

# BIBLE TEACHING AND WORSHIP GUIDE



## FOR THE HOME-BASED CHURCH

Produced Weekly

*Jesus Interprets his Ministry*  
Mark 4:1-20

Copy this sheet for the Gathering Time, Bible Study, and Worship Experience leaders for the next meeting of the church.

## Leaders' Responsibilities:

**Important:** Each person who will be leading one of the three parts of a session during a Unit of sessions needs to have access to the "Basic Information for Leading the Unit of Study". That information is often provided at the beginning of that Unit of sessions. The weekly session "Background" located in the Teacher Preparation is much more specific to that day's study.

1. **The Gathering Time Leader** will gather all of the people together and help them prepare their minds and hearts for a wonderful worship experience before God. His/her responsibility is to introduce the congregation to the theme (content) and the Scripture that will be central to their worship experience for the day.

2. **The Bible Study Leader** will then help the people understand what the Scriptures have to say and teach us about the content of the study for the day. He/she will guide the people to make a general application of the study (ie: How does this Bible study apply to people today?)

3. **The Worship Time Leader** has the responsibility to use the theme and Scriptures to guide the congregation to make personal commitments to God's will for each one in regard to the study for the day. He/she will use others to lead in the music, taking the offering, ministry moment comments, and other activities and parts of the **Worship Time** that can aid in participatory worship.

## Prior to this Coming Session:

### **Gathering Time Leader:**

### **Bible Study Leader:**

The Bible Study Leader will need a few gardening or landscaping magazines or books. He/she will also need a Bible dictionary and a regular dictionary.

Note the idea of using a cassette or digital recording of the parable. If you use this option, you will need to request a person to record the parable on a cassette or digital recorder. You will play the recording near the beginning of the teaching session.

Have large sheets of paper and crayons, markers or paints for the youth to use in the application time.

### **Worship Time Leader:**

Ask an older youth or an adult to read the old hymn , “*Take My Life and Let It Be Consecrated, Lord, to Thee.*” The words are printed at the end of the lesson today.

### **Music Sources:**

“Speak to My Heart”, ***Baptist Hymnal***, 1991, #281.

**Gathering Time:** (Suggested time: 15 minutes)***Jesus Interprets his Ministry*****Focal Text**

Mark 4:1-20

**Background Text**

Mark 4:1-34

**Main Idea**

Though the reactions to Jesus vary, the harvest Jesus proclaimed is certain and abundant, with people's response to Jesus determining their place in that harvest.

**Question to Explore**

In light of varying views of Jesus today, how can we be assured that he really is the Christ and that Christ's way will be victorious?

**Teaching Aim**

To help the class consider their place in the coming certain victory of God's kingdom

**Gathering together:**

Sing "Speak to My Heart", *Baptist Hymnal*, 1991, #281.

**First thoughts:****A Listening Ear****Mark 4:23**

Several years ago a man began to lose his hearing. The doctor who examined him and the audiologist who tested his hearing indicated the hearing loss was because of too many loud noises in his earlier years. The digital hearing aids he wears are a help but they are not as good as his natural ears were before the damage was done. Several friends have jokingly accused him of having selective hearing – hearing just what he wants to hear.

Like others with hearing loss he has responded sometimes in unexpected ways because he didn't hear correctly. The person who spoke to him was clear in their speaking. His hearing what was spoken was very unclear. There have been times when the hearing loss was embarrassing. One day he was trying to sign up for a telephone long distance plan. The agent to whom he was talking asked him a question that he didn't understand. He had to ask the agent to repeat it several times before understanding the question. The problem of communication was due to hearing loss. He didn't have "ears to hear."

Can you think of a problem when God has had difficulty communicating with his children? The problem is never God's problem. He always makes very clear what he is saying. Therefore, the problem of communication is always with his children having listening ears. Even a congregation may not always hear correctly.

What are some issues that make communication difficult?

First of all, the lines of communication must be open. There can be no interference if misunderstandings and problems are to be avoided. Several years ago there was a severe ice storm in much of Quebec, Canada. The freezing rain that fell coated everything with a thick layer of ice. The weight of the ice caused millions of dollars in damage to telephone lines, power lines, and buildings. Beautifully formed maple trees everywhere were stripped of their limbs. Thousands of people were without telephone service, electricity for heat and cooking, or any means of communication for days and even weeks. Communication was broken.

Sin in the heart of a Christian will break the lines of communication with God. Do you read God's word every day, pray every day, gather for worship on a regular basis, love God with all your heart, have no anger or resentment toward anyone, and respond quickly to God's every prompting? If you are to hear him, you must have listening ears to hear him clearly. If God is to open your spiritual ears, you must confess every sin. You must seek his forgiveness. He does not answer prayer, except the prayer of confessing sin, when a person does not obey him.

"If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear" (4:23). If your heart is tender and sensitive and open to God and his every word, he will speak to you and you will understand.

## **Closing the Gathering Time:**

Take time at this point to mention items of prayer concern for the church, announcements of ministry or activities, and anything else that needs to be shared with or by the congregation. Pray for these needs. Remember to praise God in prayer.

Break time! Take five minutes between sessions. Encourage children to use the washroom so that they won't need to leave during the Bible Study time.

Distribute youth/adult Bible study outlines or paper for note-taking, if available.

Also hand out the activity sheets for preschool and younger children to use during Bible Study and/or worship.

**Note to the Bible Study Leader:** Suggested teaching time for the Bible study should be about 35 minutes. Use the “Teacher Preparation” for your personal study during the week before the session. Use the “Bible Study Plan” for the actual session.

## Teacher Preparation

### *Jesus Interprets his Ministry*

#### **Focal Text**

Mark 4:1-20

#### **Background Text**

Mark 4:1-34

#### **Main Idea**

Though the reactions to Jesus vary, the harvest Jesus proclaimed is certain and abundant, with people’s response to Jesus determining their place in that harvest.

#### **Question to Explore**

In light of varying views of Jesus today, how can we be assured that he really is the Christ and that Christ’s way will be victorious?

#### **Teaching Aim**

To help the class consider their place in the coming certain victory of God’s kingdom

### **Introduction to your personal study:**

As my preschool daughter and I walked through our neighbourhood one morning, we spied a sewer service vehicle parked in front of a neighbour’s home. On the side of the van there was a sign depicting the service offered. My curious daughter asked, “What does that van do? What is it for?”

I explained that it was a drain repair service. Going into a good bit of detail, I explained that a plumber, using a device called a sewer snake, might go into the home and clean out clogged or broken drains. Jennifer, sensitive as many preschoolers are, got a worried look on her face as she hesitantly asked, “Oh Mom. Do you think someone in that house has a broken brain?”

The story is humorous, but it conveys a truth. There was nothing wrong with my daughter's hearing, but still the message had not gotten through. She had heard the words I said, but had used child-like logic to interpret the words in light of what she already knew.

In our scripture lesson today, Mark 4, Jesus uses a form of the word for 'hear' as many as thirteen times. He admonishes his listeners to genuinely hear what he has to say, struggle to understand it, and then put it into practice. It is important to listen, not only with our ears, but with our hearts.

## **Background:**

Please ask for and read the information contained in the “**Basic Information for Leading the Unit of Study**”, found at the beginning of this Unit. Whoever downloaded this session for you should have that material for you as well.

## **Focusing on the Meaning:**

### **The parable of the soils (Mark 4:1-20)**

#### **Word pictures**

**4:1,2** Here is another interesting picture of Jesus as he taught by the seashore. He again used a boat as his pulpit in order to be heard by the great crowd that swelled around him at the water's edge. Teaching with parables seemed to be a favourite method with Jesus. Because parables were commonly used in Bible times by heathens and Christians alike, the crowds were probably quite familiar with this method. The word parable comes from a Greek word meaning something placed alongside something else. It is also commonly known as an earthly story with a heavenly meaning. Parables convey truth in an interesting way, as they are often taken from affairs of ordinary life understandable to all. This method of teaching causes one to think for oneself and make one's own deductions. The crowds might hear the lesson now, go away and think about what he'd said in such a vivid way, then come to a correct understanding. Jesus always taught for a response.

**4:3** Perhaps Jesus actually saw a farmer in the distance as he related this story of the sower and soils. Farming was an image well known to Christ's listeners. The image attracted their attention and caused them to listen to what Christ was saying. Galilean farmers were in the habit of scattering the seed on their land prior to plowing it. If the seed fell on thorny or rocky places it didn't matter, because all the ground would be worked up after the sowing.

### **Different kinds of soil (Mark 4:4-8)**



**4:4** The path was probably untouched by the plow because the farmer left strips of land (rights-of-way) between his fields where people might walk. There would be no opportunity for the seed to sink into this cement-like soil, so birds could easily swoop down and eat the exposed seeds.

**4:5,6** In many areas of Galilee there is a narrow ridge of earth over a limestone shelf. Seed which fell here would quickly germinate in the thin warm soil. But because there was so little moisture in this shallow soil, the sprouts would quickly be scorched by the hot sun. There was little chance for the plant to send down any real roots.

**4:7** Part of the field contained weed seeds and thorns that hadn't been properly cleared away. Perhaps they had been burned off, but the roots had never been removed. When the good seedlings sprouted they were soon crowded out by the bigger weeds and thorns. The larger plants hogged the moisture, depleted the soil nutrients, and caused the smaller plants to be stunted. Because the soil could sustain only so many plants, very little useful fruit was produced.

**4:8** It seems only reasonable that most of the seed fell on good soil. After all, what sort of farmer wouldn't have mostly good, rich, fertile soil? An average yield in those days was 10-20 fold (i.e. 10 –20 grains for each one sowed). A return of 30,60, or 100 fold would be absolutely tremendous [Layman's Bible Book Commentary, Vol. 16, p. 44].

**4:9** "he who has ears to hear, let him hear"...Eugene Peterson's contemporary version ***The Message*** reads like this "Are you listening to this? Really listening?" Jesus was saying that every person has a duty to pay attention to what was spoken.

## **Mystery**

**4:10-12** These verses, which are a quote from the Old Testament prophet Isaiah, might seem to indicate that Jesus didn't want people to understand what he taught by parables. But that isn't so. Jesus taught so that his hearers would understand clearly if they had receptive hearts and open minds. Those whose hearts and minds were closed by bigotry and tradition wouldn't be able to deal with his truth. There was likely a regretful tone in Christ's voice as he spoke of those who couldn't fathom what he was saying in such simple terms. They were unable to hear with spiritual discernment because they chose not to let God rule in their lives- they chose not to hear and respond. Every individual chooses whether or not to respond to the wooing of the Holy Spirit.

## **The Story made Clear (Mark 4:13-20)**

**4:13,14** Jesus took time to give a detailed explanation of this parable to his disciples. Are you surprised that the disciples had so little understanding? We have had the advantage of reading and rereading this parable, and discussing at length its meaning. The disciples had heard the words only once.

The seed represents the word of God (salvation message) which never changes, and the sower is any servant of God who shares the message. The human heart is likened to four types of soil. The response to the message depends on the condition of the heart.

**4:15** The pathway represents hard hearts or cement like hearers. They actually do not hear the message at all. It is like rain pounding down on pavement – it just bounces off of the hard surface. Their hearts are hardened by sin. Long before God's word can penetrate their thinking, Satan rips it from their minds.

**4:16,17** The shallow, rocky soil represents the emotional hearers. They might accept the word with gladness but don't understand the cost involved in being a Christian. They show promise but when difficulties arise their enthusiasm ebbs and they seek comfort elsewhere. This does not mean that the person was saved and then lost again. There was no genuine experience of grace in the first place.

**4:18,19** Thorny soil pictures those persons who receive the salvation message but do not allow Christ to have complete sway and cleanse everything from their lives that might strangle their spiritual growth. Too many other things vie for attention. Christ's message does not receive number one priority so there is little fruit produced in such a life. Jesus specifically mentions the deceitfulness of riches – so many people are caught up in the allure of wealth and the desire for having more stuff. The world tempts us to believe that success is about having all the comforts and trappings available. Often our lives are busy with the activities of getting and spending. However, the more complicated our lives become, the more important it is to keep Christ as our priority.

**4:20** Happily, this story has a wonderful outcome. There are those whose hearts are receptive. They respond to the gospel message, give it opportunity to grow in their lives, and allow it to produce tremendous results. This parable is very optimistic in that although some of the seed fell in difficult places and never grew properly, the majority fell in good soil. There was a great harvest. Sometimes as we share the gospel, we despair because much of our efforts seem wasted. There seems to be little response. However, we must patiently continue to do our part, sow the seed, and leave the results to God. He has assured us that the harvest will be plentiful.

### **Your Goal as the Leader of this Bible Study:**

This very familiar parable of the soils teaches us that the response to God's message in our lives depends entirely on the receptive condition of our hearts. Just as the soil was hard packed, shallow, and thorny, our hearts can be resistant to the message, emotional in response, or too distracted to allow for much growth. But the overarching message of this passage is the sure and certain response to God's word as it is shared among people. The message will be planted in hearts that are responsive- victory is certain. What place we play in that victory will depend on our own receptiveness to what God desires to see happen in our lives.

### **For Personal Reflection:**

1. **What have I learned from this study?**
  
2. **What personal experience does this lesson bring to mind?**
  
3. **What is one action I will take this week to apply this Scripture passage to my life?**

## **Bible Study Plan** (Suggested time: 35 minutes)

### ***Jesus Interprets his Ministry***

Regroup the church after the Gathering Time and break by singing a chorus that young children can relate to—or another praise chorus if your congregation does not have children. Children who go to their own Bible teaching session should stay with the group until after this song. Have the preschoolers and children accompany the hymn with rhythm sticks, maracas, bells, etc. Children who stay with their parents in the Youth/Adult study should have the material on worship as suggested in **The Children's Corner** at the beginning of this **Unit** of studies. (Ask your leader who downloads the studies for those suggestions).

**Begin by helping the group locate the Focal Text in their Bibles. Also, share with them the Main Idea to be learned from the Scriptures, and the Questions to be Explored by the group.**

#### **Focal Text**

Mark 4:1-20

#### **Background Text**

Mark 4:1-34

#### **Main Idea**

Though the reactions to Jesus vary, the harvest Jesus proclaimed is certain and abundant, with people's response to Jesus determining their place in that harvest.

#### **Questions to Explore**

In light of varying views of Jesus today, how can we be assured that he really is the Christ and that Christ's way will be victorious?

#### **Teaching Aim**

To help the class consider their place in the coming certain victory of God's kingdom

#### **Connect with Life:**

Parables were meant to be heard and then acted upon. Prior to the study, have someone with a dramatic reading voice record the parable on cassette tape or on a digital recorder with a playback audio suitable for all the participants to hear (verses 3-9).

Have the group listen to the recording with their Bibles closed. Ask if they were hearing it for the first time, would they understand the central truth of the parable? What is the main emphasis Christ was trying to get across with this simple story?

## **Guide the Study:**

Discuss the meaning of the word 'parable'.

Have one of the group look up the word in a Bible dictionary and a regular dictionary to compare meanings.

Ask: "Why did Jesus often use this method of teaching?"

Then ask: "Do you think Jesus meant to keep the truth from some of his hearers?"  
Refer to notes on verses 10-13 to analyze the mystery of parables.

**Have some gardening or landscaping books and magazines on hand.** Invite someone in the group, who has some background working with the soil, to analyze the four different types of soil mentioned in this parable.

Ask: "What would be the readiness for growth of each?"

Have someone read through Jesus' explanation of the story in verses 14-20.

Ask: "Can you think of a modern day equivalent for each type of heart condition?"

Ask: "What do you think Jesus might have been alluding to when he mentioned the 'cares of this world' in the thorny soil?"

Invite the group to share some issues that they might have been grappling with that are keeping them from being productive in their Christian lives. Do not insist that everyone share personal problems.

Ask: "True or False? A Christian's heart might be representative of more than one type of soil at different times in his life." Ask the group to thoughtfully consider what kind of soil best represents their own lives at this particular time.

Christ emphasizes our responsibility for hearing. Ask: "How is it that we can 'have ears to hear'?"

## **Encourage Application:**

If you have two or more youth, this is the time to give them the **Youth!!! Take Ten** page and allow them to move away from the adults and apply the lesson by and for themselves.

The wonderful aspect of this parable is the inevitable victory that is ours as we are faithful to share Christ's message. Prompt the group members to share their reasons for optimism in spite of a seeming abundance of infertile hearts in our world today.

Invite group members to lead out in prayers of gratitude for the inevitable harvest that will result, as we are faithful to share the Word with every person.

**Take a five minute break to separate the Bible Study and Worship Time.** Children may need to use the washroom again before worship.

# Youth!!! Take Ten

## Bible Study Application for Youth

You may wish to move away from the adults for the final five to ten minutes of the Bible study and help each other as youth to apply the lesson to your own needs.

### ***Jesus Interprets his Ministry*** **Mark 4:1-20**

**A youth will lead the following activity and comments.** No adults need to be present. If possible, teens should take turns in leading the application time.

On large sheets of paper, draw pictures that illustrate the four types of soil that Jesus refers to in this parable. Put the pictures up in the worship area for the group to see.

**Worship Time** (Suggested time: 30 minutes)***Jesus Interprets his Ministry***  
**Mark 4:1-20****Beginning the Service:**

Begin the service by having someone read the words to the old hymn "Take My Life, and Let It Be Consecrated".

**Take my life, and let it be consecrated, Lord, to Thee;  
Take my hands and let them move at the impulse of Thy love.**

**Take my feet, and let them be swift and beautiful for Thee;  
Take my voice and let me sing always, only, for my King.**

**Take my silver and my gold, Not a mite would I withhold;  
Take my moments and my days, Let them flow in ceaseless praise.**

**Take my will, and make it Thine, It shall be no longer mine;  
Take my heart, it is Thine own, It shall be Thy royal throne.**

**Lord, I give my life to Thee, Thine forevermore to be;  
Lord, I give my life to Thee, Thine forevermore to be.**

**Offering:****Praying for the World:**

Outreach to others is often accomplished by sports camps, teams or simply participating in sports activities. Pray that Christians may be quick to use their involvement in sports to have a positive witness to Christ in every situation.

**Sharing Guide:**



**This sharing guide is written to assist the person who directs the worship time to reemphasize the teaching for the day and help guide the congregation to respond to God's call and will for their lives in regard to the scripture studied. The leader may choose to follow the guide closely. Or, he or she may wish to only use it to give direction and a concept for preparing an original message. The leader is free to choose other ways to communicate and share the concepts presented here.**

## ***Sowing Seed***

### **Introduction**

The following story is told by a man in his seventies: "I remember as a nine-year-old boy learning to scatter seed on the soil before pulling a harrow across the field with a team of horses. Dad made a feed bag with a cloth strap sewn to it. The strap was placed around the neck in a way that the bag of seed would hang to my left side. As I walked across the field I reached into the bag for a handful of seed. I then scattered the seed in a semi-circle in front of me as I walked. I soon learned to scatter the seed evenly across the field.

In this way some of the seed fell too far to the edge of the field where it was not covered. Some of this small farm was very rocky. Seed that fell among the rocks often germinated but never grew to maturity. Some of the seed fell on the very poor soil, would germinate quickly but soon withered and died. This was true even if good moisture came from the rains. But to our joy, much of the seed fell on better soil, germinated and grew to maturity for harvesting. The harvest of seed was used to feed the livestock as well to grind into flour for the family."

Human hearts are much like that poor, share-cropper farm soil. It does not matter how carefully the seed of God's word is sown, the evil one takes it away before a sinful heart can even think about the message. Human hearts have different responses to God's word. What kind of "soil" is your heart? Some are hard and not receptive. Others are caught up in the affairs of pleasure, making money, being successful, and even in immorality. God's word is choked out before it has a chance to bear fruit. Sometimes even a "good person" will not properly respond to an invitation to receive Christ.

What is your response as a believer to the truth of God's word? Are you experiencing victory in the kingdom of God as a result of your complete response to the invitation to hear the words of Jesus? Are you experiencing spiritual growth from the soil of your heart? Does your response enable God to give you victory in spite of the circumstances?

Sometimes believers will get into God's business and wonder why the "crop" does not grow. Remember, you are to sow the seed – not grow the crop. You must stay out of God's business, which is causing the seed to germinate and grow to maturity and become ready for harvest. You can stay out of God's business by taking care of your

own business, which is sowing the seed. Are you sometimes guilty of not having ears to hear? You can hear what God is saying to you through reading his Word, through prayer, and through the congregation by the power of the Holy Spirit. God speaks in these ways. He works in the hearts of all who have ears to hear.

God speaks by His Spirit through these ways in order that you might know him, his purposes and his ways. The man who told the story earlier pastored congregations for 30 years. God was so gracious and blessed his ministry. He was then asked to become a missionary to serve a group of congregations in Saskatchewan and Manitoba, Canada. He had no desire to leave the ministry of pastoring congregations. But the deep desire of his heart was to know God, to follow him wherever he might lead.

He had ears to hear what God was saying. God spoke very clearly through his word and through others. He revealed his purpose and his direction for the man's life for the next fifteen years. The joy and fulfillment that he and his wife experienced was beyond measure. The ministry of pastoring was simply expanded. The soil of his heart was receptive to receive the seed of God's word. He did things his way and accomplished so much more than any person could have ever dreamed or imagined.

When you know God, when you obey him, when he has his way in you, then you will not experience doubts about his leading in your life. The prayer of your heart could be:

**Call to Commitment:**

**Note to Leader:** If appropriate for your congregation, ask them to conclude the service by repeating the prayer written below with you. **Make copies from the final page of this session.** Lead them one phrase at a time like this:

***"Father, make my heart tender //  
and sensitive to your every word. //***

***You are in me and I am in you. //***

***Control me and teach me by your Holy Spirit //  
that I may understand and obey your word. //***

***Help me to never doubt your word, //  
even when I do not always understand."***

**Concluding the Service:**

Sing "Speak to My Heart" again.

Copy for someone to read at the beginning of the Worship Time.

**Take my life, and let it be consecrated, Lord, to Thee;  
Take my hands and let them move at the impulse of Thy love.**

**Take my feet, and let them be swift and beautiful for Thee;  
Take my voice and let me sing always, only, for my King.**

**Take my silver and my gold, Not a mite would I withhold;  
Take my moments and my days, Let them flow in ceaseless praise.**

**Take my will, and make it Thine, It shall be no longer mine;  
Take my heart, it is Thine own, It shall be Thy royal throne.**

**Lord, I give my life to Thee, Thine forevermore to be;  
Lord, I give my life to Thee, Thine forevermore to be.**

Provide copies for the congregation to use as the conclusion to the **Worship Time**.

***“Father, make my heart tender //  
and sensitive to your every word. //***

***You are in me and I am in you. //***

***Control me and teach me by your Holy Spirit //  
that I may understand and obey your word. //***

***Help me to never doubt your word, //  
even when I do not always understand.”***

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***“Father, make my heart tender //  
and sensitive to your every word. //***

***You are in me and I am in you. //***

***Control me and teach me by your Holy Spirit //  
that I may understand and obey your word. //***

***Help me to never doubt your word, //  
even when I do not always understand.”***

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***Control me and teach me by your Holy Spirit //  
that I may understand and obey your word. //***

***Help me to never doubt your word, //  
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