Preschool–Grade 6

The Parable of the Sower

Sunday School Lesson for Preteens (Ages 11–12), 45–60 minutes

Main point: The seed is the word of God. What it does in us depends on how we hear it: a heart like good ground hears, understands and keeps the word, and it bears fruit.
Bible passage: Matthew 13:1–23. Students read it out loud themselves.
Memory verse: "But that on the good ground are they, which in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience." *Luke 8:15 (KJV)* and "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." *Matthew 13:23 (KJV)*
You need: a Bible for each student, paper or a notebook and a pen for each student, a whiteboard and a marker, and one take-home sheet for each student.
Before class: read Matthew 13:1–23, Mark 4:1–20 and Luke 8:4–15. Write both memory verses on the board. Decide who reads which verses, or go around the room one verse each.

1. Opening game: Same Words, Different Results (5–10 minutes)

Ask: "Five people sit through the same lesson. A week later, one remembers nothing, one forgot after a day, one meant to do something but got too busy, and one is still doing what they learned. Why such different results from the same words?" Let students list reasons on the board: distraction, not understanding, no follow-through, worry, not caring. Say: "Jesus told a story about exactly this, and then explained it Himself."

2. Bible story: Students Read It (15 minutes)

Read out loud: Matthew 13:1–9. Old words in this passage:

- **multitudes** (13:2): huge crowds; **ship**: a fishing boat
- **parables** (13:3): stories that teach a lesson; **sower**: someone who scatters seed by hand
- **way side** (13:4): the hard path beside the field; **fowls**: birds; **devoured**: ate up
- **forthwith** (13:5): right away; **deepness of earth**: deep soil
- **scorched** (13:6): burned; **withered**: dried up
- **hundredfold** (13:8): a hundred times as much; **sixtyfold**, **thirtyfold**: sixty and thirty times
- **Who hath ears to hear, let him hear** (13:9): if you have ears, really listen

In 13:10–17 the disciples asked why Jesus spoke in parables. He said, "But blessed are your eyes, for they see: and your ears, for they hear" (13:16).

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Read out loud: Matthew 13:18–23. Old words in this passage:

- **the word of the kingdom** (13:19): God's message about His kingdom; Luke says, "The seed is the word of God" (Luke 8:11)
- **the wicked one** (13:19): the devil (Luke 8:12); **catcheth away**: snatches away
- **anon** (13:20): at once; **dureth for a while** (13:21): lasts only a short time
- **tribulation** (13:21): trouble and hard times; **persecution**: being mistreated for following God
- **by and by he is offended** (13:21): soon he stumbles and quits; Luke says they "fall away" (Luke 8:13)
- **the care of this world** (13:22): worries about everyday life; **deceitfulness of riches**: money promising more than it can give
- **unfruitful** (13:22): bearing no fruit

Talk it through: the same seed fell on all four grounds. The difference was the ground. Jesus' explanation is about the hearer: the first doesn't understand, the second has no root, the third lets other things crowd the word out, and the fourth understands and bears fruit (13:19–23). Mark adds "the lusts of other things" to the thorns (Mark 4:19), and Luke adds that good ground keeps the word and brings forth fruit "with patience" (Luke 8:15). Fruit takes time.

3. Questions to ask (15 minutes)

1. Jesus said, "Who hath ears to hear, let him hear" (13:9). Everyone in the crowd had ears. What was He asking them to do?
2. The way side hearer "understandeth it not" (13:19). What can you do when a passage doesn't make sense to you?
3. The stony ground hearer received the word "with joy" (13:20) but had "not root in himself" (13:21). How can someone be excited about God one week and gone the next? How does a person put down roots?
4. What are the thorns for people your age: worries, phones, money, popularity, busyness (13:22; Mark 4:19)? Which one crowds out God's Word most easily?
5. Good ground "heareth the word, and understandeth it" (13:23) and keeps it "with patience" (Luke 8:15). What does keeping the word look like on a normal school day?
6. Some brought forth a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty (13:23). What do you think that says about how God sees growth that looks different from person to person?

4. Memory verse (5 minutes)

Old words: **honest** means true and sincere; **keep it** means hold on to it and obey it; **patience** means keeping on over time. In Matthew 13:23, **understandeth** means understands and **beareth fruit** means produces good results.
Read both verses together. Then students cover one phrase at a time and quiz a partner. Say Luke 8:15 this week; keep working on Matthew 13:23 next week too.

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5. What this means for us (5–10 minutes)

Say: "The seed is the word of God, and the heart of that word is the gospel. God loves you, and 'all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God' (Romans 3:23, KJV). Jesus is God manifest in the flesh, God who came as a man (1 Timothy 3:16). 'Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures' (1 Corinthians 15:3–4, KJV). When the people on the day of Pentecost heard that word, they asked what to do (Acts 2:37), and Peter told them: 'Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.' (Acts 2:38, KJV) We **repent**, turning from sin, and our old self dies (Romans 6:6). We are buried with Jesus by baptism in His name, all the way under the water. **Remission** means our sins are washed away, and we rise to walk in newness of life, a brand-new life (Romans 6:4; Acts 22:16). And God fills us with the Holy Ghost, and we speak with other tongues as the Spirit gives utterance, which means as He gives the words (Acts 2:4). Jesus called this being born of water and of the Spirit (John 3:5). That is hearing the word and keeping it."
Pray with the students, and encourage them to talk with their parents and pastor about being baptized in Jesus' name and filled with the Holy Ghost. Never pressure a child.

6. Activity: Journal (10 minutes)

Each student writes privately. No one has to share. Write these three prompts on the board:

1. Which kind of ground best describes how I've been hearing God's Word lately? Why?
2. What is one "thorn" in my life that crowds out God's Word, and one step I can take to clear it this week?
3. Write a short prayer asking God to make your heart good ground.
   If there is time, invite a few volunteers to share one sentence. Early finishers can do the **Parable of the Sower crossword** (vbshq.com/puzzles/parable-of-the-sower-crossword) or worksheet (vbshq.com/worksheets/parable-of-the-sower-worksheet).

This week: read Matthew 13:1–23 again at home, then read Mark 4:1–20 and Luke 8:4–15. Write down one thing each one adds.

7. Prayer

"Dear God, thank You for Your Word. Give us ears to hear and hearts that understand. Pull up the thorns that crowd You out, give us deep roots, and let Your Word bear fruit in us with patience. In Jesus' name, amen."

If a student asks, "Who is the sower?": in this parable Jesus explains the seed and the ground (Matthew 13:19–23), and Mark records, "The sower soweth the word" (Mark 4:14). Keep to what Jesus said here.
If a student worries about which ground they are: answer honestly and gently. Jesus told the parable so people would hear well. Anyone can choose today to listen, ask until they understand, and keep the word with patience (Luke 8:15). Encourage them to talk with their parents and pastor.

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