



LC STUDY GUIDE

Stalled Series

The Passage: Mark 4:1-20

April 11 – April 24

Intro: Perhaps you were at Grace Chapel on April 4th and saw the drama of a small group of people moving beyond the expected church etiquette and express their deeper feelings related to their faith. It resonated with quite a number of us and whether GC is your church or whether you missed the Sunday, we invite you to check it out online.

We have begun our new series "Stalled" which seeks to respond to the feeling of being idle or stuck in our faith life. Whether for a long season or a shorter one, this is something that all of us have experienced to some degree. To set the tone for our meeting, let's not separate ourselves into stalled and un-stalled, but rather see if we can gain wisdom in Jesus' "Parable of the Sower."

Mark 4:1-20

1 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."

O – The scene begins with the crowd being so large that Jesus needs to get into the boat. He uses the water as a natural microphone so the crowd can hear him. What words, phrases, or thoughts strike you in the first eight verses?

I – Why do you think the sower throws these seeds in so many unlikely places?

(A variety of answers are possible. Among them ought to be the idea that the sower is trying to give everyone a chance. Further, crop-raising in ancient Palestine was often so frustrating that farmers would use "the broadcast method" of planting seeds first, then tilling the ground afterward.)

I – Spend a few minutes looking at how Jesus describes the different types of soils. How would you unpack the metaphor in your own words? There are no wrong comparisons here; just say whatever comes to mind.

I – Often we seek to find ourselves in the story by asking which soil we are in, which is natural. But we must also see that Jesus gives this parable after a dispute he has with the religious authorities in Mark 3:20-35. With the sense of the context, how does the parable add another lens to the original hearers listening at the lake? What does it say to you?
(That in the heart of Jesus, the Kingdom of God is for more people than are often included. Further, the message of God is sometimes missed by those that appear to have gotten it.)

A – What practices, habits, and perspectives, can we employ to steward and grow the message of Jesus that has landed in the soil of our lives? What practices have you found helpful to nurture your daily spiritual life (e.g., prayer, the reading of Scripture, etc.)? What other spiritual formative practices have taken shape in your life (meditation, Sabbath-keeping, practicing hospitality, serving others, the application of Scripture, and the many more that put Christ & Kingdom in the center of life, while also growing our spiritual lives)?

O – What questions come to you mind as you read verses 9-11?

I – What is Jesus trying to explain to his disciples in verse 11?

(It's extremely necessary to see that Jesus is not a friendly rabbi trying to make people a little happier and these parables are not merely poetic feel-good stories. A significant aspect of Jesus' mission of redeeming all things is to call out the injustices of the

social/religious/Roman-political system and call out the individual's sin and personal pre-occupation with self. As seen later in the Gospel of Mark, his message is problematic to everyone, including Herod and Pilate, religious authorities, and the ordinary people of society. The parables are a way of containing some of the subversive rhetoric while wrestling with the truth contained in the message. Those who have patient and open hearts get first-access to the truth of God.)

I – The "eyes seeing, ears hearing" language of verse 12 is a reference to the prophetic words found in some of the prophets like Isaiah (48:8), Ezekiel (12:2) and Jeremiah (5:21, 6:10). What do you think Jesus is saying here?

(The prophets are calling out the closed-hearted and closed-minded listener. Jesus is inviting his listeners to open their minds and hearts and to trust the Lord and allow this divine mystery to take root in the soil of their lives so they can receive the message and grow in faith.)

A – As we read Jesus' explanation of the parable, what steps can we take in allowing the message to continue to take root in the soil of our lives? How can we be part of this harvest that yields "thirty, sixty, a hundred times of what's been sown"?

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- a. Please note that not all these questions are to be asked in a single meeting. Take some time to prayerfully discern what will serve your LC the best. Select and reword the questions that best fit your voice and your Life Community group.
 - b. Complement these questions with "process questions" (what else? what more? what do others think?)
 - c. When you ask questions, give people ample time to think and respond. Wait. Take your time; don't rush people but encourage participation. Avoid answering your own questions!
 - d. Application: Pace the study to conclude with difference-making application.
 - e. Secondary texts—use other texts sparingly, even if they are relevant. Such texts will push you into "teaching" rather than facilitating, causing people to feel distracted or de-powered.