ask God to work in your life and help you produce fruit for Him.
- ▶ **Share.** Identify opportunities God gives you during the week to “sow seeds” in the lives of others. Pray for boldness and take advantage of the opportunities God places in front of you.
- ▶ **Care.** As you share Christ, “work the soil.” Do more than speak words; show care and concern. Display the love of Christ in your actions; invest time in someone's life and let God use your words and actions to prepare the soil.



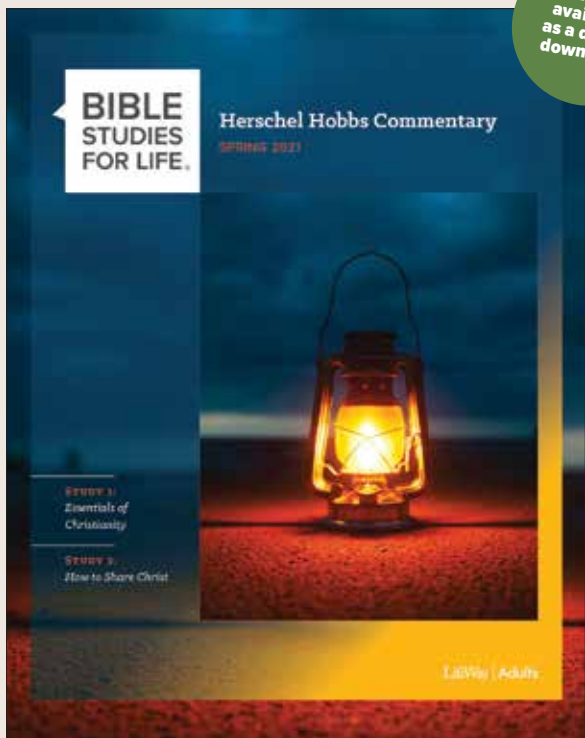
COMING NEXT QUARTER

THE CHURCH GOD DESIRES

- Session 1 **Characterized by Love** (Revelation 2:1-7)
- Session 2 **Steadfast in Difficulties** (Revelation 2:8-11)
- Session 3 **Uncompromising with Truth** (Revelation 2:12-17)
- Session 4 **Strong in Purity** (Revelation 2:18-29)
- Session 5 **Vigilant Against Complacency** (Revelation 3:1-6)
- Session 6 **Faithful in All Things** (Revelation 3:7-13)
- Session 7 **Sufficient in Christ Alone** (Revelation 3:14-22)

ELIJAH: LIVING OUTSIDE THE COMFORT ZONE

- Session 1 **Serve with Courage** (1 Kings 16:29-33; 17:1-6)
- Session 2 **Serve with Trust** (1 Kings 17:7-16)
- Session 3 **Serve Through Prayer** (1 Kings 17:17-24)
- Session 4 **Serve with Loyalty** (1 Kings 18:20-26, 31-39)
- Session 5 **Serve Even When Discouraged** (1 Kings 19:1-5a,11-18)
- Session 6 **Lead Others to Serve** (1 Kings 19:19-21; 2 Kings 2:6-14)



HERSCHEL HOBBS COMMENTARY

Reduce your leaders' research time—additional study material is all in one place. And widen group participants' paths to greater Bible understanding.

FEATURES

- Comprehensive Bible exposition of each session's Scripture passage
- Examination of key words, background, and setting
- Questions to guide the study of each passage
- Interactive responses to help readers apply God's truths
- Commentary on items in the biblical text that group members might have missed
- Explanations of important Greek and Hebrew terms
- Now with larger type and more room for adding notes!

**BIBLE
STUDIES
FOR LIFE.®**

The most in-depth commentary with the Bible Studies for Life® series; use with any resource for adults or students.

lifeway.com/hobbs | 800.458.2772

LifeWay

ESSENTIALS OF CHRISTIANITY

When we compare world religions, we quickly see that we are far apart in our beliefs and worldviews. Some people attempt to find a common ground by declaring, “It doesn’t matter what you believe, so long as you sincerely believe it.” But what we believe does matter! Our beliefs make a difference both now and for eternity. This study looks at the core truths central to the Christian faith. Within these core truths, we discover the character of God, the nature and work of Christ, who we are, and where we are going—truths that point us to a right relationship with God.

Robby Gallaty is the senior pastor of Long Hollow Baptist Church in Hendersonville, Tennessee.

HOW TO SHARE CHRIST

The gospel of Jesus Christ is truly life-changing. Every follower of Christ knows that and has experienced it, but we are surrounded by countless others who have yet to hear or experience that same gospel. Christians are called to point others to the gospel. It is a privilege to share with others the message of Christ, the way out of death and into eternal life.

Marshelle Wilburn is an urban missionary in the San Francisco Bay Area. She partners with her husband, Port, in church planting, associational missions, and marriage and family coaching.

