



TITLE: Plus Nothing | STORIES OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

BIG IDEA: This short story is meant to change your heart.

ICE BREAKER: What's a story that someone's shared with you that you will always remember for the rest of your life?

MAIN SCRIPTURE:

Mark 4:1-20

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. 2 He taught them many things by parables, and in his teaching said: 3 "Listen! A farmer went out to sow his seed. 4 As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. 5 Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. 6 But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. 7 Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants, so that they did not bear grain. 8 Still other seed fell on good soil. It came up, grew and produced a crop, some multiplying thirty, some sixty, some a hundred times." 9 Then Jesus said, "Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear." 10 When he was alone, the Twelve and the others around him asked him about the parables. 11 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 12 so that, "they may be ever seeing but never perceiving, and ever hearing but never understanding; otherwise they might turn and be forgiven!" 13 Then Jesus said to them, "Don't you understand this parable? How then will you understand any parable? 14 The farmer sows the word. 15 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. 16 Others, like seed sown on rocky places, hear the word and at once receive it with joy. 17 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. 18 Still others, like seed sown among thorns, hear the word; 19 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. 20 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."

OPENING THOUGHTS:

This short story is regarded as the first Parable (a short story about the Kingdom of God) that Jesus teaches. He picks the perfect spot to get into a boat and teach from a cove (named the cove of the sower) that naturally amplifies the speaker's voice. Jesus uses these short stories to provoke questions about the heart of his audience and our hearts today. This is the ministry of Jesus asking questions that lead us to search our hearts and find a need for the Gospel. As we read through and discuss this Parable, what are the

questions the Spirit of God is prompting in our hearts that would lead us to receive or abide deeper in the Word and Truth of Jesus?

#### MAIN POINTS:

- THE SOWER = JESUS T
- HE SEED = THE GOSPEL
- TYPES OF SOIL = CONDITION OF THE HEART
- Hardened Soil
- Shallow Soil
- Crowded Soil
- Willing Soil

#### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What is the significance of Jesus sharing the Parable of the Sower as his first Parable?
2. Why would Jesus use the example of farming as a way to teach people?
3. Is there anything that has made or is making our hearts hard and resistant to the Gospel? Has a lack of time with Jesus made our hearts shallow?
4. Are there things in our lives acting like the thorny weeds, choking out the work of the Gospel in our hearts?
5. How do we keep our hearts receptive to the Gospel?

#### FURTHER STUDY:

#### CHALLENGE:

WHAT KIND OF SOIL ARE YOU? Take note that essentially all the soil is the same. The difference between them is only "IF" and "HOW MUCH" they are being cultivated. If your heart is hardened, your faith is shallow, or your life is being choked out, you can begin to cultivate change right now. That's a Challenge, an Encouragement, and a Promise! How we care for your heart will determine how we grow in Jesus.

#### CLOSING PRAYER:

PRAYER: Jesus, you sow yourself in our hearts. The Word of Truth, generously! The Word of Life, graciously! Defend us from the Evil One Who seeks to snatch us away. Soften our hearts that have been hardened by sin and separation. Deliver us from distraction, from our worldly desires and all that would lure us and choke us out with false promises. Till us, Turn us, Enrich us, by the power of your Holy Spirit that we may become and stay willing soil, Forever faithful and fruitful for you. In Jesus' name, we pray, amen!